



# Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD  
SEVENTH ASSEMBLY

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

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**Wednesday, 5 May 2010**

**The Assembly met at 10am.**

*(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.

## **Papers**

**Ms Bresnan**, by leave, presented the following paper:

Radiation Protection (Tanning Units) Amendment Bill 2010—Explanatory statement, dated 5 May 2010.

**MS PORTER** (Ginninderra) (10.03): I present the following paper:

Retirement Villages Bill 2010—

Exposure draft.

Supporting document, dated May 2010.

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

Leave granted.

**MS PORTER:** It gives me great pleasure to table in the Assembly today the exposure draft of the Retirement Villages Bill 2010.

Some members will recall that I formally tabled *Retirement villages in the ACT: a discussion paper* in August 2008, which was compiled after extensive research into the retirement village legislation in other jurisdictions across Australia and a lengthy consultation process involving people living in or with an interest in living in a retirement village, the industry and relevant peak bodies.

At the time of tabling the discussion paper, I drew members' attention to the fact that the ACT has one of the fastest growing populations of older people in Australia. The 2006 census indicates there are almost 66,000 people aged 55 years and over living in the ACT. It is expected that by 2047 the proportion of people living in the ACT aged 65 years and over will represent 21.5 per cent of the total population. This is double the current elderly portion of our population. In fact, ACT government population projections predict that from 2006 to 2016 we will see a 5.2 per cent increase in people aged 60 years and over, moving from 13.7 per cent of the total ACT population to 18.9 per cent.

The challenges posed by our ageing population are increasingly becoming the focus of economic and social policy, not only for the ACT government but for government

at every level. As I said, we are facing a very real challenge in relation to the ageing of our population, the result of a decline in fertility rates, an increase in life expectancy and the ageing of the baby boomer generation.

As the population ages, people are expected to live longer, continue to actively participate in the paid or voluntary workforce, beyond what is traditionally the retirement age, and maintain a high level of general health and wellbeing. The ACT government is committed to responding to the needs of an ageing population, such as the health and wellbeing of older Canberrans, including the impacts of disability, housing and accommodation, support services for older people, transport and work and retirement issues, including ongoing employment opportunities and planning for retirement.

It is also worth noting that the ACT previously had quite a transient population, with Canberrans more likely to be without the constant support of extended family members. However, this trend is changing, with more and more people choosing to retire in the ACT or returning to Canberra after initially moving elsewhere to retire.

It is also expected that many people will seek to downsize their current living arrangements. For many older people in our community, remaining in the family home, large enough to raise a family and set on a reasonable-size block, may present challenges that, if not solved, may have a detrimental effect on one's wellbeing. However, as we are remaining healthier and more active in our community as we age, it was found during the consultation process that people contemplating a move to a retirement village may not do so until their 80th year and beyond. This phenomenon poses particular challenges for those managing retirement village living. As I said last year, because of this, it is important that individuals are able to make informed choices that continue to maximise their living arrangements and their independence as they grow older.

The ACT government continues to support positive ageing through a number of strategies, as we know. The Stanhope government has a range of initiatives to make downsizing more affordable for older Canberrans, to help people adapt their housing and to age in place.

In relation to aged care and independent living property developments, the ACT government is committed to working with the building industry and aged-care providers to reduce the time it takes to deliver high-quality aged persons accommodation. The whole-of-government case management approach has assisted proponents on virtually all projects.

However, I, as you know, have taken a personal interest in the welfare of people who have chosen to live in a retirement village environment, as a number of matters of considerable concern in relation to their living arrangements have been raised with me over some time.

When I first started to look into the issue of retirement villages, I found that legislation existed in every other state and territory in Australia that regulated this industry. In the ACT, it is currently governed under a code of practice, the Fair

Trading (Retirement Villages Industry) Code of Practice 1999. Through examining the legislation of other jurisdictions and after extensive consultation, I identified the need to bring the ACT into line with other jurisdictions.

A considerable number of written and verbal submissions were received during the consultation process, giving valuable insight into the specific and important areas of concern. Issues of concern broadly fell under the following: information disclosure, financial management and dispute resolution.

It was clear that there was a need for comprehensive legislation to be enacted in the ACT to regulate the retirement village industry, which was, and is, growing in size, due to our changing demographics, and is being joined by interstate players formerly governed by the legislation in their state of origin.

