



Debates

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Wednesday, 10 February 2010

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Wednesday, 10 February 2010

The Assembly met at 10 am.

(Quorum formed.)

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

Education (Suspensions) Amendment Bill 2010

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

Title read by Clerk.

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (10.03): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Members may get a sense of *deja vu* here today. The bill that I present today is, indeed, largely similar to a previous bill tabled by the minister and the same as a bill I attempted to present late last year. This bill will give our ACT school principals the same autonomy, the same decision-making capacity, that their counterparts in the independent school systems in the ACT and all the New South Wales schools already enjoy. In the interests of intrajurisdictional parity in the ACT and interjurisdictional parity with New South Wales and in an effort to resolve the issue once and for all, I table this version at the start of a new year here today.

The minister's actions yesterday do warrant some attention in my presentation speech here today. There was absolutely no need to play his game of one-upmanship. I have indicated to the government on numerous occasions that the opposition is willing to come to the table to discuss a way forward on the detail of the bill. We have indicated our willingness on previous occasions to negotiate in the interest of the ACT schools community. However, it does seem that dialogue with Minister Barr's office is nigh on impossible. Our recent history in this place confirms this view.

The minister deems it unnecessary to liaise with the opposition and the crossbench, and, to coin a phrase, has opposed our attempts to bring this bill before the Assembly for opposition's sake. There is no logical reason for that, except perhaps not trusting our ACT school principals to be able to make the same decisions within their schools that their counterparts in the independent school systems in the ACT and all of the New South Wales schools have been given.

The bottom line is that principals would like to see their powers in regard to suspension enhanced. Principals have indicated to me that they would be happy with an increase that would enable them to better engage with the students that need to be brought back into the school community, and five days is simply not enough for this, according to the principals. Ten days would enhance their ability in this regard, but

what about those that need 11 days or 15 days or 18 days? In these cases, our principals face additional red tape. However, for the umpteenth time, our own independent ACT school principals have had the ability and autonomy to consider these various options of up to 20 days for years.

If Mr Barr was genuine in promoting the cause for enhanced principal autonomy then he would bite the bullet and not hide behind halfway measures yet again. Give the ACT principals the parity with their counterparts in the New South Wales school system and make the decision for parity not just another token halfway measure because of political one-upmanship.

I can understand school principals not wishing to rock the boat; they would rather accept a halfway measure than the current status quo, and they are obliged to listen to their minister. It is a great pity that the minister does not repay their loyalty with some honest answers, starting with why he does not trust our ACT principals to be able to make the same decisions within their schools that their counterparts in the independent school systems in the ACT and all the New South Wales schools have had for years.

I have to say that I am disappointed with the way that Mr Barr has attempted to confuse the situation with misleading statements, going from five-day suspensions to 20 days. Nobody is suggesting an automatic entry into a 20-day scenario, and I would hope that 20 days would never be used by the principals, but the option is there. While I think that the full 20-day option would be very rarely used, this is really not about the number of days but whether we trust our principals to make the right choice to suit particular circumstances. I certainly do have faith in the professionalism of our educators to make these decisions, while the current evidence would suggest that Mr Barr does not.

My office has had a significant and growing number of complaints from parents who are frustrated with the problems their children are experiencing in our schools and on whose behalf I continue to make representations to Minister Barr. Consequently, and not surprisingly, this topic has generated considerable interest in the community. Parents are urging us to take a stand on their behalf.

The call for support of the teachers and students who have to put up with continued disruptions in the classroom is coming through loud and clear. The plea to allow those who want to learn must also be given consideration, and the management of disruptive students should not be at the continued cost of those who wish to learn. There is a desire for better management of disruptive students, and frustrated educators who face the conflicting targets that are forced on them need our assistance.

This is the question that I have been attempting to debate with Mr Barr—I have been asking Mr Barr the question for three months: should our principals have the autonomy and the ability to determine appropriate actions for students in their own schools? Well, Mr Barr, the answer from the community is loud and clear—yes, they should. My colleagues in the opposition and I continue our stand here today to champion this right.

In presenting this bill to the Assembly, I voice my strongest plea to Minister Barr and encourage the government to reconsider its previous position and vote to give parity to ACT principals both within our own ACT education sectors and within the New South Wales education system. I also emphasise once again to all our parliamentary colleagues in the government and on the crossbench that they reconsider their position and listen to what the principals and educators are telling them. This is not about whether a child should be suspended at all; it is about trusting the judgement of our principals and ensuring that they have every possible opportunity to address issues as they arise in their schools.

We can say it again and again, but the reality is that suspension for a maximum amount of time will be rarely used. Again, it is the principle of the issue. If the need arises, the school itself is best placed to find a way forward, and in some situations it may be that the only way to move forward is to have a circuit-breaker at the discretion of the principal. We acknowledge that suspension is certainly not the only answer to antisocial behaviour in ACT schools, but it goes some of the way towards empowering principals and is a starting point from which to progress.

After my consultation with the relevant stakeholders, the bill presented here today includes a provision for the department to set out guidelines for principals to ensure that the re-entry of a student is as supportive and streamlined as possible. These guidelines will be set down by the department and will, no doubt, incorporate some of the policies that already exist within the system.

The difference is that the focus will now be on these policies, and the requirement for guidelines will ensure that these policies are formalised and acknowledged as best practice for principals. The requirement for guidelines will ensure that all parties are aware that the re-entry of a student will be supportive, consultative and as smooth as possible for all concerned—that is, for the student and his or her family as well as the school and the school community.

As the minister stated yesterday, the issue of suspending students has generated considerable interest in the community. We have had a lot of support from parents, who, as I mentioned, are urging us to remain steadfast on their behalf. The question is: should our principals have the autonomy and the ability to determine appropriate actions for students in their own schools? The answer is a resounding yes, they should. I commend this bill to the Assembly.

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

Review of government services

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.12): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the report on Government Services 2010 published by the Productivity Commission in January 2010 that delivered a scathing appraisal of the performance of the ACT Labor government;
- (b) the general lack of efficiencies within the ACT Labor government; and
- (c) that the report includes, amongst others, the following failures by the ACT Labor government:
 - (i) the ACT has the highest median childcare fees of any state or territory at \$65 per day;
 - (ii) the ACT has the worst median waiting time for elective surgery at twice the national average, the lowest number of public dentists of any jurisdiction at 2 per 100,000 people, the lowest bulk billing rates in the country and the lowest number of public hospital beds per capita;
 - (iii) the inefficiency of the ACT public schooling system compared to other states and territories using a like-for-like analysis, as also revealed by the Commonwealth government's My School website;
 - (iv) the lack of funding for non-government schools, which is the lowest in the country;
 - (v) the inefficient and bureaucratic public housing system which costs \$36,672 per year for each dwelling—the highest in the country; and
 - (vi) the increasingly under-funded emergency services which have resulted in steadily increasing ambulance response times; and
- (2) calls on the government to urgently and clearly articulate how it will address the issues raised in the report.

Mr Speaker, the real test of a government and its worth can be summed up in fairly simple terms, and that is this: has it made the lives of its constituents better or worse? Have things improved during the reign and the time of that government, or have they gone backwards? And when we talk about an ACT government charged with delivering territory functions as well as local functions, the more specific question might be: has the level of service delivery by that government got better, or has it got worse?

If people were to look at the last 8½ years and ask themselves that question, if Canberrans were to ask themselves that question in key areas, I think they would answer that, in many areas, they have got worse. That is what the debate today is about. That is what the Productivity Commission report has shown us. If Canberrans were to ask themselves whether it is easier or harder to get access to a GP in 2010 than it was in 2001, I think they would say it is harder. If they were waiting for elective surgery, would they be waiting longer? We know that they would. They would be waiting much longer for elective surgery.

If they are looking to buy their first home, would it be harder in 2010 than it was in 2001? Clearly, it has got harder. If they are sitting in traffic, are they spending more time in traffic or less time in traffic on the same road? For many Canberrans, it is obviously a case of spending more time. In areas such as education, have things improved? What about public housing and the delivery of it, and basic services? Is childcare more expensive, more accessible or less accessible?

In all of these areas, after 8½ years of ACT Labor government, we have seen things go backwards. And the Productivity Commission has blown the whistle on this. For a long time, this government has said: "Well, no, things aren't that bad. Look, we're a bit better off than some of our state and territory colleagues." The Productivity Commission has blown the whistle on that argument. This report, essentially a report card on 8½ years of ACT Labor, says that things have not got better; in fact, things have got worse. In all of these key areas, things have gone backwards.

It is worth going through a summary of some of what the Productivity Commission had to say in relation to the performance of the ACT Labor government. This is a report card on their time in government. I will give a bit of a summary of some of the key findings. Under this Labor administration, we have the worst median waiting time for elective surgery, at around twice the national average; the lowest number of public dentists in the country; the lowest bulk-billing rates in the country; the lowest number of public hospital beds per capita; the highest childcare fees; the highest spending on prisoners per day; the highest rate of householders experiencing financial stress who also receive commonwealth rent assistance; and the highest rate of cases pending in the Magistrates Court for longer than six or 12 months.

That is just a summary of some of the findings of this report. What it says, and I think it was summed up in the *Canberra Times*, is that we are paying more and getting less. Canberrans, after 8½ years of ACT Labor, are paying more and getting less and, on so many indicators, doing worse than the rest of the country.

We need to pause there for a moment and ask: who are we being compared with? We are being compared with, amongst others, New South Wales. New South Wales Labor is actually, in some areas, delivering better services than the ACT government.

Mr Coe: Things are grim when they're the premier state!

MR SESELJA: It is grim when ACT Labor falls behind its New South Wales Labor colleagues. That is what we need to put into context, because we have got Labor regimes all around the country except in WA. We have seen some terrible Labor governments right around the country. Out of all of our interstate counterparts, New South Wales should stand as the worst example, yet the performance of ACT Labor, in a number of these areas, falls behind even New South Wales.

It is worth going through some of the really important ones, because in so many areas we are paying more and getting less. If we look at childcare, childcare rates in the ACT are the most expensive in the country, at \$65 per day for long day care. The government might not care about that, but for thousands and thousands of Canberrans,

childcare is amongst their most significant areas of household expenditure. Childcare is a major area of expenditure for Canberrans, and we are paying more than the rest of the country.

The ACT is the only jurisdiction, with the exception of the Northern Territory, to have no government-managed childcare services. The figures show that 79.4 per cent of childcare centres in the ACT are managed by community groups and 20.6 per cent are managed by private operators. We can look at the effect on household income, particularly of low income earners. For example, a family with two children and with a gross family income of \$27,000 outlays almost 20 per cent of its income on childcare. Across Australia, this figure is closer to 10 per cent.

We need to reflect on that for a moment: Canberrans, when it comes to childcare, are paying much more than their state and territory counterparts. For many low income earners in particular, this is making up a large amount of their household income. With respect to their household income, for one of the most important areas of expenditure, along with basic items such as rent, food and electricity, childcare is right up there. And many Canberrans are faced with increasing costs.

I am sure that Mrs Dunne and others in this debate will go into some of the reasons and some of the issues of failure in relation to the ACT government's role in the delivery of childcare and in ensuring that Canberrans have access to affordable childcare in the territory.

In health, we can go through the list. The ACT has the lowest bulk-billing rates in the country. The ACT has the lowest percentage of patients in the urgent and semi-urgent categories seen to by emergency departments within triage category time frames. The ACT has the lowest number of available beds per capita. The ACT has the lowest number of public dentists of any jurisdiction, at two per 100,000 people. Elective surgery patients in the ACT have a longer wait in the ACT for surgery than they would have in any other jurisdiction—worse than New South Wales; worse than Queensland. This is the legacy of this government.

In terms of elective surgery it is one of the clearest examples of where the figures simply do not lie. The figures tell a story of where we have gone, over 8½ years of ACT Labor. When they came in, there was a wait of around 40 days. Now there is a wait of around 70 days. It has almost doubled in their time. And this is at a time when their budget has almost doubled. So their budget has almost doubled and yet elective surgery waiting times have almost doubled in the same time. We are paying more and getting less, and Canberrans would be asking themselves why. Why is it that we seem to be so poorly served by this government? Canberrans have the second longest waiting time in the nation, with 42 per cent of patients not seen within recommended triage times, but the ACT is still spending more than any other jurisdiction on patients in emergency departments.

We often hear it, don't we? We often hear from this government, "Well, we've spent this much and we've spent that much." People would say: "Well, that's our money you're spending. How wisely are you spending it? How well are you delivering on those services?" The Productivity Commission says, in these key areas: "Not very well." You do not compare well even with states such as New South Wales.

In education, of course, we see some mixed results. We know that, overall, when it is averaged out, we rank very well as opposed to other states and territories. But let us look at some of the figures. The ACT government spends just over \$16,000 per student. I think that is combined—\$16,000 comes from government for ACT students in government schools, second only to the Northern Territory. Yet, according to the *Canberra Times*, the My School website has revealed that three-quarters of ACT schools are performing worse than their immediate counterparts in other states. That must be of concern. Minister Barr, in response, said:

It probably does lend some weight ... to the theory that many in education have had for some time that some of our best schools have been coasting a little.

What does that mean? Does that mean that the ACT government have been coasting? Who is to blame if our schools have been coasting? This is a failure of leadership. The ACT Labor government have been there for 8½ years while the minister acknowledges that in some areas they have been coasting. Why have they been coasting? Why have they been resting on their laurels? Why have they not been committed to improving education outcomes year by year by year rather than simply coasting and relying on good overall averages? That is the question that perhaps Minister Barr can answer if he wants to speak in this debate. Ultimately, we are paying more and getting less.

We see it in areas such as public housing. The net recurrent cost of providing assistance per dwelling in the ACT is the second highest in the country behind the Northern Territory, at a cost of \$7,736 per dwelling, well above the Australian average of \$6,366. That is when we exclude the cost of capital. When we include the cost of capital it is \$36,672; the Australian average is \$26,074. Again, it is well outside the Australian average. We are paying far more—paying more for less.

With respect to emergency services, the Ambulance Service recorded the slowest median response time among capital cities and second slowest in the 90th percentile. And we have seen commentary in relation to that.

We continue to see—and it is reflected in the Productivity Commission report—the issues around the stress for many renters in the ACT in what is such a tight rental market. We know that one of the reasons has been this government's absolute failure in areas such as planning and areas such as land release. They have simply failed to keep up with demand to the extent that we know that for first home buyers, according to the HIA-Commonwealth Bank report that looks at the effect on first home buyers of the price of housing, the ACT is the most unaffordable jurisdiction.

We come back to where we started, Mr Speaker. The Productivity Commission has blown the whistle on this government's performance. It has given them a fail for 8½ years of ACT Labor government. In some areas it is well behind New South Wales. So we have got a situation where Canberrans would say: "Where am I after 8½ years? Am I better off or worse off?" If they are waiting for elective surgery, if they are waiting in emergency, if they are trying to access a doctor, if they are waiting in traffic on Gungahlin Drive, if they are trying to buy a home, if they are paying for childcare, things are worse.

Things have gone backwards under this government. The service delivery from this government can easily be summed up now. The ACT Labor government's approach to service delivery has been that Canberrans pay more and we get less. The question now for the government is contained in the last part of this motion. We want a response. We want more of a response than we would expect to get from the Chief Minister, which will be denial. He will claim that we are getting the best service in the nation when the Productivity Commission have actually blown the whistle on that argument. They have put a spotlight on those claims. On any reckoning, in those key service delivery areas, they have given this government a fail mark.

We would say this to the ACT Labor government: what are you going to do about it? How are you going to put in place policies that will put downward pressure on childcare fees? How are you going to put in place policies that will make it more affordable for people to buy a home? How are you going to cut the longest elective surgery waiting times in the nation? These are the questions for this government to answer. This is what we would expect to hear from the Chief Minister when he gets to his feet. I expect, unfortunately, though, that what we will hear is a lot of denial. These are serious issues. The Productivity Commission has given ACT Labor a fail for 8½ years. Things have gone backwards. It did not need to be this way.

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Land and Property Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage) (10.27): The report on government services was released by the Productivity Commission in January this year. To that extent I agree with Mr Seselja's motion, but my agreement with those parts of the motion that are true and factual begins and ends there. Sadly, from that opening fact Mr Seselja descends immediately, and for 15 minutes, into a messy and flimsy tissue of cherry-picked factoids presented completely out of context—just simple, wishful fiction.

Mr Speaker, let us look at the confection of cherry-picking and distortion of facts that Mr Seselja calls a motion. Mr Seselja expresses alarm and dismay that Canberra has the highest childcare fees in any jurisdiction. What he does not mention, what context he does not provide, is that childcare fees in regional and rural areas are invariably lower than in cities, bringing down the average cost for most jurisdictions but penalising the ACT, a city state, which of course has no regional or remote areas or regional or remote childcare centres or facilities. A more accurate comparison of Canberra's childcare fees could be made with similar sized cities like Newcastle. In fact, the cost of childcare in the ACT is lower than that in a number of large cities around Australia. But let us not let the facts get in the way of a factoid, Mr Seselja.

Here is another piece of information the Leader of the Opposition does not tell you in relation to childcare—that the funding provided by the ACT government for childcare is \$632 per child against a national average of \$353 per child. The contribution by the ACT government to childcare in the ACT is almost double the national average by the other states and the Northern Territory. That is a little bit of context in relation to the contribution by this government to childcare—\$632 per child against a national

average of \$353 per child. That, of course, reflects in part the establishment of our popular early childhood schools which deliver a whole range of early childhood services for children and families, including childcare. But these are all inconvenient truths.

There are plenty more. Elective surgery waiting times are always a favourite of oppositions with no ideas. For someone waiting in discomfort, even one day's wait is a day too long. As Mr Seselja knows, waiting times reflect the times waited by people who have already had their surgery, not those still waiting. There is one quite simple but incredibly cruel way of bringing down the official waiting times—that is, to give surgery to people who have been on waiting lists for the shortest periods, but we do not do that. We might call it the Seselja elective surgery solution. It is a perfect complement to the Liberals' policy of reducing hospital bed numbers, which in itself is another extremely effective way of keeping people on waiting lists for longer—out of sight and out of mind for statistical purposes. That is what the Liberals did the last time they were in government. They cut hospital beds in this city by 114. It is a stunning record of achievement by a government to cut public hospital beds by 114. I am stunned whenever members of the Liberal Party in this place stand up and pontificate and moralise on our commitment to public health in this city when their record in government was to cut 114 beds.

Mr Seselja: It was 40 days that you had to wait then.

MR STANHOPE: Mr Seselja parrots, "Yes, 40 days," but at what cost? The motion goes to efficiencies and efficiencies in government. What was the cost of delivery of health services under the Liberals? It was 130 per cent. What did the Productivity Commission report in relation to the cost of health services in the ACT in its 2001 report? Under the Liberal Party public health costs in the ACT were at 130 per cent—30 per cent above the national average. Mr Seselja stands up and parrots, "Yes, waiting times were only 40 days," but at a cost of 30 per cent. There were completely unsustainable costs and inefficiencies. It was at a cost of 130 per cent which, since coming to government, we have brought down to 106.6 per cent.

The other fact that Mr Seselja does not go to in the ROGS report in relation to health expenditure and efficiency is the relative cost of delivering health services in the ACT today as compared to 2001. It is 106 per cent as against 130 per cent and he stands up today and moves a motion condemning us for being inefficient. The Liberal Party's record was to deliver health services to this territory at a cost of 30 per cent above the national average. He dares then to compare relative waiting times. If you are spending 30 per cent more than the national average on health costs, unsustainable costs, and closing hospital beds at the same time, just ponder and reflect on it. You closed 114 beds whilst spending 30 per cent more than the national average on health expenditure.

We have reopened all the beds, plus twice as many. We have taken bed numbers from 670 to 900 and we have reduced expenditure. In other words, we have created efficiencies, reducing the Liberal Party's enormous 130 per cent spend. We have the best health outcomes in Australia. Labor, by contrast to Mr Seselja, has a deliberate policy of identifying for surgery those Canberrans who have already been waiting the longest for elective surgery. That is why waiting times are the length they are. We are

ensuring that those who have been waiting the longest get into the operating theatre and off our lists. As we boost resources for elective surgery—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Stanhope, just one moment please. Members of the opposition, Mr Seselja gave his speech, which I am sure members of the government found controversial, in silence. I expect Mr Stanhope to be given the same courtesy.

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. In 2008-09, for the sixth consecutive year, this government funded and delivered a record number of elective surgeries—10,104—massively up on the 7,600 delivered in our first full year of government. Directly as a result of Labor's policies, by 30 June last year the number of Canberrans waiting for elective surgery for more than a year had fallen by 24 per cent on the previous year and by 46 per cent from three years ago. These are the other facts, the other context, conveniently ignored by Mr Seselja—a 46 per cent reduction over three years.

While we have been devoting attention to those who have been waiting the longest, we have also been improving our performance for those in most urgent need. In 2008-09, 94 per cent of all urgent elective surgery cases were admitted within 30 days—almost the best result in Australia. This has improved again in the last year and is now at 95 per cent for category 1 patients. Those are the embarrassing facts that Mr Seselja ignores—the quality of our performance. The quality of our performance is there to be seen in the outcomes where they deeply matter. These are not the facts that Mr Seselja wants to hear. They are not the facts that support his motion. It is a record of significant achievement by this government.

In a week when many Canberrans are just waking up to the uneasy knowledge that the Liberals and Greens in this place have helped scuttle our city's best and most cost-effective hope of delivering a state-of-the-art public hospital system for north Canberra, it is timely to look soberly and realistically at elective surgery into the future. The fact is that while Labor has delivered record numbers of surgeries for six years on the trot, the lists continue to grow. In 2007-08, the list grew by 2.9 per cent.

My question to Mr Seselja is: what would happen to that number under a Liberal government once you carry through with your plan, signalled again by Mr Hanson just in the last week, this time to cut hospital beds by up to a third? What will happen to that number now that you have personally and proactively helped knock over the Calvary sale? We all know the joke about the most efficient hospital being the one with no patients. I do not think any of us thought that that was a legitimate health policy option for an alternative government in this place. But it is one to which Mr Seselja puts poor, innocent statistics in his motion to support.

We also should look at the hand-wringing which we have just witnessed in relation to public dentists in any jurisdiction. That is another factoid that conveniently ignores and provides no context to the more meaningful statistics. Isn't it interesting? Mr Smyth is banging on about waiting lists in relation to elective surgery and hospitals and condemning us for our expenditure on public dentists, but he does not

go on to say that the Productivity Commission reported that the ACT has the shortest waiting times for public dental services in Australia. Why didn't you mention that, Mr Seselja? Why didn't you go to the fact that we have the shortest dental waiting times in Australia? What was the basis on which you ignored that particular statistical fact, Mr Seselja? We have the shortest public dental waiting times in Australia. Thank you for your silence on the matter.

The Liberals have shown a deep contempt for the intelligence of Canberrans to try this patent, transparent political spin. Canberrans were not that gullible in October 2008 and they will not be again in 2012. In 2008, what did they do? They delivered Mr Seselja the second worst result the Liberal Party had ever achieved in an ACT election. Mr Seselja began his speech by saying that the great public or community test of a government's commitment to the delivery of services is the Productivity Commission report. No, the greatest test, Mr Seselja, is the ballot box. You received the second worst result of any Liberal leader since self-government. That is the test, Mr Seselja. The test is that you and your party have been rejected three elections in a row since you were in government and since you cut 114 beds in our public hospitals. There is the number one test.

Mr Seselja: I got more votes than you. They liked me more than you, Jon.

MR STANHOPE: That is why you are the Leader of the Opposition, mate. The test is whether or not you are in government, and you are not. You are sitting on the crossbench. You have been sitting there for four years, Mr Seselja, and you will be sitting there for another four. I guarantee now that it will be many more into the future. There is the test of what the people of Canberra think, Mr Seselja. It was the second worst result by a Liberal leader since self-government. Now let us talk about the test inherent in that.

Mr Seselja: But more votes than you—more votes than you. That hurts, doesn't it, Jon, that I got more votes than you? You always come back to it.

MR STANHOPE: Here we go on facts and statistics—because you had more electors, Mr Seselja. I received a higher vote than you, mate, and you know it.

Mr Seselja: So you're going to tell untruths again? We can see the embarrassment. Just make up the numbers.

MR SPEAKER: Order, members!

MR STANHOPE: This really goes to Mr Seselja's understanding of statistics, doesn't it? I am embarrassed for you, Mr Seselja. I am embarrassed for you again, Mr Seselja, that even in your own electoral result you have got to fudge the figures. What a sign of a fragile ego that he has to make up numbers into his own political electoral result. What a ripper!

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My point of order relates to relevance. This is a debate about the review of government services and not electoral results.

MR SPEAKER: Unfortunately, your colleague sparked a discussion on electoral results but, Mr Stanhope, let us return to the matter of substance.

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker; I am happy to do that. As we look into Mr Seselja's motion there are a number of other indications of the type of man that he is and the kind of government that he would lead. He criticises the government for spending more than the rest of the country on public housing, but you heard him just now condemning and damning us for daring to spend more than any other government on public housing. Then he criticises the government for spending less than other governments on private schools. What a wonderful summary of the man and the sort of government he would lead.

To condemn this government for investing in public housing and then in the very same breath to condemn it for spending less than other governments on private schools—what does it reveal about Mr Seselja and the Liberals? Where does this casual and contemptuous demonisation of public housing tenants come from? It comes from the same place as the ridiculous Liberal plan—renounced by, I have to say, the previous Liberal housing spokesperson—the random, unannounced drug raids on public housing tenants.

That is where it comes from. But it is a very unpleasant subtext to today's motion. A government that spends more on housing, its more needy—what an outrage! A government that is investing millions retrofitting its public housing stock with water and energy saving technologies—double outrage! A government that believes its own tenants deserve to live in a place they can be proud to call home—for goodness sake, quickly call in the auditor! But, of course, when it comes to funding private schools, more generosity is called for: why are we being so miserly? In the case of private schools we are to be condemned for not giving enough, except, of course—gosh what a surprise!—he has misunderstood the numbers. The ACT government provides \$1,600 in funding for non-government schools. It is below the national average but it is not the lowest. Anyway, Mr Seselja got the numbers wrong; he miscounted.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (10.42): While the Greens share some of Mr Seselja's concern on aspects of the Productivity Commission's report on government 2010, we cannot support the motion in its current form. The Greens cannot support the motion on several levels. The motion opens by asking the Assembly to note that the Productivity Commission delivered through its report on government services "a scathing appraisal of the performance of the ACT Labor Government". In fact, the Productivity Commission did not and would not deliver an appraisal of any state or territory. The report merely delivers statistical data.

The second point of the motion asks the Assembly to note "lack of efficiencies within the ACT Labor Government". This is an extremely broad and sweeping statement which asks the Assembly to take on some sort of good faith the opposition's statement without any reference to specific data or parameters.

The motion then continues to ask the Assembly to note some very selective sections of the report. While the statistics quoted may be accurately lifted from the report, they

present a particularly limited examination of what is a vast amount of data gathered by varying methods. To ask the Assembly to acknowledge these statistics in isolation would be an oversimplification of the information provided, as this information can only be fairly interpreted in the context of the larger report.

It is important to note that in 1993 when the heads of government established the review of government service provision, it was to provide information and serve as a tool for government to use for strategic budget and policy planning. Information in the report has been used to assess the resource needs and resource performance of departments. It has also been used to identify jurisdictions with whom to share information on services.

The data in the report can also provide an incentive to improve the performance of government services by enhancing measurement approaches and techniques in relation to aspects of performance, such as unit costs and service quality. It may also help jurisdictions to identify where there is scope for improvement and promote greater transparency and informed debate about comparative performance.

As helpful and essential as this large collection of data is, it does make for a complex report which should not be used to make generalisations. Although interjurisdictional comparisons offer a level of accountability to customers, clients and citizens and expand interjurisdictional learning, consumers must be wary of the method of comparisons used under each measure. Not all data in the report relates to the same time period, and not all jurisdictions measure data collection with the same method.

One such example in this report is that it states that the ACT has the highest rate of childcare costs in Australia. The ACT does have expensive childcare costs, and the market sets these costs. Demand is elevated in the ACT, and the average income for Canberra households is relatively high compared to other states. This is combined with the fact that childcare workers in the ACT usually receive higher remuneration than many other jurisdictions. This example clearly points to the original intent of the report, which is to support interjurisdictional learning, particularly where governments have adopted policy approaches, such as paying childcare workers at a rate that recognises their importance.

I also refer to section 1.6, titled “Approach to performance measurement”. It is a section of the report which states that data may not be directly comparable if definitions or counting rules differ or they are so broad that they result in different interpretations—for example, depreciation rules—the scope of measurement varies—for example, waiting times for elective surgery—and the sample size is too small for statistical reliability.

There is also the issue of timeliness and accuracy. The report says:

Sometimes there is a trade-off between the precision of data and its timely availability—data that are provided in a timely fashion might have had fewer opportunities to undergo rigorous validation

However, as I said earlier, the Greens do share some serious concerns with regard to some of the results of the comparative data in the report, but, in order to make a

serious analysis of these results—significant and weighty questions—you have to do so with some academic rigour. That would be preferable to the sensationalist press-release style of this motion by the Liberal Party today. There has been no genuine scholarly approach to this motion, and the Greens do not believe that it is a sincere attempt to critique the results of the report.

The Greens will be expecting the government to clearly articulate how they will address many of the issues raised in the report. We do not believe the government have effectively communicated to the public how improvements have been made since the collection of data in the report or how they intend to address the measures which the ACT clearly has room to improve on.

The approach by the Liberal Party today will not serve the people of the ACT to gain a realistic and accurate explanation from the government as to how they intend to improve on the results in the report. It does not serve the constituents of this Assembly to cherry-pick pieces of data from the report and sensationalise statistics. It will not produce a genuine picture of services in the ACT.

I will say that it is incumbent upon the government to make an honest appraisal of the results from the report, and the Greens will be expecting each minister to report regularly to the Assembly and to the Canberra community. We do have a number of forums coming up, such as estimates, where we expect there will be clear explanations regarding what progress has been made. The Greens cannot support a motion such as this today as it does not present an accurate and well-considered request to the Assembly.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (10.49): Mr Speaker, I have never heard such an amazing list of excuses for yet again selling out the people of Canberra. The Greens ran on the premise that they would be third party insurance. They would hold the government to account. They would, perhaps, undertake scholarly work so they could back up their arguments with the facts. But if you look at the data that is contained in the ROGS report, it does not offer an analysis, and rightly so. It does not offer a commentary; it just puts the data and the facts there. There is no doubt that this motion is required today, and there is no doubt that this motion should be supported by the Greens.

Instead of some scholarly analysis from the convenor of the Greens, all we got was a list of excuses as to yet again why they will sell out to the people of the ACT; why they will simply let the government off the hook; why they do not want to get into the detail and analyse what is in this report. If you do go into the report and if you do some analysis—hopefully in a scholarly way, but who is to define what a scholar is—then you will realise that this motion is accurate and this motion is worthy of support.

What this motion does is outline another insight into the poor performance of the Stanhope-Gallagher government. What it does is comprehensively indict the government on what it has failed to achieve. I agree with Ms Hunter on one thing—that is, this report does not make judgements about policy areas dealt with in the report. The report provides detailed analysis of various policy areas with tables that provide extensive statistical insights into each policy area. What that means is that it is

up to us to examine the report and draw reasonable conclusions from the data. I did not hear a single reasonable conclusion from the convenor of the Greens. All I heard was a whole lot of get-out-of-jail excuses because they simply fail to hold the government accountable, yet again.

If we go to the motion and look at paragraph (vi)—the increasingly underfunded emergency services which have resulted in steadily increasing ambulance response times—that is a statement of fact. If you want the facts, let us go to the report. If you go to the chart on page 9.13, emergency management services for fire events, and if you look at the real funding of fire service organisations in table 9.2, you see that, in 2008-09 dollars, the ACT is the only jurisdiction that does not have real funding of fire service organisations. We have gone backwards.

I hope the analysis of that is to the liking of the convenor of the Greens, but if you look at the chart on page 9.13, you will see that funding in New South Wales from 2004-05 to 2008-09 went up 19 per cent; in Victoria, 112 per cent; in Queensland, 12 per cent; in Western Australia, 67 per cent; in South Australia, nine per cent; in Tasmania, two per cent; in the Northern Territory, nine per cent. There is only one jurisdiction that goes backwards.

Now, I hope that is scholarly enough, because in 2008-09 dollars, in 2004-05 the ACT spent \$52.2 million. In 2008-09 it only spent \$50.6 million. That is backwards. So what is wrong with holding the government to account on paragraph (vi) of this motion where we see the emergency services real funding of fire service organisations going backwards in the ACT? It is the only jurisdiction to go backwards, Ms Hunter. I hope my analysis meets with your agreement. If not, I can actually send my staff around to brief you on how a smaller number means that something has gone backwards, because that is the basis of this. We always get the scold from the Greens; we always get scolded for daring to hold the government to account. We are scolded by the third party insurance party, but they really are the “we’ll just let the government get away with anything” party. They are just a party that does not stand up for the people of the ACT. Perhaps the minister would like to come down and explain why the real funding of fire service organisations in the ACT has gone backwards under this government.

That is not the only measure where they have gone backwards. Let us go to table 9.1 on page 9.8. It is the analysis of volunteers in emergency service organisations, and the numbers have declined. In 2006-07 there were, according to this chart, 1,452. It went up in 2007-08 to 1,572 but then it declined; it went backwards. In 2008-09 it went down to 1,437, a decline that concerns me. I hope the minister will come down and provide some scholarly analysis of why this decline has occurred. Perhaps Ms Hunter will then seek leave to speak again to either validate what the minister has said or just accept his excuse.

But that is the problem for us: when you sell out, you sell out, and that is the problem for the people of the ACT. They will come to know that the Greens are a sell-out. When you have motions to hold the government to account, there is a real opportunity to be third party insurance, but they just choose not to accept that.

Let us be fair: most of the other jurisdictions, if not all the other jurisdictions, have also seen a decline in volunteer numbers. This is apparently due to a fall in volunteers in fire service organisations, so questions need to be asked. Let us do some scholarly analysis, shall we? We apparently have a problem. The minister, who has the data, will hopefully come down and respond, and then perhaps as an Assembly we can come up with solutions. But unless you hold the government to account, instead of mouthing platitudes and excuses, nothing will ever change.

Let us turn to ambulance services. Remember, there was a very critical report—perhaps you could call it a scholarly analysis—of the delivery of ambulance services in the ACT community done by none other than the Auditor-General. That was a damning indictment of response times, which caused the personal attack from the Chief Minister on the Auditor-General and all its implied threats. He does not like the bad news. But here is another report that actually confirms the findings made by the Auditor-General. If you go to the table showing the number of qualified officers, you see that the ACT is the only jurisdiction to record a fall in qualified ambulance officers during 2008-09. That is in complete contrast to all of the jurisdictions. I hope that is scholarly enough for you, Ms Hunter. We are the only jurisdiction to record a fall.

So what is going on with this critical aspect of operations within the ACT Ambulance Service? Where is the minister? What is the excuse this time? Who is responsible for this adverse record in the ACT in contrast to all other jurisdictions? As Mr Seselja says, this is a scathing appraisal of the performance of the ACT government.

Let us go to the analysis in figure 9.29, the analysis of ambulance response times. Again, the ACT is the standout performer for all the wrong reasons. Ambulance response times in the ACT have increased for each of the past five years in contrast to the performance of virtually all other jurisdictions. So why are we going backwards? Why are we the only jurisdiction to go backwards? That is the purpose of this motion today. It is to hold the government to account, to seek answers and to ensure that they put solutions in place.

We had asked some questions on this entire matter after the Auditor-General's report, and it is interesting, because I got an answer, finally, from Ms Burch, who must have been the acting minister on the day. I asked the question in annual reports hearings: can you provide the number of times an ACT Fire Brigade vehicle has attended an ACT Ambulance Service call-out in a first-response capacity as an ambulance when an ambulance was unavailable? The answer was as follows: the ACT Fire Brigade responded to a total of 241 medical assistance calls during the 2008-09 financial year; however, not all of these are results of an ACT Ambulance Service intensive care ambulance being unavailable.

It is standard procedure that, when there are not enough ambulances—and that is a question for another day—you do respond with a Fire Brigade vehicle. That is okay, because the Fire Brigade officers are trained to do this. But it does beg the question. That happened 241 times; that is five a week. Five times a week if you had rung for an ambulance and were expecting an ambulance you got a Fire Brigade truck. So there is

a question there, and it is highlighted again by this report. That is called analysis, Ms Hunter. That is what we do in the Liberal Party.

So there is an analysis of ambulance response times, and in figure 9.28 there is an analysis of staff attrition. Again, we are the standout performer at the wrong end of the chart.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Minister for Gaming and Racing) (10.59): It is a pleasure to be able to contribute to this debate. There is nothing more enjoyable in this Assembly than debating the ACT Liberal Party on matters of productivity and efficiency.

In this particular motion, my attention was drawn particularly to a series of points about halfway through this in relation to an alleged inefficiency in the ACT public schooling system. We heard a little—only a few minutes—from Mr Seselja, and I look forward to Mr Doszpot's contribution on this matter at some point in the near future.

Mr Seselja made a series of claims. Generally, he endorsed outcomes within the ACT education system, but he drew some particular attention to a couple of tables contained in the report on government services that indicate that, yes, the ACT government spends more per student on government schools than any other jurisdiction bar the Northern Territory. Given the rural and remote characteristics of the Northern Territory, it is no surprise that costs are much higher in that jurisdiction.

The ACT does spend more money. There are two principal reasons for that. One is a policy choice that, until this morning, I took to be one that was endorsed by all parties in this chamber: we have invested more in lowering class sizes. This was a policy that the Liberal Party professed to support, potentially, until this morning, although we will seek some clarification. Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition, when he gets up to reply at the conclusion of this, will reconfirm whether the Liberal Party still supports that policy.

In table 4A.16 in chapter 16 of the Productivity Commission report, we see that the ACT has the second lowest student-to-teacher ratio in public schools of any jurisdiction—the gap most particularly being the case in primary schools, where we have focused our investment in additional teachers. The national average is a student-to-teacher ratio of 15.6 Australia-wide. In the ACT, it is 13.6. Only the Northern Territory has a lower average than the ACT. All other jurisdictions are in the 15s, ranging from 15.3 in WA to 15.9 in New South Wales. A clear policy decision to provide additional teachers in primary schools is one of the key factors why the ACT government spends more per student in the public system than other jurisdictions do. There is what I understood to be a tripartisan position that we consciously make that investment.

The other major factor, although you see this trend changing as you look at the data, has been an inefficient use of public school buildings in the ACT. Pleasingly, if you look at the change from 2004 to 2008, you see that the ACT is making massive strides,

when compared to other jurisdictions, to more efficiently use our public school buildings. That was a controversial process—interestingly, it was opposed by the Canberra Liberals, most particularly, but equally by the ACT Greens—to see the more efficient use of public school infrastructure. It has enabled us to have the capacity to reinvest in our public school infrastructure to the tune of over half a billion dollars now. When combined with the commonwealth government's investment, it is the single largest investment in public education in the history of this territory—investing in infrastructure which was being poorly utilised. It is important that we acknowledge the change that has occurred.

There are other tables contained within the detail of the Productivity Commission report that ably demonstrate how we have been able to more efficiently utilise our public school resources. That is important too, because, whilst we want to invest more in our education system—and we do invest more than any other comparable jurisdiction in this country; it is a policy badge that we wear with pride—we also need to do it efficiently.

For the Liberal Party to come into this place this morning and lecture the government on productivity measures and efficiency measures is just laughable—laughable. They stand condemned on their record of opposing every significant microeconomic reform that this government has sought to undertake. Every single significant piece of microeconomic reform that this government has sought to implement has been opposed by the Canberra Liberals—every single point.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what does that lead you to conclude? It is time for a bit more analysis of how the ACT compares with other jurisdictions. I think it is fair to say that we have the worst shadow economics team in Australia here in the ACT. I have been constructing a simplistic league table in relation to shadow economics teams in this country. I am sure the Greens will understand that I have constructed this and will acknowledge that I have put it together. In that simplistic league table, I am afraid, the ACT Liberals have moved from last to second last as a result of a dynamic new shadow economics team that has emerged in a place not too far from here. On a simplistic league table, on raw scores, Abbott, Hockey and Barnaby Joyce would have to be the worst shadow economics team in this country. However, being a fair man, I believe it is appropriate to adjust for an index of community socioeconomic advantage in this instance. We have got to adjust for the Queensland National Party. On that basis, the clear winners in the national league table of worst shadow economics spokespeople are Seselja and Smyth. Seselja and Smyth win.

Let us look at another simplistic league table, productivity measures. In this instance we will create a little league table of our own across the chamber. I would say, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I think the Chief Minister has alluded to this, that Mr Coe would probably head the productivity table within the ACT Liberal Party. Clearly he has demonstrated the greatest capacity for hard work. He does not always get it right, but at least he gets in and has a go.

Mr Stanhope: He gets out of bed in the morning.

MR BARR: He does get out of bed in the morning. Second to Mr Coe in the productivity league table on the Liberal Party is Mr Hanson. I will give him credit. He

is often loud. The Speaker has observed that already; in one day of question time, he has worn out the totality of the Speaker's patience in relation to question time interjections. He is certainly doing very well on that score. Top of the class there, Jeremy. But on any productivity measure, Hanson and Coe win hands down over Smyth and Seselja.

Let us look at some other measures. The *Canberra Times* last year undertook a bit of a league table of their own and measured the parties in a variety of different areas. Most particular and most interesting was the score on policy: D-plus for the Liberal opposition—hampered by a deficit of policy. Haven't we seen that, Madam Deputy Speaker? We have witnessed it in this morning's debate and in the way that they have begun 2010. They have begun 2010 where they left in 2009—opposition for opposition's sake. They have nothing constructive to add to the public policy debate in this territory. They have opposed every significant piece of microeconomic reform that this government has sought to implement, even when, in their heart of hearts, they know it was the right thing to do.

Mr Doszpot let the cat out of the bag to me prior to being in this place, when he was not so heavily influenced by the black hand of Mr Smyth. When he was not so heavily influenced, Mr Doszpot said to me in a particular car park in a Canberra shopping centre that, although it was unpopular, it was the right thing to do to close schools. He knows it; I know it. He said so in his first interview to *City News*. He said: "We wasted three years talking about this. The community has moved on." Everyone has, it would seem, except for Mr Doszpot. He may well continue to run this line, but we know, and the community knows, that he is stuck in the past.

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (11.09): The simple truth out of the Productivity Commission's report is that we pay more, we get less and we wait longer.

We have heard from Jon Stanhope and Andrew Barr. Jon Stanhope basically went on the attack with a tirade of denial and false accusations; I will come to more of those later. But what we just heard from Andrew Barr, when he had 10 minutes to defend this government's record on education and other areas within his portfolio responsibilities, was a Heather-esque attempt at wit reminiscent of some previous speeches he has made in here. Rather than being a serious attempt to defend or explain the government's record, it was simply a very dismal attempt at humour.

The Greens' response, I would have to say, is equally disappointing. Meredith Hunter, who is known for her non-attendance at estimates hearings and her abject failure to hold this government to account, spoke for seven or eight minutes, basically in defence of the dismal record of her mate Katy Gallagher and her government. If the Greens are to be taken seriously as economic managers, if they are going to be taken seriously as commentators in the Assembly and if they are going to be taken seriously as people who hold the government to account, they need to do more than spend seven or eight minutes apologising for the government and criticising the people who brought this very good motion on.

I commend Mr Seselja for bringing this motion on. It is very important that we recognise what this government is failing to deliver to the people of the ACT. After

eight years of mismanagement, what we see across all of our portfolio areas is a city in decline.

I turn specifically to health, which is obviously a great area of concern for the Canberra community. When we look at some of the key performance indicators in comparison both to other states and to when the Liberals were last in power, we can see a decline across the board.

When we come to elective surgery, in 2007 and 2008 the ACT had the longest median waiting times for elective surgery in the entire nation. This indicator is measured by the number of days patients at the 50th percentile have waited for surgery. When Jon Stanhope said that he is talking about taking the first people off the list, who have waited the least amount of time, we are talking about people at the 50th percentile.

The ACT's result was the worst in the nation by a long way. Indeed, there was a 72-day wait for elective surgery. The average across the rest of the nation was 34 days. The ACT figure is twice as bad as the national average, Mr Speaker. That is a performance indicator that Mr Stanhope wants to defend.

Mr Rattenbury: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Would you resume your seat, Mr Hanson.

Mr Rattenbury: I invite Mr Hanson to recognise the change in the chair. Whilst he is reading his speech, he might acknowledge the change in the membership of the chair.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Will you do that, please, Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: Certainly, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do get confused sometimes as to what role the Speaker is taking—whether he is the spokesperson or the Speaker. Sometimes I do get somewhat confused. I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for my grievous error, and I thank the spokesman for the Greens for pointing that error out.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Hanson. I am sure that the Speaker will be able to provide you with a briefing on how to address the chair.

MR HANSON: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I certainly apologise. I did not realise I had offended his sensibilities to such a degree. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is good to see that the Greens are struggling with the big issues of state here in the ACT.

Mr Coe: The future of the territory is in safe hands with this Assembly.

MR HANSON: Yes. If you want to interject again—you do criticise my interjections, Mr Rattenbury, whilst you are sitting in the chair.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, one of the protocols is that you actually address me and not—

MR HANSON: Certainly, Madam Deputy Speaker; I do appreciate that. I will move on to the next point, which is a reflection of where we were in 2001-02 with elective surgery rates. We had a waiting time, a median wait, of 40 days. I have said before that it is now 72 days. That is a significant decline. Regardless of the excuses that Mr Stanhope, his colleagues and the Greens make for this, it is inexcusable.

Patients have waited for more than 365 days. You will recall that Mr Stanhope said that he was addressing those people who had been waiting the longest because that is how he is tackling it and that is why the figures are so bad. But when you look at the facts, and not the spin, you will see that we have the worst result for people who wait the longest. Indeed, for people who have waited over 365 days, that figure is 10.3 per cent of all patients, whereas the national average is three per cent. For Mr Stanhope to say that he is tackling the patients waiting for the longest period of time—that is clearly not having any effect on the numbers.

I will move on from elective surgery to our emergency department waiting times. At some time most of us here would have experienced the result of our long waiting times for emergency department treatment or heard from constituents who have waited for hours and hours with their children or elderly patients who have been unable to see medical staff on time for urgent and semi-urgent treatment. For urgent and semi-urgent treatment, the categories are 30 minutes and 60 minutes respectively. You are meant to see 75 per cent of those patients on time. However, in the ACT it is 52 per cent and 51 per cent, respectively, for urgent and semi-urgent. That is only just behind the Northern Territory, the worst in the nation. When you consider the issues that the Northern Territory faces in terms of health outcomes, with its difficult problems with socioeconomic status and a large Indigenous population, you see that that is another dismal failure by the Stanhope Labor government.

Mr Stanhope has talked about hospital beds and the number of hospital beds that his government has put in. The reality of the situation is that the ACT Labor government has delivered the lowest number of hospital beds per capita in Australia. Compared to all the other states, per capita we have the lowest number of hospital beds. It is a dismal record.

With general practitioners we know that this government has essentially denied responsibility for any failure to provide the number of GPs we need in the ACT—to a point where we are now short 70 positions. Whilst GP numbers in the rest of Australia have been growing at eight per cent per annum, we have got a decline in our GP numbers so that again, per capita, we have the lowest number of GPs in Australia. And of the GPs that we do have, we now have the lowest bulk-billing rate. We have the lowest number of public dentists.

This is not coming cheap. We spend more per capita than any jurisdiction in Australia other than the Northern Territory, but we have health costs which are increasing at 11.1 per cent, the highest in the nation. Not only are we spending more than anybody else: we are getting the worst results, and health costs are increasing at an exponential rate, more than in any other jurisdiction in Australia.

I turn briefly to corrections. When we look at the amount that we are paying for our prisoners, the amount in the report had us at a rate that is more than in any other jurisdiction in Australia. But from the latest facts we know that that figure has now almost doubled under the management of Simon Corbell, to \$504 a day.

For policing, another one of Mr Corbell's portfolios, in relation to property crime, we have the lowest proportion of investigations finalised within 30 days of the offence becoming known to police. In terms of road safety, we have the poorest results for speeding. And let me turn to some other reports. When it comes to unlawful entry involving the taking of property, we see that, on figures per 100,000, we are the worst in the nation. For motor vehicle theft, that figure again is the worst in the nation. And other theft, on a per capita rate, is amongst the worst in the nation; I think we are only behind WA on that rate.

When we look across my portfolio areas, most importantly health, which affects everybody here in the ACT, we can see that there is no question but that we pay more, we wait longer and we get less—more so than the other states and more so than when this government came to power.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and emergency services) (11.19): I can only reiterate the views that my colleagues on this side of the Assembly have expressed in making the point that the Liberal opposition continually fail to demonstrate any capacity to be consistent in their approach on these matters. They are quite prepared to criticise the government with their views about the performance of various government services. But, when it comes to proposals to actually put in place reform, to try and make things better, they simply refuse them.

My colleague Mr Barr amply demonstrated in the context of education and reform of the education process how every single step that this government has taken to try and reform and improve the delivery of education services in this city has been opposed by the Liberal Party—blocked, hindered, at every step.

It is the same with health, of course, with measures that the government has put in place to try and improve the planning, delivery and coordination of health services, particularly in Canberra's north in relation to Calvary hospital. Where were the Liberal Party on that? Were they proposing reform? Were they supporting reform? Were they putting in place steps to advocate the need for reform? No; they were simply saying no. They were rejecting. They were opposing. They were opposing for the sake of opposing.

I would like to turn to the issue of emergency services and in particular the criticisms made by Mr Smyth in relation to emergency services. Of course, what Mr Smyth fails to acknowledge about the performance measures in emergency services, and in particular ambulance services, is that different jurisdictions measure performance, and in particular response times, in different ways.

In the ACT we adopt what is considered to be leading best practice where we record response times, and performance against response times, from receipt of the 000 call;

effectively what is known from the first key stroke. So the time the emergency service call taker starts to enter the call into their system is when the clock starts running here in the territory. But that is not uniform across Australia. In fact, in many jurisdictions across Australia the measurement of response time only commences from when the request for an ambulance is actually given to the ambulance crew, when a crew is allocated.

There can often be a considerable period of time between when the call is taken and when the call is actually allocated to a crew for actual response. So in that respect it is little surprise to me that the ACT does not perform as well as other jurisdictions. Just in terms of that measure alone, we are disadvantaged. Ms Gallagher highlighted this in some comments yesterday about waiting lists for elective surgery. She made the point that you can change these things and make them look better if you are less honest with the figures. And we know that other jurisdictions do that; other jurisdictions do not count certain patients if they have stayed too long on the list, as Ms Gallagher outlined yesterday.

But we do not do that because we try to provide an accurate assessment and accurate figures to our community about how services are delivered. If that places us at a disadvantage compared to other jurisdictions who are not so open, who are not so transparent in their reporting, so be it. But we will continue to adopt an appropriate approach when it comes to measuring performance in these areas. The government has been working hard with the Ambulance Service and with the union that represents ambulance officers to improve the operations of our Ambulance Service, and I have been the first to acknowledge that our Ambulance Service is facing real pressures. It has only been in many respects down to the very significant level of goodwill and commitment by ambulance officers that we have continued to provide the very high level of service that we are able to provide.

We are taking steps to address these issues. Let us look first at the issue of growth in relation to our ambulance services—growth in the order of 10 per cent per year each and every year. That is a significant level of growth. It is compounded by the demand in other areas of the health service and the fact that the Ambulance Service often becomes the option that people turn to for various types of immediate medical care. For that reason, the government has already put in place additional crews and additional vehicles to try and help meet that demand.

We have moved to a demand-based model for the delivery of ambulance services so we have more ambulance vehicles on the road at the busiest times—busiest times being between about 7 o'clock in the morning through to around nine, 10 o'clock in the evening. At other periods of the day the crewing arrangements change to reflect the lesser demand that we know traditionally and usually occurs during those early hours of the morning.

So demand-based crewing has been a reform the government has put in place. Extra vehicles is another measure the government has put in place. Extra crews is another measure that the government has put in place. The government has also, through the Emergency Services Agency, put in place measures to reform the communications centre arrangements, to improve and streamline the operations of the communications

centre to provide greater clinical support to our Ambulance Service officers on the road from the communications centre, so that judgements can be made about whether or not the call coming through is actually a 000 call and warrants the highest level of response or whether a lower but still appropriate level of response is put in place by the crew and by the comms centre. So these are all measures that the government is putting in place to try and manage demand and still provide a very high level of service.

What is pleasing about the ROGS data is that, of emergency patients surveyed by the Ambulance Service, 96 per cent were either satisfied or very satisfied with the level of service provided. So we still have a very high level of customer satisfaction from users of the Ambulance Service. They appreciate the level of service and they recognise that it is of a high quality.

What is also pleasing in the data from ROGS is that survival rates in the ACT for adults that have suffered a cardiac arrest where resuscitation was undertaken by the ACT Ambulance Service intensive care paramedics was above the national average. So we have got survival rates above the national average. That is also a very pleasing figure.

As minister, I recognise there are real pressures on our Ambulance Service. They are driven by growth. They are driven by an ageing of the population. More and more people are resorting to the Ambulance Service in their time of need. We are taking steps to address that. We are taking steps to improve resourcing, to work with staff, to work with management, to put in place the measures that are necessary. Of course, as members would be aware, the government has agreed to a full review of the operation of ambulance services. That work is close to completion and that will give us a strong framework for further decisions we need to take to further improve the management of the Ambulance Service into the future.

The point Ms Hunter was trying to make, and which has been so unfairly criticised by those on the other side of the Assembly, is that you have to view this data with a little bit of intelligence, a little bit of thoughtfulness, and recognise that the report itself acknowledges that in many instances data for indicators are not directly comparable. Indeed, in relation to the Ambulance Service data itself, there is a very clear disclaimer by the Productivity Commission where it says: "Data for this indicator in relation to response times are not directly comparable"—and they are not directly comparable for the reasons that have been outlined. As I think Ms Hunter was trying to say, if you want to have a serious debate about this, take those things into account, acknowledge them and be intellectually honest about it, rather than trying to score the cheap political point.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (11.29): I will address a few points that have been raised, in particular in relation to some of the health issues. We have had a lot of discussion about the median waiting times for elective surgery. I note the data in the Productivity Commission report about our elective surgery waiting lists is from 2007-08 and that since then extra funds have been appropriated by both the ACT and federal governments and that there have been reasonable improvements.

Although we did have the somewhat premature opening of a new operating theatre, which I will note, I certainly hope that once this new theatre is fully operational it will have an impact on waiting times. With this additional funding going to address waiting lists for elective surgery in particular, we would expect, however, to see continual improvements in the next couple of years. It would be a matter of concern if we did not see an improvement. Government would have to justify this investment and look to where they are going to offer further solutions.

We have also discussed the Productivity Commission report stating that the ACT has the lowest number of public dentists of any jurisdiction. This is concerning and is something which we need to investigate further. Dental care is often one of the more neglected areas of our health system; people do not always recognise the importance of dental care. However, dental care affects many other areas of a person's health, including nutrition. I note that there was a federal policy announcement in this area—that the now federal Labor government would establish a national dental health scheme if elected. However, we are yet to see anything delivered by the federal Labor government on this.

I also note that it was a federal-state-territory funded area but that the Howard Liberal government withdrew federal funding and did leave the states and territories with quite a massive hole in their dental public care. So both those points need to be noted. I would appreciate an update from the minister about what is within the territory government's responsibility in this area and what it can do to address and improve this area.

We have also discussed the bulk-billing rates in the ACT and we do know that we have the lowest bulk-billing rate in the country. It has been a much discussed issue over the last few months. Much of the blame for this situation does actually lie with the federal government and the funding models they have pursued. The system of Medicare rebates and the resulting red tape and required paperwork has lent itself to the growth of large corporate practices or to smaller practices moving away from bulk-billing.

The classification of the ACT as a metropolitan rather than a regional area also disadvantages us. This is something I would hope both our Labor and Liberal federal representatives for the ACT are lobbying on, but I have to say I have not heard anything public on this from either party. We in the ACT can tinker around the edges, but until the reported extra GPs that we have heard about come online in several years, and until we have a changed funding model at the federal level, this is a problem that is going to continue, and we do need to acknowledge that.

The Productivity Commission report also has data on the number of public hospital beds per capita. This is an issue that goes to the very heart of the capital asset development program and also, obviously, the Calvary debate, which we will be addressing later today in the chamber. I am concerned about initial views that have been expressed in Mr Hanson's health discussion paper that the Liberals would like to see a greater focus on private health. This would lead to a greater decrease in public health beds and would have an impact on surgery waiting times.

The Productivity Commission report also has the figures of the payments per public housing dwelling in the country. In recent years we have seen big cuts to administrative costs for Housing ACT and we would not want to see further cuts to this. What has not been mentioned at all in this debate, or acknowledged, is that a proportion of the cost stated goes into other services which support people in public housing to stay in that house. This could include domestic violence assistance, mental health services or other health assistance and even employment services.

Public housing is an important part of providing housing to vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our community. It is easy to target public housing, but that neglects to address what would happen to people if we did not provide public housing and the necessary support services. What would happen to people and families who, due to financial difficulties, have lost their home and have nowhere to go? What would happen to people escaping domestic violence? What would happen to someone who has finally received help for their mental illness for the first time but needs somewhere to live so they can have a job and have that stability in their life? As has been noted by experts in various fields of social policy over and over again, if we do not provide stability through housing, the other areas of a person's life cannot be addressed.

Also in relation to the public housing stock, we do have old stock, so it does cost more if we are to keep that stock in decent repair. I would hope and expect that the stimulus funding from the federal government will impact on this. What I am concerned about is what will happen when this and other funding associated with the federal housing white paper runs out. When the changed arrangements under the federal, state and territory housing agreements hit us, they could have a major impact, particularly on those essential and crucial support services that help people maintain their housing.

The Productivity Commission, as we have also heard, also shows that the ACT ambulance response times are increasing and I note the points that both Mr Smyth and Mr Corbell have raised in relation to this. Over the years, confidence in our ambulance services has diminished and there are some suburbs now that the ambulance can take a very long time to get to. The public accounts committee will soon be looking into this matter via the Auditor-General's report. This will be a very important inquiry and I look forward to that committee's report and seeing what recommendations they make about how the service can be improved.

I have to address some of the points we have heard from the insightful Liberal Party today. I have to say it is a typical motion from them—lazy, lacking in any substance and always taking a dumbed-down approach. Rattling off a set of figures does not actually provide an analysis, although they might think it does. But I do have to say that what happens typically when we have this sort of motion coming up is that the Liberals attack, the Labor Party attack back and we do not actually have any debate on the substance—and that does not really achieve much for anyone.

Before I finish, I will have to go to Mr Hanson, the wonderful Mr Hanson, particularly his criticisms on committee attendance. This comes from a person who has been on one committee over the past year or so. That is quite a major effort from

Mr Hanson, isn't it? Perhaps he is too busy making his own leadership plans. I would suspect that is what is going on.

And, of course, there is Mr Hanson's health discussion paper and the brilliant and insightful assertion in the *Chronicle*, referring to the health system, that it needed to be better, more efficient, as well as bigger. What an insightful and brilliant assertion from Mr Hanson! I am very much looking forward to how Mr Hanson can show he will do this. The fact that he has actually just discovered this and that he has also just discovered preventive health is a very interesting point.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (11.37): I am happy to rise in support of Mr Seselja's important motion which, of course, has been trivialised as one would expect by the Stanhope government and the insubstantial responses put forward by the Chief Minister, Mr Barr and Mr Corbell. Sadly, it has been trivialised by the party that promised to bring the community third party insurance in the ACT.

The Stanhope government must every year dread the thought of what the Productivity Commission might say about it in its annual report on government services. It must dread the report because every year it shows up this government for what it really is—an underachieving, failing government with wrong priorities, poor management and a government more focused on inputs than outcomes.

What we have seen in the Productivity Commission report is that over the eight years of the Stanhope government things are getting worse for the people of the ACT. This Stanhope Labor government is working for Labor. It is not working for the people of the ACT and the result is that Canberrans, in the words of the *Canberra Times*, are paying for more and getting less.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me give you a few examples from my own portfolio areas. I will start with the area of child protection. According to the Productivity Commission report, and I am referring to figure 15.2 and also to the tables that go with the report which are not in the hard copy edition, the ACT is the only jurisdiction with declining expenditure on childcare and protection.

Figure 15.11 shows that the ACT has the third lowest rate in the country of placement of Indigenous children in out-of-home care with Indigenous relatives or carers in Indigenous residential care. Only Tasmania and the Northern Territory are worse. Figure 15.13 shows that the ACT government's expenditure on all out-of-home care per child is declining. When the figures first came out, I did not criticise, because it is quite possibly the case that we are getting more efficient at these matters.

One of the things that I have said consistently on this indicator is that we need to drill down and the minister needs to drill down to demonstrate whether we are in fact getting better value for money or whether we are in fact just spending less. I think that that is part of the debate and the discussion that we need to have in this place. This is one of those indicators where the jury is still out. The challenge for us as an Assembly is to drill down into those figures.

But at the same time that we see it is possible we may be being more efficient here, we are spending less per child than we spent five years ago in real dollar terms. The

other part of this figure is that the ACT is the only jurisdiction over the reporting period where we have seen a decline in expenditure in real terms. Now, the minister likes to come back and say, "But we have not talked about the budget that is currently at hand because we have not finished the reporting period." That would be reported upon next year, and we look ahead, we look in anticipation for improvement in the government's performance which will not be based on assertion from the minister.

The minister disgraced herself when she went into print in the *Canberra Times* on this the other day. Her embarrassing performance on this was, I suppose, what we have come to expect. There were substantial errors in this. The first one, of course, was predictable. It is what governments always say: "These figures are old." Ms Burch went into print the other day and said that these figures were two years old.

Some of the figures are five years old, yes, and some of them are two years old, but the most recent figures relate to the position as at 30 June 2009. They were slightly more than six months old when they were reported. They were not two-year-old figures, and that is one of the false facts, one of the factoids that this minister put in her foray into the media the other day.

It went on, but if you look at the tables, if you look at the graphs and if you look at the information that that supports, real, total, recurrent expenditure on child protection and out-of-home care in the ACT fell from a high of \$39 million in 2004-05 to a low of \$30 million in 2007-08 and up slightly to \$31 million in 2008-09. Over the period, there was a decline—the only jurisdiction in the country in which this occurred. I wonder whether the children of the ACT think that they are better off under a Stanhope Labor government.

There are other figures there that are of considerable concern. I think it is incumbent upon us to delve deeper into them. This might be a job for an appropriate committee. Figures in table 14.5 show that the ACT substantiation rates, after initial decisions not to substantiate, are amongst the worst in the country. It is a complex thing, but what it boils down to is that someone makes a report that they are concerned about someone being at risk. The report is looked at and they decide that there is no case to answer. In 30 per cent of cases in the ACT, those reports are eventually substantiated within 12 months of their not being substantiated.

It is a stand-out figure—much, much higher than any other comparable figures in the country. They are difficult figures to compare, but I think that it does ring alarm bells, and it should ring alarm bells for the people in the community. The minister also claimed, and she claimed again yesterday, that we had the best response times. In fact, that is simply not true. Other jurisdictions do much better than us in responding more quickly to reports of abuse or children at risk.

Turning briefly to the juvenile justice system, I need to point out some of the issues in the report. Figure 15.17 shows that the ACT has the highest average rate in Australia of detention of Indigenous juveniles—that is, people aged 10 to 17. In the ACT, looking at the underlying rate at table 15A.174, the ratio of Indigenous to non-Indigenous detention suggests that for every one non-Indigenous juvenile in detention per 100,000, 61.3 Indigenous juveniles are detained. This is a very large jump from earlier figures.

There are other figures, but I really need to look at the childcare figures, which are something that I am particularly concerned about, because people in my electorate are particularly concerned about it. We will be discussing this later in the day. The report shows that we have a very high proportion of not-for-profit providers of childcare services in the ACT, higher than anywhere else in the country. I do not know that that is particularly a problem, but it does belie a point that Ms Hunter made when Mr Seselja made the point that we had the highest fees in the country. It is in fact that only ACT families pay more than \$300 a week for centre-based or long-based care. She said, "That is all right, because the market sets the fee."

However, we have to remember that most of these organisations are not-for-profit. They do not go out there looking for a profit. What they do, if you actually talk to them, is that they look at their costs and they work out how much it costs to provide the service and that is what they charge. There is no profit. All they are doing is covering costs. When we have nearly 80 per cent of our service providers being not-for-profit, they are not out there looking for a profit margin, and they are not out there looking at what the market will bear. They are looking at what it costs them to run a childcare centre and that is what they charge for clients.

One of the other things that is most important in this figure is dealt with in paragraph 3.63. It shows that the out-of-pocket expenses, particularly for people on low incomes, are far and away the highest in the country. They are far and away the highest in the country. It is no good saying, "We have high incomes so we can afford to do this." It is a stand-out figure, and I draw members' attention to the figure in table 3.27, because it shows just how poorly we are performing in comparison with the rest of the country.

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Women) (11.47): I rise again to say thank you for giving us an opportunity to provide clarity to the nonsense that is contained in this motion. Each year the Productivity Commission, as a secretariat producing the report on government services, releases a report on the provision of a range of government services, including housing and childcare fees.

What we see in this motion is a cynical and deliberate simplification and misrepresentation of the facts. I think others in this chamber have agreed. But as always, the ACT Liberal Party is not about facts. It is around cherry-picking a little bit of data, suiting it to their own purposes and trying to make out that they have actually got something to say and a policy to work around. But this unfortunate motion has made some serious misrepresentation of the facts.

Mr Seselja states that the ACT has the highest median childcare fees of any state or territory at \$65 a day. I think we have just heard Mrs Dunne talk about that. But childcare fees are a matter for individual childcare service operators to determine based on their business model. This applies to both private and community-based childcare services. The setting of childcare fees is not, nor should it be, the role of the government. The Productivity Commission's report on government services is quite

clear. It measures the ACT, a city-state, with states and territories which have large regional areas. The figures draw a false comparison with our metropolitan jurisdictions.

Comparing Canberra to other urban areas provides a more accurate comparison. The commonwealth government's mychild website indicates that most weekly rates for centre-based childcare in inner-city Sydney range from \$375 a week to \$520 a week. Wollongong and Newcastle range from \$300 to \$375. This compares with the cost in the ACT of \$325, as reported in the report on government services.

Those opposite are comparing Cunnamulla with Canberra on childcare. There are other market factors that influence cost as well. The ACT has the highest per capita income across jurisdictions in Australia and has one of the highest percentages of working parents. This does drive demand and competition. The capacity of parents to pay influences the varying degrees of cost of childcare provided to their children.

I note the assistance for families who struggle to achieve these costs. This includes a rebate to parents for the cost of childcare of up to 50 per cent of fees provided by the Labor federal government. The ACT government is helping our families. We have provided increased funding for the provision of childcare services, spending \$632 per child aged from birth to 12 years of age, an increase of \$145 from the previous year. Compare that to an average spend of \$353 that they like to point to.

The increase reflects in part the establishment of the state-of-the-art early childhood schools. The ACT government has been listening to the childcare sector. We work with the childcare services forum, which is composed of representatives from the private and community-based childcare sectors and have been providing government with valuable information on childcare sector development, including our commitment to quality reforms in childcare.

I do not think those opposite are really interested in quality childcare. They only seek to misrepresent our childcare sector by making false cost comparisons. They have noted that 80 per cent of our childcare providers are community based and I am sure that each and every one of them must be disappointed when they hear those opposite say that they believe they are charging too much for those services.

Before I move to housing, I would like to make comment on Mrs Dunne's child protection comments. She continues with the nonsense that she has continued with this week. We have shown yesterday, and I am quite happy to keep on reminding Mrs Dunne, that we have continued investment. We are up to over \$44 million in the child protection line. We have also invested in child and family centres, which they do not seem to get. I think Ms Bresnan seems to indicate that they cannot quite come to grips with early intervention and prevention strategies.

Indeed, I do recognise that there was a \$68 million investment post-Vardon report over four years. That did reconfigure and change our child protection system that gives us our working system that we have now. One of the facts that they are forgetting to admit is that we have the highest, most stable placements in child protection. They are not interested in children being located with stable families so

they can grow and develop. No, they just come and penny-pinch on false dollar figures.

On housing, Mr Seselja has simply got it wrong when he complains about the cost per dwelling for public housing in the ACT. The cost simply reflects the value of land in the ACT. It is not a measure of the efficiencies or otherwise of public housing.

Mr Seselja: You take out the capital component and it is still the second highest; so explain that then.

MS BURCH: And what is more, that high figure represents the high value of public housing stock to the territory, which of great benefit to us all.

Mr Seselja: I use both figures. You have not grasped it, Joy. Did you look at the other figures?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Seselja!

MS BURCH: Let me explain the position to Mr Seselja, because he seems not to have understood. Chapter 16 of ROGS deals with housing. The housing chapter looks at a range of measures to assess the performance of the provision of housing assistance by each state and territory as far as practicable on a comparable basis. One measure is the cost of providing assistance per dwelling for public housing across all jurisdictions. That measure is reported in table 16.12. Mr Seselja refers to it in his motion.

The cost for the ACT reported in the 2010 report on government services is \$36,672 per dwelling. Quite rightly, as Mr Seselja points out, it is the highest in the country and some \$10,598 above the national average. Of course, upon a very preliminary analysis, which I think others in this chamber have agreed that is all they are capable of, these figures provoke a negative response. But on close inspection, the ACT figure is close to both Western Australia at \$35,596 per dwelling and the Northern Territory at \$32,881 per dwelling.

Why, it must be asked, is the ACT not more comparable to New South Wales at \$24,653 or Victoria at \$25,458 per dwelling, which are much closer to the national average of \$26,074? The answer is revealed, if those opposite took the time to look, in table 16.5; so just read a little bit further on. The financial indicators for public housing 2004-05 to 2008-09 are based on dollars per dwelling. The table shows the breakdown of costs that make up the \$36,672 per dwelling for the ACT and those for the other jurisdictions.

Upon analysis of the amounts shown in that table, one figure stands out as the major cause for this higher cost. That amount refers to the indicative user cost of capital for land, which for the ACT is \$19,814 per dwelling or 54 per cent of the total cost per dwelling. The indicative user cost of capital represents the opportunity cost of the value of land held by Housing ACT. The indicative capital cost for the ACT is \$19,313 or 89 per cent above the national average. The reason for this is that public housing in the ACT is located within the metropolitan area and not spread across rural

areas that tend to have lower land values. I suggest that those opposite look at a map of Australia—

Mr Coe: Address the recurrent stuff, Joy.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Coe!

MS BURCH: based on childcare and housing and just look at the obvious comparisons. The indicative cost of capital also includes an amount for the value of the dwelling. Here in the ACT the value of \$8,317 is only slightly higher than the national average of \$7,687, and in part reflects—

Mr Coe: Slightly?

MS BURCH: It is eight per cent, Mr Coe, but maybe it is a bit complicated for you as well. We should be applauding our results. I would like to remind those opposite in the Assembly that when the Liberals were last in government they ripped out and sold 1,000 houses from our public housing stock. Given that our public housing stock is allocated to those in need, those most vulnerable in our community, that are at risk of homelessness and disadvantage, the thought of ripping out 1,000 properties just beggars belief. It beggars belief that they could come in here and think that we do not perform with our serious investment in public housing.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (11.57): It is disappointing again that the Canberra Liberals have had to highlight more inefficiencies with the ACT government's management of our city. My particular interest, of course, with regard to the report is public housing. In the ACT we have got a number of issues in public housing which need to be addressed and a number of issues in public housing that have been highlighted in the report by the Productivity Commission. Despite the fact that we have higher costs than any other jurisdiction apart from the Northern Territory, even though this government calls it "investment", we still have major problems with maintenance, major problems with antisocial behaviour, major problems in determining the future of multi-unit complexes and major problems with our relationship with community housing providers.

The key figure that I am going to be addressing today is one that Ms Burch pretty much skipped over, and that is the net recurrent cost of managing housing in the territory. The important figure here is the \$7,736 per dwelling. She talked about capital cost, she talked about land value, she talked about having houses in metropolitan areas. That is all very well. But the recurrent cost is the cost that it takes for the department to manage each house. Here it is \$7,736, higher than any state in Australia.

Mrs Dunne: We don't have any rural and remote areas to drive up that cost.

MR COE: We do not have rural and regional areas that we have to subsidise. We do not have areas thousands of kilometres from our state capital, from our state housing headquarters, to subsidise. No, they are all within a 20-minute or half-an-hour drive, with perhaps the exception of Uriarra estate. Yet we still have the highest net

recurrent cost of any state. Only the Northern Territory exceeds that. I think we would all understand the Northern Territory has some particularly unique issues that we do not necessarily face in the ACT to the same extent.

That \$7,736 is \$1,370 above the Australian average. The Australian average is \$6,366 and here we have \$7,736. There is a difference of \$1,370. When you consider that, as of the last budget, we had 11,700 dwellings in the ACT, if you times that by \$1,370, the cost per dwelling, we in the ACT are paying \$16 million per year because we are not meeting the national average. And that national average includes the Northern Territory, which is more than double what the national average is. You have got an outlier there which is distorting the figures quite significantly. So if we were to deliver the national average, including the outlier of the Northern Territory, we would save \$16 million in public housing.

We heard Ms Bresnan earlier talk about what would happen if we did not provide public housing, and she gave three or four different scenarios. What we can say categorically, rather than looking at hypotheticals about what would happen if we did not do something, is: how about we look at what is happening because of what we are doing? The fact is that we are driving people into public housing because we do not have enough housing in the ACT, and the housing we do have is too expensive. They are the real issues. It is not a matter of saying what would happen if we did not do public housing. It is what would happen if we did all the housing in the ACT properly and did not drive people into public housing in the first place.

We have the highest average of public housing houses in the country, about 8½ per cent. And we heard last year that the Greens want to increase that to 10 per cent. Rather than necessarily increasing public housing stock by 1½ per cent, why do we not increase all housing in the ACT by that percentage or whatever percentage may well be appropriate? I think if we increase the housing stock in the ACT, if we have a good, stable land release strategy, what we are going to have is more houses and people will not need to go to the public housing in the first place.

It is interesting that those opposite, the Greens and Labor, both have this socialist utopia whereby public housing is the only answer for our housing woes. I do not accept that. I do not accept Ms Burch's or Ms Bresnan's rationale that the socialist answer is the right answer. What I think is the right answer is to avoid the problem before it actually occurs. A bit of prevention would not go astray. What I think we need is to make sure we have a good, stable land release strategy, a good strategy for housing affordability, so that people do not get forced into public housing in the first place. We know that for every person that goes into public housing, we have \$7,736 of taxpayers' dollars which need to go into it to subsidise it. Would it not be better if that problem did not arise in the first place?

Yet if you have a socialist world view, you would not agree with that. You would not agree with that because you would only say that increasing public housing stock as a percentage is the answer. And really what it comes down to is why the Labor Party do not want to deal with community housing providers—because they want a bigger empire. They want a bigger empire in Housing ACT that is controlled and managed by the ACT government. That is what they want. They do not like the idea that the

private sector, the community sector, may be able to contribute to our housing problems in the ACT. They do not like to accept it.

I find it very hard to believe that the ACT government is seriously looking at these issues when it has a world view which, I think, is incompatible with the welfare of Canberrans. If you had an ACT government that had some ideas, had some strategy, was not as arrogant as to not even acknowledge that there is a housing problem in the ACT, maybe we would be in a situation that would actually suit more Canberra families.

Only the Canberra Liberals do have a strategy for bringing our housing difficulties under control, actually releasing land at a stable and constant rate so that the housing market can accurately predict what is going to be required and what the prices will be, what demand will be and what supply will be necessary in order to keep our market in equilibrium. What we have at the moment is an absolute disaster, and it is a great shame that so many Canberra families are driven into public housing by the ACT government, due to the gross mismanagement and inefficiencies of Housing ACT, stemming from the minister herself.

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (12.05): I welcome the opportunity that Mr Seselja has provided here today with this motion. This is an opportunity to discuss some of the misconceptions that currently abound, specifically within the education sector—misconceptions, I might add, that have been perpetuated by the minister himself, misconceptions that our students are the best in the nation and misconceptions that our non-government or so-called blazer schools, as Mr Barr has been known to call them, are doing so well that they need no extra funding. Mr Barr often says in this place that the debate on non-government schools versus government schools is over. That is certainly not the case, especially when our non-government sector is so inequitably funded.

Mr Barr, in his response to Mr Seselja's criticism of this government's performance, certainly underlined the very facts that he was trying to counter. After eight years of a Labor government, the ACT community is paying more and getting less. The examples the education minister used on government expenditure and lower class sizes actually highlighted the lack of vision and performance of this minister and this government.

After continually criticising Liberal policy on lowering class sizes, a matter of a few weeks out from the election the now familiar Barr backflip occurred, a Barr backflip for which we should be holding up notice boards as to the effectiveness. That was, I think, a No 9 Barr backflip. Presto, the criticism morphed into an Andrew Barr initiative, from bagging the Liberals to stealing the Liberals' policy.

He is starting to believe his own spin as he tries to justify this government's lack of initiative and performance. The fact that he has spent the majority of the time running a narrative on his view of the opposition rather than refuting the opposition's statements about his performance, and his government's poor performance, says it all. Why not give a good spin rather than face up to this record?

While we are talking about spin—digressing for a moment—Ms Burch, I note, has also had another spin which she has been caught out on, saying that the Multicultural Festival this year had more attendees than last year. Her office has now said that this is incorrect. Interesting!