My initial discussion paper made 31 recommendations and identified several key areas of concern under those broad headings that I mentioned previously. The primary issues that needed to be addressed were around the adequate disclosure of information, particularly at the time of choosing to move into retirement village living, improved financial management and disclosure of financial information, and clear and accessible processes for dispute resolution when problems arise.

It was also apparent that some people who chose to live in a retirement village had varied expectations, some of which may not have been met, and possibly will never be met. For instance, many people believed, when signing a contract to buy into or lease a retirement village home, that they were then automatically entitled to move, if and when the time came, to higher need care that the owner may also have on the same property or adjacent to it—that is, a hostel or nursing home.

Nursing homes and hostels are governed by commonwealth legislation, the Aged Care Act 1997, and a person residing in a retirement village who believes, or whose carers believe, they need to move to such an institution need to be separately assessed and approved for such care. The decision as to whether a person is moved to an aged-care residential facility owned and managed by the same provider as the retirement village is based on availability at the time and the suitability of the facility. There is no automatic right.

It was clear that full disclosure of information relevant to this significant lifestyle choice was necessary to ensure that such decisions were based on a solid understanding of what was to follow. There is a great deal to consider, as you can imagine, and matters can be very complex and even confusing to some. Critically, people need to make informed choices about their living arrangements at all stages of their adult life.

As members would be aware, the discussion paper was subsequently released for further community comment, and I was very pleased to receive substantial comment and feedback at that stage of the process. I would also note that my office still receives considerable requests from people living in retirement villages in the ACT relating to the issues that I have described above, who are anxiously anticipating the passing of this legislation, as well as interest in its progress by industry and peak bodies.

I feel confident that the exposure draft of the legislation that I am tabling today will address the matter I have mentioned in a constructive way, giving certainty not only to those who choose to live in a retirement village but also to the industry.

The primary object of this bill is to promote consumer protection and fair trading practices in relation to operating retirement villages. It will also ensure that prospective residents have available to them the necessary information to make an informed decision as to whether or not retirement village living will best serve their interests. The information will be accessible, clear and consistent, and I believe that this will result in increased confidence in the industry. It will also promote growth and ensure the viability of the retirement village industry in the ACT, as well as assisting individuals in their choices.

This draft bill, once enacted, will see the consistent adoption of best practice standards for the retirement village industry and will provide a clear regulatory framework to ensure certainty for the retirement village industry in planning for future expansion. It will also encourage other industry players currently operating under legislation interstate to consider moving to the ACT and setting up business.

It is interesting to make a comparative analysis of what is occurring in other places in the world with similar demographics. The first retirement village did not appear in Japan until the early 1980s, yet there are now over 7,500 such establishments, known as silver peer units, in retirement communities in Tokyo alone, to support its rapidly ageing population. Traditionally, Japanese elderly continued to live with their children, but today many Japanese are opting for communal living facilities as they believe that their dignity will be best preserved through the independence that such establishments provide. Even in a family-oriented country such as Japan, a well-managed network of retirement villages provides a viable alternative.

Figures that were released earlier this year indicated that the retirement village industry is in a relatively strong position in Australia in spite of the problematic economic environment that we have been and are still currently enduring. In 2009, the number of retirement villages in Australia grew by four per cent, and the number of dwellings grew by five per cent. However, the figures that were released at this time also showed that the number of people living in these retirement villages grew by only 3.1 per cent, a figure obviously inferior to the level of growth in the number of villages. During the same period, there was a spike in interest in serviced apartments. A loss of confidence in the retirement village industry was identified as the primary reason for this trend. I believe the underpinning legislation that I am proposing will help to generate greater confidence in the industry.

Members will be aware of this government's strong commitment to all aspects of positive ageing. One has only to look at the recently released positive ageing strategy for evidence of this. Throughout this process, I have been pleased to receive the support of my colleagues, and the commitment of the Chief Minister before the last election, when he was also then the Minister for Ageing, that should a Labor government be formed after October 2008, this government would table retirement village legislation, a promise that I am fulfilling by tabling this exposure draft today.

I would particularly like to thank the staff of the parliamentary counsel for their assistance in drafting this legislation. Here in the Legislative Assembly, members are very fortunate to be able to call upon an array of dedicated professionals to help us in our work, and I would like to recognise the contribution that was made in this process.