A few interesting publications came to light in the last few weeks: the Productivity Commission's report on government services and of course the controversial My School website. Both sets of data give us an interesting and new perspective of the state of the ACT's education system. My School has no doubt been a significant talking point nationally and has been the cause of much public commentary. Whether or not you agree with the publication, and indeed the publication of tables as a result of the data, is neither here nor there in this debate. The one aspect we can all agree on is that the data published on My School has given governments across Australia information on which they must be held to account and information that we in this place must take on notice.

The results for the ACT are not as rosy as the education minister would have us believe. Surprise, surprise! And to make matters worse, this government has had access to this information for years. Overall, the results are mixed for ACT schools, with a number lagging behind in comparison to other schools in similar demographic areas. In fact, three-quarters of our students are doing worse than their counterparts in other parts of Australia.

When we take into account the fact, as presented in the Productivity Commission report, that the ACT government provides more financial support for government school students than any other state and territory government in Australia, except for the Northern Territory, this result is really put in perspective. We are spending more and we are getting far less.

Mr Barr has been described in an opinion piece in the *Canberra Times* on 2 February as “confidently presiding over a system that gives our kids less of a head start than they could achieve almost anywhere else in the country”. Without going into direct comparisons of schools, it is clear to see that, despite telling us over and over again that educational outcomes would be improved with the expenditure of millions of dollars for our new superschools, this has simply not been the case. After communities had the heart ripped out of them with the closure of schools, the results clearly shown in the data tell us that there has been no significant educational improvement. The results do not back up the rhetoric that these changes would create the better educational outcomes that Mr Barr so often gave us that he is now very much the holder of the title “minister of spin”.

The bottom line is that the Stanhope government cannot claim that the experiment of closing schools has worked. The real question is: how long have this government sat on their hands? How long have they sat on this information and how long have we been trending downwards? How long have they known? We know that it is 10 years since the ACT first started ACTAP and subsequently NAPLAN testing. So this government have been getting results since 2001, and the current minister since 2006. Surely this has been time enough to see the trends and to head off any disastrous outcomes.

What has been the minister's response so far to these results? There was a glimmer of concession when he stated that we may have been coasting and that there is an action plan for the areas that need more attention. In fact the minister stated that he would be targeting resources. And as Mr Seselja so elegantly put it, who has been coasting? Is it the schools or is it the government? I think we all know which way the finger-pointing should go. But of course that is constantly deflected. It is always somebody else's problem. But it is high time that responsibility was taken by this minister and this government for their own inactivity.

What does this really mean? Should we believe that the results were a complete surprise? Should we just be looking at funding in the vain hope that things will improve, close our eyes and hope for the best? This seems too much like a kneejerk reaction. No consideration has gone into the prospect of the impact in some schools. Other programs may be forsaken in pursuit of better NAPLAN results and the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged may even grow.

When it comes to the report on government services, the most damning data to come out of this publication is the lack of funding for non-government schools, which is the lowest in the country. This is backed up by the latest national report on schooling in Australia. This government only provide for a non-government school student 18 per cent of the funding of a government school student, compared with an average of 25 per cent funding in other states. This government have failed to realise that equitable funding of the non-government education sector adds considerably to the quality of education that can be found across the board.

It is the basic right of everyone to choose which education system they wish. It is also a basic right of every student with a disability to access equitable funding regardless of which school they go to. Here the disparities are incredibly greater than previously stated.

The Productivity Commission has effectively given the ACT government a fail mark across a number of areas, including education. The message is clear: 8½ years of ACT Labor and they have failed on many fronts.

Since 2002 we have seen many key indicators fall from above national average to trailing every other jurisdiction. I reiterate what my colleagues before me have said: things have not got better; they have got significantly worse; and we, in Canberra, are paying more and getting less. That is the legacy of this government.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (12.13), in reply: I thank members for their contributions to the debate. It is worth responding to a little of what has been said. It is unfortunate, I think, that the Chief Minister, instead of actually accepting that there are some very concerning figures in the Productivity Commission report, simply attacked. And we see that time and time again.

Instead of saying, "Gee, these are concerning," we would expect the leader of our government would look at these figures—whether it is on waiting lists, whether it is the amount we spend per day per prisoner, whether it is the cost of childcare or

a number of these measures—and would be concerned and would say: “We are going to fix it. This is unacceptable. We are going to do better. We are going to turn around this massive increase in elective surgery waiting times, the problems with our emergency departments.” But instead all we heard was the attack, the denial that there is a problem and the attack.

Mr Barr had 10 minutes to tell us how he, as education minister, was going to respond to these issues. He has pointed the finger at some schools—he will not say which—but he is pulling the blame away from himself. He is saying some of our schools are coasting. Which schools and what are you doing about it? Is it not, in fact, the ACT Labor government that has been coasting? He had 10 minutes to tell us what reforms he was going to put in place to ensure that our schools do not coast, that they do not rest on their laurels, that we are endlessly striving for improvement.

But he spent eight minutes on personal attacks. He had 10 minutes to give us an outline. But we know that when it comes to education policy he does not have any; he just copies ours. We have seen it. He copies ours. He criticised our policy when we came out with it for the election but then he copied it. He copied it because he knew it; he knew that he had to. He knew that he had no choice because it was the right policy, because people responded well to it because it was the right policy. So it is probably no surprise that he spent eight minutes of his 10 minutes on personal attacks rather than giving us the answers to how he was going to ensure that the laziness in education that has been evident from him and his predecessors as ministers and his government was going to change. He has acknowledged the coasting but, of course, has pointed the finger at schools and said it was going to change.

We did not hear that, unfortunately. We did not hear the plan. And it is perhaps because of that approach—we heard the approach from the Chief Minister and the approach from Mr Barr—that we do get such poor outcomes. But maybe the focus is not actually on reforming, improving and fixing some of these serious problems, it is simply on launching attacks.

We got the usual sell-out from Meredith Hunter. Ms Hunter, of course, accepted whatever the government says. “Nothing to see here, no scrutiny needed here,” and in her seven or so minutes she lectured us for daring to bring on motions boldly criticising the government. How dare we bring forward a motion criticising the government! And that was what we have come to expect. Whether it is endorsing the budget on day one, whether it is caving in on school closures, whatever the issue is, we are seeing more and more, as time goes on, the Greens, particularly through their Parliamentary Convenor saying to us: “If the government says it, we accept it. Criticisms of the government? No, we do not really need to bother with those.”

The Productivity Commission’s findings are serious; they are objective findings; they are not something we made up; they are something presented. And they make for a damning assessment of this government and for the last eight years. It unfortunately is summed up by the fact that we are paying more and getting less. After 8½ years of ACT Labor, we are paying more and getting less. And no amount of prevaricating, no amount of spin, will change that fact. The Productivity Commission has delivered a damning assessment of ACT Labor’s time in office.

We will continue to hold them accountable for that. We will continue to push so that we see improved outcomes rather than continuing to go backwards in these areas. It appears from the debate today that we will continue to be the only party in this Assembly that will hold this government to account and we will push for real reforms and real changes that will make a difference to Canberrans.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 6

Noes 11

Mr Coe

Mr Doszpot

Mrs Dunne

Mr Hanson

Mr Seselja

Mr Smyth

Mr Barr

Ms Bresnan

Ms Burch

Mr Corbell

Ms Gallagher

Mr Hargreaves

Ms Hunter

Ms Le Couteur

Ms Porter

Mr Rattenbury

Mr Stanhope

Question so resolved in the negative.

Sitting suspended from 12.22 to 2 pm.

Questions without notice **Hospitals—operating theatres**

MR SESELJA: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Health and relates to the operating theatres which were officially opened by you and the Prime Minister in September last year but which remain closed. Minister, you were reported in the *Canberra Times* as saying that “the theatres would begin taking patients in October”. Minister, were you aware at the official opening that the theatres would not be ready to be used in October? If so, why did you open them?

MS GALLAGHER: The advice to me when the theatres were opened was that all plans were that they would be able to take patients from October. That was the information that was provided to me and to the commonwealth government.

What happens when you commission operating theatres is that they go through a process of dry runs where fake operations are trialled through the operating theatres as a way of ensuring patients' safety and testing the infrastructure. These are new operating theatres. It was during that work that there were some problems identified, particularly around the power supply, and some remedial work had to be done in order to make those operating theatres safe.

The answer to the question is this. It was our understanding at the time that they were going to be taking patients from October. In the process of dry runs, which are standard procedures for the opening of new theatres, some problems were identified—

quite rightly. The processes for patient safety held up. Some remedial work was done. Those theatres are available for use now. I think one is in use now. With the one that is going to be used as a cardiac theatre, one of the cardiologists has requested that some extra cabling be put in prior to that theatre being used for cardiac surgery, but it is available for other types of surgery if required.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Seselja, a supplementary question?

MR SESELJA: Minister, how many elective surgery operations have not been conducted as a result of the delays in opening the theatres?

MS GALLAGHER: There has not been any elective surgery not being done. The elective surgery program—

Mr Seselja: How many would have been done if they were opened in October?

MS GALLAGHER: I know it is the Liberals' policy—and it is going to be excellent to see when it comes out in the election just how you are going to cost this—that you run every theatre 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and nobody gets a break. We have already heard Mr Hanson on the record about that.

But we fund our elective surgery program. It is funded for approximately 9,700 operations. All of those operations will be performed. That is what the budget funds. We do not have an open-ended budget that just says, "There is an operating theatre there. Go and fill it with patients." That is not the way the program runs. No elective surgery procedures have been cancelled due to lack of theatre space.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, a supplementary question?

MR HANSON: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, will you apologise to the community for misleading them about the opening of these operating theatres?

MS GALLAGHER: I will not apologise to the community around ensuring that the facilities in our public hospital system are safe. I think what Mr Hanson is trying to put to me is that there should have been no change of plans, even though there were problems identified with the operating theatres, and that we should have just pressed ahead. At that time, when I was asked, it was the intention to have those theatres operational in October. I should say that it has not reduced the amount of elective surgery that has been able to be performed in the hospital. What it was going to allow was extra flexibility for timetabling of particular operations. It will help us manage the emergency work that comes in.

When the emergency work disrupts the elective work that is where we have challenges. Five of our 10 original theatres were used every day for emergency work. When you increase the number of your operating theatres by two that means there are extra flexibilities to ensure that your elective work gets done. I am absolutely confident that the processes in place have allowed what we need to provide in our theatres, which is a safe environment both for surgeons and their staff and patients. To have done anything differently would have been negligent.

MR HARGREAVES: A supplementary, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks very much, Mr Speaker. Could the minister please let us know whether or not in fact the operation of the theatres at Canberra Hospital has improved at all, in terms of efficiency, throughput and quality, since 2001 to today?

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, on a point of order as to relevance: this is specifically about the issue of the two operating theatres which were opened in September but were not actually conducting operations. This is not a broader question about the conduct of operations in the Canberra Hospital since 2001. It is a very specific question that was asked by Mr Seselja.

Mr Hargreaves: On the point of order, Mr Speaker: I was trying to find out whether or not the introduction of two new theatres had made any difference to the efficiency of the service provided at the hospital.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you for the clarification, Mr Hargreaves. There is no point of order.

MS GALLAGHER: The question does go to the extra capacity that has been provided for the elective surgery program, both at Calvary and at Canberra. We have seen enormous growth in demand for elective surgery. We have had to match that with assisting the opening of more theatres. In fact, when we came to government, there were theatres lying there that were not funded to deliver any operations. We have continuously increased the operating theatre capacity since we came to government. Two, from memory, were just lying there, closed, without any funding. Perhaps Mr Hanson's fake concern about these two theatres could be extended to his own colleagues who, over a number of years, sat there and were not the slightest bit concerned about closed operating theatres at Canberra Hospital.

Mr Smyth: We had a far more effective system than you did—far more effective.

MS GALLAGHER: We have continuously opened the 10 theatres that were there that were never opened under you, Mr Smyth. They were never opened; they were closed, with no funding. Those have been opened with full funding. We have extended the hours of operating theatres to allow for the more efficient use of those theatres. We have extended hours; we have opened more theatres. We now have the enhanced operating theatres at Canberra Hospital that are operational and have been since 1 February, once all of the testing for those issues was complete. We are now performing almost 10,000 procedures a day. The throughput has grown considerably, and we are doing it in a more efficient system.

When Mr Smyth was last in government, the health system in the ACT was running at 30 per cent above the national average—at 30 per cent above the national cost for a similar outlay. We have brought that down to 6.6 per cent. So there is one for the number crunchers over there—a 24 per cent improvement in the efficiency of our public hospital system.

Hospitals—Calvary Public Hospital

MR HANSON: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, on 17 December 2009, you issued a press release which stated:

But no one has been able to dispute the Treasury Analysis.

This is in reference to the Cavalry hospital purchase. Treasurer, Professor Sinclair Davidson was able to dispute your analysis on 28 October 2009—prior to your making that statement—when he said:

The argument that the ACT Government should maximise the value of assets on its own balance sheet is quite simply nonsense. It is the function of Government to provide services to its citizens and to do so in the most cost-effective manner.

This analysis was backed up by Dr Terry Dwyer, who has a PhD in economics, on 15 November 2009. Mr Tony Harris, a former auditor-general of New South Wales, has also described the fundamental premise of the analysis as a contrivance. Treasurer, do you now accept that your government's analysis of the purchase has been disputed by experts? If not, why not?

MS GALLAGHER: I did see Mr Hanson's excitement at getting the analysis from Tony Harris yesterday. He ran over to the leader of the boys group and quickly showed him all the lines. In fact, I could have highlighted "contrivance" for him, because I predicted it. I watched you go and sit over there in your little boys brigade, high-five each other, slap, and go, "How exciting! Now we've really got her."

Mr Smyth: Answer the question. You're not answering the question.

MS GALLAGHER: Just to give a bit of background, I think I was not the only person in here watching the little excited boys on the public benches.

Mr Stanhope: High fives?

Ms GALLAGHER: Yes, there was a bit of high-fiving, a bit of fists, a bit of "go get her!" Sorry, Mr Speaker; I am just supplying context to the discussion. The point which I have been making is that nobody has been able to dispute the fact that, under the three models, there is a \$145 million improved outcome on our budget, according to the Treasury analysis, and nobody has been able to dispute that.

Mr Smyth: But there are other experts.

MS GALLAGHER: No, there are other opinions about policy decisions the government should have taken.

Mr Smyth: It's just an opinion; therefore it doesn't count.

MS GALLAGHER: You are accusing me of being wrong. Let us just understand what has happened here. There are other opinions about policy decisions the

government should take, and those opinions may be very valid, but they are not policy decisions this government has taken. Mr Hanson's question to me was that other people have disputed the Treasury analysis, and that is incorrect. Nobody has, and nobody has been able to, and nobody will, because the numbers hold up. There is a \$145 million improved outcome on our budget.

Now, you go away and find someone who can dispute that and then we will send it off for independent peer review, as we have done with the Treasury analysis. And then, when you have got that, you come in here and then you say, "Yay, we have found someone who says the Treasury analysis is wrong," because you have not found anyone yet.

Terence Dwyer, Professor Sinclair and Tony Harris have different opinions about positions the government should take. The government have stood here a number of times and said that we believe the public hospital should be owned by the public. That is the fundamental difference between all of that analysis—they are all opinions that say, "You don't need to own it." We are saying we think the people of the ACT should own their public hospital, and we think there are benefits to come from that. That is a difference of opinion, Mr Hanson, not incorrect Treasury analysis.

I am very sorry; you have got to go back and find from your experts someone who can dispute the figures, and you will not find anyone. Then you have to explain how the supposed economic rationalists of this city are ignoring the fact that the buy option was the best one for our budget. You go and explain to people where that \$145 million should be taken from if we are to proceed with the status quo, because that is the reality. Every option costs money, but the best option in terms of our finances moving forward is the buy option. So you go and explain where you are going to find the difference in that money if you are happy to see the status quo remain.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, a supplementary question?

MR HANSON: I ask the Treasurer if she will confirm that she does consider Mr Harris an expert, and does she consider his analysis, which she tabled yesterday, to be wrong?

MS GALLAGHER: The analysis that Tony Harris provided—and I am not aware of the instructions that were given to him from the archbishop; this was work that was commissioned by the archbishop but the archbishop provided me with his analysis—

Mr Smyth: Oh, so it is an analysis?

MS GALLAGHER: Sorry?

Mr Smyth: So it is an analysis?

MS GALLAGHER: It has "analysis", I think, from memory, on the top of the sheet. It says "analysis", so that is what I will call it.

Mr Doszpot: The Chief Minister didn't think so.

Mr Smyth: But she just said there was no analysis.

MS GALLAGHER: That is what I will call it. I think he—

Mr Smyth interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: For God's sake, Mr Smyth, grow up. The interjections, Mr Speaker—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MS GALLAGHER: Mr Harris's analysis—

Mr Smyth interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Smyth!

MS GALLAGHER: They asked me a question, Mr Speaker. I then used the word “analysis” and they all break up into uproar—that there is some major win there that I have used the word “analysis”. Mr Harris's analysis, to me from my reading of it, seems to be preoccupied with the issue of the government's credit rating; that it is all about protecting the government's credit rating. This has not been about protecting the government's credit rating. This has been about an integrated health system, but it has also been about what our budget can afford and the best way forward.

So Mr Harris presents a number of options, many of which, I have to say, will be completely—

Mr Hanson: Crazy?

MS GALLAGHER: Well, ones that LCM—

Mr Hanson: You should consider them then, by your own rationale.

MS GALLAGHER: ones that will be unpalatable to Little Company of Mary. And let us just remember here, boys, that before we go ahead we do need LCM's agreement, before we do anything. But Mr Harris's idea that we take out a loan and then not only pay the loan back but interest on the loan and the financing costs of that—only to have that asset remain on Little Company of Mary's balance sheet—again to us when we are looking to the ones that are making the investment, I have a few concerns with. I should also say that Mr Harris does point to the fact—*(Time expired.)*

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, a supplementary?

MR SMYTH: Treasurer, can you point the Assembly to any experts who agree with the Treasury analysis who are not paid by the ACT government, and will you table this advice?

MS GALLAGHER: The government support the Treasury advice. We have no reason to believe that the experts at Treasury have not provided us with the best advice.

Mr Seselja: I think the answer is no.

MS GALLAGHER: No. The answer is no. I have not commissioned any other work, other than an independent peer analysis of the Treasury work. The Treasury work holds up. I could ask the same question: can you point to anyone who disputes the Treasury analysis? The answer to that is no.

Mr Smyth: Davidson does.

MS GALLAGHER: No. You are wrong, Mr Smyth. He has not disputed the analysis. He has disputed the government's policy decision about the way forward. And that is incorrect. He has not disputed the financial analysis of this arrangement. Nobody has been able to dispute these figures. These figures hold up. In relation to Mr Harris, he was commissioned—

Mr Smyth: Have you read his advice?

MS GALLAGHER: Yes, I have. Mr Harris has been commissioned by the archbishop to come up with other options because the archbishop did not like the one the government had. What a surprise! He was commissioned specifically to provide alternatives to the archbishop, and that is what he has done.

Mr Hanson: On a point of order: I seek leave to quote from Professor Sinclair Davidson to clarify what I think is Ms Gallagher misleading the house.

MR SPEAKER: I do not think that is an option open to us, Mr Hanson. Ms Gallagher, do you want any more time?

MS GALLAGHER: No.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, a supplementary question?

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks very much, Mr Speaker. There has been much discussion on financial matters. In the context of the financial analysis, minister, could you outline for the benefit of members the impact on the bottom line, for example, about the issue of a grant to a non-government organisation and how it appears on a bank balance sheet as opposed to a recurrent and capital impact on the balance sheet?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Hargreaves for the question. The challenge presented to the government, as I have said a number of times in this place, is that under the current arrangements, under the status quo, the government will essentially be providing a grant to the Little Company of Mary of in the order of \$200 million. We would be required to make all the payments for that. That cash would need to come out of our operating result as a grant to a private organisation, as it does, for example,

with grants to non-government schools and grants to the non-government sector—as opposed to what we are able to do with assets that we have full management, ownership and control over.

The challenge for us is that we have a pool of cash that we are able to use to invest in assets that we own. That is what we do at the Canberra Hospital. That option is not available to us at Calvary. And, yes, it presents our budget with significant challenges that none of the options presented by any of the critics that the opposition are now holding up as their experts on this deal with. None of them deal with the budgetary issues and the challenges ahead.

It provides alternatives. In fact, Mr Harris's advice actually says that you need to go and see whether any of these are legitimate alternatives. He makes the point in his analysis that nothing that should be done should be a sham or should be concocted just to relieve the budgetary pressure of the government. And he goes to issues of control as opposed to legal ownership. But none of those issues he finished to any finality. In fact, he says that these would need further examination about whether they would actually hold up.

These are legitimate issues. All of the experts, even if they are critics of the position the government has taken, have acknowledged that we need a different way of doing things than the status quo—something that the opposition have failed to grasp or understand.

Planning—service stations

MS HUNTER: My question is to the Minister for Planning and it concerns the closed service station sites across Canberra. Minister, in the 2009-10 budget the government introduced a waiver of change of use charge to stimulate the redevelopment of closed service station sites. A number of these sites, including the one at Page, have not been operating for some years and have become neglected and are dumping grounds for all sorts of waste. How many service station lessees have taken up the government incentive to redevelop their site since the waiver of change of use charge was introduced?

MR BARR: At this stage I am not aware of any.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Hunter, a supplementary question?

MS HUNTER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, why has the take-up rate been zero? If that is the case, will you be extending the change of use incentive in the 2010-11 budget or introducing additional incentives to improve the take-up rate?

MR BARR: My understanding is that the time needed to remediate a site from its former use as a petrol station is considerable. In some instances the decision to undertake that remediation work has not been taken, but this incentive may in fact have triggered that action. The time frame required for the remediation to be complete and then for a new development application to be lodged is more than 12 months. The government will, of course, consider the feedback from industry in relation to this incentive in the context of our deliberations on the 2010-11 budget.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Bresnan, a supplementary question?

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. What is the government now doing to streamline the planning process for these valuable sites? How quickly can the problem be rectified?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Bresnan for the question. The major reforms to the planning and development system that were instituted in 2007 and 2008 have streamlined planning in the ACT. We have the most efficient and effective planning system in the country. That is very clear from the performance of the Planning and Land Authority in recent times. The additional resources put into development assessment have significantly reduced the backlogs that were there under the old system. The new system is functioning very effectively.

The measures that were put in place by the government to facilitate the massive investment through the commonwealth stimulus package have been incredibly effective. The ACT is one of the leading jurisdictions, if not the leading jurisdiction, in the implementation of economic stimulus measures across education, social housing and a variety of other areas. So the planning system has been responding very well. The flexibility that was built into the new system has proved to be quite valuable in responding to changed circumstances and the government will continue to closely monitor the situation.

In relation to the service station site specifically, we are very keen to see redevelopment opportunities taken by the private owners. But ultimately, while you can dangle many financial incentives in front of the private sector, they own the sites. It is up to them to come forward with the development applications.

MS LE COUTEUR: A supplementary, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Le Couteur.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. Minister, can you update us on progress on some of these sites that have not been addressed? In particular, Page, Latham and Rivett come to mind.

MR BARR: Obviously, I do not have that information on every service station site in front of me now. I will get some advice from the Planning and Land Authority on the sites on which there have been approaches to government in relation to remediation, and also potentially pre-application meetings before a development application is lodged, and I will provide that information to the Greens.

Budget—savings

MR COE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, yesterday in question time you were asked about the use of consultants to find savings in the ACT budget. You said that, at the time of the 2009 estimates hearings, a decision to establish a panel of consultants had not been taken at that time. Treasurer, when was the decision taken to

establish the panel of consultants to provide advice on possible budget savings, and where did the advice come from that such a panel was needed?

MS GALLAGHER: I was going to answer this at the end of question time, because it is exactly the same question that Mr Smyth asked me, so I cannot believe you have duded yourself out of a question to me. It was 18 November 2009. It was advice from Treasury to me, which I believe went to cabinet through the EREC process.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Coe, a supplementary?

MR COE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Treasurer, what information was used to make the decision to establish the panel of consultants to consider possible savings?

MS GALLAGHER: What information was used? We have a process, the expenditure review committee. They have met. They have met across governments, chaired by Treasury and CMD. They are looking across a number of years. In that final year of the forward estimates, we are looking to find \$122 million worth of savings. Those savings obviously will not be met through the one per cent efficiency dividend that we have imposed on government, nor will it be found just through wage restraint. So we need advice coming not just from our agencies or from the non-government sector, the community consultation process, about where those savings should come from. It was a collective view of EREC, on advice to cabinet, that this was the best way forward. And I think it is. Have you got any other ideas?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, a supplementary?

MR SMYTH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Treasurer, what will the consultants do that the Treasury and departments cannot do to find these savings?

MS GALLAGHER: I have a lot of faith in Treasury; indeed, all of our agencies provide us with excellent advice. But I do not think it would be a surprise to anybody in this place that from time to time public services across Australia—across the world, indeed—use consultants for expert advice on different matters. For example, undertaking research, financial modelling, benchmarking reviews—

Mr Smyth: And that can't be done inside Treasury?

MS GALLAGHER: Mr Smyth, you are against any outsourcing or commissioning of work from consultants now, are you? Treasury has its limitations. It is a small agency and it has a lot of work to do. From time to time, when expert opinion is required—for example, maybe some analysis done on our superannuation account or our insurance premium—it is quite appropriate that governments seek that advice externally from experts in the field to ensure that we are getting a range of advisers in the decisions that governments take. I do not think you have uncovered a new way of doing things here, Mr Smyth. I think this has been pretty standard practice. I note that we have not had one idea from the Liberals around how they would offer any help towards the \$122 million in savings. In fact, I do not think I have had any from the Greens. I do not think I have had any from the community.

Mr Smyth: We offered to sit down with you, and you rejected it.

MS GALLAGHER: We are meeting one per cent in terms of the government, and we are going to commission other work as we see fit.

Mr Smyth: You rejected it.

MS GALLAGHER: We have not spent any of that money on expert consultants if they are required. I think there was a media stunt that was done. Zed was in at work for the day, which was a bit of a surprise to everybody, and a media release went out. It must have been a sitting day because we know he is never around unless it is a sitting day. But Zed was in and Zed wanted a bit of TV, and he put out a media release. *(Time expired.)*

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, a supplementary?

Mr Hargreaves: That is two in a row.

MR SMYTH: Treasurer, who will make decisions—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, one moment, please. Sorry, Mr Hargreaves, do you have something you want to add?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, I have, Mr Speaker. I draw to your attention to the fact that two supplementaries in a row from the same member might be a little unfair.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you for your feedback, Mr Hargreaves. Mr Smyth, you have the call.

MR SMYTH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Treasurer, who will make the decision about the use of the consultant and how much the panel will be able to spend on possible savings proposals?

MS GALLAGHER: Treasury will have that authority but they will keep me informed as required.

Deakin swimming pool

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Minister for Planning and concerns the recently commenced technical amendment to the territory plan for Deakin pool. Given the planning minister's commitment in 2005 that no lease variation would be permitted that would remove the requirement for a 50-metre indoor pool on site, why was a technical amendment proposed that would reduce the pool to 25 metres?

MR BARR: Circumstances changed between 2005 and 2009.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Le Couteur, a supplementary question?

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes, Mr Speaker. Given that technical amendments have to be consistent with the policy purpose, how was that consistent with the government's commitment to retain the 50 metres?

MR BARR: Governments are from time to time, when circumstances change, able to change their policy position.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Bresnan, a supplementary question?

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. How was the public notified of this proposed technical variation throughout the consultation period last year?

MR BARR: By the usual mechanisms the Planning and Land Authority undertakes for technical variations. I understand that there was information on the website. There was a media release and there was a notice published in the *Canberra Times* and I think also in the *Chronicle*.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Hunter?

MS HUNTER: Considering that you have changed your policy position on this, did you take into account events or services that might be affected by only having a 25-metre pool in Deakin?

MR BARR: Yes.

Budget—deficit

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, yesterday in question time you referred to a report and quoted from a *Canberra Times* article which said that the ACT economy was one of the two best-performing economies in Australia. You failed to mention, however, that the same report from CommSec concluded that the ACT economy has been insulated from the US financial crisis.

Treasurer, your government has budgeted for four years of deficit and expects deficits to continue until 2015-16. Treasurer, how can you claim that the ACT's budgetary situation is the result of the global financial crisis when a report, on which you look with favour, concludes that the ACT economy has been insulated from the US financial crisis?

MS GALLAGHER: We have the GFC denial from over that side. It never happened. You never saw it. They were not there. No, they never saw it.

Mr Smyth: CommSec is wrong?

MS GALLAGHER: No. Look at it in the context in which those comments were made. Mr Smyth is trying to argue that we have been insulated from the GFC right down, that we have been insulated from the collapse of the financial market, that we have been insulated from the changes to monetary policy.

Are you serious, Mr Smyth? It is almost as good as your leader putting a question on notice asking me how much money we get from the commonwealth in payroll tax. That is about as funny as it gets, I think. Albeit, you were away—I think you were

away on holiday—I cannot believe it would have got through your office. The Leader of the Opposition, the man who would be Chief Minister of this city, asks me, the Treasurer, “Just how much money do we get from the commonwealth in payroll tax?” The answer there is a big fat zero. We would love to get some, actually. Maybe that is one of your ideas that you have got for resurrecting the budget. You are going to levy the commonwealth’s payroll tax. That helps. I cannot believe that the shadow Treasurer has just asked me, has just basically said that there has been no impact from the GFC on our budget.

I think the comments made by CommSec perhaps had more to do with the fact that we do not have a large banking and finance sector in the ACT, as Mr Smyth might have realised. We do not have a large manufacturing system in the ACT. The issues that have affected WA and Queensland perhaps have not affected us as much. But let no-one be under any misapprehension that the GFC resulted in our forward estimates losing \$1.1 billion. Our economy has held up very well. It has held up very well because the commonwealth government embarked on a very vigorous stimulus program and, for the ACT government, did not slash and burn their budget but took a much more measured approach, against the best advice of the shadow Treasurer.

We had our own stimulus program, the local initiatives package. Our economy has done very well. We maintained our employment levels, as an employer in the territory. We have supported industry through this crisis. We have been thanked by industry for this. Now the results are there for all to see, and Mr Smyth has been denied the ability to put out a media release that bags the economy, just like he likes to do in every area of his portfolio—the man that only gets out of bed when there is bad news to be had for the people of Canberra.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, a supplementary question?

Mr Stanhope: Ask a supplementary, mate.

MR SMYTH: I will, Chief Minister. Mr Speaker, it appears she can read certain paragraphs from CommSec but not others. Treasurer, why do you not accept responsibility for your budget deficits that are of your making and are not the result of the US financial crisis?

MS GALLAGHER: I do not think anyone could say that I do not accept responsibility for them. This government is the one that is working very hard to recover our budget. As much as you like to say that it was my fault that the GFC happened, I think that the cool, rational heads of the majority of the community of the ACT understand that there were a few factors outside of my own personal control that led to the collapse of the world’s banking system, the financial markets and the American home lending system—that perhaps those were not to do with Katy Gallagher from Canberra. Mr Smyth, if you want to live in that dream world we are happy to let you sit there with that thought—if it keeps you happy, Mr Smyth. I think the people of Canberra understand that those factors were outside this government’s control. They also understand that we are taking responsibility for fixing them—fixing our budget but making sure that we maintain services to this community.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, a supplementary question?

MR DOSZPOT: Treasurer, why does the report from CommSec conclude that the ACT economy “may slip modestly down the leader board as the global economy recovers”?

MS GALLAGHER: The short answer is that when you are number one there is only one place to go. That would be the easy and quick answer. But there are risks to the ACT. Again, I do not think that is a secret to anybody. When the commonwealth seek to recover their budget and restrain their expenditure to two per cent, as they have outlined in their update to their budget, that potentially has serious consequences for the ACT and the ACT economy. There are big risks ahead and big challenges for us. Perhaps we could all grow up a little and maybe work as colleagues to get through this.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, a supplementary?

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for your generosity. Minister, is the forest of cranes across the landscape a sign of economic health in this territory? Is the fact that the jobs vacant columns in the paper—

MR SPEAKER: Preamble, Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: This is about the economic health, thanks very much, Mr Speaker. This is not a preamble; this is a question.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: This is a question, even for you to understand, Colonel Klink.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, the question, thank you.

MR HARGREAVES: Okay, Mr Speaker—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: “I know nothing, Mr Speaker.” Minister, is it true that the paucity of job vacancies is a sign actually of job health? And is it true in fact that the ACT is now seen as a leading light across the country?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Hargreaves for the question. Mr Smyth has been poring over the media reports to try and find some bad news in what has been really a series of good news results for the ACT and the ACT economy. I cannot for the life of me think why he would just want to promote in this place the talking down of the ACT economy.

The results that we have seen over the last three months have been tremendous news. And, yes, they have come on the back of months and months of bad news in this area—again linked to the GFC. We have seen enormous pressure placed on not only our budget but on the economy across the country, and the ACT has been no different.

But every economic indicator that has come out in the last four months—whether it has been across housing, retail, unemployment, our state final demand figures—has been good news for the people of the ACT. And these figures should be universally welcomed, because what is good for the economy here is good for the budget, and what is good for our budget is good for our community. Really, we should all be supporting and accepting this as good news.

Whilst I know Mr Smyth likes for me to take personal responsibility for every economic figure that comes out, particularly when it is bad, perhaps he can give me the same courtesy of congratulating me every time we get good news.

Housing—affordability

MS PORTER: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, recent statistics on housing affordability show that the ACT continues to be the most affordable jurisdiction in Australia. Is this true?

MR STANHOPE: I thank Ms Porter for the question and her continuing interest in housing affordability. As galling as it is for Mr Seselja and the Liberal Party, the latest Real Estate Institute of Australia figures for the September quarter again show that ACT households fared better than households across the whole of Australia. The figures are actually quite startling. In the ACT just 17.2 per cent of family income is needed to meet the average loan repayment. Compare that to the national average of 29 per cent—the ACT 17 per cent, the national average 29 per cent, and across the border in New South Wales—

Mr Seselja: And what is it for first home buyers?

MR STANHOPE: We will get to that. It takes 31.2 per cent in New South Wales, on average, to service a home mortgage.

And we are not just the most affordable when it comes to home ownership. According to the Real Estate Institute, the ACT also leads the affordability pack in the rental market. Here in the ACT, again 17.1 per cent of family income is needed to meet rent payments, compared to the national average of 25 per cent and an average across the border in New South Wales of 27 per cent.

In fact, on Monday night's WIN news—and I am sure members watched Monday night's WIN news—Mr Michael Wellsmore, the ACT President of the Real Estate Institute of Australia, not exactly a red rag organisation closely aligned with the Labor Party, made the point crystal clear when he said, "We are the most affordable jurisdiction in the nation." That is the view of the President of the Real Estate Institute of the ACT. We stack up exceedingly well compared to others—no ifs, no buts.

For the benefit of Mr Seselja and his colleagues, who do have difficulty with numbers—we saw that this morning when Mr Seselja could not quite work out or get his mind around the percentages of people who voted for him in the last election, exactly what it did indicate; that he is the second least successful Liberal leader in the history of the Liberal Party in the ACT, and probably in Australia—I will read out

Mr Wellsmore's explanation in relation to affordability. This is what Mr Wellsmore said; these are Mr Wellsmore's words:

You have a situation in New South Wales where the medium house price in Sydney, for example, I think is around the \$570,000; in Canberra it's around the \$460,000. So immediately you would think we're a little more affordable.

But there's a big disparity, where as at—in New South Wales, because the household income is around \$80,000, I think there's about 31 per cent of the household income goes towards your housing costs, for mortgage costs that is, whereas in the ACT it's about 17.1 per cent. But the reason is because our household income is \$120,000 a year.

There you have it, from the President of the Real Estate Institute of the ACT this week. The ACT government actively works to improve housing affordability for those who are not represented by these statistical averages—and, of course, these are statistical averages. We acknowledge that: there are many Canberrans, younger families and families without that average household disposable income that do have issues, do have challenges, in assessing affordable and appropriate housing—and that is why we have the nation's leading housing affordability action plan.

We have massively accelerated land release: 3,400 sites in 2007-08, 4,300 in 2008-09 and over 4,000 this year—11,000 sites in three years. We have seen the success of OwnPlace: 45 houses happily occupied and 105 currently under construction. Land rent is proving a winner: 21 exchanges, 179 waiting to exchange. Fifteen per cent of house and land packages in all greenfields estates must be affordable—at this stage, house and land packages of under \$300,000. (*Time expired.*)

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter?

MS PORTER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, does the Access Economics report which was recently released add anything to our understanding of this issue?

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, it does. The Access Economics report of a week or two ago, I think it was, confirms that the government is not just heading in the right direction on housing affordability but is showing leadership in the area. You have to acknowledge and would concede that Access Economics is one of the more objective reporters in relation to these sorts of issues, national economic issues, and, of course, as the Treasurer has just indicated, there have been times when the reports of Access Economics do reflect on some of the areas where we have struggled in relation to economic growth. But here we have it again this week; once again we have the naysayers and the talkers down—those that will never lose an opportunity to trash this town. They are actually very well represented on the other side of this chamber.

The report released last month makes interesting reading and does validate our policy settings, particularly with respect to land release and the resultant impact on housing affordability. I will quote the following excerpt from the latest Access Economics report, which links the government's accelerated land releases to the strength of the construction sector, which, in turn, has had the happy result, according to CommSec, of us being the most robust economic growth rate jurisdiction in Australia and with good outlooks for the future. Access Economics says:

The ACT's housing construction sector has been picking up pace across a time when the national supply of new housing has been struggling. In part that represents the ACT Government taking an earlier ... interest in the necessity of getting more land released than has been evident in some other jurisdictions. More over, forward indicators of activity suggest more good news lies around the corner.

That is what Access Economics says about the ACT. The report highlights that the ACT's strong economic performance is attributable to the strength of our housing market and the strong level of residential housing construction. Not a bad endorsement, is it, Mr Seselja?

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Seselja?

MR SESELJA: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Is the Chief Minister aware of the HIA-Commonwealth Bank report which consistently looks at the impact of housing affordability on first home buyers? How does that rate the ACT?

MR STANHOPE: I am aware of the HIA-Commonwealth Bank statistics in relation to housing affordability, and you do need to understand the context—

Mr Seselja: Have a look at first home owners.

MR STANHOPE: Once again, it is the context in which the statistics actually are measured and whom they are measured against. They are measured against mortgages or loans of the Commonwealth Bank, a very small sector. It does not reflect what is happening—

Mr Seselja: A small sector—the Commonwealth Bank is a small sector?

MR STANHOPE: It is. The HIA-Commonwealth Bank affordability indicators are based on loans from the Commonwealth Bank across the board. They are not averaged out. You see it most recently in relation to the HIA-Commonwealth Bank median house price projections for the ACT, which actually are around about \$70,000 or \$80,000 above what is the actuality of the median house price here in the ACT. This is a direct response to the methodology employed by HIA-Commonwealth Bank in their predictions.

It goes to all of the housing affordability indicators, predictions or prognostications of HIA-Commonwealth Bank. It is a very diffident methodology. It is a methodology that actually does not reflect the actuality of housing starts across the board. It does not reflect the enormous activity that has been generated through our housing affordability action plan. The 15 per cent of all houses in greenfields estates in the ACT that are constructed for under \$300,000 is not reflected in the HIA-Commonwealth Bank methodology or outcomes.

In the context of housing starts, housing loans, housing activity and the number of Canberra first home buyers who access the first home buyers grant, we do have the numbers and the ACT leads the nation again.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Le Couteur, a supplementary question?

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. Chief Minister, what work is the government doing on long-term total affordability for households in the ACT? In this, I am alluding to the cost of transport, the cost of heating and the cost of cooling, which are equally relevant to someone living in a house in the ACT.

MR STANHOPE: I thank Ms Le Couteur for the question—at one level a diversion from the basic start-up cost of a house, but nevertheless very important.

The ACT government are very conscious of the need to ensure sustainable transport opportunities for people of the ACT. We have worked hard in the last couple of years on a raft of initiatives to improve public transport, modal shift and sustainable transport. One of the highest priority policy initiatives being pursued within Territory and Municipal Services across the entire department is the sustainable transport action plan, an action plan that we hope to have the capacity, through the coming budget, to begin to put some meat to the bones of if we can actually find, in these economic times and with the issues that we face economically, the capacity to begin to fund the very significant infrastructure and transport-related initiatives that will turn our sustainable transport action plan into a reality. It is a number one priority for the government and the department, but some of these initiatives of course are expensive and will take time.

In addition to that, this government's investment in a whole range of infrastructure that will assist in modal shift is very significant. Over this quarter, perhaps, for instance, just by way of example—and you are aware of this, I think, from estimates last week—the investment by this government, with some encouragement from the Greens, I acknowledge, in bicycle paths and on-road bicycle lanes has been exemplary. But in relation to a whole range of initiatives that the government have pursued, we have at the heart of our thinking and policy making a sustainable city, one which actually does deal with issues across the board in relation to infrastructure, infrastructure investment and sustainability.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—security breaches

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the Attorney-General and relates to security at the ACT prison. Attorney, why did the breach of the prison's email and internet policy occur last month and what is the status of the investigation into this breach?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Doszpot for the question. Why did that occur? It occurred through a prisoner accessing an email-based function within a website of a press outlet. It was a way of circumventing the security's whitelisting policy, which currently permits, as a whitelisted or approved site, sites such as newspaper sites. There are legitimate and good reasons why prisoners should be allowed to read the newspaper and to read the newspaper online.

As a result of that breach, which did not in any way see any impact on anyone associated with that prisoner—there were no threats made, there were no

communications that were inappropriate; nevertheless it highlighted the possibility of that being done—the government is reviewing the whitelisting arrangements for internet access at the prison. That process is close to completion. Once that is done I would expect internet access to be resumed for prisoners at the AMC.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, a supplementary question?

MR DOSZPOT: Attorney, can you advise whether there are currently any other investigations being conducted into inappropriate or unauthorised use of technology by prisoners and provide the Assembly with the details of these investigations?

MR CORBELL: Not to my knowledge.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary, Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: Yes, Mr Speaker. Will you take the question from Mr Doszpot about the investigations on notice?

MR CORBELL: I have answered the question.

MR HANSON: What access to email and internet do the prisoners at the Alexander Maconochie Centre currently have?

MR CORBELL: I would have to check the exact status as of today, but I did attend the prison last week to visit the facility. It was one of a number of visits I have undertaken in the past month. At that meeting I was extensively briefed on the issues around security and, in particular, issues around the internet arrangements. As of the time of that meeting, which was approximately a week ago, access had not been restored. I cannot tell members today, now, whether access has been restored but I can certainly take the question on notice and provide that information to members.

I think it is very important to stress that it is absolutely appropriate that prisoners have access to normal sources of information that do not compromise the security arrangements at the facility. In a human rights compliant environment, if it is appropriate for prisoners—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, they are not committed to a human rights regime for this facility. They are just not committed to it.

If it is appropriate for prisoners to get newspapers then surely it is appropriate for prisoners to be able to read newspapers online. If it is appropriate for prisoners to listen to the radio, surely it should be appropriate for them to view radio websites online. If it is appropriate for prisoners to get access to books from a library, surely it is appropriate for prisoners to get access to that information online. This is about a contemporary human rights response to these matters.

What on earth do the Liberal Party have a problem with in terms of accessing this sort of information, unless, of course, they sense, in the base political way that they do,

that there are votes in beating up on people who have been incarcerated? People who have been incarcerated are serving their debt to society, but it does not mean they are easy punching-bags for people like the Liberal Party.

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker—

MR SPEAKER: Sorry, Mr Hanson. You have already had two other supplementaries.

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary.

MR SPEAKER: You have used them up. I took your previous question for having it put on notice as one—

Mr Hanson: It was a double-barrelled question, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: I call Ms Bresnan to ask a question without notice.

Namadgi national park—orienteeing

MS BRESNAN: My question is to the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services and is in regard to the proposed large-scale orienteeing event of up to 1,000 people to be held in Namadgi national park at Easter. Minister, what specific provisions have been put in place to ensure that there is no damage to the areas that will be used for car parking and for the running of the event itself?

MR STANHOPE: I thank Ms Bresnan for the question. Indeed, I am aware, through representations from the National Parks Association, of some concerns that the association read that Namadgi national park might be used for a national orienteeing event that will be held there in a few weeks time. It is, at one level, a philosophical discussion on the appropriate use of our national park. It is an issue that was agitated, and agitated very seriously, through the extensive, long-term consultations on the development of a plan of management for Namadgi.

In that plan of management, at the end of the day, the position the government has adopted, which is reflected and has been reflected in the draft, is that Namadgi should be made available for a full range of pursuits and activities, that it should not be a reserve that should unilaterally be denied access to by people wishing to pursue massive participation events. I do think we need to look on a case-by-case basis at the nature of the activity.

There were representations made to the government that certain activities with above a certain population should be banned absolutely. That is not the position the government have taken and it is not the position the government believe is appropriate. We believe an event such as an orienteeing event, conducted over a number of days, with each day's activities conducted in a different area, is the sort of activity that is quite appropriately amenable to a national park and, indeed, to Namadgi. We are conscious of the need to ensure that there is no damage or hurt to the environmental values of Namadgi. That is why it holds such a special place in terms of our management and our attention.

As to the details of the administrative arrangements in relation to the orienteering event which will be conducted, I do not have those in my mind. They may be in the extensive notes I have here; I am not sure. But I will certainly obtain for you, Ms Bresnan, and members of the Assembly the details of all the administrative arrangements and arrangements on access, parking and other facilities that will be provided at the site.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Bresnan?

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, have you ensured that there will be independent monitoring of the impact of the event on the site so that there is better information in the future about the impact of large-scale events on natural areas?

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Ms Bresnan. Certainly Parks, Conservation and Lands will be closely monitoring the activity. Rangers will be present on a daily basis and will observe proceedings. I must say I have not sought a report, but I would, as a matter of course, have expected that I would receive a post-report brief. It is an issue that we will certainly monitor. It is an experience that we will learn from, as we do with all. It will be monitored and there will be a report.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary, Mr Coe?

MR COE: In a follow-up to the question about the national orienteering event in April, I would like to register the Liberals' full support for this event. Chief Minister, what support is the ACT government giving for this event and to orienteering generally in the ACT?

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Coe, and I do appreciate the bipartisan support. I think it is the first for the year. We might chalk it up. I have been tipping that when the leadership challenge comes it will come from Mr Hanson, but, Mr Coe, you might just be the quiet worker. You keep it up, Mr Coe. You do not have those outrageous ego issues, those shocking issues about ego and right to rule, the silver spoon in the mouth, the ruling class syndrome. We might just change the odds in the caucus book, Mr Coe.

The ACT government, of course, makes a \$26,000 annual grant for orienteering, Mr Coe. I am not aware of the specific support, but I know that Orienteering ACT and the organisers have been working closely with ACT government agencies, most particularly Parks, Conservation and Lands, in relation to this particular event.

Events such as this are very important for a whole range of reasons in the context of sport and our support of sport and in the context of life here within Canberra and the region. When one actually does look at some of the economic impacts or implications, there are very significant reasons for supporting events such as this.

It is possible that this particular event will bring somewhere in the order of 1,000 people into the ACT. It is an event of an order for a whole range of reasons that the government is pleased to support, whilst accepting, of course, that we do need to be mindful of the areas in which events such as this are pursued.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Le Couteur, a supplementary?

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, will you ensure that the final management plan for Namadgi will implement the Assembly committee's recommendation to set a cap on large-scale events of 600 people?

MR STANHOPE: I will take some advice, but I think the answer is no, as the government is not inclined to unilaterally cap. The attitude the government takes is this. What if the National Parks Association wanted to organise a fundraising walk from Mount Ginini through to the Orroral Valley and 1,000 people turned up to undertake a walk on formed roads? What would your attitude be? This is the attitude the government has taken. Every event surely should be assessed on its merit.

And if it was not as dramatic as that, what if some organisation wanted to undertake a fundraising walk from Mount Ginini two kilometres down the hill and back and 1,000 people turned up? Would you think it reasonable that a walk from 10 am to midday on a Saturday that involved 1,000 people crossing the Namadgi boundaries into the park should be banned or that 400 people should be stopped at the gate and people say to them, "No, sorry, 600 is the quota; you 400 can come back tomorrow"? That is nonsense. They would do no damage. They would walk on a formed road; they would turn around and walk back.

I just do not believe that you can bring this absolutist cap attitude to a massive park. It constitutes half of the ACT in mass. It represents exactly half of the entire mass of the ACT and there is a proposal that only 600 people should be allowed into it at a time. I just do not accept the sense of that.

Childcare—fees

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services. The Productivity Commission report on government services found that the ACT had the highest median fees for childcare services in Australia. Minister, what impact will the introduction of portable long service leave in the sector have on the ACT's relative childcare costs?

MS BURCH: I think we have been through this before, and Access Economics has said the portability of long service leave is a worker's entitlement. There are a number of things that go into childcare costs, and we have been over that a number of times. We do not expect that portable long service leave will impact on the cost of services. Services set their own fees, Mrs Dunne, which I have repeated to you a number of times.

MR SPEAKER: I call Mrs Dunne to ask a supplementary question.

MRS DUNNE: What analysis has the ACT government done on the impact of its changes on childcare costs for working families and the economy at large?

MS BURCH: We have been through this before, Mr Speaker, but I thank Mrs Dunne for raising childcare costs. She has asked around participation on workforce. Access

Economics has shown there will be no difference to workforce participation. She has raised the issue of our quality agenda and the impact on cost. The parents I talk to are interested in the quality agenda. They are interested in improved ratios in respect of child participation. They are interested in quality services. They are interested in the skill set of the people that work with their children.

Mrs Dunne, we have been through this before. I am happy to keep on going through it. Access Economics has provided that analysis. I provided that to you last year, Mrs Dunne. So we are investing in childcare. We are introducing a quality agenda. Mrs Dunne, if it is difficult for you to get across this in question time, I am more than happy to give you a brief.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary, Mr Hargreaves?

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, can you tell us what impact the additional \$70 million that Minister Katy Gallagher put in to repair the damage that the Liberal Party did to childcare services has had in the context of today's cost of childcare?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Hargreaves for the question and again the opportunity to highlight the investment that this government puts into childcare as care and protection. I take this opportunity to revert to this morning's discussion. We were looking at the cost of childcare—

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order relating to both the supplementary question and the answer. The question that Mrs Dunne asked was about childcare. The supplementary is about care and protection. They are entirely separate issues. I think the \$70 million refers to care and protection rather than childcare. I do not think that the question or the answer which Ms Burch is giving is in order.

MR SPEAKER: I thought I heard Mr Hargreaves focus on childcare. Do you want to clarify that, Mr Hargreaves?

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Speaker, I am not as picky as those opposite. I believe that any child welfare issue encompasses the whole sphere of the welfare of children. This minister is responsible for child welfare. That is where my question went to—child welfare.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Hargreaves. I do not share your interpretation of the depth of the question. Mr Doszpot, a supplementary question?

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I got the question in, and I am happy.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, thank you. Mr Doszpot, a supplementary question?

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you, Mr Speaker. When Mr Hargreaves is ready; I can wait.

Mr Hargreaves: I'm ready if you are.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, what analysis has the ACT government done of relative childcare costs for the ACT as compared to elsewhere in Australia?

MS BURCH: Again, I will go back to this morning, when we did provide information on the comparative cost of childcare in other centres. We can look at childcare costs in Sydney, which range from \$375 to \$522. In Wollongong and Newcastle, their range for the weekly cost of childcare is \$300 to \$375. That compares with our cost in the ACT of \$325. We also spoke this morning about the increase in the provision of childcare places. In 2009, we put 666 childcare places in; this year, we will put in an extra 460 childcare places.

We continue to invest in childcare. The ACT is spending \$632 per child from birth to 12 years of age. We went through it this morning. I am quite happy to provide a briefing for you. This government works closely with the sector. We have a children's services forum, with people from the sector and people from the department. We work together on how we manage childcare places across the ACT. I am quite happy to explain that to you any time that you want a briefing, Mr Doszpot.

ACT Ambulance Service

MR HARGREAVES: My question without notice is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Will the minister please inform the Assembly about the challenges facing the ACT Ambulance Service in the local community and how the service is overcoming these?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Hargreaves for the question. It is the case that the ACT Ambulance Service is facing very significant growth as our population continues to age. To give members a bit of a view on this, in the 2008-09 financial year, the Ambulance Service attended over 32,000 incidents involving over 34,000 responses. To put that perhaps into something more tangible, that is the equivalent of 90 incidents every 24 hours over that period. That is a very significant workload for our Ambulance Service.

We have a very high quality ambulance service here in the ACT, thanks to the training and the dedication of our ambulance personnel. We are the only ambulance service in the country where all of the intensive care ambulances are staffed by intensive care paramedics. We are the only ambulance service in the country where that is the standard, and it is one that delivers a very high quality of service to the Canberra community.

There is no doubt we are facing some very particular pressures: 10 per cent growth on average into the Ambulance Service in terms of demand every year, year on year. The government acknowledges that this is putting significant pressure on our ambulance officers, and the government is committed, and I am committed as the minister, to continue to work to improve the operations of our Ambulance Service and to continue to put in place additional resources for our Ambulance Service to help meet that demand. That is going to be an ongoing task, not just this year but each and every year into the future as we continue to see growth in demand for services.

I will highlight some of the work that the government has already done: since 2007 an extra \$11.6 million has been provided to the Ambulance Service. That has been to help recruit 30 additional staff to key areas of the Ambulance Service. Some \$1.7 million of that resourcing has been dedicated to 14 new—extra—frontline positions to help manage demand, particularly during peak services. We have also invested in improving the capital equipment of the Ambulance Service. We have replaced since 2007 every single ambulance in the Ambulance Service with a new vehicle. We have put in place new equipment, like new stretchers. We have replaced all the cardiac monitors in all of our ambulances so we have state-of-the-art equipment to assist our ambulance officers in dealing with those life-threatening incidents.

The government is doing more work to address these issues. In close coordination and close consultation with representatives of ambulance officers, such as the union representing the officer—the Transport Workers Union—we have put in place a detailed review of all the operations of our Ambulance Service to make sure that we fully understand where all the pressures are into the future, what needs to be done to address those and what the priority areas need to be. This will be an ongoing process for government and for the Canberra community. As our population continues to age, as we continue to see growth in demand and as we continue to see some of the problems as a result of shortages in other parts of the health work force, such as GPs, demands on our Ambulance Service are going to continue to increase.

The government will keep working with ambulance officers, with ambulance management and with the emergency services agency to ensure that we have a contemporary, well-resourced ambulance service capable of meeting the needs of our community into the future, and that is our commitment.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, a supplementary?

MR HARGREAVES: Could the minister please outline the ways response times are recorded in relation to ACT Ambulance Service call-outs in comparison to other jurisdictions?

MR CORBELL: This, I think, is an important question—and I thank Mr Hargreaves for it—because what is important to highlight is some of the debates on response times for our Ambulance Service. I saw the very unfair headline in the *Canberra Times* when the ROGS data came out which suggested that ambos ambled. I think that was the headline in the *Canberra Times*. I reject that. Our ambos are hardworking. Our ambos are there 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and they do a very important job for the Canberra community.

The way that we measure response times in the ACT is best practice, and only the ACT, Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia measure response times from the first key stroke. That is pretty much straight after the triple zero call is received in the communications centre. Compare this with what happens in some of the large jurisdictions like New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, where they only measure response times from the time the call is transferred to dispatch, equally, even

in the Northern Territory, where it is transferred to the responding crew. That is a significant difference. What that means is that those jurisdictions start recording response times later, longer after the call has been received; whereas we measure it effectively from the time the call is picked up by the operator.

That, of course, means that there are going to be some differences in our response time. But I think that is the honest way to report it. That is the way the community would expect that it is reported and that is what we will continue to do. But I think it does highlight that often unfair comparisons are made of our response times compared to other jurisdictions, because many of those jurisdictions—indeed, half of them—measure it from a period late in the cycle from call to dispatch compared to what the ACT does.

We will continue to work closely with the Ambulance Service and with the union representing ambulance officers in tackling these issues.

MR SPEAKER: I call Ms Porter to ask a supplementary question.

MS PORTER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Could the minister please outline some of the achievements of the ACT Ambulance Service?

Mr Hargreaves: Other than saving my life.

MR CORBELL: That is a very important achievement and I know that Mr Hargreaves has a very high regard for the work of our Ambulance Service, as do I. I am pleased that he received quality care when he called on them.

Mr Speaker, the Ambulance Service is continuing to make some real achievements, particularly in the area of training. The training work that we have undertaken is significant. Commencing in 2007, the Ambulance Service achieved alignment of all assessment tools, training guides and student modules to the advanced diploma of paramedical science, ambulance. This qualification, awarded to ACTAS officers that successfully complete a three-year training program to practise as an intensive care paramedic, is recognised by all Australasian ambulance services and places our officers on par at a clinical level with any other service in the country.

We are also unique, as I have already mentioned, Mr Speaker, in that we are the only service that offers the community intensive care at a paramedic level of clinical care on every ambulance. Unlike in other services where some officers are trained to advanced levels but below intensive care, all of our officers are trained to intensive care level. This presents a real challenge because it means that often our officers are poached by other services because we do the investment in the training and they end up getting a good offer somewhere else.

Nevertheless, this requirement is an important one for the ACT Ambulance Service. We will continue to make this investment, as well as making an investment in other areas such as in urban search and rescue, chemical, biological and radiological response, and specialist bariatric, which are all important capabilities for our Ambulance Service if we are to properly serve the community.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, a supplementary?

MR SMYTH: Minister, what you say is true, that it is hard to compare jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but, just looking at the year-on-year results for the ACT for the last four financial years, is it not true that the response time has deteriorated?

MR CORBELL: The figures we see in the ROGS data highlight that we are having to deal with significant demand and significant increase in demand. I am pleased to hear the admission from the opposition that they actually got it wrong in their criticism of the government in terms of the delivery of the services. Here is the admission from Mr Smyth that he should not have made the simplistic assertion that the government has failed in terms of addressing this issue. He knows, and he is now admitting, that you cannot compare the ACT with at least half of the other Australian jurisdictions because of the different ways they measure response times.

We will continue to work to invest in ambulance services. We will continue to work to tackle demand.

Mr Smyth: So has it got worse or not?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, you have asked your question.

MR CORBELL: There are real challenges in tackling demand, but in the same way that this government is managing demand—

Mr Smyth: Point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Stop the clock, thank you.

Mr Smyth: It is a very specific question. Does the chart show that—just looking at the ACT for the last four years, has the response time deteriorated? It is a very simple question. The minister is not answering it; he dances around it but he dares not answer it.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, the question is clear.

MR CORBELL: In the same way that the government is tackling issues around growth in general health services, whether it is primary health care or whether it is in relation to hospital care—

Mr Smyth: Point of order, Mr Speaker: he cannot ignore your advice. It is not about what the government has done; it is about the times themselves and that the 50th and 90th percentile in the charts shown, comparing just the ACT to the ACT, have deteriorated.

MR SPEAKER: Minister Corbell, a specific answer to the question would be helpful.

MR CORBELL: I am answering the question, Mr Speaker. It is very important that we highlight the fact that these issues are driven by demand. We need to tackle

demand in the same way that we are tackling demand in general health services. That is what the government will continue to do.

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

Answers to questions on notice

Questions Nos 404 and 495

MS GALLAGHER: I have answered the question that I took on notice from Mr Smyth. In relation to question 404 from Mr Seselja, I signed that off on 11 December and it went to the committee office. There has been some issue between the two—

Mr Seselja: So there has been a breakdown in terms of—

MS GALLAGHER: Yes. But it is there and available, and I understand it was resent a week ago, so it should be there.

With respect to question 495, the department has advised me that this will be ready by close of business tomorrow afternoon. It has taken longer than expected to answer this question. My apologies for the lateness of the response.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Hospitals—birthing centre

MS GALLAGHER: In relation to the question I took on notice from Ms Hunter around the birthing centre, Ms Hunter asked me whether the architects had expertise in designing specialty wards—in particular, birthing centres—and whether they were required to subcontract out. I understand they were not required to subcontract out and that they did have access from within their own organisation as experts in designing birth centres. In particular, projects that they have been involved in recently are the Royal North Shore birthing area in Sydney, where they have a physically separate birth centre similar to the current Canberra model, the Mater Mothers in Brisbane, and the Nelson hospital birthing area in Nelson, New Zealand.

I am advised that the Bligh Voller Nield team have recently discussed the aspirations for the birth centre with the Friends of the Birth Centre and have been given advice that they want it to be light filled, calming, comfortable and a comforting space which is non-medical. The specialist expertise within the architects firm has been supplemented by the fact that the designer working on this project has had both of her children in a birth centre. She is familiar with and supportive of the philosophical approach to birthing.

Alexander Maconochie Centre

MR CORBELL: During question time Mr Doszpot asked me a question in relation to internet access at the AMC. I can advise Mr Doszpot and members that, as of today, all access to internet use, including educational programs, email and whitelisted websites, is still not available to prisoners. However, the review of access has been

completed and I am advised that it is likely that access to educational sites on the internet for the purposes of prisoners' educational programs and access to email will be restored later this week. General internet use is likely to be restored at a later time, once some final work is undertaken in relation to that matter.

Health

Paper and statement by member

MR HANSON (Molonglo), by leave: I present the following paper:

The state of our health—Canberra Liberals—Health discussion paper, prepared by Mr Hanson, dated February 2010.

MR HANSON: I seek leave to make a statement in relation to the paper.

Leave granted.

MR HANSON: Madam Assistant Speaker, I have presented a discussion paper titled "The state of our health". The nature of opposition means that, more often than not, we do find ourselves commenting on the government's agenda. This is all part of holding the government to account and is fundamentally important to our democratic process of maintaining scrutiny of government. Policy development and providing an alternative vision is the other half of an opposition's role, and the discussion paper I have tabled today, titled "The state of our health", represents part of that process.

The health discussion paper that the Canberra Liberals have tabled today sets out a vision for health in the ACT and articulates a process whereby we will be engaging with the community in the development of our policies. I intend to spend the next few years having an open conversation about health in the ACT, and the policies that we take to the next election will be a logical conclusion of that conversation.

I have already had many conversations in the last year with ACT and federal peak medical bodies and health professionals as well as with numerous healthcare consumers. I now want to take those conversations to the next level and use a more structured process to develop the Liberal Party's health policy agenda for 2012. I want to harness the body of intellectual capacity that is out there in the ACT community. I want to use the ideas, the knowledge, the intellect and the experience of health experts and academics in the field to further develop our policies.

The conversations I have already had and the observations I have made have allowed me to develop a view of where our health system is currently succeeding and where it is failing, and they have allowed me to form a view of the strategic direction we should be taking in the development of health policy. I have a view of where our health system is and where it should go; it is how to get there that is the question. I have articulated this in the discussion paper and have also outlined the process I will be following to ensure that our discussions with the key players in the provision of health services as well as the broader community are as fruitful and structured as possible.

In terms of where we currently find our health system, the picture is certainly mixed. We have some great strengths in our health system, and I acknowledge those, but we are also failing in key areas. Probably the biggest issue confronting the patient is one of access. Although our doctors, our nurses and our allied health professionals are the best in the world, it is clear that accessing our health system is becoming increasingly difficult. It is difficult to see a GP, and waiting times for elective surgery and our emergency departments have grown alarmingly in the last eight years. This is only going to get more difficult in the face of a growing and ageing population.

As an example, GP numbers in the ACT are the lowest per capita in Australia. Our GP numbers are so low that we need an additional 70 full-time GPs. Our GP numbers have actually been declining while across the rest of Australia they have been increasing at about eight per cent per annum. We also have the lowest GP bulk-billing rates in the nation. We are also short of nurses, particularly specialty nurses in areas such as mental health, and we are short a number of allied health professionals. We have the lowest number of public dentists per capita in Australia.

A flow-on effect from the shortage of GPs that we face is that many more people present at our emergency departments than is otherwise necessary. Our emergency departments in the ACT continue to fail to meet target rates for urgent treatment and semi-urgent treatment, with only 53 per cent of patients being seen in the required times. I note that when the Labor government took office in 2001 the percentage of patients seen on time for that category was 97 per cent.

The picture for elective surgery is equally grim: the median wait for elective surgery in the ACT is twice the national average and has doubled during the time of the ACT Labor government from 40 days to 72 days. Access block and high bed occupancy continue to be problems. Indeed, our bed occupancy rates are 91 per cent, although 85 per cent is considered dangerous.

The ACT has the highest rate of mental and behavioural problems in Australia and has not been adequately supported by investment in community programs. We are also still waiting for the secure mental health facility that was promised years ago. The Capital Region Cancer Service is also facing ever-increasing demand for services. There is inadequate provision of practical preventive health initiatives in the ACT. That is evidenced by the ACT's high rates of obesity and high number of long-term health conditions.

Despite relatively high levels of private health insurance per capita in the ACT, the ACT has comparatively high levels of public hospital use per capita, about 18 per cent above the national average, resulting in additional demand on our already stretched public hospital system. The ACT suffers from a lack of community aged-care services and, given our ageing population, is poorly positioned to cope with a significant increase in demand without overloading our already stretched systems.

Despite the poor performance outcomes I have articulated, the ACT is spending more tax dollars on health per capita than any other jurisdiction in Australia except the Northern Territory. Our health costs in the ACT are increasing at 11.1 per cent

per annum, which is the highest in the country. Although I do not question the amount of money being spent, I do question the way it is being spent.

I make these points not as a political point scoring exercise but to highlight the fact that something significant does need to be done. As much as the government would have us believe that all things are on track, it is simply not the case. It is clear to anyone who works in the ACT health system, who studies it or tries to access it that we have fallen behind in key areas and we do need to catch up. This is not about to get any easier.

The pressures on the ACT health system will grow considerably over the next 20 to 25 years because of our expanding and ageing population. By the year 2032, Canberra's population is projected to grow by approximately 67,000 people. The proportion of the population aged 65-plus is projected to increase from nine per cent to 25 per cent, and by 2022 the number of overnight hospital admissions is projected to increase by about 50 per cent. The problems of the present are nothing compared with what we will face in the future, and this has led to the phrase being coined that we are facing a health tsunami.

We also have to be realistic about what we can afford. The cost of delivering health care in the ACT is enormous, consuming nearly \$1 billion of the ACT budget each year. As I said, that is growing by 11 per cent a year. Our system therefore needs not just to be more effective but more efficient. The government is endeavouring to increase the capacity of elements of our healthcare system. However, given the \$57 million of infrastructure that ACT Health failed to deliver last year and the government's track record on infrastructure delivery generally, I think it is reasonable to expect that the projects outlined in the government's capital asset development plan are likely to be subject to scope reduction, delay and cost increase.

I also fear that we will struggle to staff an expanded health system adequately, given that we are struggling to adequately staff our system now, if we do not make some changes. Regardless, expansion of infrastructure is only one element of what needs to be addressed. As an example, the ACT government are spending less than any other jurisdiction except the Northern Territory on GPs, and I question whether we have the balance right.

Given the ever-increasing costs of health care and the growth in demand, we must not focus simply on "bigger" as a response; we must also focus on "better". What I mean by "better" is, indeed, far less easy to define and far less politically saleable than building a new hospital or healthcare centre, but we must be far more efficient in the way we deliver services. We must be more effective in the services we provide, and we need to coordinate all of our health services far better.

So the question is: what should we be doing? During the course of 2009, three major reviews of the health sector commissioned by the commonwealth have reported: the National Hospitals and Health Reform Commission, the preventative health task force, and the primary healthcare strategy. I agree that the thrust of what is being said in each of the reports is of value, but the great challenge is actually turning the aspirations contained in those reports into a policy that is funded and then effectively implementing those policies.

We do await the commonwealth's response, but we cannot wait for their response indefinitely before we start to act locally. I believe that what is needed is a new long-term approach to health in the ACT in which a greater emphasis is given to the provision of preventive care, early intervention and health care in the community.

Ms Gallagher: Wow! What a revelation!

MR HANSON: There is a need to change where and how health care is provided to ensure that our scarce and expensive public hospital beds are not the only option for patients who could be better treated at home or in less intensive subacute community facilities.

Ms Gallagher: Have you been reading our brochures again, Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: I notice continuous interjections from the minister.

Ms Gallagher: It is hard to take him seriously—very hard.

MR HANSON: Despite the fact that she is interjecting from across the benches, we have seen little evidence of the government pursuing such policy. There is also a need to better coordinate the activities of our public and private hospitals, our health service providers and health consumers so that the patient is at the centre of the system. Our focus should change to an emphasis on wellness rather than sickness.

The ACT is unique in its size, both in terms of geography and population. This reduces some of the complexity and, I think, provides scope to implement significant changes without the same difficulties facing other states and territories. The ACT has a chance to provide a model for how health care is delivered in Australia, and we could potentially lead the way in any health reform as part of federal and state governments.

The ACT is, however, limited by funds that it can invest in developing new programs. The intention, therefore, as we move forward should not be to simply invent or develop new programs but, rather, to scrutinise successful strategies and emerging programs and initiatives within the ACT—I certainly acknowledge that there are a number—and elsewhere in Australia and overseas to determine where they could be expanded or adapted for use in the ACT.

I will outline the changes that I am calling for: firstly, a change in focus from treatment at the acute hospital end of the healthcare spectrum to one that has a greater emphasis on prevention, detection, early intervention and care in the community; secondly, better coordination of all those elements of health care, including the involvement of public and private health service providers, community groups, ACT and federal government resources, and patients; thirdly, the provision of more specialised subacute beds and services for patients who could be better cared for outside hospitals in their homes or in facilities such as residential aged care.

I note just today in the *Australian* that there is an article with regard to the number of hospital beds tied up by elderly patients. The number across Australia is 3,000. The

analysis provided is that if those people could be treated either in their homes or in residential age centres, the cost would move from \$1,000 a day to \$126 a day. That is the sort of initiative that we need to see.

The key results that I believe that would arise from this sort of approach are greater prevention of illness and the treatment of people earlier in their illness, which would actually result in a healthier society. A stronger focus on prevention, detection and early treatment will ultimately provide cost savings and reduce the pressure on our already stretched hospital system. Better coordination and use of all health resources in the ACT, including better use of technologies such as e-health, would put the patient at the centre of the system.

I have provided evidence in the paper that changing the way we deliver health care in the ACT can make the costs of health more sustainable. We do need to increase the capacity of our hospitals, but I believe that a shift away from a hospital-centric system to a system with preventive and primary health care at its foundation could be more efficient. Indeed, Jon Menadue, who has conducted reviews of both the New South Wales and the South Australian health systems, found:

The evidence is clear that countries with a strong primary care have lower overall costs and generally have healthier populations, especially where there is a higher primary care physician availability.

My views are not out of sync with national trends. Federal health minister Nicola Roxon, in an address to the Australian Self Medication Industry on 13 November, said:

We are concerned that in our health system pretty much all roads lead fairly quickly to the hospital ... We believe that our system needs to have ... some shorter roads that lead to other options and other appropriate services.

This stands in stark contrast, I believe, to Jon Stanhope and his position within the ACT government. I was very disappointed, I must say, with the response that was provided by Jon Stanhope to the introduction of this paper. I think that this paper does raise a number of very useful ideas. I would hope that many of the trends that I suggest would be agreed to by the government and also by the crossbench.

Ms Gallagher: Well, considering there is nothing new in the paper, Jeremy, I think you are probably right.

MR HANSON: Well, if the minister says there is nothing new in the paper, I do not, then, understand why the Chief Minister felt the need to attack it. The Canberra Liberals have done the hard work to prepare a detailed, positive strategy for the way forward. Jon Stanhope actually responded with an untruthful comment by saying that this was some plan to cut hospital beds. I will quote from the paper:

There is a shortage of public hospital beds in the ACT and the Canberra Liberals are committed to the process of expanding the capacity of our hospitals.

Ms Gallagher: Thanks to the Liberals, who cut 114 beds from the system.

MR HANSON: Now, what I am hearing is interjections—opposition for opposition’s sake—from the minister rather than acknowledging the positive aspects that we are looking at by presenting this paper today. Jon Stanhope misquoted the paper, and he has shown that he is prepared to use fear and smear against the Canberra Liberals and use fear for the future health of our entire population rather than consider the positive solutions that are being proposed.

Ms Gallagher: There are none.

MR HANSON: I certainly will not accept this sort of behaviour from the government. It is disappointing today to hear the continual interjections from the minister, the negative response. This is a government that spent last year and has already started this year criticising the opposition for not engaging in the policy debate by not presenting their ideas and not presenting an agenda. Here we have the minister criticising now that the positive initiative is taken, when the Canberra Liberals demonstrate that they are doing the hard policy work and are engaging with the community, and we see negativity from the government.

I would just like to clarify a point that was made by Ms Bresnan earlier in a debate today about private hospitals and the coordination required. We are not anti private hospital; we are very project private hospital. Indeed, what we want to do is encourage the people that have private health insurance to use the private health system. Currently, we have a figure 18 per cent above the national average of people who use the public hospital system here in the ACT when we have actually one of the highest take-ups of private health care. What that means is people who should otherwise be using the private health system are accessing our public system. If we could get those people to use the private system, that would free up beds and that would free up capacity in our public hospital system. These are the sorts of initiatives that we need to be looking at. This is the sort of work that we need to be doing.

Ms Gallagher: Subsidising the private system.

MR HANSON: Again, what we are hearing from Katy Gallagher is an attack on us. This is about making sure we better coordinate our health system and have a strategic direction so that we do treat all of our hospitals in Canberra as a system rather than an isolated public and then private system. I hope that we are not going to see an agenda coming either from the government or from the Greens—

Mr Coe: Your job is to manage health care, not just public hospitals.

Ms Gallagher: Right, so it is our job to manage the private hospital, is it?

Mr Coe: It is your job to support them.

Ms Gallagher: It’s our job to fund the private hospital system, Alistair?

Mr Coe: It is your job to facilitate private health care. Yes, it is.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Le Couteur): Ms Gallagher, Mr Coe, please! Mr Hanson has the floor.

MR HANSON: We have an agenda from the Greens to nationalise, to socialise and compulsorily acquire Calvary hospital. What I do not want to see is the same sort of steps being taken towards any sort of compulsory acquisition of our private hospital system. The challenge obviously is how to make real these outcomes that we are seeking. I do not have the solutions to achieve all these goals here today, but I am confident that the solutions are available.

I have a lot of questions that do need to be answered to inform policy development, but I am confident that over the next couple of years, by working hard and working together with the community, we will get the answers that we need to the questions. The collective knowledge, the intellect, the experience available to do all this work in the ACT is, without doubt, more than adequate. I do sense a willingness to help, and we saw that the other day with the kind words from the AMA and from others. The real enthusiasm out there—

Ms Gallagher: Yes, who were they?

MR HANSON: Well, we saw quotes from Access Economics, I think, and from Bob Wells from the ANU. I can get more; I can give you a list of people who want to contribute to the debate rather than sneer at the debate like the Greens and Labor are doing.

Ms Bresnan: Sneer?

MR HANSON: Well, it is. You are sitting back there putting forward the sorts of comments that are coming rather than engaging constructively. To harness this expertise, I will be running a number of forums over the next couple of years aimed at exploring and discussing all the good ideas in a variety of areas, including preventive health, chronic illness, mental health, health workforce, primary health, allied health and so on. The discussion paper does contain a list of the sorts of questions that I think we need to ask as part of the forums—

Ms Gallagher: Maybe acute health, maybe hospitals?

MR HANSON: Sorry, minister, a contribution? A positive contribution?

Ms Gallagher: No.

MR HANSON: Was there one?

Ms Gallagher: It is unparliamentary to respond to interjections, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Was it? No, I missed it. If she does have something valuable to contribute then I would certainly welcome that, minister. You know I would. No doubt there are many other questions that could be asked, and I welcome those as well.

I am confident that I will get the quality and the quantity of answers that I will need to lead a very well informed and well targeted policy development. Each of them will be policies that will have been shaped by the experts and by the needs of the community. The first forum that we will be conducting will be conducted on primary health in the ACT on 30 March at 6.30. I am very pleased to announce that the guest speaker will be Dr Paul Jones, the president of the ACT AMA. I would cordially invite any members of the Assembly and Ms Gallagher, if you would like to contribute—

Ms Gallagher: It is already in my diary.

MR HANSON: Very good. I hope you will not be coming there and expressing these negative comments. It is an optimistic, forward-looking forum and not an opportunity for negative construct.

In conclusion, this is a somewhat new approach to policy development, and I do encourage all to participate. This is an opportunity for the experts and the community alike to help shape our health system of the future. I hope at least you, Madam Assistant Speaker, if not others, are as enthusiastic as I am about working together to come up with some great new ideas. Thank you.

Canberra—safety and vibrancy Paper and statement by member

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo), by leave: I present the following paper:

Results of Greens consultation on proposals for a safer and more vibrant Canberra—Summary paper.

I seek leave to make a statement in relation to the paper.

Leave granted.

MR RATTENBURY: In September 2009 the Greens released a discussion paper titled *Reducing alcohol related violence: a new framework for the ACT*, which I have previously tabled in the Assembly. We conducted a three-month consultation period and received a strong level of support for the nine proposals in our paper.

The submissions received have been summarised in the paper I table today, which is titled *Summary paper—results of Greens consultation on proposals for a safer and more vibrant Canberra*. I commend the paper to members to have a read of because I think some of the feedback received is very interesting.