I would also like to thank former staff members Emma Smith and Annika Hutchins for their contributions throughout the early stage of this process, and of course my current staff, Andrew Hunter, Charles Njora and Jack Simpson. I would also like to thank other supporters that have been helping me throughout this process with the consultations, such as the peak bodies and the retirement villages themselves, in helping me through that process of consultation. It has been a long journey and it is important to recognise those who played a role in the formative days.

I believe this draft legislation, when it is finally enacted, will provide the people of Canberra with adequate protections when moving into retirement village living arrangements, whilst also providing certainty for the industry. Interested parties now have an opportunity to comment on the draft exposure bill, and I look forward to receiving this feedback. I am sure the final bill, when it is tabled in this place, will meet the needs of all stakeholders.

## **Road Transport (Alcohol and Drugs) (Random Drug Testing) Amendment Bill 2009**

Debate resumed from 17 March 2010, on motion by **Mr Hanson**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**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) (10.17): Mr Speaker, let me say at the outset that the government has no in-principle opposition at all to the introduction of random roadside drug testing as a road safety initiative to deter drug driving. I have previously outlined the process that the government proposed to pursue, accepting Mr Hanson's bill that has been proposed in relation to this.

Members will recall that when this issue was raised previously, in our last sitting week, I indicated that the government would release a discussion paper and that from the discussion paper we would take submissions. We would then prepare an exposure draft bill. It was my expectation then that the Assembly would agree to debate the bill that the government proposes to introduce cognately with Mr Hanson's bill.

At one level I regret that Mr Hanson has decided not to support that particular process and wishes to proceed unilaterally with his legislation today, in the face of advice from me and from the government that we were engaged in a process—a process of community consultation—in relation to roadside drug testing and that that process has not yet concluded. I must say, Mr Speaker, that I welcome the joint submission that the government received from you and Ms Bresnan in relation to our discussion paper.

We are still awaiting one significant submission that, it has been indicated to us, is under preparation but has not yet been concluded. That is a submission from ACT Policing on the issues pertinent to a roadside drug testing regime.

That is the position the government finds itself in at the moment in relation to this proposal. We have foreshadowed an alternative process because we do have some genuine concerns with some of the technical aspects of Mr Hanson's approach and proposal. We have issued a discussion paper. We have invited submissions. We have received submissions. ACT police have indicated to us that they would prefer some additional time in which to prepare their submission. In the context of that advice from me today, I am not quite sure of the wisdom of a process that proceeds in the absence of formal advice from those that would be charged with implementing the scheme and those that would be responsible for the legislation, who have indicated they wish to be involved but have not yet been able to conclude their consideration.

I understand that the bill is being presented; we are going to debate it. Ms Bresnan advises that the position the Greens have arrived at is that they are prepared, because of the significance and importance of the issue, to proceed to the in-principle stage today and that there would be agreement then to adjourn the detail stage. The government would welcome that if the Assembly were minded to adjourn at the in-principle stage to give the Assembly an opportunity to consider some amendments.

I am not quite sure how the process would work if this bill is agreed to in principle today, but I would have hoped that there was some capacity then, through the detail stage, for issues that may, for instance, be raised by ACT Policing and be incorporated in a government response, to be debated cognately, say, in June, when we next return. We could conclude the debate on Mr Hanson's bill, which the government now is happy to do, but would welcome an opportunity to be able to present amendments at that stage, amendments which I imagine will flow from the outcomes of the consultation which the government is currently undertaking.

I should say—and I say this genuinely in acknowledgement of an undertaking that I gave last time, an expectation that I had—that I did indicate an expectation that TAMS would have concluded the drafting of a bill by this stage. They have not. I acknowledge that an undertaking or an expectation that I aired when last this matter was raised has not been met. I accept responsibility for that, but the department has had some capacity constraint and has not been able to conclude drafting. I acknowledge that. I did give an undertaking that I would have draft legislation that members could consider by today, and I do not. I accept that and ask for the Assembly's understanding.

I indicate that the government are prepared to support this matter moving through in principle. We will not support it in principle, but I accept that it will be agreed to in principle and I would like an opportunity to then have the matter adjourned so that the Assembly has the benefit of amendments that the government would propose to bring to the Assembly for consideration.