Canberra—nightlife

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (3:48): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) recognises the importance of promoting a safe and vibrant Canberra nightlife;

(2) notes:

- (a) the ACT Greens' September 2009 paper *Reducing Alcohol Related Violence: A New Framework for the ACT* and subsequent release of the ACT government's September 2009 paper *Review of the Liquor Act 1975 Final Report*; and
- (b) the time elapsed between the government's April 2008 Discussion Paper and September 2009 Final Report and its intent to introduce exposure draft legislation early in 2010; and

(3) calls on the ACT government to:

- (a) commit to evidence based policies to lower alcohol related violence by introducing a risk based licensing framework;
- (b) ensure the operation of live music venues is encouraged and not inappropriately deterred through the risk based licensing framework, given their contribution to a vibrant community;
- (c) share with licensees the responsibility for getting patrons home safely by:
 - (i) providing year-round affordable public transport options; and
 - (ii) investigating the best models of industry supported transport such as venue supplied courtesy transport and industry subsidised transport;
- (d) table in the Assembly an exposure draft of legislative changes to the Liquor Act 1975 by the last sitting day in March 2010; and
- (e) ensure that:
 - (i) the public and hospitality staff are fully informed about all proposed changes; and
 - (ii) the legislation is debated and commenced prior to 1 November 2010, which marks the start of the 2010-11 summer season.

The streets of Canberra at night can be a welcoming and safe place to be. Anyone who attended the Multicultural Festival on Saturday night would agree. During the night, there was an overwhelming sense of colour, movement and enjoyment. People left with a positive buzz and some were even heard to comment, "What a shame it can't be like this every Saturday night in Canberra."

And it is a shame that many people are fearful of going out at night in our entertainment areas. There is a fear of unprovoked violence and general antisocial behaviour. Media reports like the one that appeared in the *Canberra Times* on Saturday morning give people real cause to think twice before heading out. The headline read "Seven locked up after drunken night in Civic" and described a series of alcohol-fuelled fights and forceful arrests.

The guiding principle behind the Greens' discussion paper released last year was the idea that everyone should be able to go out at night and have a good time without the risk of violence. Canberra should be a place where everyone feels safe and comfortable. And, while I think Canberra may be hard pressed to turn on a show like the Multicultural Festival every weekend, I do think there are elements we can take from last Saturday night. Those essential elements are safety and vibrancy. These are two starting principles Canberra can adopt for our nightlife and one I think we would all seek to embrace.

I have moved this motion today to highlight a number of key points: firstly, the need to act to create a safer and more vibrant Canberra nightlife; secondly, the fact that independent research and consultation projects were undertaken by both the Greens and the government and that some of the fundamental findings of each are backed by strong evidence and will go towards building a safer nightlife in our city; thirdly, the need to act on those policy proposals that are backed by evidence and have them implemented before the next summer season; and, fourthly, the need to engage the community and fully explain the new laws before they commence.

We need to spark a cultural change around drinking in Canberra and this will not happen simply by the government legislating. We also need to explain those changes. The Greens and the government, as I have touched on, have both conducted our own research and consultation on the issue of alcohol-related violence. It is with some frustration—

Mrs Dunne: It just didn't take as long as the government.

MR RATTENBURY: It is with some frustration, as Mrs Dunne is alluding to, that I note the government started their consultation process in April 2008 yet did not release the discussion paper on intended action until September 2009, and at this stage do not have a clear timetable for moving to change.

Whilst it is obviously important to engage all of the relevant players and to allow sufficient time to do so, it is also important to keep moving forward with reform in this area and to have a clear timetable for action. That is why one of the central elements of our motion today is to put some clear deadlines on this work so that we can focus towards meeting those deadlines.

Whilst the Greens and the government have worked up our discussion papers through separate processes, I was pleased to see a healthy level of common ground on a number of key findings in our respective discussion papers. That is an outcome that I think provides fertile ground for positive change, for actually getting agreement in this place to pass the legislation through the chamber in a timely manner.

Both the Greens and the government looked carefully at a risk-based licensing framework and concluded that it is a valuable tool to adopt to work towards the overarching goal of a safe and vibrant Canberra nightlife. The evidence shows that there are two clear factors that indicate the risk of a particular venue experiencing violence: firstly, venue capacity and, secondly, venue trading hours.

Essentially, the evidence shows that larger venues with higher maximum capacities are at increased risk of violent incidents and, similarly, that the later venues trade the higher the risk of violence. A risk-based licensing framework does two things to encourage a safer and more vibrant nightlife. Firstly, it gives incentive to smaller, safer, boutique-style bars. These small venues are less likely to experience or attract violence. Secondly, for those venues that do trigger the higher risk categories there will be higher annual fees. The return to government from these increased fees can then be used to adequately and consistently fund liquor licensing inspection teams.

In the past there has been some concern that the number of inspections from year to year varies as the vagaries of budget funding vary. By linking funding to licence fees, inspections are guaranteed. This is important in ensuring that inspectors are able to get out and check that venues are acting responsibly and within their licensing requirements. This is a reform the government have flagged they will act on, and the Greens will support such a reform. We support it because it is backed by evidence that shows it will build a safer and more vibrant nightlife in our city.

There are, however, other policy proposals in the government's final report that are not backed by such strong evidence. The Greens call on the government to commit to introducing only those policies that are backed by clear evidence.

As we seek to tackle the issues of alcohol-related violence and binge drinking in our entertainment districts, we believe that we should focus on the policies and focus our resources on those ones that have an evidence base rather than pursuing those that are more debatable. The Greens firmly believe that priority must be given to policies such as a risk-based licensing framework. We would prioritise those over policies where the evidence is not as clear, such as lockouts.

The evidence for lockouts can best be described as mixed and certainly not as strong as that backing a risk-based licensing framework. The focus should remain on the ultimate goal, which is to work towards making people feel safe when they go out in our city, removing that fear and encouraging people to make the most of our city centre. The evidence must be relied upon in choosing which is the most valuable tool to use to achieve that goal.

What we can learn from the places in Australia where lockouts have been trialled is that, in order to give them the best chance of reducing violence and antisocial behaviour, they need to be coupled with two costly initiatives: firstly, increased police numbers on the street late at night at the time of the lockout; and, secondly, significant public transport upgrades to cater for the spill-out effect that accompanies lockouts.

The transport infrastructure requirements that need to be put in place to cater for the spill-out effect of lockouts are over and above the regular late-night transport requirements. The difference is that under lockout schemes patrons surge onto the streets at the designated lockout time. The demand on the public transport is higher, and significant investment is required to reconfigure public transport to meet this surge in demand.

The Greens included in our paper a proposal for better public transport late at night. This received strong support and people made clear that they need and want to be able to travel home safely at night. However, the model of transport the Greens proposed and continue to support is one where transport options are provided throughout the night on an ongoing basis so that patrons can disperse on their own terms, as opposed to a predetermined surge point during the night.

If either the increased police presence or reconfigured public transport is missing, the experience has shown that lockouts simply push people out onto the streets, where they group together, some not wanting to go home just yet, others wanting to go home but being forced to wait in taxi lines. In this scenario there may be the potential for increased violence. The research talks of violent queues to enter venues before lockout, as people get nervous they are going to miss the cut-off, and violent spillover periods as the streets fill with people after lockout.

A poorly organised lockout scheme quite literally pushes the problem from a controlled space inside a venue out into the uncontrolled space of the streets. The Greens' view is that the ACT would be foolish to take on a system of lockouts which requires large expenditure on police numbers and significant public transport reconfiguration to cater for the spill-out effect associated with lockouts. These costs would be significant and would be unjustified because, even when spent, the money would not be going towards a policy strongly backed by evidence. We would be far better served by targeting those policies that we know have a better chance of success.

The government have flagged that they will be moving to implement lockouts. The Greens do not support this and we will call on them to revisit the decision. There is much in their raft of proposals that can be acted on, that we believe are good proposals, and we would urge the government to focus on those when they bring the legislation before the chamber.

I would like to come back briefly to public transport. Our motion calls on the government to share with licensees the responsibility for getting patrons home safely. The government final report has raised the prospect of requiring venues to offer courtesy transport when there is no public transport available. This is a positive initiative that deserves support. It is dangerous to have people at drinking venues without ready access to public transport. It is sad but true that, for some, the temptation will be too great and instead of waiting for a taxi or walking to public transport they will get in their car and drink drive.

There has been significant public discussion in the last six to 12 months of the problem we have with this in the ACT. For those who drink to excess and wander home at night, it is again a shame that some will become destructive and cause distress to local residents unfortunate enough to live on their route home. Another good reason for ensuring people have ready access to transport home is that where people line up for taxis and congregate in large groups violence and antisocial behaviour can occur. Again, this is unfortunate but true.

Where the risk-based licensing system seeks to spark a cultural change about where and how we drink, providing transport recognises that this cultural change will not

happen overnight and we need reliable transport to get people home safely and not encourage them down the path of thinking they will risk it and perhaps drink and drive.

However, there are important provisos to our support for the courtesy transport initiative. Firstly, the government cannot use this proposed requirement for courtesy transport to hand over all responsibility for providing transport options. There will need to be a balance between public transport and venue-provided transport. To get the most out of these systems, the two will need to work together, quite literally. There will need to be a targeted strategy to ensure that venue-supplied transport delivers people to places where they can then access public transport to get to their home region. The initiative will be totally counterproductive if it simply results in people being taken from venues around Canberra and dropped in Civic only to find there are no public transport options for them. Then they get on those same problematic taxi queues.

This requirement for the government to remain involved in public transport is set against the backdrop of the Nightrider bus service. This is a government-run late-night bus service between the major interchanges. It is, however, only run a couple of weekends each year in December and on New Year's Eve. The statistics show a promising number of people using the service, which would only grow were people able to rely on the service to run throughout the year.

Nightrider is a success story that shows the demand for reliable public transport late at night and the ongoing need for the government to remain involved in providing the service. The ongoing and regular service offered by Nightrider into the night is the model of public transport the Greens support and is contrasted with the surge model of transport required under a lockout scenario.

The Greens set out the need for better public transport in our discussion paper and we received strong support for our idea. One of the important points made in submissions was that there are various models of industry-supported transport. Two notable examples are contained in the text of the motion: venue-supplied courtesy transport and industry-subsidised transport. The government needs to investigate which of these models would suit the ACT the best given our make-up of venues and capacity to contribute to each scheme. The model adopted needs to be fully researched and found to be the one most suited to ACT conditions. The proposal needs this work to ensure that it is successful and does create the better late-night public transport service that we need.

I would like to touch briefly on live music. The motion also calls on the government to ensure that live music venues are encouraged and not deterred from operating in Canberra. This goes towards creating a vibrant nightlife because live music is an important part of the nightlife and must be embraced under the proposed new licensing framework. This section of the motion stems from recent concerns in Victoria where live music venues have been put under financial pressure from that state's risk-based licensing framework. The ACT has the opportunity to learn from the difficulties in Victoria and to give live music venues the support they deserve.

The Greens are calling on the government to ensure that live music venues are not adversely affected by the new licensing framework. To achieve this, the government should commit to not including the presence or absence of live music as a factor indicating risk of violence. As I said earlier, the evidence is that venue capacity and trading hours are reliable indicators of risk of violence. The same cannot be said of the presence or non-presence of music. The research we have performed has found differing reports on the role live music has when it comes to generating violence.

Finally, I would like to speak to the need to spark a cultural change. The motion finishes by calling on the government to commit to a legislative time frame for implementing the alcohol reforms. This time frame concludes with the reforms being in place by the 2010-11 summer season, perhaps the busiest time of year. There are a number of very important steps along the way to having the reforms in place for the next summer season. A crucial step is talking to the patrons and hospitality staff, those that work in the industry, about the proposed reforms and educating them about the changes.

A key example is the proposed new offence of providing an already drunk person with more alcohol. Importantly, the proposal is that this offence would cover both bar staff and patrons. Everyone needs to be aware of these types of changes to the law because if people are not aware of the new law proposals they simply cannot be implemented and the good measures that are being sought to achieve will not be achieved most successfully.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (4.04): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit paragraphs (2) and (3), substitute:

“(2) notes:

- (a) the Government’s release of the Discussion Paper *Review of Liquor Act 1975* and release in September 2009 of the final report on the Review; and
- (b) the ACT Greens’ paper *Reducing Alcohol Related Violence: A New Framework for the ACT*; and

(3) notes the ACT Government is committed to:

- (a) evidence based policies to lower alcohol related violence by introducing a risk based licensing framework;
- (b) ensure that the operation of live music venues is encouraged and not inappropriately deterred through the risk based licensing framework, given their contribution to a vibrant community;
- (c) providing year-round affordable public transport options that support the introduction of venue supplied courtesy transport;

- (d) the tabling in the Assembly of an exposure draft of legislative changes to the *Liquor Act 1975* by the last sitting day in March 2010; and
- (e) the introduction of legislation for debate and commencement prior to the start of the 2010/11 summer.”.

I thank Mr Rattenbury for bringing forward this motion today. The government’s commitment to undertake a major comprehensive review of ACT liquor laws is the first such major review since the Liquor Act was first introduced 35 years ago. In April 2008 I released a detailed discussion paper raising a number of key questions and possible options for reform for public comment. The government was keen to seek community input on the best way forward to ensure the responsible sale and safe consumption of alcohol in the territory.

The review process undertaken was complex. I make no apology for the period of time that it took to complete. It required not only careful consideration of a large number of public submissions received but also a detailed analysis of national and overseas evidence-based research data on measures adopted elsewhere to combat the ever-increasing alcohol-related costs on Australian communities. The cost on communities across Australia is significant. It is estimated that it costs Australian communities up to \$11 billion annually in terms of alcohol-related harm and the costs associated with that harm.

The final departmental report to government in September 2009 made 50 recommendations for reform. In a review of this type it is important to ensure that any recommendations finally adopted by government would be effective in minimising harm to patrons. Most Australian jurisdictions have now moved to introduce risk-based licensing frameworks with significant licensing renewal fees and penalties for those licensees who continue to serve alcohol irresponsibly, contributing to drunkenness and alcohol abuse in the marketplace.

The government’s proposal to require licensees to prepare risk assessment management plans with their application indicating how they would propose to manage risks associated with their venue would require them to consider alternative courtesy transport options, for example, for patrons in circumstances where public transport is not available in the early hours of the morning. While the availability of courtesy transport would be a matter for the liquor industry to provide, the government would be keen to work with the industry to ensure that this occurs.

In relation to the government’s intention to introduce a risk-based licensing framework and a new harm minimisation and community safety philosophy into our written legislation, the government has been careful to maintain a balance—a balance between acknowledging the significant contribution made by the liquor industry to Canberra’s economy and to a more vibrant community and the growing financial and social costs on the community associated with the abuse and misuse of alcohol. For this reason the government welcomes the Greens’ support in this endeavour and notes the significant consensus in the Greens’ paper supporting the government’s key recommendations for reform.

The government is working hard to ensure that the cost of a risk-based licensing framework on the ACT liquor industry does not operate in such a way as to diminish the social amenity of Canberra's vibrant nightlife. The solution depends on working with industry by involving them in the solutions. The government's amendment to this motion emphasises and draws attention to the level of common agreement between the Greens and the government in addressing effective solutions to this important community issue.

The government's amendment also recognises the government's ongoing efforts and commitment to maximising both social amenity and community safety. For example, the government has already reformed the body that oversees liquor licences. In February 2009 the ACAT became operational, introducing a new model for overseeing liquor licences and other regulatory issues in the territory. The ACAT has great flexibility in deciding which regulatory measure to impose in response to licensee misconduct. The government has also funded new inspectors to increase the capacity of the Office of Regulatory Services to monitor and encourage compliance with territory legislation.

The government has announced a detailed reform agenda, and I would like to touch on a number of these matters. I have already mentioned risk-based licensing. Risk-based licensing provides us with a greater capacity to properly reflect the costs that higher risk premises impose on the broader community, whether that is in terms of increased policing resources, costs on health care, costs on transport—costs on a range of other areas. Risk-based licensing will be a key measure for the government's reform. The government has already outlined how it believes that framework should be implemented.

I will be undertaking detailed discussions with industry stakeholders in terms of the detail of that new licence fee structure. I acknowledge that there are some concerns from industry about the level of fees and what it may mean for some licensees. I will work to achieve as constructive an outcome as possible, recognising that nobody likes fees to go up but nevertheless working to ensure that we get as much agreement as possible and trying to get a constructive outcome on that.

I have mentioned transport briefly. That is something which I note the Greens have also raised. The government takes the very strong view that this is not just a matter for the community in terms of taxpayer-funded services. Go to any other metropolitan area around the country and you will see that, as a condition of their licence, licensed venues must provide courtesy transport for their patrons. For example, I had the pleasure to visit Newcastle over the Christmas-new year period. Newcastle is an urban centre similar in size to the ACT in terms of population. I visited a licensed club. I was able to get to and from that club on a free courtesy shuttle bus provided by the club. That meant that my family and I could go out and enjoy the night. We had relatives with us and we were able to have a few drinks and get home safely. We did not have to worry about driving. We did not have to worry about all of those issues.

I believe there is a very clear onus on licensees to contribute to the transport solution. They should not simply say it is a matter for government, because licensees in

jurisdictions around the country are required to deliver courtesy transport for their patrons. I do not believe that the ACT should be any different in that regard. That will be an important element of our reform agenda.

Another important element of our reform agenda is to encourage the establishment of small boutique venues. Smaller venues cause less harm. Smaller venues are easier to manage. For that reason, the licensing structure will be set up in such a way that fees for smaller boutique venues will provide an incentive for those venues to be established. That can create greater diversity and activity in a centre in terms of licensed venues and it also means the risk is easier to manage.

The government has also outlined that its reforms to the Liquor Act will involve changes to the criteria upon which licences can be granted. It would be fair to say that we have probably had the most generous liquor licensing regime in the country with little consideration being given by approving authorities to the location of a venue or the fact that there may be other licensed venues in close proximity to the proposed licensed venue. Little regard has been had to the impacts on the surrounding community. There has been little opportunity—indeed virtually no opportunity—for a community suddenly faced with a licensed venue in its midst to comment and for those comments to be taken into account.

The government has decided that all of that will change. The commissioner will have the capacity to refuse a licence if they believe there are detrimental impacts on the surrounding community as a result of feedback from that community and to impose conditions in response to those comments to make sure that those negative impacts are mitigated. The commissioner will have the capacity to refuse the allocation of a licence if they believe there are too many liquor licensees already operating in that general vicinity. These are all areas for reform. The government is pleased that it has put in place a process to do that.

I would also like to talk about enforcement. Enforcement is the other key element of this reform package. The government has announced that it believes that from the risk-based licensing regime it can put in place additional police powers to be able to enforce conditions of liquor licences and the responsible service of alcohol. The government believes two dedicated teams of approximately six officers each, 12 in total, can be established as a dedicated team to deal with liquor licensing.

At the same time we are proposing that the powers related to the enforcement of the responsible service of alcohol shift from the civilian inspectorate to police, because it is the police who are out on the job at the time when these licensed venues are generally operating. Indeed, it has been our experience that when the civilian inspectorate has gone out and checked on the operation of licensed venues they have only been able to do so in the presence of the police in any event. So it makes sense for the police to take that front-line enforcement job on. We want to provide the additional resourcing to do that, but that resourcing can only be done through some recovery of the cost, which is an important element of the liquor licensing fee structure.

Finally, I would like to comment on the issue of lockouts. I note that the Greens are indicating their opposition to that. I note also that Mrs Dunne has raised some

reservations about it. The government's position is that lockouts should be available to police in our legislation. However, we do not believe that the exercising of that power is justified at this time. We do not believe the option should be closed off. There is mixed evidence about the usefulness of lockouts. I would reject the assertion by Mr Rattenbury that it results in lots of people spilling out at a particular point in time. That is not how a lockout works. A lockout works on the basis that people already in a licensed premise can leave but they cannot get into any other licensed premise.

The key purpose of a lockout is to stop new people coming in after a particular point in time. It is not like a closure because of a 6 o'clock swill—to use that historical example—where everyone is booted out at one time. A lockout is about preventing people coming in after a particular time. It does not require the licensed premise to close. There is a difference. We believe that that option should be available at the discretion of the minister—subject to disallowance by the Assembly—should it be needed in the future and we will be making provision for it in the legislation.

In terms of time frames, I can confirm, as I confirmed last year—indeed I indicated it to Mr Rattenbury earlier this month and I note he repeated the time lines in his motion—that the government intends to release an exposure draft of its new Liquor Act by the end of March this year. The government intends to introduce legislation for debate in the middle of this year for consideration by the Assembly and hopefully passage by the Assembly by the end of the year so that it will be able available before we head into next summer. Obviously the government is in the hands of the Assembly as to whether or not the legislation is passed at the time, but we are confident that the legislation will be introduced in time for the Assembly to do that, should it wish.

The government have a comprehensive reform agenda. It is one we have been working on in great detail for a considerable period of time now. I believe that time is time well-invested. We have a comprehensive reform agenda and I am pleased that the Greens are indicating their support for many elements of it. I look forward to that support when the bill comes to the Assembly.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (4:18): This is an important motion because it brings into focus two key points about Canberra's nightlife and the underlying laws and regulations, particularly those relating to the service and consumption of alcohol.

Firstly, it confirms what we already know about the industry's desire for reform for liquor licensing laws. Many in the industry are looking for change. They are concerned about the level of violence we see in our cities. They are concerned about the reputation that can fall on their industry because of the behaviour of their patrons. They are concerned about the lack of shared responsibility between venue owners and patrons for alcohol consumption and patron behaviour. They are concerned about the security of their venues and the safety of their patrons. They are concerned to see their patrons get home safely from a good night out. They are concerned to ensure that live entertainment elements of the industry can be sustainable and can enhance that good night out.

The ACT's industry wants to see changes that will help secure the long-term future of businesses to provide a safe and enjoyable environment for their staff and their

patrons. We know this because, like the Greens, the Canberra Liberals have been talking to the industry. We have had our roundtables and discussions and we know the kinds of reforms the industry is seeking. We know that industry is looking for a collaborative approach between industry and government, with shared responsibilities and initiatives leading to a common objective. We know that industry is looking for balance within that collaborative framework. It does not want a sledgehammer approach from government. What it does want are reforms that are workable and that yield that common objective.

It is interesting that the government's proposed reforms and those put forward by the Greens in general terms are aligned. This has been commented on before. It augurs well for the time when we in this place will need to deliberate on and debate the government's reform legislation.

That said, while we believe that this is an important motion brought here today, the Canberra Liberals do not support a number of elements of the motion, because they pre-empt that debate that will come forward when the reform legislation is presented. It should be sufficient that those elements of the motion are covered in the Greens' consultation paper as they were covered in the government's consultation.

I had proposed to move some amendments, but Mr Corbell has moved amendments which, if they succeed, will make it difficult for my amendments to be moved. I will speak on how the Canberra Liberals think that this motion should look, which is not substantially different but there is something that needs to be said.

I alluded to the fact that there are three policy-type initiatives that are addressed in Mr Rattenbury's motion for which this is not really the place. In its policy paper, the government has already committed to evidence-based policies and risk-based licensing frameworks; the time to have the discussion about how those should look is when the government comes forward with its legislation for passage.

There is wide agreement in the Assembly—there is, in fact, a committee inquiry going on—in relation to the operation of live music venues. I have a problem with Mr Rattenbury's paragraph (2)(b) because there seems to be some internal conflict. He is saying that we want vibrant live music venues—that they should be encouraged and not be deterred by risk-based licensing frameworks. I am not quite sure what he is trying to get at.

Then there is the issue of shared responsibility for public transport. Transport is a vital issue in relation to the nightlife in Canberra—the fact that there is very little transport to get people home. It is an important issue. But, as I have reservations about lockouts and curfews, I have some reservation about putting a whole lot of people who have drunk an awful lot of alcohol on the one bus to send them home. Mr Rattenbury, Mr Corbell and others have highlighted the problems about taking people out of a controlled environment and putting them on the street when they would really rather be inside drinking and that that leads to violence. If you put them on a bus when they would really rather be inside drinking, that may also lead to violence. This is an area I am particularly concerned about. We need to have a much more detailed discussion about how we manage public transport in the ACT and about transport options in relation to liquor licensing.

I note that Mr Corbell highlighted his experience of a licensed club in Newcastle. There are many licensed clubs in the ACT that also provide courtesy vehicles but at this stage there has not been a great deal of public discussion with venue operators of licensed premises, as opposed to licensed clubs, about the provision of those services. It is a very important issue which needs to be dealt with in a way which is much more sensitive than is proposed in this motion.

I had proposed that we would keep Mr Rattenbury's paragraphs (1) and (2) but delete paragraphs (3)(a), (b) and (c) because they are specific policy issues, and then go on to the issues where there now seems to be substantial agreement. When I drafted my amendments this morning, there was not that level of agreement in relation to the tabling of an exposure draft in March and the conclusion of this legislation by the beginning of November 2010. I notice that the government has now come on board with this timetable. In the draft amendment that the minister circulated this morning, he was not on board. I am glad to see that he has now come on board.

The only other thing that I am interested in is that Mr Rattenbury wants to have consultation with the public and hospitality staff but seems not to think it is important to have discussions with the hospitality industry. That is remiss, but it becomes a moot point because Mr Corbell's amendment takes out all reference to consultation.

That brings me back to the government's position. The second point we need to focus on, which is sharply focused on in Mr Rattenbury's motion, is the glacial pace at which the government in the ACT has moved on this. It is much like the government's introduction of its on-the-spot fines for antisocial behaviour. This was a key element of making the city safer and more secure—particularly around hospitality areas—which is the primary target for reforms in the liquor licensing laws. After getting the legislation through the Assembly in April 2008, with the support of the Canberra Liberals, it has taken almost two years to get the system in place. It was only just before Christmas that a temporary, paper-based system came into operation.

Likewise, with the wider reform of the liquor industry, it was in February 2008, after he was put under pressure by the Canberra Liberals, that the Attorney-General asked his department to develop the terms of reference for review of the liquor licensing laws in the ACT. It was not until April 2008 that we saw those terms of reference. The closing date for submissions on that was 30 June 2008, two months after the release of the discussion paper. We saw 32 submissions lodged. But it was more than 15 months later, in September 2009, after the closing dates for submission, that the report finally was released. And here we are, five months further on again, and still not a page of legislation—not even an exposure draft—has seen the light of day. Indeed, the government's proposed amendments to the motion we are debating today indicate that that exposure draft will not be available until March.

Although, in the amendments that he has moved, the minister has indicated some movement on the completion of this process, it is not as firm as was the original motion proposed by Mr Rattenbury—that this matter should be resolved in the Assembly by 1 November 2010. That would, of course, be quite a rigorous process, which we would all impose upon ourselves if we went down that path.

Mr Rattenbury makes a very important point that there is no point in passing this legislation if it is not able to be implemented through the busy summer season when we see most people out and about in Canberra. We do not want to see a repeat of the on-the-spot-fine process that took 15 months to implement. This is the way that this government, and particularly this minister, works.

While the process that we have talked about today is laudable and the aims are laudable, I still do not hold out a great deal of hope that the government will be able to meet this deadline. For three years already, the hospitality industry of the ACT has waited for this much-needed reform. For the government, it is okay to give only two months for the public and the industry to make submissions; yet, as we have seen, it has taken the government 15 months to release the report—as it took the government 15 months to implement the on-the-spot-fine process.

We have now seen that it will take the government another six months to develop an exposure draft, so it will be very difficult for this government to meet the deadlines that they have sort of set themselves by this amendment today. Also, through that process of the exposure draft and finalising the legislation, the government need to get out on the ground and do the work to ensure that the industry, the patrons and the public in general are aware of the changes that are foreshadowed and that, when the new laws come into operation, they will be able to come into operation cleanly and effectively.

I want to make some comment in passing on the comments made by the attorney in relation to the review of the liquor licensing process. The feedback that I have had from licensees is that over the past few months, maybe a year now, they have seen substantial improvements in the service and in the approachability of the liquor licensing service in the ACT. That is a compliment that needs to be passed on to the government, and I hope that those improvements will be seen elsewhere in the administration of liquor licensing, for the benefit of the community and the safety of the community, to ensure that we have a vibrant nightlife which is safe and where people do not feel concerned to let their children go out into Civic or elsewhere at night or worry about them when they are out.

I compliment Mr Rattenbury for the motion. I understand that Mr Corbell's amendments will pass. I flag that I am still concerned that Mr Corbell has wimped the final date to some extent. The Liberal opposition will be holding him to account and we will be doing what we can to ensure that the legislation is passed in a timely way.

Amendment agreed to.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (4.31): I appreciate the support of and comments made by members today. This is an area of discussion that I think we all understand needs some serious focus and some serious work considering the Greens are striving to spark a cultural change when it comes to drinking in Canberra.

At the moment it is accepted practice amongst too many groups of friends to go out and drink to excess without thinking through the consequences. As a community, we

need to redraw the line on what is and is not acceptable practice. This is the starting point for a cultural change. This is the central theme around which our motion and our work in this area are constructed.

In terms of some of the specific comments in the debate today, I want to reassure the minister that I do understand the concept of a lockout—not a throw out. But our research indicates that nonetheless there still seems to be a spill-out effect at those times—for a range of reasons, including people failing to get back into venues and a range of other matters.

Whilst we have accepted the government's amendments, I am unclear why the Greens' proposal to ensure that the public and hospitality staff are fully informed about all proposed changes was excluded from the amendment. As I touched on earlier, it is really important that, if we do pass these changes, we ensure a good education program for both the general public and the staff and those working in the industry affected by this. We need to ensure that there is that education, that awareness-raising, around the new provisions before they come into effect, so that they have maximum impact.

That said, I am pleased to see this motion passed today. I am pleased to see the support in the Assembly for the sorts of measures that I think are needed. The Greens are aware that legislating in 2010 will be only the first step in sparking the required cultural change. We will continue to work towards a Canberra nightlife that we all want and deserve. Ultimately, our desire is that people are able to go out and have a good time—to enjoy the nightlife in the city without having that fear of unsolicited violence, that fear of getting caught up in something that may lead to some sort of tragedy.

I look forward to seeing the legislation come into the chamber, to having a detailed discussion at that time and to getting some measures in place that can be the beginnings of that cultural change that we sorely need.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Childcare—services

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (4.34): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the poor performance by the ACT Government which has seen ACT childcare services become the most expensive in the country;
- (b) the importance of community-based organisations in the childcare industry in the ACT;
- (c) the lack of long-term planning by the Government to provide adequate support for the childcare industry in Canberra, particularly those which are community based;

- (d) the lack of support provided by the Government to the Gumnut Place Child Care Centre to find long-term accommodation; and
 - (e) the failure of the Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services to provide an assurance to the 50 families and 12 staff at the Gumnut Place Child Care Centre that it has a long-term future in the ACT; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) explain to the community why the ACT has the most expensive childcare services in the country;
 - (b) explain why the Gumnut Place Child Care Centre has to be displaced from its present accommodation which it has occupied since 1993;
 - (c) immediately provide an assurance to the 50 families and 12 staff of the Gumnut Place Child Care Centre that it will provide support to the Centre to find suitable long-term accommodation from 2011 onwards;
 - (d) immediately investigate options for suitable long-term accommodation for the Centre; and
 - (e) provide support to the Centre to move to new long-term accommodation should the need arise.

Childcare is a front-of-line issue for a large number of Canberra families with children, particularly where there is more than one breadwinner in the family, be that a part-time or a full-time breadwinner. The figures that we have seen over the last few months indicate that childcare is becoming an increasingly troublesome issue for people in the ACT.

We have seen the poor performance of the ACT government in relation to childcare services in that childcare services in the ACT are the most expensive in the country on a median basis. And this is in a town where nearly 80 per cent—79.4 per cent, I think—of all childcare providers are in the community sector. These are people who are price takers, not price setters.

They provide a service which is to some extent already—and I am not using this as a criticism of the sector—subsidised by the ACT community in that many of the not-for-profit childcare organisations are in no-rent or low-rent facilities. They are not adding into the cost of childcare in the ACT the hefty cost of accommodation that the for-profit organisations have to take on board. It does show that, while we have the highest median cost of childcare in the country, it could be higher if the mix in the community was different and if the for-profit sector had to pay to build a centre, pay for the borrowings and the opportunity costs of running a centre and if those costs were factored in to a greater extent than they are.

The central thrust of the motion today is not about the overall childcare system in the ACT, important as that is, but about the plight of one individual childcare centre, the

Gumnut Place Child Care Centre in my home suburb of Evatt. It is fortuitous that the Gumnut Place Child Care Centre is so named because it invokes the famous and iconic story of Snugglepote and Cuddlepote by May Gibbs.

Indeed, the Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney had a recent stage musical production of Ms Gibbs's story. I think the story-line synopsis reflects in many ways the situation that has developed at the Gumnut Place Child Care Centre. Let me quote from the synopsis of the Belvoir Street Theatre musical production featuring Snugglepote and Cuddlepote:

It's a baffling country for a young gumnut. The stinky old Banksia Men want the bush for themselves, gumnuts are being thrown overboard, Mrs Snake's up to less good than usual, those weird human beings are lurking in the shadows, and who is this marvellous Ragged Blossom, newly floated down from the treetops? With so much to find out and so few answers, there's really only one thing to do: take a trip to the city and see what the whole shebang's about.

Mr Hanson: Which one's Mrs Snake?

MRS DUNNE: I am not going there at all.

It would not take much imagination to match Snugglepote or Cuddlepote, the characters in this production, with those involved in the whole shebang over Gumnut Place Child Care Centre in my home suburb of Evatt. Like the staged musical, there is much to find out but there are few answers for the people at Gumnut in Evatt. And like the staged musical, the gumnuts of Evatt have to come to the city, to this Legislative Assembly and to Ms Burch, to try to find out what the answers are.

The reason for my motion today is to try to get answers from a minister and the government that does not like to give answers. It does things without telling people, let alone asking them. It does not care and takes the view that knowledge, and in this case unshared knowledge, is power. It is to try to get answers from a Stanhope government that works for Labor and not for the people of the ACT. The Gumnut parents have come to the city, to this Legislative Assembly, to get answers to why they are to be evicted from their premises of 17 years. They have come to the city because they cannot get answers through correspondence.

Minister Burch on 25 November last wrote to the chairperson of the Gumnut Place Child Care Centre. The letter was full of platitudes about how the minister appreciates the concern of the Gumnut parents about their future accommodation but it does not provide any answers. Indeed, the letter epitomises the insults that come from this government when it finishes with this sentence:

I wish you every success in finding alternative accommodation for Gumnuts.

Ms Burch: Are you going to table that letter? It is another misrepresentation of a letter, similar to Gungahlin.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Hargreaves): Ms Burch, order, please! Mrs Dunne has the floor.

MRS DUNNE: I would be happy to table a copy of the letter if my staff could print me off a copy.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, I would appreciate it if you and the chair had a conversation, not you and the others.

MRS DUNNE: I would be quite happy to table the correspondence which Gumnut has provided to me and which they have given their approval for me to use today.

If Ms Burch had any real compassion or appreciation for the concerns of Gumnut parents and staff, she would not sit in her plushy office, sending off such insulting letters; rather she would get out there and talk with the Gumnut parents and staff and she would discuss with them the proposals that will certainly bring about the closure of this centre. Instead of summarily throwing families out of a much-loved centre, Ms Burch should be out there assuring those families that the government will support the centre to find long-term alternative accommodation.

Ms Burch: Which is what we are doing, Mrs Dunne. It is what we are doing.

MRS DUNNE: You will get your turn.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Order, members! There is an order of speaking.

Ms Burch: Remind her of that when she interrupts.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I will.

MRS DUNNE: Instead of causing stress and concern to those families, Ms Burch should be standing next to them and working with them to investigate their future accommodation options. Instead of leaving families out in the cold, Ms Burch should be telling them what assistance the government will provide for the physical move of Gumnut and its equipment if they have to move to new accommodation. Instead of wrenching children away from their friends and creating worry for families about when and even if they can find accommodation in other centres, Ms Burch should be helping them with the options.

I seek leave to table the letter that Ms Burch wrote to the Gumnut Place Child Care Centre on 25 November 2009.

Leave granted.

MRS DUNNE: I present the following paper:

Gumnut Place Child Care Centre—Future use of the Evatt Preschool—Copy of letter to Ms Amanda Ronald, Chairperson, Gumnut Place Child Care Centre, from Joy Burch MLA, Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, dated 25 November 2009.

Coming back to where I was, instead of making mums and dads go back to their budgets to see whether they can actually afford to send their children to other centres, Ms Burch should be working out why the ACT has the most expensive childcare services in the country. More importantly, she should be telling those mums and dads what she is doing to address this inequity. But we know that Minister Burch has no intention of doing anything at all to answer the questions or address the high cost of childcare in the ACT. She has said before and she said it again only this morning and in question time that the cost of childcare in the ACT is not something in which this government would seek to involve itself.

Indeed, Ms Burch is intent on driving childcare costs up further by imposing more government regulation. In addition to the government regulation, the changes that will be brought forward in 2012 as a result of the COAG agreements will surely drive up the costs of childcare in the ACT and will impose huge changes on community childcare centres that do not have the margins and the capacity to change and make the changes necessary in the time available. In addition to that, Ms Burch has facilitated the introduction of portable long service leave for the community sector, which is fine and good in principle but it will raise the cost of childcare.

What effect do these rising childcare costs have on the economy, the community and labour market participation rates? Documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show that Minister Burch simply does not know, because the government has undertaken no modelling to find out. Minister Burch does not know and she does not care, and that is why she writes insulting letters to the parents of Gumnut Place.

In washing her hands of any responsibility for childcare costs in the ACT, Minister Burch fails to understand and, worse, does not care that most of the childcare centres in the community are run by community-based organisations. Indeed, as I have said before, the Productivity Commission report on government services shows that the ACT has the highest level of community-based childcare centres in the nation.

These community-based organisations are important, even critical, elements of our large community. They provide many services that, were it not for them, would not be provided by government. Therefore, the government should be doing everything that it can to ensure the viability and sustainability of these community organisations and the services that they provide. It is irresponsible for Minister Burch to stand here so arrogantly, with a very damp hand from washing it, and pronounce that the government is not concerned about the things that impact on the cost of childcare in the ACT.

Here is the bottom line for Minister Burch and this ACT Labor government. There are mums and dads out there right now, including the mums and dads in the 35 families of the 50 children who attend the Gumnut Place Child Care Centre in Evatt, who are wondering whether they can continue to pay for the cost of childcare in the ACT. There are mums and dads out there who are starting to think that they will have to give up their jobs and look after their children at home because they cannot afford to continue to go to work.

There is a skill shortage in the ACT. There is a low level of unemployment. There is a shortage of housing, particularly affordable housing. All of this impacts on the workforce and the economy at large. And what impact will fewer kids in childcare centres have on the viability of those centres? What impact will fewer kids in the childcare system have on childcare prices? Minister Burch does not know, because she and her department have not done the modelling. They fessed up to that to the opposition recently in response to a freedom of information request. Minister Burch therefore washes her hands of any responsibility. Minister Burch does not know and does not care.

This Stanhope government is failing the young families of the ACT. It has no long-term plans for the future of childcare services in the ACT. It has no statistical data on which to develop those plans. Once again we see, demonstrated in this government's aversion to consultation, that there has been no consultation with these young families on the imminent closure of the Gumnut Place Child Care Centre.

The point is that to take away a substantial proportion of the space that this centre currently occupies will ensure that the centre closes. They cannot continue to provide services for 35 places in the diminished space that will be available to them after the end of this year. There have been letters from successive ministers. Ms Burch is not the only one who has been at fault here. Her predecessor, Mr Barr, used exactly the same terminology when he told Gumnut Place Child Care Centre that they could not have the space in 2010. All he did was say, "Here is a number in the department. Ring it, and good luck in finding alternative accommodation." That is not what community organisations who provide important services in the ACT expect. I demand better service on behalf of those organisations from any government in this territory.