Having outlined the government's position, I will just say briefly now that the core of the concerns that the government has with this bill is our belief that, for random

roadside drug testing legislation to have the road safety effects intended, the legislation does need to be very carefully crafted and does need to be crafted or drafted in the right way. To that extent, it is important that it be understood not just by legislators, the courts, politicians and perhaps the police, but by the general public at whom it is aimed. We have genuine concerns that this bill can be improved upon in those regards.

We think there are some serious flaws that make this particular approach impractical for the courts to uphold, particularly when random roadside drug-driving charges get to the court. We believe that aspects of the way in which this particular model for roadside testing has been crafted will make it very difficult for the police to undertake random roadside tests. That is the advice which my department provides to me, and it is advice that I choose to accept. Mr Hanson has another view. Indeed, Mr Hanson can rightly claim that his model is based very much on the Victorian model. I am advised that there are differences and exceptions which are important in relation to the similarity between the two.

As I say, I would welcome an opportunity at the detail stage to be able to put forward some proposals for change to some of those issues. Some of the issues which we will go to in amendments that we would propose to move go to what I am advised is the impracticality of the nature by which the tests will be undertaken as a consequence of the approach Mr Hanson proposes. For instance, I am advised that there are issues in relation to clause 5 of the bill and the definition of “approved drug screening device” as a device that can “give an indication of the concentration of the drug in the person’s oral fluid”. The technical advice that I have received from the department is that there are serious issues and concerns with that particular approach to determining whether or not a person has taken drugs. I am advised, for instance, that, firstly, the equipment currently available for accurately determining the concentration of a particular drug in a person’s oral fluid is not appropriate for use in high volume roadside drug screening programs. The roadside screening and analysis devices currently in use in Victoria and in other jurisdictions, including Tasmania, are designed primarily to detect the presence of certain illegal drugs. They do not provide an evidentially certain indication of the concentration of those drugs in a person’s oral fluid.

You might say that you will not get to that because you will, by other devices, insist that there be no concentration. So in fact, whilst it is determined or explained or defined as a process that actually determines the presence—that the approved drug screening device is designed to determine the concentration of the drug in the person’s oral fluid—it will never, ever get to that because there will be a nil concentration determined. But that is incredibly clumsy. In an evidentiary sense, if these matters are challenged in court, I am advised that, after a charge, these matters will create very significant evidentiary issues for a prosecutor.

The experience from random breath testing programs in other places, I am told, shows that a high volume of random roadside tests must be carried out each year in order to produce a change in driver behaviour. Essentially, unless there is visible enforcement of the legislation, people who would drug drive would not be deterred. And, because police have no access to a screening device that can measure the concentration of a

drug in a person's oral fluid—because it simply does not exist—it is impossible to implement the random roadside testing scheme that Mr Hanson envisages through this legislation. As there will be no random roadside aspect to the legislation because high volume testing cannot be undertaken through limitations on technology, there will be no cultural effect. No behaviours in our community will change as a result of the legislation drafted on this model.

Another reason that has been presented to me as a result of my department's understanding of this particular issue is that any drug testing regime based on a prescribed concentration approach to roadside screening tests is impractical because it assumes, quite wrongly, that it is easy to detect the level of a prescribed drug in a person's oral fluid and to set a legislative limit for oral fluid or blood concentration that statistically correlates to the actual risk of driving impairment at that drug concentration level.

For alcohol, there is a clear statistical correlation between the level of alcohol detected through breath analysis and the level of alcohol in the blood. By contrast, the relationship between drug levels in oral fluid and drug levels in blood is far less clear. The quantity of a drug present in a person's oral fluid can be substantially affected by factors that are unrelated to the quantity of drug actually ingested, such as the person's oral fluid production rates or the person's hydration levels.

Significantly, some drugs that are found in oral fluid are not actually secreted in saliva at all. An example is THC, which is the primary psychoactive substance found in cannabis. Although THC is not secreted in saliva, it can be detected in a person's oral fluid for a short time after ingestion because it binds to mucosal cells in the person's mouth and throat, and those cells act to "contaminate" the person's oral fluid. The method of ingestion affects the rate at which THC is bound to those cells. For this reason, oral fluid analysis does not provide a reliable indication of the quantity consumed, although it is a good means of detecting recent cannabis use.