To return to the synopsis of the Belvoir Street Theatre's production featuring Snugglepot and Cuddlepie, will the stinky banskia men throw the families of Gumnut to the bottom of the sea and keep Gumnut Place for themselves? Is Minister Burch up to less good than usual? Will she continue to offer platitudes rather than help? Will she remain in denial over the level of childcare fees and the impact of government regulation on those fees? And are there weird things lurking in the shadows for other childcare centres in Canberra?

There is much for the mums and dads of the Gumnut Place Child Care Centre to find out. They have had no answers yet. They have come to the city and to this Legislative Assembly to get some answers. I wonder whether Ms Burch will be able to answer them today.

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (4.49): Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this motion. I will again provide some commentary on our investment. Firstly, I say that I will not be supporting Mrs Dunne's motion. I think that would be quite clear and I will move amendments that I am hoping are now being circulated in my name. Before I go on, I just want to pick up on Mrs Dunne saying—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Excuse me a second. Are you formally moving the amendment now or what are you doing?

MS BURCH: Yes, I move the amendment now being circulated.

Mrs Dunne: I would like to see it.

MS BURCH: It is coming now.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Continue Ms Burch. You have the floor.

MS BURCH: I move:

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

“(1) notes:

- (a) that the Report on Government Services shows that ACT childcare services are expensive compared to other States and Territories;
- (b) the importance of community-based organisations in the childcare industry in the ACT;
- (c) the role of the Children Services Forum in informing government about the childcare industry in Canberra for planning purposes, which includes representation of community-based childcare; and
- (d) the continued support provided by the Government to the Gumnut Place Childcare Centre to find accommodation in 2011; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) provide an explanation to the community why the ACT has expensive childcare services in the Report on Government Services;
- (b) explain why the Gumnut Place Childcare Centre has to be displaced from its present accommodation;
- (c) provide clarity to Gumnut Place Childcare Centre about the Government’s support of the Centre to find alternative accommodation;
- (d) continue to investigate options for suitable accommodation for the centre; and
- (e) ensure assistance is provided to attempt to find a suitable facility for childcare centres in need of alternative accommodation.”.

Mrs Dunne speaks about doing everything to provide for viable and sustainable childcare. I just want to remind her that we have that at the forefront of our thinking. This is why we had duly introduced portable long service leave. It is around creating a sustainable and viable workforce within the sector. This is why we have endorsed a national quality agenda. Every state has done that. This is why we have increased childcare places. This is why we have invested in childcare and this is why we work with this sector through the children’s services forum.

I am happy to provide the information again to inform and educate all the members of this Assembly about how childcare services are provided in the ACT and the role of government. For the second time today, and I think even more so in this week, I state that the ACT government is committed to working in partnership with private and community organisations that provide childcare in the ACT.

Working in partnership with the community does not mean that we control what they do. These are businesses where the government regulates the conditions upon which they are granted a licence and monitors their compliance with the notified childcare standards. The ACT government does not interfere in business decisions of childcare providers and there are no legislative provisions for the government to do so. As such, the ACT government has not been involved, and is not involved, in controlling or regulating childcare costs, nor should it be.

The determination of childcare fees is a matter for individual childcare service operators based on their business model. This applies to both private and community-based childcare services. The fees set by the childcare providers are market driven and based on identified demand. The ACT, as Mrs Dunne has indicated, has a mix of private and community-based childcare services, with around 80 per cent run by community providers.

There are many factors that contribute to the cost of childcare—for example, training, food, rent, equipment and insurance, staff wages, conditions, maintenance and buildings, and other facility expenses. Some of these expenses are reduced for organisations that run several licensed childcare services. Expenses are generally higher for a single service operator due to the smaller economy of scale. Recent reports indicate that in the ACT, the average cost of childcare is \$325 per week for 50 hours of care. This is similar to or lower than fees in equivalent urban centres across Australia.

Let me make our geography clear to those opposite. The ACT is an urban jurisdiction, a city-state. Across Australia, childcare costs are generally higher in urban centres than those in rural areas. This in turn brings down the other jurisdictions' average wage cost. The commonwealth government's mychild website indicates that the weekly rates for centre-based childcare in inner city areas range from \$375 to \$520, and Wollongong and Newcastle from \$300 to \$375.

This compares with the cost in the ACT of \$325. This provides a different picture. In addition, the 2010 ROGS report stated that we perform well against all quality measures that improve the health, safety, early learning and wellbeing of Australia's children. Let me repeat that: we perform well on measures that improve the health, safety, early learning and wellbeing of our children.

There are other market factors that influence cost. The ACT has the highest per capita income across jurisdictions, and this drives demand and competition. The capacity—

Mrs Dunne: This is what we spend most of our disposable income on.

MS BURCH: Mrs Dunne, please do not interrupt, dear.

Mrs Dunne: Sorry, I will stop interrupting when—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, order! That is sufficient. We have had this conversation before. If you want to have something to say, say it to me.

MS BURCH: The capacity of parents to pay influences to varying degrees the costs of the childcare provided to their children. There is assistance for families who struggle to meet these costs. The commonwealth government provides a rebate to parents for the costs of childcare. In some situations, this is up to 50 per cent of fees. The ACT government also supports children and families through programs that assist low income and disadvantaged families, through funded emergency placements, and through casual and short-term care at childcare centres across the ACT.

The ACT government is committed to continue to deliver high-quality education and care services for children in the ACT. The ACT government continues to provide increased funding for the provision of childcare services, spending \$632 per child from birth to 12 years of age. That is an increase of \$145 on the previous year. This compares to a national average of \$353.

The ACT has high-quality childcare services. The National Childcare Accreditation Council rated ACT long day care services as more than 90 per cent satisfactory or higher on health, nutrition and wellbeing children indicators. The ACT received the highest results across Australia. The ACT was also rated above the national average on protective care and safety of children, and the third highest in Australia.

The ACT childcare centres and family day care providers are monitored more regularly than other states and territories, a reflection of the ACT government's commitment to ensure high-quality services are provided. There has also been a 30 per cent increase in degree and diploma qualified staff working in ACT long day care during the past 12 months and an increase of 57 per cent in overall enrolments at CIT in the children's services program.

However, this government is committed to further increasing quality childcare standards for our children. To this end, we are working with the sector to implement the national quality framework, which will improve staffing ratios in childcare and preschool rooms, lift the qualifications of childcare staff and ensure children receive quality play and education programs. This important work reflects the strong investment in our children so they thrive and grow into healthy, well-rounded adults. These endeavours work towards improving childcare services for all children and young people, including those in the ACT.

Every step along the way, Mr Assistant Speaker, the opposition have opposed these reforms, rejecting quality childcare for our children. Every step along the way, they do not want to embrace the national quality agenda. They have no interest in supporting portable long service leave. So every day along the way they have no interest in the workforce of childcare. They want childcare, but they do not want to support the workforce that provides the care to each and every one of those children.

The role that my department plays in regulating childcare and ensuring compliance with the childcare standards is an important one. The department works closely with childcare providers to ensure quality services are provided and parents have confidence with the services that care for their children.

The ACT children's services forum is a sector-wide consultative forum that provides an opportunity for the children's services sector to consider issues of supply and demand, workforce development and sector capacity building. This forum, which is the sector forum talking around supply and demand, workforce development and sector capacity building works with this government, Mrs Dunne, on those important issues.

Mrs Dunne also refers in her motion to a particular service, the Gumnut Place Child Care Centre.

Mrs Dunne: We are getting there.

MS BURCH: Let me repeat again that the ACT government does not provide childcare services or interfere in the business planning concerning the delivery of childcare services by an organisation.

Mrs Dunne: It is a community-based childcare centre, you goose. You are interfering because you are evicting them.

Mr Seselja: You are interfering.

MS BURCH: Mr Assistant Speaker, they are interjecting over there, so can you apply the same rules? The government regulates and monitors service delivery in compliance with licensing conditions and the childcare standards.

Gumnut Place Child Care Centre is operated by a community-based, not-for-profit parent committee.

Mrs Dunne: And you are evicting them.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, please!

MS BURCH: Gumnut has operated from an unused building adjacent to the preschool since 1993. Over recent years, Gumnut has also been able to utilise a vacant room at the preschool on a temporary basis, so that they now provide a total of 35 licensed places.

Mrs Dunne: For 17 years.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Order! Mrs Dunne, we have had this discussion. Mrs Burch has the floor.

MS BURCH: Due to an increase in demand for preschool places in the Belconnen region and the government's commitment to increase up to 15 hours of preschool for

children four years old, the Department of Education and Training advised the Gumnut management committee in 2009 that the preschool will no longer have room available beyond the end of 2010. I understand that this decision was not taken lightly. It was taken balancing the needs of the childcare centre with the needs of the local community and preschool education of children.

The children's policy and regulation unit within my department has had contact with the Gumnut centre director and the management committee a number of times during 2009 and is assisting Gumnut to investigate alternative sites for the Gumnut Place Child Care Centre within the Belconnen region. An ongoing series of meetings are planned with the director and the committee members. I have made it quite clear to the Gumnut management that the department has worked and will continue to work with them to find alternative sites.

The preschool children at the preschool need to use their room. I understand and acknowledge the impact the decision has had on the families whose children are currently provided with care at Gumnut and I am sorry that they are having a stressful time while an alternative location is explored. I think I am on record as saying that I sympathise with the angst. The nonsense coming out of Mrs Dunne does not help the angst.

Mrs Dunne: Yes, put it on the record; I said it.

Mr Seselja: So sincere, isn't she? "I think I am on record. I will have to check if I sympathise."

MS BURCH: My department is working hard to assist the centre find a new location. As with other situations, we assist childcare providers to find a way through and resolve issues in the best interests of the children and the families concerned. I also note that Mrs Dunne has a briefing on this tomorrow; maybe you do not need it. I will be saying the same things to you again, Mrs Dunne, but perhaps the penny will eventually drop.

I also want to refer to a media release that Mrs Dunne put out. It is headed "Dunne: Government must provide assurance for Gumnuts Child Care Centre". I just want to point out a number of things. She says that, instead of wrenching children away, Ms Burch should be helping them with options. I go back to the letter I wrote. I say that I have asked the staff in the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services access management branch of the children's policy and regulation unit to continue to explore options for acquiring suitable accommodation for their centre. She is a little bit wrong there. She also goes on to say that all I could say was:

I wish you every success in finding alternative accommodation for Gumnuts.

I think there is more than just one line on that. But I also note something else in her press release. She dates the letter to which she referred as 25 October 2009. I was not even a minister on 25 October 2009; so wrong again.

Mrs Dunne: Okay, a typo.

MS BURCH: Oh, it is a typo from Mrs Dunne—deary, deary! Then she goes on to indicate, or tries to make reference to ACT Labor having no long-term plans. Wrong! In 2009 we put on 666 places. In 2010 we will put in more than 460 places. So by the end of this year we will have over 16,000 childcare places across the sector. We also work with the Children’s Services Forum. As I have said, we are broadly working with the sector on the issues of supply, demand, workforce development and capacity building. Madam Deputy Speaker, this government is investing in childcare centres. I do not support Mrs Dunne’s motion and I ask that the Assembly support my amendments.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (5.03): Childcare is as critical an issue in the ACT as it is nationally. It is an area of life that affects families, the business community, government, schools, childcare providers and, most importantly, children. It is a costly part of many families’ budgets and requires the assistance of federal funding to assist those who qualify to meet these costs.

We know from the 2008-09 ROGS that the ACT has the highest rates of childcare costs in Australia. It begs the question of why childcare in the ACT is the most expensive. It is critical for the people of the ACT to understand why they are paying more.

One of the reasons I want to mention here and one of the factors that plays into this issue is that there is an issue around the market and the market setting costs. I do take on Mrs Dunne’s comments today that a large part of our childcare providers are community based—I think something like 80 per cent are community-based—but also one of the factors is around market costs.

Demand is high. The average income for Canberra households is relatively high compared to other states. I know that average income figures do not tell the whole story of Canberra families, but we need to understand that that is one of the factors around this issue and that is partly why we pay more for our services. I will go into some other reasons a little further along, but we do need to be asking the ACT government, and it is important for the ACT government to clearly explain, why these costs are higher.

I am pleased to see that Mrs Dunne notes in her motion the importance of community-based childcare in the ACT. Community-based childcare tends to be not for profit, and it is a very large part of Canberra’s childcare industry—as I said, something like 80 per cent. Community-based childcare centres often pay above award wages and provide better conditions for their workers in order to retain workers and to provide the best care, with continuity of care, to Canberra’s families. Given that community centres treat their workers so well and offer such great outcomes for our children, private centres also have to pay their workers more and offer better conditions to compete for staff and clients.

This is a really important point. If you want quality childcare, you need to pay people a proper wage. The ACT should be proud of its record where our childcare workers

are better paid than many other jurisdictions. Of course, there is still a long way to go to address workforce shortages, and pay and conditions for workers in the childcare sector. There are ongoing federal campaigns being run by groups—one of them of course is the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union—to push for improvements in these areas.

We also need to ensure that there is a strong and ongoing commitment from childcare providers, whether private or community-based, to continuing professional development and training of their workers. This allows the development of a strong and robust industry that allows workers to grow and develop and follow their chosen career path.

Better pay and conditions for childcare workers is vital and welcome, but is another reason why the costs for childcare in the ACT can be seen as higher than in other jurisdictions. For many parents—this is a really important point—there is the issue of quality. Of course, that comes out first when you are choosing a childcare centre for your child. “Is this providing the best quality care for my child?”

The ACT government has little control over childcare costs. Ms Burch has put those points out there, around the fact that these are businesses. Whether they are full profits that need to return a profit to the company or whether they are community based and need to cover the costs of operating, it is not the government’s role to walk in and tell them how much to charge each parent. But the government does play a role in regulation, and therefore compliance costs are an area that may need some investigation.

There is a whole section in the Children and Young People Act that deals with childcare, monitoring of childcare, and regulations and so forth that need to be met by childcare centres. This is also important if we are going to go to the health and safety issues and the quality of childcare that is provided here in the territory. But maybe we do need to be going back to ensure that that is not putting too much of a burden on our childcare centres.

The ACT government cannot legislate as to how much childcare providers charge for their service, as I said. They can, however, look at the role they play in childcare provision and investigate options for bringing costs down. The federal government also play a role here. They need to do more to address high costs, high demand and skill shortages in the industry. I would encourage Minister Burch to lobby her federal counterparts to make any necessary improvements.

As we all know, childcare is a massive part of early childhood development in order to strengthen social and emotional connections as well as intellectual development. A recent research paper on the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website states:

Brain research shows us that, from birth to five years, children already have most of the physical brain capacity they need. We now know that significant learning and brain growth occurs during infancy.

Play is widely recognised as a vital tool in engaging young minds. The research paper states:

Recent research has shown that interactions between children and staff that are based on sustained, shared thinking within play-based programs maximise children's learning outcomes.

So childcare centres are an invaluable tool in assisting in the development and wellbeing of our children in the formative early childhood years. Therefore it is important that childcare centres are secure in their accommodation and can offer the same security to their staff and to the families they serve. Ensuring that play schools, playgroups, childcare centres and preschools all have certainty and stability in their long-term accommodation is important to allow communities to develop in and around these services.

Parents are always attempting to juggle the balance between work, life and family and what is in the best interest of their children. This is particularly important when we talk about the place where their child is being taken care of in their absence. We know that parents want a caring, supportive and stable environment integrated with high-quality appropriate education programs. It is difficult to make commitments for the future when the long-term viability of the accommodation of the childcare centre, play school or preschool may be under threat.

Gumnut Place Child Care Centre is one example where uncertainty about the future of the accommodation has raised concerns for staff, parents, children and the community at large. It is important that we plan not only for the future of Gumnut Place but beyond this, to ensure securing consistent tenancies for all childcare and early childhood education providers. In recent weeks, I wrote to Minister Burch on the issue of future accommodation for Gumnut Place, and I look forward to her response.

Upon election to the Assembly, we had several organisations approach the ACT Greens for assistance to resolve similar issues. Given these approaches, item 9.2 in the ALP-Greens parliamentary agreement is about "providing space for all playschools and playgroups in ACT government facilities by February 2009". This was achieved.

While it may appear at first that there is not a huge problem for the ACT community, it is important to understand that to the affected families and children it is an incredibly important issue that needs to be addressed. The ACT Greens are pleased to report that in the case of the Inner North Playschool, amongst others, new community facilities were found to house these important services.

It is also very important that we provide suitable accommodation that provides certainty to everyone. In the case of the French-Australian Preschool, I made representations to the former minister for children and young people and I am pleased to see that a solution has been found for this preschool.

I agree with Mrs Dunne that childcare is vitally important for our community. I agree with Mrs Dunne that ROGS does raise an interesting issue about the costs of childcare

for Canberra families. I agree with Mrs Dunne that the accommodation problems for Gumnut Place centre are concerning and that the ACT government should be working to assist Gumnut Place to find alternative accommodation and to reassure families and staff about the future of accommodation and therefore the viability of the centre.

I will, however, be supporting the amendments put forward by Minister Burch to this motion, because I believe that the amendments focus the motion to achieve the important outcomes of explaining the higher costs of childcare in the ACT and securing future accommodation for Gumnut Place. If Mrs Dunne actually looks at the amendments put forward, she will see that they achieve that important outcome of the explanation of the costs and the importance of finding a secure home for Gumnut Place.

The ACT government cannot tackle the issue of childcare costs alone. They need to be lobbying their federal counterparts. Mrs Dunne raised the issue of the staff-child ratio that will be brought in and the implication for costs. It does go to the quality. When I have been out in my electorate, I have had people come up to me and say, "Please ensure that goes through, because there is nothing more important than ensuring the quality of childcare for our children." Of course, that is going to have a cost implication, and we need to be looking at that. We need to be looking to the federal government to provide further assistance not just to the ACT but to all states and territories.

I also need to pick up on the issue of portable long service leave. It goes again to the heart of what workforce we want in our childcare centres. We need to be properly supporting that workforce. We need to be properly paying them. It is just not good enough to be saying that they should be on some sort of poverty wage looking after children. If we want to have a good-quality system, we need to ensure that we look after that workforce.

I know that the ACT government have said that they would work towards solutions for Gumnut. In her amendment (2)(e), the minister ensures that "assistance is provided to ... find a suitable facility for childcare centres in need of alternative accommodation". The amendments also clearly talk about explaining to Gumnut Place why this situation has arisen and providing clarity to Gumnut Place about the government's support of the centre in finding alternative accommodation.

I would say that we have a former school site in the Belconnen area at the moment. Many of our former school sites are now vibrant hubs across the ACT, providing much-needed accommodation to community organisations, whether they be arts organisations, wellbeing organisations or organisations providing services to the vulnerable and needy in the city. They also can be places that could have a community-based childcare centre as well. In the Ginninderra electorate, in the Belconnen area, we have the former Flynn primary school. I would suggest to the minister that that may be a very good place to be looking—to see whether Gumnut could be accommodated somewhere like the former Flynn primary school.

I will be monitoring this case and others like it, and I will continue to monitor the skill shortages and high costs of childcare in Canberra.

This motion calls for the government to explain the current situation and to act to improve things in the future. I urge the minister to do so. I feel that the amendments do not undermine the intent that was put forward today by Mrs Dunne in her motion.

I believe that, by the passing of the amendments, through this amended motion, we will get to see some results. I would expect to see those results sooner rather than later. The one around childcare costs is a far more complex issue and involves different layers, or tiers, of government. It does involve the federal government. But certainly one that is a very local issue is that ongoing importance to ensure that we do provide accommodation for childcare, play schools, playgroups and preschools.

All of us in this place need to have a commitment to providing early childhood education and care that are of the highest quality. It is the best thing that we can do for our children here in the ACT.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (5.17): I fully support the motion moved by Mrs Dunne on the Gumnut Place Child Care Centre. It is a great disappointment that it has come to this.

Before I get into what I am going to say, I would to acknowledge that Amanda Ronald, the chairperson of the Gumnut committee, is here today. The work that she and her committee have done is outstanding. It is a shame that a volunteer board of directors should have to work so hard to maintain the good work they are doing already.

When you look at the benefits that Gumnut provides to the Belconnen community and the broader Canberra community, it is quite amazing. They have got 12 full-time staff, 80 kids and about 50 families—let alone the grandparents. And on and on.

The benefits that such a community centre brings are absolutely amazing. Yet here we have a government that is presented with a pretty simple problem when it comes down to it. The government needs only to provide a classroom or two and the whole problem is fixed. It is my understanding that the Evatt school is not even at capacity and there may even be spare classrooms there, so there could well be a solution very close to home. Yet here you have the Chief Minister and the minister, Joy Burch, dragging their feet and refusing to cooperate.

This is very much a local issue as well as an ACT-wide issue. It is indicative of how this government acts on the whole. Given that it is a local issue, it is worth noting what some of the local members have said about this and what some of the potential local members have said about it.

People who know me well and know how I organise my stuff know that I have quite a collection of literature from the past four or five ACT elections. I could have gone back to the 1995, 1998, 2001 and 2004 folders, but I did not. I just ventured into the 2008 folder.

Mr Seselja: That is recent.

MR COE: It is recent. It is interesting. I reckon I have got what must be pretty close to a full sample of every candidate's stuff, including that of the Deputy Speaker, Ms Porter. It is interesting. Not much appears in our literature about childcare—not much at all: that is very interesting, but that is all right, that is okay, because that is made up for by some of the other candidates—with the exception, perhaps, of Chris Bourke.

Chris Bourke was the dentist who ran his campaign a little on the quiet side but still did put out a few bits of literature. Unfortunately, there was nothing there about childcare. However, perhaps in his favour, the old childcare might get a good run in preselection documents there and he might be able to sway some of the delegates, perhaps the national executive, when they choose a candidate here in Fraser.

Mr Stanhope, too, did not mention any childcare bits and pieces in his literature—mainly because there was no literature from Mr Stanhope. He was not exactly the most popular man in October 2008. Quite frankly, when your vote goes from 22,000 down to 13,000, you have got to ask a question, don't you? You have got to ask the question, "Do people want to see my face in their mailbox?" The answer usually is a big no.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Coe, can you stick to the subject of the amendment to the motion.

MR COE: I am very much on this, because it is all about local issues and it is all about local solutions.

Ms Burch knows the issue; she even sympathises. That is great; that is wonderful. But what would be better would be for her to use her ministerial powers and actually solve this problem. I do not think it would take too much time and it would not take too much thinking. She has the power to solve it, yet she cannot or she will not. If she was here, perhaps she would be able to respond, but of course she is not.

Let me go back to the literature, the 2008 election campaign literature. Adina Cirson put out a lovely flyer. It was a bit branded by the Labor Party; I hope the discretionary office allowance did not pay for this, because it is actually from Wayne Berry. Wayne Berry has a co-branded piece here with Adina Cirson. One of the things that she is particularly interested in is high-quality, accessible and affordable childcare. Is that not exactly what Gumnut is providing? That is exactly what it is—exactly. Here we have the Labor Party, which Adina and Wayne are very much a part of, saying no.

When Mr Stanhope goes in six or seven months time as everyone expects, and perhaps Adina comes into this place on the count back, I wonder whether she will be waving this around like Neville Chamberlain did in 1939, saying, "This is it."

Mrs Dunne: Quality childcare in our time.

MR COE: That is right: quality childcare in our time—and affordable. Maybe not. Maybe not, if Gumnut does not quite get to last beyond the two or three months if she is in the Assembly after September.

Then there is the other candidate, who is probably more likely to win that count back, and that is Dave Peebles. Dave Peebles gave childcare a pretty big mention in most of his literature. Everyone probably saw these DLs. They say, “Helping working families with affordable housing and childcare”. Every household in the electorate got that about 11 times, so he made that point, I think. It was also on his website: “I am strongly committed to policies that will promote affordable housing, and that will make life for families a little easier, for example, by providing excellent child care services”. Where does this fit into the Labor Party’s plans to shut down Gumnut? He did not quite articulate that in his website.

Nor did he articulate that in his newsletters. Some people would have seen the *Page Times*, the *Belconnen Times*, the *Nicholls Times*, the *Higgins Times* or the *Charnwood Times*. You may think that they are actually six or seven different pieces. No; afraid not. The only thing that is different is really the title. The old syndication has worked pretty nicely for old Dave when it comes to printing these. One thing that is common in each of these—other than the word “*Times*”—is “Helping working families with affordable housing and childcare”. And:

The Government—

the ACT Stanhope Labor government; they do not mention Jon Stanhope here, though—

has also invested in improving childcare facilities to help working families. “I know from my own family’s experience how important quality childcare facilities are to working families”, said Dave.

That was in his own newsletter. He said that again in the *Belconnen Times*; he said it again in the *Nicholls Times*; he said it again in the *Higgins Times*; and he said it again in the *Charnwood Times*.

Mrs Dunne: Why is Nicholls full colour and Charnwood only black and white?

MR COE: That is a very good point. How does he rate these suburbs? I think you can pretty much work out Dave’s strategy by whether he went for the high gloss for the suburb or the low gloss and whether he went for the old Gestetner or whether he went for high quality, probably 150 gsm, and spent a few hundred bucks in Nicholls and the *Belconnen Times*. What it does say is that perhaps they were more interested in politics than policy. Perhaps he was more interested in targeting Labor votes in Nicholls and in Belconnen than in Charnwood, Page or Higgins.

More importantly, it shows that the Labor Party is not at all committed to childcare. This is a pretty easy one for the government. Here you have someone other than government delivering a service which everyone seems to love and they do not have to do anything about it. Yet somehow they manage to stuff it up. Only Stanhope Labor has this ability.

I am not sure whether Ms Burch has learnt from her fellow right factional colleague Andrew Barr how to be arrogant on these sorts of things and how to drag her feet and

refuse to budge. But here is an opportunity for Ms Burch to actually stand up and say, “Let’s find a solution and let’s find it quickly,” so that in a year’s time Gumnut will be open and for the 12 months leading up to that time there will be some certainty.

Instead, there are 50 families in Belconnen that are anxious about their kids’ futures, that are currently calling around and trying to look at other options for childcare. Again, that puts more stress on the actual child and the actual family. It puts stress on the staff. What happens to the staff in the next 12 months if they get offered a job in two months or three months? Quite frankly, if I was in their position I would be very tempted to take it, because there is no certainty.

There are a lot of questions that need to be answered and a lot of people and families at stake. The minister has an opportunity to resolve the matter, yet her stubbornness is seemingly insurmountable.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (5.27): I want to dwell on the amendment that Ms Burch has put forward, which the Liberal Party will be opposing. It is interesting to see that Ms Burch has learnt a few lessons from her colleagues in relation to amendments—that when a motion comes forward the first thing you have to do is delete all words after “that” and substitute your own words. Ms Burch, in substituting your own words, you are supposed to nullify all the things that were in the original motion. It is interesting to look at subparagraphs (1)(a), (b), (c) and (d) of Ms Burch’s amendment as they are somewhat similar to the sentiments in the original motion. She also calls on her own government to do something. That is in there as well.

Now we get to the nitty-gritty part. Paragraph (2) of the motion requires the Stanhope government and Ms Burch in particular, as the minister responsible for childcare, to do something for the people at the Gumnut childcare centre. First of all, she has to explain why they need to go. Mr Coe has touched on this issue. They have been told that they need to go, but there has been no explanation given. In fact, in November last year the Gumnut childcare centre wrote to Ms Burch—I have a copy of the letter here and I would be happy to table it—after Ms Burch wrote to them on 25 November. I am sorry, there was a mistake in our press release; we put 25 October rather than 25 November. However, that does not nullify the fact that you gave them short shrift; your letter gave them short shrift.

When they responded to you, they asked you a series of questions which to this day go unanswered. Ms Burch has not answered that letter. She says she has taken it on notice. It will be a long time, it seems, before they get an answer. Today we are seeing Ms Burch trying to squib the whole thing. She does not want to provide a service to the Gumnut childcare centre. She does not want to provide them with certainty.

Ms Burch: No. So you’d rather displace the preschool children and leave Gumnut in place? Is that your answer, Mrs Dunne?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Le Couteur): Mrs Dunne has the floor.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. There has been no explanation as to why there is suddenly a need to take over the preschool places at Evatt, which

have been vacant for 17 years. Some of my children attended the Evatt preschool. For 17 years that has been run as a single-stream preschool. It is yet to be demonstrated to this place—there has been an assertion by this minister—or to the parents of Gumnut that there is an urgent need and that that urgent need cannot be accommodated in the Evatt primary school, where I understand there are empty classrooms. Those issues have not been addressed by the minister for education or the minister responsible for childcare. They have not been addressed here today. She has simply asserted something. Asserting something does not substantiate it and it does not give an explanation to the Gumnut parents.

In addition to that, Ms Burch's amendment squibs it all the way along the line. Providing clarity is not what they ask for. They know what their situation is. They know that if things do not change, at the end of this year there will be no Gumnut Place because there will be no accommodation for them. They know that 80 children—50 families, 35 places—and 12 people in employment will not be working or occupying places at the Gumnut childcare centre in Evatt because it will not be viable.

The other thing we know is that the Gumnut childcare community board made a specific request to the minister which she has knocked back. This is a request that Gumnut childcare centre made to me and Minister Barr in 2006 because they knew back in 2006 that they would come under pressure with the closure of preschools around them. They have asked for clarity time and again. I made representations to Mr Barr on this subject. As recently as November last year they were making representations to the minister asking if they could have McKellar preschool, which is vacant, and they were told no. The only definitive thing that this minister has told them is that one of the options that they found for themselves and put forward has been knocked back by this minister.

There is no guarantee in this amendment today that Ms Burch and her department will do anything more than continue to knock back the Gumnut Place childcare centre at Evatt. There is no guarantee, because what she is going to do is "provide clarity". We know what their situation is. They are in a very difficult place. They do not have options. "Continue to investigate options" is not "find an option". That is looking at them and going, "Not really very convenient; we won't do it." As to any attempt to find suitable accommodation, there is no commitment in Ms Burch's amendment to the people of Gumnut. My motion sought to provide certainty so that they could come away from here today knowing that the ACT Legislative Assembly was standing behind them and that they would have accommodation come the end of the year.

These are weasel words from Ms Burch. Ms Hunter has signed up to those weasel words. She has sold out the people of Gumnut again. The message when I talked to the Gumnut parents was that they went to see the Greens about this issue. The Greens' initial response was to say, "If the government has made that decision, we can't do anything about it." They just roll over every time. What they were asked to do today—

Ms Hunter: On a point of order, Mr Speaker—

MR SPEAKER: Stop the clock, please.

Ms Hunter: I would ask Mrs Dunne to withdraw the statement she just made about a meeting that never took place. It is just untrue.

MR SPEAKER: I am sorry, Ms Hunter, I was being distracted. Can you repeat your point of order?

Ms Hunter: It is a point of order that Mrs Dunne has just made a statement about a meeting that did not happen. She has put that on the record. I would like her to correct the record.

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne?

MRS DUNNE: On the point of order, I can be asked to withdraw things if they are unparliamentary or disorderly. I repeated an assertion that was made to me. Ms Hunter can stand up and correct the record. I will give her leave if she wishes to, but the point of order does not stand. I have not said anything which is disorderly.

MR SPEAKER: There is no point of order, Ms Hunter. If you wish to put that on the record later on, you can make a personal explanation under standing order 46.

Ms Hunter: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, the clock will start again now.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The situation we have today is that Ms Hunter has sold out the people of her electorate. She gave a speech about the importance of childcare and for the first 10 minutes or so she was getting about 7½ or eight out of 10 for a reasonable understanding of what is going on in the childcare centre. But when it comes to the nitty-gritty, she fails. She has rolled over. Why? This is the Labor Party. These are the people who said that they would sit on the crossbench and provide third-party insurance, that they would make sure things were done right and were done fairly. I tell you here today, Mr Speaker, that the Greens have sold out my constituents. I say to the people at Gumnut Place in Evatt that, if they thought they had third-party insurance, the policy has just gone bust.

We will not be supporting the amendment before us today. I will do my utmost to ensure that when this passes phrases like “providing clarity” and “continuing to investigate” result in bricks and mortar for Gumnut Place and that those bricks and mortar are found very soon. If they do not, this childcare centre will wither on the vine. It will wither on the vine because Ms Burch and Ms Hunter collaborated together to ensure that that happened.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (5.38): I will be supporting Ms Burch’s amendment; I will not be supporting Mrs Dunne’s motion, which I am sure is no surprise to Mrs Dunne. In relation to the specific matter that Mrs Dunne has referred to—that is, the Gumnut centre—Ms Burch has explained that initiatives and discussions and assistance are being provided by the department, working closely with Gumnut, to explore alternatives and suitable locations. I am confident from my discussions with

her and with her office that the children and families who attend Gumnut will be found alternative accommodation in the near future.

I am very pleased to be able to speak to this amendment. Quality early education and care is vital to the future of ACT's children. Some of my own grandchildren have been or are in receipt of childcare services, and I know how important it is for my son and daughter and my stepdaughter to get high quality and reliable childcare services for their children.

When issues of childcare arise, it is important to understand the local sector that is providing these services for our children. It is my understanding that there are 248 licensed childcare services in the ACT. Of these, 243 provide centre-based care and include long day care, independent preschools, playschools and school aged children. A further five licensed services are family day care schemes. The opening of licensed childcare services continues, and 11 new services opened last year.

In addition, there are 70 government and non-government preschools providing early childhood education and care in the ACT. In the ACT, 80 per cent of licensed childcare services are community based. Community services are the backbone of the childcare sector, and their commitment to children and families is extremely important to families and the community as a whole.

I have got quite a bit of experience in this sector. When I first arrived in the ACT I worked in the childcare sector where I was in charge of the babies area of a community-based service. Subsequently, for a number of years my office was located in the same building as the Tuggeranong office of the then Childcare Services, now Community Services, therefore I have firsthand experience of this sector.

The 248 licensed childcare services provide 15,588 licensed childcare places across the ACT, and this includes family day care. Some 666 places became available in 2009, and an additional 463 new places are becoming available for 2010. It is estimated that approximately 2,200 staff are employed in the childcare sector in the ACT. So you can see that it is a very important sector in terms of employment. Mrs Dunne's sideways swipe—a not-so-subtle swipe—at the conditions of these employees and her scaremongering about the effect on fees is far from helpful, as Ms Hunter also alluded to.

Childcare is a large service sector. It provides many services across the ACT and many options for parents. The fees charged by licensed childcare centres, as Ms Burch has said a number of times, are set by providers of childcare services, not by the ACT government.

It is also pleasing to see that there has been a 30 per cent increase in the degree and diploma qualifications of staff working in ACT long day care during the past 12 months and an increase of 57 per cent in overall enrolments in CIT in children's services and programs. Before coming to this Assembly, I was the chair of an organisation formerly called TRACHS, which is training for health and community services. It has now been amalgamated and no longer exists under that name, but I saw first hand the results of this important work—that is, the considerable take-up of

training opportunities for childcare staff across the many different services that I have been describing and the resultant provision of quality childcare.

As Minister Burch has already stated, when looking at costs across all jurisdictions, it may initially appear that the ACT has high costs. But comparing like with like—that is, urban metropolitan cities with each other, such as Wollongong and Newcastle—the costs of childcare are very similar.

Planning for additional childcare centres is also market driven, based on population need and identified demand. As stated repeatedly by Minister Burch, the government regulates and monitors childcare services in accordance with licence conditions and with the relevant childcare standards. It does not set fees or provide childcare.

When discussing the provision of childcare services, the issue of quality is crucial, as I said before. Ms Hunter has also referred to that. The government is committed to the provision of quality childcare services and is investing heavily in early intervention, including the early childhood preschool services. This government is also participating in the national reforms in early childhood education and care. We have heard earlier from Minister Burch also about the importance of quality care and the ACT's success in this area.

The Council of Australian Governments endorsed major early childhood reforms on 2 July 2009, releasing *Investing in the early years—a national early childhood development strategy* and an early years learning framework. The national early childhood development strategy aims to improve the health, safety, early learning and wellbeing of Australia's children and spells out a vision that by 2020 all children can have the best possible start in life to create a better future for them and for the nation. The strategy is being supported by a new national quality agenda for early childhood development and care, to which the minister referred. This will further significantly lift the standard of care for our young children.

As part of the strategy, an early childhood education national partnership has also been agreed to by all governments, which focuses on providing universal access to 15 hours of preschool programs for all four-year-old children. A recent report written by early childhood experts titled *Childcare and early education in Australia* identified that this agenda was on the right track. Children who attended an early childhood program had better language skills than those who did not, and in groups where teachers were university qualified and more teacher-supported small group activities were offered, children had higher pro-social behaviour and fewer problem behaviours.

You all heard Ms Hunter refer to the importance of the childhood opportunities in those first early years of life. These are important initiatives which will ensure that children have access to the best childcare during the most important early years. These services complement other significant early interventions and prevention services provided by this government in conjunction with our community partners, such as child and family centres and family and support programs. We can talk, I am sure, for a long time about the success of our child and family centres, and I am looking forward to the establishment of one in west Belconnen.

I return to Mrs Dunne's reference to the Gumnut centre and say again that I am confident that the minister's department is working closely with Gumnut to explore alternatives and to find a suitable location for them. I am confident that this is going ahead. I support Ms Burch's amendment and not Mrs Dunne's motion.

Question put:

That **Ms Burch's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 4

Mr Barr	Ms Hunter	Mr Coe
Ms Bresnan	Ms Le Couteur	Mrs Dunne
Ms Burch	Ms Porter	Mr Seselja
Mr Corbell	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Smyth
Ms Gallagher		

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (5.52): It is an extremely disappointing day for the people of the Gumnut Place childcare centre that we have had this watering down of a motion, because what today was about was trying to provide certainty for these families. It does actually seem to show that Evatt's gumnuts really are under threat from the big bad banksia men and mean old Mrs Snake. What we have seen here today is that, collectively, the Greens and the Labor Party have taken what should be a simple process and made it difficult. They show that they are not working for the people of the ACT.

The Labor Party is really spending its time puffing itself up and talking about generalities, but when it comes to the crunch it is not prepared to work for the people of the ACT, for the people of Evatt, for the children who attend Gumnut Place childcare centre, for the parents who send their children there and for the 12 workers who work there. They have been aided and abetted in this by the Greens, who have sold out. They spend their time, again, talking in platitudinous ways about how important childcare is, how important it is that we have a community-based childcare service in the ACT, but when we are confronted with an individual community-based childcare centre, "No, we don't not want to help them."

This is typical of the Greens; we see it in everything. For years and years they talked about how they were in favour of urban infill, until there was urban infill in a particular place or a particular street—"Not that one; that's not right." It has been brought out here today; they are always in favour of things in general, but when it comes to the individual, practical circumstance, they always find an excuse why they back away. Here today, while they spoke in platitudinous terms about the importance of community-based, not-for-profit childcare centres and what great work these community organisations do and how we need to support them, when it comes to the crunch, Meredith Hunter and the Greens cannot support the Gumnut Place childcare centre, which is in her own electorate.

Ms Burch takes everything on notice. Ms Burch does not do anything of her own volition. We had an opportunity here today to ensure that Ms Burch did something for

the people of my electorate, the people of Ms Hunter's electorate, and the Greens squibbed it. If we get to the stage where people start leaving Gumnut childcare centre and, as Mr Coe said, the staff start getting poached, it will not be the fault of the Gumnut childcare centre, it will be the fault of Andrew Barr and Joy Burch and Meredith Hunter and her Green colleagues.

This is a very sad day for the people of the ACT who were looking for certainty in their childcare centre. We are looking for certainty in the childcare centre. Ms Burch, you were being asked to provide the children who go to Gumnut childcare centre with certainty; as much certainty as you are proposing to provide to children who may go to Evatt preschool in the future. We do not know whether they will and we do not know whether that is the only accommodation solution for children who may go to Evatt preschool. But there are 80 real children who today, this week, go to Gumnut childcare centre, and you are not prepared to guarantee them a future.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 5.57 to 7.30 pm.

Islamic library services

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (7.30): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) recognises:

(a) the importance of:

- (i) encouraging and promoting a deeper knowledge and understanding of the Islamic culture and history amongst the people of the ACT; and
- (ii) providing safe, open, tolerant and accessible spaces in Canberra where people can investigate and practise Islamic culture freely and openly;

(b) efforts in the community towards establishing an Islamic library resource in Canberra; and

(c) that this resource has the largest, most diverse and broadly representative collection in Australia of Islamic texts and other material; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

(a) provide assistance to the Islamic library in cataloguing its texts and materials;

(b) investigate methods of providing or sourcing support to assist in the Islamic library's establishment; and

(c) report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day in August 2010.

I bring this motion on today because I believe the Canberra Islamic library is a valuable resource for our community that should be recognised and supported. It counteracts ignorance by providing a safe and non-intrusive environment for people to investigate Islamic history, culture and laws. The Canberra Islamic library encourages tolerance and respect. I would like to take this opportunity today to talk a little about its history, plans for the future and why this resource should be supported by this Assembly.

I believe this motion is timely in light of the Multicultural Festival that has just passed, the failure of Nicholls mosque in receiving approval, and the shortcomings with the proposed Islamic school. Canberra is a place for everyone and I believe it is important we show the Islamic community we are supportive of initiatives that encourage learning and understanding of Islam in our broader community.

I would like to make it clear that this is not about favouring one religion over another. It is about (a) recognising that we have a resource that is providing a great service to the Canberra community and potentially the rest of Australia and (b) that this particular community needs a helping hand so the library can properly function.

Before I go on, I would like to acknowledge that we have Mr Ahmed Youssef and Mr Asmi Wood in the chamber gallery, who are instrumental in the library and are part of the Canberra Islamic Centre, and to thank them for coming here today.

The construction of the Canberra Islamic Centre began in 1998 and was officially opened in 2004 in Monash, Tuggeranong. It is a centre with many facilities, including a central prayer room, function hall, recording studio, industrial kitchen and garden area. The construction of the library will be a part of the CIC. I would like to note that the CIC has predominantly been built around community donations.

The CIC has received support from the ACT government and from many other quarters. Former Governor-General Sir William Deane was particularly supportive and officially launched the model of the CIC at the Hyatt Hotel in Canberra in 1997, stating that it was a great contribution to Australia.

The Canberra Islamic Centre showcases artistic and historical exhibitions regularly for schoolchildren and the Islamic community. It has also been home to weddings, funerals and annual religious events. It is a meeting place for thousands of Muslims across Canberra and it has provided a wonderful service to the south of Tuggeranong.

The library has been a central theme of the CIC. The founding members had envisioned the library, once built, to be a significant service for not only Canberra but the rest of Australia. The library has a collection of between 25,000 and 30,000 books and other resources, some of which have been already catalogued by volunteer librarians. Many of these books have been donated by the Islamic and non-Islamic community, including Lourie Fitzgerald, a Catholic priest who in his will donated up to 2,000 books to the Canberra Islamic library. Because the construction of the library has not begun, all the resources—books, videos and recordings—are currently being stored in the prayer room of the CIC.

One cannot speak about the inception of the library without mentioning Ahmed Youssef who, as I have already noted, is here today and has maintained a steady campaign to establish this wonderful resource for Canberra. I would also like to acknowledge the tireless work by CIC founding members. Ahmed Youssef is a foundation member and former president of the CIC. Ahmed moved from Egypt to Australia in 1969 and resided in Melbourne for 14 years before moving to Canberra. Ahmed taught Arabic and Islamic studies at the then Canberra College of Advanced Education.

When Ahmed came to Australia it was clear to him that there was not enough information on Islamic religion and culture. For more than 40 years Ahmed has been collecting literature on Islamic art, women's rights, law and a variety of other subjects. In fact, Ahmed has so many books he has had to store them in his home. His garage is so full with books he cannot actually park his car in it. His wife, Jamila, originally from Switzerland, has also worked hard to get the library established. People describe Ahmed and Jamila as working as a team. Jamila has been a great support for Ahmed. She has assisted in collecting books, volunteered at the CIC, and for the least part she has been extremely patient while books have invaded her home.

Ahmed has not only volunteered as an imam, running regular Islamic classes, marriages and funerals; he also visits prisoners in Canberra and Cooma. I think anyone who meets Ahmed would agree that he is an extremely graceful, compassionate and friendly person. Ahmed Youssef was named the Australian Muslim Volunteer of the Year last December. It has been his dream to see the library through to its conclusion and I hope Jamila and Ahmed will have an opportunity to see the library functioning in Canberra.

Before going on, I would like to talk a little about multiculturalism, our interpretation of it and efforts to promote and live it.

According to Geoffrey Levey from the *Australian Financial Review*, multiculturalism is "a set of practical policies aimed variously at improving the absorption of migrants and harmoniously integrating a culturally diverse society around liberal democratic values". A similar interpretation can be found in the recently released ACT multicultural policy for 2010-13. Its vision is to "create a community where multicultural traditions and heritage are celebrated as a part of a safe, cohesive and harmonious society which upholds the human rights of the people who live here". Many in this place would agree with these aims and surely that these aims are achievable with some hard work and perseverance from our political leaders and community.

The ACT Greens believe that the diversity of cultures in the ACT community greatly enriches our society and should be celebrated and that all ACT residents, whatever their background, have the right to live free of discrimination and to engage in and share their culture within universally recognised human rights. The ACT Greens believe that Canberra is a place for everyone.

Of course, there are many schools of thought on how best to achieve this. I would argue multiculturalism is about the interaction of people from different ethnicities,

cultures and generations sharing and exchanging beliefs and values. While many would agree with this, all too often we see multicultural policy shaped around the preservation of culturally specific institutions and in some cases leading to the social, political and economic marginalisation of some ethnic communities.

Multiculturalism is not about communities operating in silos or merely co-existing and coming together for community events. It will need strong political leadership to think outside the box. The hope here is to move beyond this outdated outlook. I believe a well-resourced and accessible Islamic library in Canberra will encourage interaction and an understanding of the many faces of Islam. A friendly environment will help promote tolerance between Islamic and non-Islamic communities and encourage interaction. This is already happening in other states. The National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies is funded by the Australian government to provide outstanding higher education level programs in Islamic studies. This is happening in collaboration with the University of Melbourne, Griffith University and the University of Western Sydney.

I would like to note that the ACT government has made efforts to support Islamic activities. The previous Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Mr Hargreaves, supported many of these ventures, such as the Muslim Advisory Council.

I would now like to touch on Islamic young people. Asmi Wood, a lecturer at ANU, in his paper *Muslims Australia: an untapped resource* on this topic, says in relation to Muslim youth:

The 'Muslim identity' in Australia appears to be at present a secondary identity and one subsumed by ethnicity.

He goes on to say:

A key underlying factor for the slow emergence of a cohesive identity in Australia is arguably because the Australian Muslim community is not only ethnically and linguistically diverse, but also because the multicultural funding criteria encourage the preservation of classic cultural characteristics ... The ethnocentric organisation of multicultural affairs favours cohesion on ethnicity in preference to cohesion around a 'religious' identity. ...

The hope here is that a recognisable identity will help Muslim youth to avoid disregarding the ethics and values of Islam on the one hand or retreating into a self-destructive extremism on the other.

For young people, having a sense of identity, as we all have experienced, is a juggling act. Having to negotiate multiple identities for some can be a source of great stress. I believe if young people can have access to their history and culture it can provide a solid foundation in and amongst the many pressures of our society. Having a source of identity for Muslim young people can provide a great sense of security, particularly in the face of sensationalised media reports, racism and xenophobia. Let us not forget that it was only three years ago we saw ugly scenes in Camden, New South Wales with the proposed mosque, and only five years ago when racial violence spilt onto the streets of Cronulla, Sydney. We have seen similar racist responses by small sections

of our community in relation to the proposed mosque in Nicholls and the Islamic school in Weston.

Keeping on the topic of Muslim young people for a moment, many second generation Muslims have had a different experience of Islam compared to their parents. Being able to explore parts of their religion in a non-intrusive fashion independently from their parents and peers is an option I believe would be very attractive for a lot of young people.

I have tried to touch on the importance of the library today. However, unfortunately, the construction of the library has been deadlocked for a number of years because of a combination of a lack of finances and internal divisions within the CIC itself. I believe, however, the library needs bipartisan support if it is to become a functioning and accessible space for the Canberra community. I believe the government can provide resources and support, not necessarily financial, to have the materials and texts catalogued, and provide or source support to assist in the Islamic library's establishment. This small amount of government direction will go a long way.

We would like to see the library get to a stage where it can be easily accessible for the whole community. This resource has the largest, most diverse and broadly representative collection in Australia of Islamic texts and other material—and it is right here in the ACT. Having all the material electronically archived, some of which is over 300 years old, would mean that people, particularly young people, could electronically access books and information. Once properly established, the library could work with other community libraries and larger libraries such as the National Library of Australia who have already expressed their support for the idea. The library could also be particularly attractive to ANU students and government departments such as ASIO and DFAT and act as a useful resource for community groups, seniors and schoolchildren who want to know more about Islamic culture and practice.

This motion is not only about supporting religious cohesion but also about providing free and accessible information to the non-Islamic community. Mr Youssef has dedicated more than a decade of his life to this work. He is a senior and he is tired. It is about time we step it up and support this initiative.

In concluding, the Canberra Islamic Centre of Monash has serviced the Canberra community, particularly the south of Tuggeranong, for many years now. The Islamic library is a resource that not many people know about and it is a shame that they do not know about it. If we could establish a friendly and enjoyable space for people to learn about other cultures and religions we could not only counter isolationism but also build upon our own unique cultural fabric in Canberra.

What I have highlighted today is that multiculturalism is more than just a buzz word. Building a pluralist society is about the growth and exchange of ideas. By promoting tolerance and diversity we progress and flourish as a community. The Islamic library is one resource that builds upon this idea. It provides a safe space for the community to freely learn about Islam, its history, ethics, gender and religious law, encouraging religious harmony rather than ethnic division. However, for the library to become a functioning resource in our community it will need more than just volunteers; it requires our support and political will.

I would like to note that other states in Australia have Islamic specific resources that encourage the learning of Islam at a higher level. The point here is that we are not favouring Islamic text as a genre. However, we do have 30,000 resources sitting in a centre, some of which, as I have already said, are over 300 years old, and these books are not getting used because they are not properly catalogued and they do not have a library space.

We are supportive of all religions. This motion today is recognising that this particular resource needs our assistance. If it has the opportunity to properly function, it can provide an invaluable service to the whole community. What a great shame it would be if in 10 years time we look back and think what could have been.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (7.45): I am pleased to rise this evening and discuss this matter raised by Ms Bresnan. I do so on behalf of the Chief Minister, who is the responsible minister but who is unavailable to be in the Assembly this evening. The Chief Minister has had circulated an amendment which I will move. I have lodged this amendment in my name but it is the same as the amendment circulated under the Chief Minister's name. I move:

Omit paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) acknowledges that:

- (a) a range of Government funding programs exist to support the development of community and multicultural resources in the ACT; and
- (b) the proposal to support the further establishment of Islamic library resources should be considered in the context of these programs should the proponent choose to submit an application.”.

I welcome this opportunity to speak to the motion this evening. Indeed, far from needing time to go away and investigate possible sources of support for an Islamic library which, of course, is the key element of Ms Bresnan's motion this evening, I am very pleased to advise Ms Bresnan right now of the various avenues that already exist for support.

The government is slightly confused by Ms Bresnan's call for the establishment of an Islamic library. The library already exists and has existed for some time. It is called the Australian National Islamic Library. It is located in the Canberra Islamic Centre and it is my understanding that it is in fact broadly accepted to be the best and the most appropriate home for such an outstanding collection of Islamic works. Indeed, as recently as this week, the owner of the collection, Mr Ahmed Youssef, has confirmed that he would not like to see the collection relocated from the Canberra Islamic Centre.

But the government is at a bit of a loss to understand Ms Bresnan's media release earlier this week calling for a dedicated building for the collection. Perhaps Ms Bresnan could have considered consulting the owner of the collection before offering up his possessions for relocation.

There is no doubt that our community is fortunate to be home to what is reportedly the nation's largest collection of Islamic texts. I would like to congratulate the centre on its efforts to bring together such a valuable resource for Muslim Canberrans, Islamic speakers and scholars. It is my understanding that the areas in which Mr Youssef believes he could do with some support are those of cataloguing and then shelving the catalogued work.

I am pleased to advise Ms Bresnan that avenues for support for this kind of work exist through the community support component of the community support and infrastructure grants program. And I would encourage the centre to apply for a grant in the next round of this program to support this important cataloguing work.

I am also happy to advise Ms Bresnan that assistance with the promotion of the collection may also be available through the multicultural grants program. And I would encourage the Canberra Islamic Centre to apply for financial assistance to promote the collection among the Canberra community through this program once the cataloguing work has been completed. Opportunities for both these grant programs are open for application from July.

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services has this week spoken to Mr Youssef and alerted him to the existence of both grant programs. And I would encourage the centre to approach relevant diplomatic missions as well to seek additional avenues of support for the work that needs to be undertaken.

The Australian National Islamic Library is one part of a growing network of quality infrastructures serving the Muslim community in the national capital. This network includes the centre itself, an expanding Islamic school which will shortly relocate to larger premises in Weston, an Islamic community facility in south Canberra and of course the mosque in central Canberra.

The ACT government is currently working with the community to identify a site for another mosque in the Gungahlin area. The ACT government has, for many years, provided financial support to the Canberra mosque to conduct annual open days, giving all Canberrans the opportunity to visit the mosque and get a glimpse of the diversity of our local Islamic community. Similarly, the government has supported the Canberra Islamic Centre to conduct open days for Canberrans to learn about the Islamic faith.

Since 2006, we have also convened a Muslim advisory council to keep the ACT government abreast of issues and concerns among the Muslim community. In collaboration with the government, the council is currently undertaking a demographic study of the ACT Muslim community in the ACT and forging links between itself and the wider ACT community through a two-way media project and an integrated sports project.

The government fully supports the first part of this motion but, as I have indicated, has some reservations about the second part. It is well known in this place that the Greens continually profess to particular standards, including upholding the notions of

proper process, fairness, equity and accountability in the expenditure of public funds. So the government cannot agree with Ms Bresnan that the government ought, simply and without any process, without any competitive process, without analysis outside of the budget cycle, agree that one particular community organisation or one faith-based group is deserving of government funding.

I think that point needs to be reinforced. If the government took a decision to provide funding to some other group without a process, without proper analysis, without the opportunity for scrutiny of whether the proposals are worth while, I am sure that the government would be criticised. But this evening Ms Bresnan is moving a motion telling the government—

Ms Bresnan: I spoke to the Chief Minister about this.

MR CORBELL: I know she does not like it, but there is a double standard being applied here by the Greens. They are saying in this case, because Ms Bresnan thinks it is a good idea, that the money should simply be provided. The government does not agree. There should be a process that is fair to all groups, including the Islamic centre, and that is what the government is proposing to do and that is why the government has moved the amendment that I have had circulated to members.

Over the course of today, the government attempted to get some idea of what it would cost to catalogue a collection of the size of this very important collection. The advice that we have received is that the going rate is about \$27 per item to be catalogued or about \$810,000 for the whole collection, nearly \$1 million that Ms Bresnan simply wants the government to gift to the organisation without any process, without any scrutiny, without any opportunity for other groups, who may have similar tasks that they want to see undertaken, getting an opportunity to get access to those funds. And that is clearly something that the government cannot agree to.

Let us put that in some context. That is about two-thirds of the cost of the bulky waste trial which the Greens are also pressuring the government on. I think we need to be clear exactly what it is that Ms Bresnan is asking of the government this evening. To provide some further examples, it is the cost of two organic waste trials for multi-unit developments and it is the entire cost of the Well Station Drive traffic lights.

As I have outlined, the government believes that there are several legitimate and appropriate avenues that exist for the Islamic centre to pursue funding for this work. And the government would be delighted if the centre succeeded in securing these funds through these competitive, fair and transparent processes.

There are, of course, other avenues of approach as well. Many dozens of community organisations make submissions to the ACT budget process each year and these submissions are, of course, weighed and balanced against competing claims as the budget is finalised.

The government will continue to adopt what we believe is a fair approach in relation to this matter. We recognise the importance of the work. We recognise the desirability of properly cataloguing the collection and promoting its availability to Muslims and

non-Muslims alike. But we do not accept the position put by the Greens that one group, over all others, should be given inside running. We will, at all times, attempt to adopt a fair process in relation to this matter, and that is why the government has moved the amendment that I have now put to the Assembly in my name.

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (7.55): We acknowledge the sentiments in the Greens' motion and agree that we should recognise the importance of encouraging and promoting amongst the people of the ACT a deeper knowledge and understanding of the Islamic culture and history. We also acknowledge the efforts that have been made in the community to establish an Islamic library which will no doubt house a broad collection of text.

It is, however, also important to recognise the grant processes that are in place to assist with this kind of activity. Across the portfolios there are grant programs and other funding programs that support such developments and proposals. I am aware from discussions with groups across many sectors that, more often than not, supply does not always meet demand. But this is another issue for another time.

Paragraph (2) of Ms Bresnan's motion is not applying due process and it is not possible to support a motion that seeks to give such advantage to one community group. We are constantly being asked for assistance by many similar organisations who also carry out good work in the community. For these reasons, we therefore support the government's amendment which acknowledges that there are a range of government funding programs in existence and that these programs are there specifically for the purpose of supporting the development of community and multicultural resources in the ACT.

The amendment also goes on to acknowledge that the proposal to establish an Islamic library should be considered in this context. I encourage the proponents to submit applications for the various funding rounds and to pursue their goal, as I would encourage any group who would seek to enrich our landscape and community with such a resource. I do thank Ms Bresnan for bringing us this motion and look forward to hearing more about the Islamic library and the Islamic library endeavour in the near future.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (7.57): I am quite surprised at the speech that Mr Corbell has just delivered and the lack of knowledge that Mr Corbell and the government seem to have of this project and indeed what Ms Bresnan actually said. If the minister was able to get on the web and look at the master plan for the Canberra Islamic Centre at Monash, or perhaps even go out and visit, he would understand that there is a new building required for the library. So it is nonsense that somehow Ms Bresnan is proposing that we move the library away from there or give away somebody else's property. It is just arrant nonsense and it is not worthy of this place. It is not worthy of this minister, who is normally quite accurate in what he does. It is either very disingenuous—

Mr Hanson: Really?

MR SMYTH: Yes, he calls it to account, or perhaps I should say that Mr Corbell prides himself on being accurate in what he does. Clearly, what has just been said in

this place is an absolute disgrace. What the proposal says is—and I cannot be sure whether it is in the press release or Mr Corbell has misunderstood (b)—“efforts in the community towards establishing an Islamic library”. I think we all know it is there. I have made speeches in this place about it. I have made speeches around the country about the centre and its location. For those that have not been to Monash, it is a fabulous place. At that intersection of Clive Steele Avenue and Isabella Drive are four of the great religions of the world. You have got the Catholics at MacKillop college, you have got another Christian church on the other side, you have got the Canberra Islamic Centre and you have got the Aussie Rules ovals that service southern Canberra. Whatever your faith there is something for you at that intersection, and it works. It works together and it works well.

As to the nonsense that Mr Corbell just said in this place, he should stand up, apologise and withdraw. My memory is that this issue has been discussed in this place on several occasions. If you had been across this issue you would have known that it started in 1995. That is when I got my first briefing about it. I am sure it was thought out well before then. I was briefed, as the member for Canberra—it was in my electorate—about what was planned. The Carnell government made the grant. The Governor-General, Sir William Deane, in 1997 inaugurated it. There is a lovely reference in the *Islamic Voice* under the heading “Islamic centre opened in Canberra”:

Canberra (Australia). Canberra Islamic Centre was inaugurated on August 23 by the Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia in a function held in Canberra Hyatt Hotel.

The \$ 3 million complex will have a huge Islamic library with the largest collection of Islamic books in the southern hemisphere. Large number of Government dignitaries including Mr. Justice Rowlands Lady Deane and high commissioners and ambassadors attended the ceremony.

Australian Muslims leader Sheikh Taj-ed-Din el Hilali and Canberra Islamic Centre President Abdul Sultan spoke at the occasion and said it was time that contributions of Muslims both in Australia and elsewhere were highlighted.

In a note circulated over Internet, Centre’s vice President Diana Rahman said Muslims were the large non-Christian minority in Australia and represent people born in over 50 countries.

That is a fantastic thing to have in Tuggeranong. I am told there are about 35,000 books and pieces now that used to live in garages and bedrooms, in boxes under beds. Now they are in one location. I thank Ms Bresnan for bringing the motion on. It is something we have discussed in this place before. It is a wonderful resource for the people of Australia, particularly the people of Canberra.

Canberra should be a place of art. It should be a place of culture. It should be a place of learning, understanding, tolerance, inclusion and a place of worship. We are very lucky in this city that we can have Sikh temples and Hindu temples. We can have Indian Hindu and Sri Lankan Hindu temples. We can have Buddhist temples. We can have a Jewish synagogue. We can have mosques. We can have Catholic and Protestant churches. We can have all the faiths here. Canberra has had from its

inception a tradition of tolerance and a tradition of acceptance. It is not uncommon to go to functions at the Islamic Centre and see Professor James Hare from the centre for Christianity and faith. It is not uncommon to go to the centre for Christianity and faith and see Ahmed Youssef saying prayers, leading prayer, and being part of the total community.

To have the nonsense that Mr Corbell opened his speech with brings discredit to this debate. It brings discredit to this Assembly because it shows there is not a genuine attempt on the part of this government to build community. If you noticed the tenor of Mr Corbell's speech, it was about the government. It was about Labor talking about Labor, talking about all the things it is doing, instead of saying, "How about us as a community acknowledging what everybody has done, but particularly the representatives of the Canberra Islamic Centre?"

As Ms Bresnan said, they are not all Muslims. I spoke to a gentleman earlier who told me that part of the collection came from the Jesuits. Over the years they were not perhaps the most tolerant of organisations towards the Muslim faith. Many of the significant donations, including books—some more than 500 years old—have come from the private collections of Jesuit fathers who left them to the centre. Why? Because they want to build bridges. Why? Because they want understanding; they want inclusion; they want knowledge.

That is what Canberra should be. I have said in this place before and I will say it again—and I am sure I will say it again after today—that the motto of the Royal Military College, Duntroon is "doctrina vim promivet": knowledge is power. Isn't that right, Mr Hanson?

Mr Hanson: Correct.

MR SMYTH: Knowledge is power. We are all empowered when we have access to knowledge. But you have got to accept that knowledge with grace and awareness and you have to understand that you do not enter a debate like this tonight to score cheap political points. I think it is a great shame.

Canberra can be a city of art and culture and learning. If you go onto the Canberra Islamic Centre website, Mr Corbell, you will find that is what is proposed. At the north end of the building there is a proposed mosque and Islamic art gallery. At the southern end of the building there will be the new building that Ms Bresnan talked about—on-site, as part of the centre—to house the largest, most significant collection of Islamic literature in the Southern Hemisphere.

I think we should all be quite joyous at this. I am very proud of my involvement. I have seen Annette Ellis there several times. I have seen previous members of the Greens and the Democrats at the centre. I think people understand what it means for us all. It is a real path forward. It is about enlightenment and empowerment, but unless we accept it willingly then I think we taint what we do here today. I think that is a great shame.

I know that Steve Pratt, if he were here, would love this motion. He worked very hard to raise the consciousness of the Canberra people on issues about Islam, to dispel

some of the myths about Islam and to get people to embrace it. Pratty and I ran a Ramadan function in the reception room. Over many years gentlemen who followed the Islam practice at that time attended to welcome Ramadan and to honour Ramadan.

Looking at this motion, we agree with part (1). As to part (2), there is a process. The minister could have simply gone to Ms Bresnan before the debate and said, "Here's the process. Give them a chance. They can apply for grants." That is what this is about. We will be supporting the government's amendment. It is the appropriate thing to do in this case. But please let us not lose sight of what could be done here. This is a brilliant opportunity for enlightenment. It is a fantastic blessing, particularly to the people of Tuggeranong, but it is a blessing to the people of Canberra to house this here. It has the ability in the long term to be an absolute drawcard and to make Canberra a centre of Islamic study and understanding, particularly in the Southern Hemisphere—when you think that the largest Islamic country is not far to our north and then not too far away are countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan, before we get to the Middle East and Egypt and your original homeland.

It is a fantastic opportunity. It is something we all should work on together. We all understand there is a process to work through and we support that process. I certainly lend my weight to the total development. As I drive down I see it all the time on Isabella Drive. I look forward to the day that it is fully operational and that when people talk about the study of Islam they immediately think of Canberra, because knowledge is power.

Canberra has a huge base in the arts, in culture. We already have world-class institutions like the ANU. Something like the Islamic library, when built in a new building on the side of the Islamic Centre—when catalogued and operational—will draw, I hope, more documents, more literature, more books, more volumes and more monographs so that the centre will grow in stature. Those of us who sit in this place making decisions, representing not just Brindabella but Canberra, should look at this as a blessing, as an opportunity to say to the rest of the world that this is a tolerant, inclusive city that understands the power of learning and that we support the Canberra Islamic library.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (8.07): Obviously I will speak about the substance of Mr Corbell's speech in closing but I just want to clarify a few things that we are proposing in the motion. At no stage did I ever suggest that we should be circumventing or bypassing processes. I actually spoke to the Chief Minister's office, an adviser in his office, about this. It would have been nice if he had passed on the conversation I had with him to Mr Corbell and the Chief Minister. It would also have been nice if they had returned the repeated calls of my staff to try to discuss this. It would have been nice if they had returned my later call after I had had the initial conversation with the Chief Minister's adviser. I explained all that to him and I take great issue with what Mr Corbell said about the second part of our motion. That was never the intention. It would also have been good if they had passed on the information about the cataloguing. Obviously we would expect there would have to be a process if that amount of money was going to be expended. As I said, I tried to call the Chief Minister's office again after I had had the initial conversation and they did not return my call. I imagine they would have had that information at that stage, but obviously they did not provide that to us. I take offence at what has been said.

Mr Corbell: That is exactly what your motion is asking us to do.

MS BRESNAN: No, it is not. That is not what it says. We have said—

Mr Corbell: It is circumventing the normal process in requiring a report to the Assembly.

MS BRESNAN: Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Corbell, you can have your turn in a minute.

Mr Corbell: She interjected on me, Mr Speaker—

MS BRESNAN: Because what you have said is frankly untrue and because I spoke to the Chief Minister's adviser and explained—

Mr Corbell: The fact is, Ms Bresnan, you got it wrong.

MS BRESNAN: It says, "investigate methods".

Mr Corbell: You got it wrong.

MS BRESNAN: No, you've got it wrong, Mr Corbell. It says "investigate methods of providing". We have never sought to circumvent process. It was just to provide assistance to direct them to the appropriate grants.

Mr Corbell: That is exactly what your motion does.

MS BRESNAN: No, it does not do that.

Mr Corbell: Yes, it does.

MS BRESNAN: That is what it says. As I said to the Chief Minister's adviser—

Mr Corbell: It is absolutely what your motion does and that's why the Liberal Party is not supporting your motion.

MS BRESNAN: Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Ms Bresnan.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you. As I said, if my conversation with the Chief Minister adviser had been passed on and if I had had a chance to speak to the Chief Minister himself—obviously he would not speak to me either—I could have actually explained and we could have had some constructive input on this motion, but obviously that did not happen either.

We will not be supporting this amendment. I understand the Liberals are and that is understandable. I think what has been said in this place is disappointing—that a

motion that is very positive and was only ever intended to be positive has been turned into a political exercise. It is extremely disappointing that that has happened.

Mr Corbell: I think your exercise is the political one.

MS BRESNAN: No. Mr Corbell has completely misrepresented what was in our motion. Again, I would point out that I had a conversation with the Chief Minister's office. That information was obviously not passed on to either Mr Corbell or Mr Stanhope and they would not return my calls. We will not be supporting this amendment. Obviously I appreciate the support from Mr Smyth and Mr Doszpot and appreciate they are supporting the substance of the motion.

I have spoken to Mr Ahmed Youssef and also to Mr Asmi Wood. Again, I would point out that we have spoken to them through the entirety of putting this motion together. It would have been nice if the Chief Minister had done the same. They would then have understood what we were trying to achieve with this motion. Mr Corbell said that we want him to give out money and that it is something government does not do. I not particularly want to raise this in the speech, but I think I am forced to. We have allocated money to the Brumbies, the Capitals and bringing Lauren Jackson here and the ACT baseball team. That is all fine, but if we want to give some money to establish or just assist in providing support—not even financially—to establish an Islamic library, issue is taken with that.

Amendment agreed to.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that Ms Bresnan's motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (8.12): I am not going to say too much. I think I have probably said all I need to in addressing the amendment. I thank Mr Smyth for his information on the Islamic library. They need to construct a building to house the texts on the site. I also noted that in my speech. Mr Corbell obviously was not listening to my speech because that was noted in there. I said it a number of times.

This was done in complete consultation with Mr Ahmed Youssef, who is here today—as we would. Again, if the Chief Minister's office had chosen to return our calls and speak to us they would have known what we are trying to achieve with this motion. We wanted it to be a very positive motion for the Islamic community in Canberra and the tone of Mr Corbell's speech was completely unnecessary and quite offensive. That is really disappointing.

Every time we meet in this place and make decisions on policy and program objectives we know that there are resource and budgetary outcomes. My motion was not about all resources coming from government—quite to the contrary. It was about government and members in this place standing behind a policy commitment for an Islamic library and assisting the search for appropriate private and public resourcing. It was never about bypassing any processes or giving anyone a handout. Mr Corbell is interjecting again. Again I would point that if he had actually spoken—

Mr Corbell: Where in your motion does it say “private funding”?

MS BRESNAN: The motion talks about “providing or sourcing”. If you had spoken to me, returned my calls and listened and if my discussions with the Chief Minister’s adviser had been passed on, you would have known that. Again, you could have worked constructively with me. If you had taken issue with that we could have come up with some alternative wording, but you did not choose to do that. You would not return my calls. I think that pretty well speaks for itself.

I thank Mr Smyth and Mr Doszpot for their constructive and very positive contributions, contrary to Mr Corbell’s. His speech today was quite astounding and I say again that I was quite offended by it.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Alexander Maconochie Centre Management

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (8.14): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that the Corrective Services portfolio has been mismanaged by the current ACT Government for a number of years;
- (b) that as a result of this mismanagement:
 - (i) that in late 2008 and early 2009 there were ongoing human rights breaches at the Belconnen Remand Centre (BRC) that were exacerbated by the late opening of the ACT’s new prison, the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC);
 - (ii) there were numerous security incidents in late 2008 and early 2009 at the BRC including violence that resulted in corrections officers being treated in hospital;
 - (iii) the prison was delivered over 12 months late;
 - (iv) that the prison was officially opened on the eve of the ACT election five months prior to receiving prisoners;
 - (v) that the prison was delivered under scope and \$3.5 million over budget;
 - (vi) that the prison has defects remaining in the security system;
 - (vii) that drugs, needles and razor blades were found in the prison shortly after the first prisoners arrived;
 - (viii) that the radio frequency identification system is not yet operational and recently a number of identification bracelets were lost;

- (ix) that there have been breaches of the *Corrections Management (Email / Internet for Prisoners) Policy 2009*; and
 - (x) that the prison is costing ACT taxpayers \$504 per prisoner per day;
 - (c) the unanimous findings of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety in Report 3, Inquiry into the delay in the commencement of operations at the Alexander Maconochie Centre, including the finding that “not all the delays to the commencement of the operations of the AMC were due to the security system as the Attorney-General has contended”; and
 - (d) that despite the prison being almost half empty and NSW experiencing capacity issues with its gaols, the Minister is yet to start discussions with NSW about taking NSW prisoners at the AMC; and
- (2) calls on the ACT government to:
- (a) commence discussions with the NSW government with a view to receiving NSW prisoners; and
 - (b) commission an independent review of the prison on completion of one year of operations.

Before I move to the corrections motion, I would like to reflect on what has just occurred here. If we are going to talk about the failures of Mr Corbell, I think it is a timely moment for us to be moving to the corrections portfolio which is littered with failure, having observed what all of us in this place have just seen. And that is how poorly Mr Corbell managed what was, I think, a fairly straightforward issue.

It is out of sheer exasperation that I have brought before the house today this motion on the incompetence shown by Simon Corbell, who is the minister most responsible. After his performance before, but, more importantly, after his inept attack on the tripartisan JACS committee yesterday, it is important that we highlight the utter failure of this government’s management of corrections throughout the last 18 or 20 months.

What became apparent through the course of 2008-09 and the start of this year, through the media and through the committee inquiry, Madam Deputy Speaker—and indeed it was confirmed by the unanimous report of the JACS committee upon which you sat—is that the man responsible, culpable and accountable for the mismanagement of the AMC, who caused so many of the problems that we saw with corrections—in particular, the overcrowding and continued exacerbated human rights breaches at the Belconnen Remand Centre—is Simon Corbell.

The litany of failures is extensive, but we have to start somewhere; so let us start with the delays at the Alexander Maconochie Centre. It was meant to open in mid-2007. And we all remember Simon Corbell hosting an official opening on 11 September 2008. Noting that we went into the caretaker period on 12 September, this was literally on the eve of the ACT election. But prisoners did not arrive until 31 March 2009.

The report provided by the JACS committee debunked the repeated claims by Simon Corbell, the minister, that all the delays we experienced were due solely to the security system and the fault was that of the security contractor. The committee found that “not all the delays were due to the security system as the Attorney-General contended”. I remember this quite clearly: when the Attorney-General was called before the committee, it was not his fault; no, it was Chubb’s. He blamed Chubb. He blamed the contractors. Remember that? None of it was his fault. And we heard that yesterday again.

He wanted to make sure he had the privilege involved in speaking in the Assembly. He told the media that he would be making that speech. He did not dare do it in front of the media as you normally would at a lunchtime press conference.

On 11 September 2008, Jon Stanhope opened the facility, with great fanfare, and told the media:

Opening the new prison means that we can now—

and I underline “now”—

take responsibility for our prisoners, ending the practice of sending prisoners to New South Wales.

Quite simply, this was an election stunt. It could be interpreted in no other way.

The inquiry found that the jail “was clearly not ready for handover”. And that was in February 2009, five months after the official opening on the eve of the 2008 election. The committee found that in February 2009, when the committee undertook a site visit, AMC was clearly not ready for handover. And it was apparent to committee members that considerable work still needed to be done.

Another finding from the JACS committee was that at the time of the opening, the minister was not appropriately briefed on the delays. It is the minister’s responsibility to make sure his department is briefing him on delays, particularly when, as it was noted at finding 13 in the report, in the period leading up to 11 September, in the previous six months, there had been eight delays.

What was delivered was not the jail as it had been originally envisaged, as was scoped. But we find a jail now that does not have a gym, that does not have a chapel. The outer perimeter fence that was envisaged is not there. The 370 beds which were planned were reduced to 300, 60 transitional beds reduced to 15, and so on.

I would like now to turn to the human rights issues that the government continues to lecture the community, particularly the Canberra Liberals, on. I would like to make the point that human rights should not be used as a shield to cover up incompetence and mistakes that have been made. You do have cost blow-outs. You have security breaches. You cannot continually use the line “it is all about human rights” as an excuse. We support human rights endeavours. We want to see the jail be as humane as

possible and make sure its focus is on rehabilitation, but that cannot be continually used as an excuse by this government.

The human rights breaches at the Belconnen Remand Centre were actually exacerbated by this government due to its failure to open the Alexander Maconochie Centre on time. You will remember it was the human rights commissioner, Dr Helen Watchirs—and I congratulate her on her recent award of an OAM—that back in July 2007 declared the BRC inhumane.

Clearly, the New South Wales government thought that because the jail was opening in 2008 they would no longer be receiving prisoners from the BRC and they basically closed off their system. So it was the delay in the opening that then exacerbated the opening. And that is a finding—

Mr Corbell: That is just not true, Jeremy. Not even the committee says that.

MR HANSON: Let me quote from the committee. That is what they said. I will have to find it in the notes, but the committee did find that it was delays in the opening of the Alexander Maconochie Centre that exacerbated the human rights concerns at the Belconnen Remand Centre. Yes, I can quote it:

While the ACT's remand facilities have always given rise to serious human rights concerns, these concerns were exacerbated during the period between the official opening ... and the commencement of the transfer ...

We have also seen a series of security breaches at the Belconnen Remand Centre, with incidents in late 2008 and early 2009. We saw the tunnelling incident. We saw six corrections officers injured in a violent incident. We saw leaking of information of an AFP investigation into members of his own department. We saw two prisoners on the roof of the BRC.

Then we saw Simon Corbell, who was not actually the minister but was the acting minister at the time, make his reckless response. Following an ongoing series of failures and embarrassments for the government, the Attorney-General, speaking in his role as the acting corrections minister, came out and explicitly commented on a case before the courts. He did this in order to deflect the criticism and embarrassment of both himself and his government in the media and he deliberately passed judgement on the matter before the courts in order to protect himself. As a result, Mr Corbell faced a motion in the Assembly expressing serious concern. The motion read:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes the potentially prejudicial comments made by the Attorney-General on ABC Radio and ABC TV on Tuesday, 3 February 2009 in relation to the actions of two detainees who went onto the roof of the Belconnen Remand Centre—

Mr Corbell: I was right, Jeremy. Have you seen the outcome of those cases?

MR HANSON: But the point is, minister, you do not—

Mr Corbell: I was right, Jeremy.

MR HANSON: If you think that the fact you were right about the final outcome gives you the authority as the Attorney-General to express an opinion on issues that are before the court, you clearly do not understand your role as Attorney-General. If that is your position then you do not deserve to be the Attorney-General of this territory. If you think that the fact the court case ended up the same way as you thought it would gives you the right to comment then you are unfit to act as Attorney-General of this territory.

Mr Hargreaves, who is away at the moment—I think he has a pair—was passed a dreadful hospital pass from Mr Corbell. But he had a bit of an unfortunate period as well, trying to sort out Mr Corbell's mess. He did not make a very good job of it, it is fair to say. He described the false opening of the AMC like a restaurant opening that he had been to. You will remember also that he described the violent incident that resulted in six corrections officers being treated in hospital as a scuffle that could have occurred at a Catholic seminary. He was rightly ridiculed in the media for those comments. But I have got no doubt that the hospital pass that he was given as a result of the bungling by Simon Corbell was a contributing factor that led to the demise of John Hargreaves as a minister in this Assembly.

I turn now to security breaches at the Alexander Maconochie Centre. Prior to it being opened, I wrote to John Hargreaves on 31 March 2009 and said to him, "Has there been any downgrading in the security specifications at the AMC to rush the commissioning?" And he said no. Sorry, that was when I spoke to him. But what we do know is that that was not true, because the SOTAR machine that should have been up and running would have prevented this, as he said in a budget debate in the Assembly. If the SOTAR machine had been up and running, it would have prevented it.

I had written to the minister earlier in March and had called for an independent assessment of the jail. I actually wrote to him, in good faith, urging him to conduct that assessment of the jail before receiving prisoners. And he told me no, that the AMC was safe, it was ready to open. But after such a short time, we know that the jail had needles, syringes and drugs in it and that, on any measure, it could not be considered safe. So it was not ready when we pushed ahead and put the prisoners in.

We have had issues with the RFID system. This is a system that is still not operational, I believe. Maybe the minister can clarify that issue. It is, the last I heard, being trialled. But we know that there were ID bracelets that were lost. I would have thought this would leave even Labor's most ardent supporters embarrassed. These ID bracelets are designed to be on the prisoner to track the prisoner. So how it is that they were lost is unfathomable. Indeed, the prisoner who was honest enough to turn herself in and say, "I've still got a bracelet on me," described the situation as a cock-up. And I think that is an apt description of what has occurred.

Turning to the report, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you would be well aware of, it is a damning result. For example, finding 23 refers to communication failures between

the various parties: the client, which in this case I take to be the government, the contractors and the subcontractors. And the report is particularly critical of the fragmented manner in which the project was managed, from the design stage all the way through to the construction and the commissioning stages.

The committee found that the management model used was confusing and that the lines of communication and control were unclear. There is also a finding that when the prison received prisoners there was no uninterrupted power supply for the building management system. I would have thought that you would have made sure that the prison had such a power supply. The report also tells us there are defects remaining in the security systems. Specifically this refers to defect 2.6, and we have spoken about that in detail in here previously, and that there was only one factory acceptance test conducted.

We also find out from the report that the territory is out of pocket \$3.5 million. The minister may advise us of where that legal case is at. But as a result of that mismanagement, we now have a situation where we are spending in the territory \$504 a day for each prisoner. The Chief Minister, prior to the prison being opened, guaranteed the people of Canberra—he said publicly—that the prison would cost us no more. In fact, he said it would probably be cheaper. How is it that we are spending nearly twice as much per prisoner than we did when we sent the prisoners to New South Wales?

I have outlined a solution to this problem, which is one that I have received substantial feedback on from many pensioners, many people in the community who are struggling to meet their daily living costs, and who find out that \$504 a day is the money that is being spent on prisoners. We all want to make sure that we have a prison that rehabilitates offenders. But the \$504 a day, when we were told that it would cost us no more—it has doubled in price in such a short time—is unacceptable. And the community is rightly outraged.

I have proposed a solution and I have discussed this previously. If we were to have a conversation with New South Wales to consider New South Wales bringing prisoners here, if we were to charge them a similar amount, this could make for a financial windfall for the government that could be used. It could be used for diversionary programs. It could be rolled into rehabilitation programs. It could be used to prevent people going to jail in the first place.

More importantly, if the jail is what it is cracked up to be and it is actually rehabilitating prisoners, why are we not getting people, particularly from our local region, Queanbeyan and other areas, in there so that we can do the right thing by them, get them close to their families and rehabilitate them? It is a win-win situation that the minister is refusing to consider. I am very disappointed.

I will turn now to the recent concerns we have had with internet policy. I am very disappointed that the minister has just brushed this off, as had the Chief Minister. These are serious issues. These are issues that we cannot simply brush off, as the Chief Minister says, as a doodle. They are breaches of policy and they are part of the ongoing failure of this government.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (8.30): I move the following amendment to Mr Hanson's motion:

Omit all words after "that this Assembly", substitute:

"(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of the ACT Government taking responsibility for the management and rehabilitation of citizens convicted of offences and sentenced to terms of imprisonment in the Territory;
- (b) that the ACT Government has taken the following steps in accepting its responsibility and its obligations under Human Rights law:
 - (i) establishing the first prison in the Territory that is based on Human Rights principles;
 - (ii) providing funding of \$25.1m for the direct operating budget of this facility for 2009-2010; and
 - (iii) establishing programs for prisoners incarcerated in the Alexander Maconochie Centre to assist in their rehabilitation, education and reintegration into the community;
- (c) that the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety in Report 3, Inquiry into the delay in the commencement of operations at the Alexander Maconochie Centre, drew conclusions about the reasons for the delay in the commencement of operations of the AMC which were contrary to the findings of an independent expert appointed to determine the reasons for the delays; and
- (d) that these delays were due to the failure of the builder and its security sub-contractor to complete the security system; and

(2) notes:

- (a) that the total number of prisoners in the AMC as of today is 194; and
- (b) that the ACT Government is committed to a review of key elements of the prison operations 12 months after the intake of all prisoners."

The Liberal Party have an appalling record of opportunism when it comes to the issue of the prison and it goes all the way back to when Mr Moore, who was the responsible minister for corrections in the previous Carnell Liberal government, strongly advocated the development of a prison for the ACT. Indeed, the last time there was a change of government in this place there was bipartisan agreement in this Assembly that there was a need to establish a prison for the territory.

Disappointingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, the Liberal Party quickly reneged on that bipartisan position and for the last eight years have adopted the position of opposition to the establishment of a prison, despite the fact that in government they advocated the exact opposite.

We continue to see that opportunism, that rank political opportunism, in the commentary from the Liberal Party over the last few months on the establishment and now the operation of what is a positive facility for the ACT, a facility that makes us live up to our responsibilities to properly manage the care and custodianship of those people who are sentenced to terms of imprisonment in the territory and that we do so in a manner that provides the greatest opportunity for them to rehabilitate themselves, to stop their offending behaviour and to become productive members of our society.

I think it is worth reiterating the issues that the government has said are important in relation to this debate. Members of course will be aware that yesterday I tabled in the

Assembly the government's comprehensive response to the findings and recommendations of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety's report into delays in the commencement of operations at the prison.

There is no doubt in my mind that the former Belconnen Remand Centre was a less than suitable facility for housing offenders. Just ask any one of the prisoners, staff or family members who were required to be held, work or visit there or did other things there at the facility. The government has repeatedly acknowledged the problems with the ACT's ageing and inadequate remand centres. Our commitment to the construction of the AMC was a clear acknowledgement of this.

The government was in the unfortunate position that it was unable to take control of the AMC prior to March 2009. However, contrary to the accusations made by the committee's report, and repeated by Mr Hanson, there is no empirical evidence to suggest that there was a rise in security incidents in late 2008 and early 2009 at the remand centre.

In regard to human rights issues, the standing committee provided no factual basis for its assertion that there were additional human rights concerns beyond those which existed before September 2008. The committee did not substantiate its claim that the delays made the pre-existing problems with the remand centres worse. The fact is the facility was inadequate before September 2008 and it remained inadequate afterwards. And the only way that was to be addressed was by providing modern facilities such as those now available at the AMC.

Let me turn to the issue of delay in the commencement of operations at the AMC. Yes, it is true that the AMC was not ready to accept prisoners prior to 30 March 2009. But it would also be much more accurate to state that the government was not willing to accept responsibility for a facility that was not ready to hold prisoners in a safe and secure manner. The reality of the situation is that the builder of the AMC was not able to complete the security system within the agreed time frames.

This is the great myth and the great lie of that committee report—that in some way the government was responsible for the delays associated with the security system. As I stated in the tabling statement that I made yesterday, it is not just the government's opinion that this is a myth, that this is false. It is also the opinion of the independent expert appointed under the contract dispute arbitration mechanisms for the purposes of facilitating disputes between the contractor and the government in relation to the prison. That expert, contracted under those dispute resolutions and provisions of the AMC contract, has adjudicated on BLL's claim that they were not responsible for the delay and has determined that they were. It is as simple as that. The independent expert, a person expert in arbitrating commercial disputes between parties under building contracts, has determined that BLL's claim that they were entitled to extensions of time in relation to the installation of the security system was not to be supported.

Ms Bresnan: Mr Speaker, I request that Mr Corbell table that document he is quoting from, because it has not been seen.

MR CORBELL: You cannot do that. That is not a point of order. That is a debating point. She can make that point in the debate, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Bresnan, you will actually need to move a motion to that end. We will take that at the end of Mr Corbell's speech.

MR CORBELL: That is what the independent arbitrator has determined—simple as that. Any other accusation that the government was somehow responsible for the delays does not stand up to that overwhelming and very clear evidence from a person whose job it is to arbitrate commercial disputes between parties. If Ms Bresnan wants to move a motion asking for the release of that documentation, the government will accept the outcome of the Assembly's decision in that regard.

The bottom line is that the independent expert's finding in favour of the territory is clearly at odds with the view of the committee. Furthermore, the official opening of the AMC was organised under assurances from the builder that the completion of the facility was imminent. The Assembly should note that testing and certification of most components of the facility had been completed at this stage, and the government considers the decision to proceed with the opening to be a reasonable one.

I would like to assure the Assembly that the AMC does not have defects remaining in its security system. I am unable to talk in great detail at this time due to an ongoing dispute resolution process in this matter. Suffice to say that there are not remaining security system defects.

The introduction of contraband, in particular drug paraphernalia, into a prison environment is the bane of prison authorities the world over. Drugs do get into prisons and it is not a new or surprising problem. Contraband had been entering facilities wherever prisoners exist a long time before the AMC was even considered. The AMC has a number of systems in place to deter and detect the introduction of contraband. To name a few, K9, a dog squad, ion scanning, metal detectors, RFID and the SOTER x-ray machine are all measures operating at the AMC.

I am satisfied that the AMC has appropriate security mechanisms in place to minimise, to the greatest extent possible, the introduction of contraband. However, we will continue to look at ways to improve this. Indeed, it would require the introduction of highly draconian measures to keep drug paraphernalia out completely. We would, for example, have to ban all contact visits with prisoners. We would have to intrusively search all visitors, staff and authorised personnel visiting the facility each and every time they did. And I can only imagine how the community and the Human Rights Commission would react to such a policy approach.

While not critical to the secure operation of the facility, the RFID system at the AMC is a measure to enhance the operation and management of the AMC. It is still in its commissioning phase. The system is the first of its kind in Australia; the first use of this technology in Australia. The recent media scrutiny has perhaps overexaggerated the issue, but it has ensured that the systems, policies and procedures surrounding the RFID have been reviewed to tighten security arrangements.

The facilities available for prisoners at the AMC to access the internet and to use email are the most generous in the country. This has been a deliberate approach to normalise the environment in which prisoners live and to assist in their rehabilitation. ACT Corrective Services reviewed the access to the internet by prisoners to minimise the risk of abuse of the system. Access to the internet has been suspended. But, as I

indicated to the Assembly during question time earlier today, it will be reoffered shortly. Giving our prisoners every opportunity to rehabilitate is of the utmost importance to the government and will help meet community expectations of reduced recidivism and its impact on the community and the economy. Turning criminals into productive citizens can only be of great social and economic benefit.

Now I turn to the issue of the cost of running the prison. The cost of running a prison, per prisoner, per day, is influenced by a number of factors. I note that Mr Hanson has called on the government to commence negotiations with New South Wales about housing New South Wales prisoners at the AMC. The government's view is that we will not be exploring this option until all policies and procedures in place at the AMC have been put through a period of 12 months of operation.

Moreover, there has never been any indication that the New South Wales government would be interested in such an arrangement; an arrangement that would face considerable administrative hurdles, one of these being that prison numbers can fluctuate considerably and, despite the bed capacity of 300, the operational capacity is lower due to the need to separate different categories and classification of prisoners.

Again Mr Hanson shows his ignorance of some of the complex issues involved in the running of a facility such as this. Not only do we have different classifications of prisoners; within those classifications we have a further need to separate certain prisoners from other prisoners. We have prisoners on protection. We have prisoners on strict protection. We have prisoners who are not able to communicate and should not be allowed to communicate or interact with other prisoners across all classifications. Therefore, it is not the case that we can simply fill the prison to its complete capacity of 300, because the requirement to keep certain prisoners separate from other prisoners will inevitably mean that the full capacity of the prison will not be able to be utilised.

To this end, the government believes it is prudent and desirable that, after the AMC has been operational for 12 months, its policies, procedures, systems and processes be revisited and examined against the experience of delivering services for prisoners in the new setting. Furthermore, as members should be aware, the government is establishing a system of independent inspection of the AMC on an ongoing regular basis. I will make further announcements about that in due course.

In conclusion, let me say this: the AMC is an important and fundamental reform for the criminal justice system in the ACT. It is our opportunity to ensure that we do deliver best correctional practice, humane prisoner management and every opportunity for rehabilitation of our sentenced prisoners.

The decision to construct the facility was the correct one. Those on the other side of the house waxed and waned on this issue, supported it one year and did not support it the next, thought it was important at one time and then took cheap, base political advantage of it later. That is not the approach adopted by Labor. Labor has been consistent. Labor has sought at all times to advance the cause of a humane rehabilitative environment, which is needed if we are to take real responsibility for the administration of justice in our city.

If the Liberal Party had had their way, they would have taken the view “Yes, we can have as tough sentences as we like, but we won’t have to manage them. We won’t have to rehabilitate them. We’ll just send them off to New South Wales.” That was their position and that has been their position for the past eight years. Labor does not adopt that approach. Labor has remained consistent. The AMC is an important reform for criminal justice in the territory and we will continue to ensure that this facility meets our expectations of a humane and best practice prison for the ACT.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (8.45): I welcome Mr Hanson’s motion as an opportunity to have an open discussion with members in this place on the direction of our major correctional facility and what direction that should be. Prison policy often tests progressive ideologies. It provides temptation to give in to a populist argument that prisons are solely a form of punishment rather than an opportunity to reform, address reoffending and provide inmates with an opportunity to become contributing members of our community. We firmly stand by our principles in this place. Correctional facilities, whilst certainly not intended to have a hotel experience, as some commentators have called it, are intended to rehabilitate, not simply punish.

I must say that it is disappointing that the Liberals have been running the “fill the prison” line, as I think it does demonstrate a lack of understanding of how prisons operate, how they are funded and what role they play in society. Running the “tough on criminals” ideal is also disappointing. Rather than pursuing strategies that actually reduce crime and reduce reoffending rates in the long term, ignoring the need for programs that prevent reoffending ignores the true costs of preventing crime. It is a very easy line to take to criticise the amount of money being spent on an inmate in the AMC. Filling up the prison to run it at a profit or cut back on the costs of running rehab programs is not a legitimate policy.

Prisons operate more effectively when they are not at full capacity, when there is a greater ability for corrections officers to separate prisoners where necessary, where there is not the huge pressure on prisoner services that comes with a full prison. And it is easier to develop a culture inside that assists prisoners to reintegrate into society when their prison sentence has ended.

Of course you would have prisoners come from New South Wales to the ACT where that is appropriate but it should not in any way be so that we can fill the prison. That goes against any best-practice and recognised corrections principles. Furthermore, it is more than a little disingenuous to suggest that we could save millions if we were to charge New South Wales the same rate for incarcerating their prisoners as they did for ACT prisoners prior to the opening of the AMC.

Notwithstanding any savings that can be made as a result of efficiencies, we do not want to see any cuts to services at the AMC. It is necessarily more expensive to operate a prison that more effectively rehabilitates prisoners and, as such, it is difficult to see how we could save money when we receive a fee of less than what it costs to provide the rehab services we need to provide. I do hope Mr Hanson is not suggesting he wants the AMC to be modelled on the New South Wales prison system. The much-maligned New South Wales prison system has been criticised from all sides as one of the worst in the country.

The Victorian government invested a small percentage of their corrections budget in programs to prevent reoffending, prior to and after release, and it had a significant impact. This compared to New South Wales which at the time was investing little in programs to prevent reoffending, and there was a marked difference between the two states' reoffending rates. Only a few weeks ago, there was a report released which showed that up to 80 per cent of prisoners in New South Wales had a mental illness.

The ACT government have, to their credit, worked to establish a prison based on human rights principles that recognises the value in providing an environment in which a prisoner has the ability to rehabilitate and reintegrate into society and has worked to establish programs for rehabilitation in the AMC. However, we have a number of ongoing concerns about the continued engagement and provision of services to prisoners, particularly after they have left the AMC. Whilst it is an understandable technique to gradually reduce dependency on prison services, the manner in which this is implemented has to consider the practicalities of the situation prisoners are in.

It is an acknowledged and documented fact that a significant proportion of inmates suffer from mental illness and, as a part of that, continuing medication and treatment are required, yet it is incredibly difficult for prisoners released from the AMC to access basic medical services. Prisoners reliant upon antipsychotics and antidepressants can make genuine improvements to their health, provided they continue with these treatments upon release.

When the state makes the decision via the judicial process to deprive a person of liberty, the state must also recognise that it has chosen to disconnect that person from the regular services provided by the community. To that end, when a person has returned to society, having had many years disconnected from basic social services, the state must recognise that this person will find it difficult to reconnect without assistance.

For the vast majority of prisoners with a mental illness, it is the first time they have received a diagnosis or any form of medication. This is obviously a reflection on the provision of mental health services also. However, we need to be prepared for the fact that someone is likely to return to the prison system when they are unable, if unassisted, to continue necessary treatment in the community.

It is difficult enough for existing residents to secure regular GP services, let alone former inmates of the AMC. The provision of care should not stop at the front door of the prison and, whilst the government have acknowledged that through-care and after-care could be improved, not much has yet been done yet. The government have given an indication that they will develop a through-care and after-care plan but it does not seem that such a plan has yet been developed, which is a concern, given that we are almost a year into the operation of the AMC.

Moreover, as the Greens have maintained continually, we need to be doing more to limit the transmission of blood-borne viruses within the AMC. We have concerns about the collection of data, when and how people contract these diseases and how this will enable the development of an effective evidence-based policy to reduce the transmission of disease within the prison. We cannot adopt a head-in-the-sand approach when it comes to the presence of needle sharing and drug use in prisons.

The public health risks that such an attitude represents cannot be underestimated and we would expect that both public and prisoner health outcomes be considered in any review that is conducted.

A thorough, effective, transparent and prompt review of the corrections system should address all outcomes that we expect from the corrections system. Corrections holds a unique place in the state's relationship with the individual and society. The ACT Greens contend that the corrections system must go beyond punishment.

Society should demand a correctional system that takes active steps to rehabilitate those subjected to its limitations. It is always tempting for a government to choose to forget those it incarcerates. But this not only unnecessarily punitive, it undermines the law-and-order outcomes that the judicial, police and correctional systems seek to achieve.

Whilst the government has chosen to implement some principles, there are functional problems implementing this in a range of areas, particularly through-care, after-care health and access to social services. We want an independent, open and comprehensive review to assist in determining the best way forward. It is to this end that I will be proposing an amendment to this motion.

Before I conclude, I need to address particularly the problematic areas of the government's response to the committee report on the delay in the commencement of operations at the AMC. The government have repeatedly attempted to undermine the decision of the committee by continual referral to an independent expert, whose report we have not seen, nor do we have any information about how this expert came to the conclusion.

The Canberra Liberals and the ACT Greens obviously have differing concerns on the current operations and construction of the AMC. This comes from our disagreements on priorities and is understandable. What we can agree on, however, is the need for an independent review which hears from all stakeholders and will provide a fair and transparent basis for all parties in this place to develop corrections policy going into the future.

Mr Speaker, I move the amendment circulated in my name.

MR SPEAKER: I am sorry, Ms Bresnan; you cannot move that until we resolve Mr Corbell's amendment.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 5

Noes 7

Mr Barr	Ms Porter	Ms Bresnan	Mr Rattenbury
Ms Burch		Mr Doszpot	Mr Seselja
Mr Corbell		Mr Hanson	Mr Smyth
Ms Gallagher		Ms Hunter	

Question so resolved in the negative.

Amendment negatived.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (8.59), by leave: I move:

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

“(1) notes:

- (a) concerns regarding the operation of the AMC;
- (b) the unanimous findings of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety report, *Inquiry into the delay in the commencement of operations at the Alexander Maconochie Centre*; and
- (c) the Government’s intention to have a review into the operation of the AMC after its first year of operation; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) commission an independent reviewer to conduct the one year review into the AMC;
- (b) ensure that the review be open, transparent and public, and include input from community and non-government groups with an interest or involvement in the AMC, including on the terms of reference for the review;
- (c) ensure the review is completed in a timely manner and be tabled in the Legislative Assembly immediately upon completion; and
- (d) report upon the progress of the review in August 2010.”.

I have addressed the keys issues. I addressed the body of the key aspects of this amendment in my major speech. Basically, I just say that we do think it is important that there is an independent review. But it needs to address a wide variety of areas, not just security and cost concerns but also health, through-care and after-care concerns and there needs to be significant input from the community in the terms of reference.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (9.00): The government will not be supporting Ms Bresnan’s amendment, and the reason for that is that Ms Bresnan continues to insist that the findings of the committee inquiry were appropriate, and she does so in her amendment. She implies that that is the truth in relation to the matter. It is not the truth, and other members of this Assembly are going to have to get their heads around the fact that they got it wrong. They got it wrong when the committee concluded that the government was responsible for delays and that it was not simply the security system that led to the delays.

That is not the result of the independent arbitration that has occurred. This arbitration has been commissioned by, and undertaken by, the parties in accordance with commonly accepted and universal commercial arbitration approaches and methodologies. It has been undertaken by a person expert in the arbitration of commercial disputes.

I love how Mr Hanson and Ms Bresnan put themselves in the shoes of those experts, people with decades and decades of experience in arbitrating commercial disputes, and say, “No, we know better. The arbitrator, that is not relevant.” It is entirely relevant because, under the contract that the territory entered into with the contractor to build the prison, there were clear and specific mechanisms for resolving disputes and determining who was responsible for delays. That is what was in the contract.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR CORBELL: I know they do not like to listen to this stuff, because they know they got it wrong. The Liberal Party know they got it wrong. The Greens know they got it wrong. The committee knows it got it wrong. The committee knows it got it wrong, because in that contract there are specific dispute mechanisms for determining who is responsible for delay and who needs to pay for that delay. It is a legal process. And that legal process has been completed. It has not been disputed by BLL. The arbitrator has determined—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR CORBELL: You do not like it, but it is the truth and you need to get your heads around it. The arbitrator has determined that BLL is responsible for the delays and the delays are associated with the installation of the security system. If you want to see that arbitrator’s report, call for that arbitrator’s report.

Ms Hunter: Table it.

MR CORBELL: Those are the facts, and the members of this Assembly who do not believe that need to start getting their heads around it. I hear the interjection from Ms Hunter that the government should table it. I would be happy to provide it to the Assembly if the Assembly so ordered. The reason I take that approach is that the contract between the territory and BLL as the contractor has a confidentiality clause in relation to the results of arbitration. However, there is also a clause in the contract that says the territory is released from that confidentiality clause if the minister has to do certain things in relation to his obligations to report to the Assembly.

I cannot volunteer it but, if the Assembly so orders, the government can provide it. That is the legal position and that is why I have adopted the course of action that I have. That is entirely appropriate. The government has made provision in the contract for Assembly processes and, if the Assembly so orders, the government will provide it.

The government will not be supporting Ms Bresnan’s amendment. It fails to recognise that there is a problem, and the problem lies with the committee report. For that reason, it cannot be supported.

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, I seek leave to move that Mr Corbell table the document that he quoted from by the close of business tomorrow.

Mr Corbell: I haven't.

Mr Hanson: He quoted from it.

Mr Corbell: You need to put a motion in writing.

Mr Hanson: I seek leave to move a motion.

Mr Corbell: You need to write it out and you need to circulate it so that we can see it. Motions must be in writing, Mr Hanson.

MR SPEAKER: The considered wisdom is that you should write out this motion so that there is clarity under standing order 213A, not 213. Then you will need to seek leave to move the motion. Perhaps we can continue with the current motion while you prepare that and we can come back to you. Does that sound reasonable?

Mr Hanson: It sounds reasonable, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Excellent.

Question put:

That **Ms Bresnan's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7

Noes 5

Ms Bresnan
Mr Doszpot
Mr Hanson
Ms Hunter

Mr Rattenbury
Mr Seselja
Mr Smyth

Mr Barr
Ms Burch
Mr Corbell
Ms Gallagher

Ms Porter

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (9.10): I would like to close. Briefly, I am in the process of circulating my motion to seek that Mr Corbell table the advice of the independent expert—the decision, as he is referring to it. Once that is circulated, I will move the motion.

In summary, let me say that I am glad that we have had the outcome we have had today. There is a need for an independent review of the jail. It has been a disappointing episode in the history of the ACT—indeed, in the Assembly—when we

see a minister, the Attorney-General, rather than accepting the tripartisan report, actually turn on members of the Assembly, Greens, Labor and Liberal.

To quote from his speech today, he said “the lie of the committee report”. He is essentially calling the members of the committee liars, including Mary Porter, his own member. I can only ask this: was she naive? I do not think that is right. Was she politically motivated to attack Simon Corbell? I assume not. Or is she actually correct, as are the other members of the committee—the Greens member and the Liberal member? Maybe Simon Corbell needs to heed the committee’s report rather than attack its members.

Without going over old ground, one interesting fact that was put forward by Mr Corbell is that the design of the prison is such that you cannot actually get it to the capacity of 300. That is his reason for not wanting to bring prisoners from New South Wales. I would be intrigued to find out if that is the case. What is the capacity of the jail? If it is not 300—if we have 300 beds but in effect we can only have 200 prisoners there—that is information that would be interesting. I would ask that the minister provide that information at some stage to the Assembly. If the capacity is not 300, what is the capacity of the jail by the time you have to move around different categories of prisoners?

I will say to the Greens that I think that there is some confusion about what I am asking for with New South Wales prisoners being brought to the territory. I think that it is good for their rehabilitation; I think that it is a cost-effective measure. Because of the largely fixed costs of the jail, according to the advice provided by John Hargreaves at estimates hearings, by bringing prisoners in—this is something that John Hargreaves was calling for back in 2001—you would be able to mitigate some of the costs of the prison. It would be good for rehabilitation.

I certainly would not be calling for prisoners to be brought from New South Wales if that was to exceed the capacity of the prison. We do want to make sure that the prison can operate effectively. But it is a worthy goal that I think would support everybody’s needs and ensure that the costs of the prison are not such that we cannot put money from the territory into the diversionary-type programs that we want to have.

Mr Speaker, do we need to have the vote before I move my motion?

MR SPEAKER: Let us finish this item, Mr Hanson; then I will give you the floor again.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Order to table

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (9.14), by leave: I move:

That, under standing order 213A, the Attorney-General table the independent expert’s decision by 4 p.m., Thursday, 11 February 2010.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (9.14): Mr Speaker, I want to put a couple of issues on the record before Mr Hanson's motion is passed.

The motion will be passed, because the government will not object to this motion at all. The first reason for that is that I accept and understand that there is a legitimate interest by members to see this document, and the government has no objection to being ordered by the Assembly to produce the document. It is important to put on the record the reasons why this course of action needs to be adopted.

As I indicated earlier in the debate this evening, the contract that the territory has entered into with Bovis Lend Lease has a confidentiality clause in it in relation to disclosure of matters relating to the determination and arbitration of any disputes between the territory and the contract of BLL. The territory inserted into the contract clauses which allow the responsible minister to not abide by that confidentiality clause should it be necessary for the purposes of reporting to the Assembly in relation to the operations of the contract.

The territory and the government have always recognised that there will be circumstances where the Assembly itself will be interested in the exercise of issues around dispute between the territory and the contractor, and made sure that there were provisions in the contract that allowed the Assembly to see this. We are not in any way hiding behind any sort of commercial-in-confidence procedure. In fact, we have explicitly made sure that there are provisions in the contract to allow us to be exempt from what would otherwise be quite a routine confidentiality clause.

This expert determination was conducted by Mr Steven Goldstein. As members will see, it is 69 pages long and it outlines in detail his judgement and his determination as a legal expert in the arbitration of disputes under the contract that the territory was not responsible for the delays and that the delays were a consequence of BLL's failure to install the security system on time.

It is important to note that BLL has not challenged this determination. It is also important to remind members why these types of clauses are in commercial contracts. They are put in commercial contracts, particularly construction contracts, to avoid the need for parties to resort immediately to the court. When these clauses are put into contracts, it allows the parties to resolve the dispute without going to court—and all the cost and time that is entailed in that—in the first instance, by instead appointing an expert independent arbiter to determine the dispute. Parties do have the opportunity, once that determination is made, to appeal it and to resort to court processes. It is worth noting that BLL have not sought to proceed to court in relation to this determination by the independent expert, and the time period has now elapsed.

Essentially, this matter about this dispute is at an end. The territory has been successful. The independent arbiter has ruled in our favour. The independent arbiter has ruled that the territory is entitled to pursue liquidated damages. That is something which is now the subject of further negotiations between the territory and the contractor.

The government will not be opposing this motion. The government will accept that the Assembly has a legitimate interest in these documents. Once the Assembly so orders, I will table the documentation.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (9.19): We are, of course, pleased to be supporting this motion by Mr Hanson that has been put before the Assembly tonight. It is important to get this independent expert's decision, but I want to make a few points about this.

I am amazed that the committee that was looking into the delays in the AMC was still deliberating around June, when I believe this decision was made—June-July. That was still deliberation; it was an ongoing inquiry. And the government had this information. I do not understand why, at that time, the committee was not informed that this had been undertaken and that the document was not forwarded to the committee to be part of its deliberation. I simply cannot understand why this information has been kept secret and has seen the light of day only at this very late stage. Mr Corbell, I think yesterday was the first time I heard you mention this, and that was in your response to the committee's report. I just do not understand why that information, which was obviously critical and central to that inquiry into the delay at the AMC, was not made available to the committee of this Assembly that was investigating that matter.

You have had a go tonight. You have said that the Liberal Party has got it wrong and that the Greens have got it wrong. It was a three-person committee, Mr Corbell. That means that every party in this place got it wrong. Maybe—just maybe—if the government had made that decision to forward this critical piece of information, that really would have helped with the deliberations of the committee.

I felt that it was very important to put that on the record. I find it astounding that, some eight months or so down the track, suddenly this comes to light. I look forward to receiving this advice when it is tabled.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (9.21): Mr Speaker, I seek leave to speak again and clarify a number of matters.

Leave granted.

MR CORBELL: In response to the matters raised by Ms Hunter, I would say two things. First of all, I was under the impression that members of committees operated as individuals, not as representatives of their parties. Indeed, that is the convention: members sit as individuals. And, as Ms Hunter should know, members of committees are not allowed to disclose the proceedings of committee deliberations to other members, particularly to ministers. So any suggestion that the government was complicit in the findings of that committee is quite inaccurate, and I reject it absolutely.

Secondly, Mr Speaker, Ms Hunter asks the legitimate question about why this information was not made known to the Assembly or the committee earlier. There are two reasons for that. The first, and the most significant, is that the arbitrator's decision occurred in July. There is a two-month appeal period for the arbitrator's decision, which brought that period to a date in September. I do not know the exact date, but it brought it to a date in September last year.

Further, the government—and I as the responsible minister, and it is important to remember that I became the responsible minister late last year—had clear advice from our legal representatives that there was the potential to prejudice ongoing commercial negotiations with the contractor should the information be released prior to when it was released. It was only when I received advice from my legal advisers that the information could be released that I did so. And, of course, I did so consistent with the advice I received from the Chief Solicitor in the Government Solicitor's Office.

Those are the reasons, Mr Speaker. There was no conspiracy, no attempt to hamstring or make life difficult for the committee. And, as I have continually said, all of the facts that were available to the expert arbitrator were available to the committee. They were all the same facts. Indeed, what the government said to the expert arbiter the government said to the committee. The point is that the committee got it wrong.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Paper

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (9.24): Mr Speaker, I table the following paper:

Alexander Maconochie Centre—Expert determination between Australian Capital Territory -v- Bovis Lend Lease Pty Ltd—Contract No C06579—Construction of the ACT Prison, prepared by Steven Goldstein, dated 3 July 2009.

The expert is Mr Steven Goldstein.

Adjournment

Motion by **Mr Corbell** proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Dr Enrico Taglietti

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (9:25): Mr Speaker, I would imagine that most of us in the Assembly would agree that Canberra is becoming known around the world for the quality and variety of its architecture. This reflects in very large part the contribution of a number of distinguished architects who have made their mark in our nation's capital over the last century.

One of those who deserve to be better known by Canberrans for his creation of an astonishing array of local architectural landmarks is Dr Enrico Taglietti. Dr Taglietti's first major project was the acclaimed Townhouse Motel and Noah's Restaurant in Civic, since demolished. Some of the many fine buildings in Canberra designed by Dr Taglietti include Dickson library, the embassy of Italy chancellery, the Italo-Australia Club, the Australian War Memorial Annex, Dickson health centre, Woden youth centre, the Apostolic Nunciature, the Latham, Flynn, Giralang and Gowrie primary schools, and a number of innovative homes, including the Dingle house in Hughes, the Paterson house in Aranda and the Killen house of Mount Majura.

Dr Taglietti was born in Milan, Italy, and first visited Australia in 1955. He and his wife, Francesca, were so impressed with Canberra that they decided to settle here the following year. In 2007 he was awarded Australia's most coveted architecture prize, the Royal Australian Institute of Architects gold medal for architecture. Enrico Taglietti is another outstanding success in Australia's multicultural community. In its citation for the gold medal, the jury noted that Dr Taglietti's work demonstrates the architectural story of an immigrant seeing a new country with a clear vision, and he continues an important tradition of successful immigrant architects including Harry Seidler, Frederick Romberg and, more recently, Romaldo Giurgola.

It is a feather in Canberra's cap that, although Dr Taglietti's practice is based in Milan and he continues to receive commissions from around the world, he has chosen to remain here in Canberra. I would like to bring to members' attention the fact that Dr Taglietti will be delivering a lecture about his work in Canberra at the National Library of Australia at 12.30 pm on Wednesday, 17 February. This is the first in the 2010 Canberra series lectures presented by the friends of the National Library. I commend this talk to all of us here in the Assembly as an opportunity to learn at first hand of the contribution of a remarkable Australian to the architectural development of our community.

Mr George Smith

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (9:27): I would just like briefly to take the opportunity to pay tribute to George Smith, who has in the last few days announced his retirement from the Wallabies and that this will be his last season here with the Brumbies. George Smith has been one of our greatest ever rugby players, certainly one of the best players to pull on a Wallaby jersey and easily one of the best players to pull on a Brumbies jersey. He played 110 tests for the Wallabies and he got four consecutive Australian super 14 player of the year awards and two John Eales medals.

George Smith, of course, is one of the Brumbies who was not a local junior but whom we pinched from New South Wales. It is obviously a tribute to the foresight of the Brumbies as an organisation in spotting the talent that obviously the New South Wales Waratahs were not smart enough to identify. George Smith has served both the Brumbies and the Wallabies; he has been one of the most consistent players in Australian rugby during the last decade or so. He is one of the few Wallabies to have played over 100 tests, and to do that in the forwards, I think, makes that even more impressive.

I would like to wish George well. I am sure we will have further opportunities during this season to farewell George Smith from Canberra. But, on behalf of the Canberra Liberals, I would like to pay tribute to what has been a fantastic career with the Wallabies and a fantastic career with the Brumbies. We wish him all the best in his retirement in whatever future plans he has.

Planning—Nicholls

MR COE (Ginninderra) (9:29): In late December we received news that the proposed direct sale of section 73 block 17 at Nicholls to the Canberra Muslim community for the construction of a mosque and community centre would not go ahead. We learnt that the Canberra Muslim community would instead be seeking another block of land.

I welcome this news, as do many residents of Nicholls. The proposed development was met with concern by residents of Nicholls due to the ongoing traffic and parking issues in and around the shops. This decision by the Canberra Muslim community president, Mr Yusuf, takes into account the shortage of parking and the excessive traffic on Kelleway Avenue, relatively poor access to public transport and the small size of the block.

It was quite amazing that this site was even suggested by the Stanhope government in the first place given the well-documented parking and traffic problems at Nicholls that had been spoken about at length in the Assembly last year. It was another example of the way this government treats the community with contempt. The first the community learnt about this proposal was a small advertisement at the back of the *Chronicle*. It was an invitation at short notice to a consultation session that was being held mid-afternoon a suburb away in Palmerston. In other words, the government hoped that no-one would notice. It should not matter what the structure is or who is the proponent; it is the government's responsibility to keep stakeholders informed.

A later information session held at the Gold Creek school was extremely well attended, and the concerns that I have already mentioned above were conveyed. But how did the community find out about this meeting? Through my letterboxing. I met people at the meeting who only knew about the meeting because of what they had received from me. The government, as with the Nicholls shops, failed to provide adequate notice to the community.

What did Mary Porter do throughout this debacle? What did the self-proclaimed "your voice in the ACT government" do to ensure the community's concerns reached those in government? Nothing. She was conspicuously silent in this whole affair. There was no voice to be heard. It seems that Ms Porter is more interested in keeping up appearances than taking up the concerns of the community. Meredith Hunter, the supposed third-party insurance, was also nowhere to be seen in this debate. It was left to the Liberal members for Ginninderra—Vicki Dunne and myself. It has to be said that Ms Hunter is rarely seen in Belconnen, Nicholls or Hall.

I am very glad in this case that the views of the community were aired and acted upon. I and the community understand the need for a Canberra Muslim community to

construct a second mosque for worshippers on the northern side of the city. I think it is important that the location of the centre meets the following objectives: that it is of sufficient size and location to accommodate their needs; that it is at a location that can easily handle traffic and parking; that it is accessible to public transport; and that it is at a location that is acceptable to all concerned.

The Canberra Muslim community have been duded by the ACT government. Perhaps if the government were not so obstructionist towards community groups when they seek blocks of land, community groups would not feel compelled to accept any block that is offered to them after years of jumping through hoops. It is in the best interests of the Canberra Muslim community and all Canberrans that the new location for a mosque is at the most suitable site. I have been told by representatives of the Canberra Muslim community that they are keen for the mosque to be a part of the surrounding community and to be in a location welcomed by nearby residents.

It is important to note that the block of land in question has always been classified as a community facility zone. The conversation now must be about what is a suitable use for this block of land. An expanded car park for the shops could be one such use. In conclusion, the right decision has been reached for the residents of Nicholls and the Canberra Muslim community. It is a shame the ACT Labour government mishandled and misled all concerned for such a long time.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 9.33 pm.