As I mentioned earlier, another significant problem that the department advised me of is that, with a prescribed concentration approach to drug-driving laws, there is comparatively little statistical information on the relationship between the quantities ingested, the resulting concentration in oral fluid or blood and any associated risk of driving impairment.

The data that we do have, which are primarily derived from blood taken from road accident victims, clearly show that taking certain illegal drugs before driving increases the driver's accident risk. How that risk level changes, either with dosage or as drugs are metabolised and withdrawn, the relationship between blood or oral fluid concentration and impairing effect needs more research.

It is known that some drugs in the stimulant class—amphetamine-based drugs—have their greatest impairing effects as they wear off rather than when they are at their highest blood concentration. For drugs in this category, a system based on prescribed concentration could be especially dangerous, as users may delay driving until the drug starts to wear off, at which point the level of driving impairment may be at its greatest.

The difficulties in setting a “safe” level of drug use for drivers are implicitly acknowledged in the bill itself. Proposed new section 11(4) makes it clear that there is no prescribed concentration for cannabis or methamphetamine, both of which have been detected in statistically significant numbers of drivers involved in accidents. The bill also anticipates that other illicit drugs will also not have a specific concentration prescribed in legislation.

It seems to me, and this is the advice of the department, that it is not particularly helpful to create an offence of “exceed prescribed concentration” and then elsewhere in the legislation, after creating the offence of “exceed prescribed concentration”, have a “no concentration” limit in relation to the prescribed concentration.

In the context of message, and the cultural effect and the desire to change behaviours, which is what legislation such as this and drink-driving legislation are all about, it is counter-intuitive to create a drug testing regime based on prescribed concentration—sending the message that we are about prescribed concentrations, with the implicit or subliminal message being that there is a concentration of drug that you can imbibe or consume that will not affect your capacity to drive—and then, in other places in the legislation, in the fine print in the regulations or as a subparagraph somewhere, say, “And by the way, the prescribed concentration in relation to the ingestion of marijuana or methamphetamine is nil.” It is counter-intuitive and it is clumsy in a legislative sense, particularly when there are alternatives.

That is the point that the government is making. This is a clumsy model—a prescribed concentration model which is achieved by then declaring that the concentration that is prescribed is nil. That is the fundamental concern that my department and the government have. There is another and better model than a prescribed concentration model, particularly where, if any are prescribed, the concentration is nil.

From comments that Mr Hanson has made in the media, I understand that it is his proposal to declare a zero concentration in relation to all prescribed substances. That is a nonsense approach. That is a nonsense.

**Mrs Dunne:** He is struggling.

**MR STANHOPE:** No, I am not. You know it is just a logical absurdity. It is an absurdity that you cannot, when driving, exceed the prescribed concentration—

**Mrs Dunne:** The fact that you are behaving like this shows that you are struggling.

**MR STANHOPE:** I am not struggling a bit. It is just illogical. It is a nonsense to create a whole legislative regime based on a notional concentration. By the way, you have created this whole edifice around a model based on a proscription—

**Mr Hanson:** Is that your one argument?

**MR STANHOPE:** No. I could reread the speech. I will start again. I will go back to the start and repeat the concerns that the government has.

**Mr Hanson:** Do you need to because you have run out of puff?

**MR STANHOPE:** No. If you were not listening, I am more than happy to start again. The point is this, as I say. The difficulty in setting a safe level of drug use, as Mr Hanson proposes, for drivers is acknowledged in the bill. There was some tweaking once Mr Hanson had pointed out to him by me the essential absurdities. He rushed off and produced a few amendments. Proposed new section 11(4) deems to address the concerns that I have raised.

So concerned was Mr Hanson that he went out and introduced amendments to his own bill, realising how flawed it was. He then determined that the prescribed concentration of cannabis—

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MR STANHOPE:** Actually, after I embarrassed him in relation to this. What concentration of cannabis do you propose is safe? What concentration of methamphetamine? And there is the issue of the cultural change which we seek to address through legislation such as this. That is what it is all about. It is about mass testing to drive cultural change.

We have this confected approach about an “exceed prescribed concentration” approach to drug testing. Then, in the fine print, a late amendment seeks to clarify that any concentration is the prescribed concentration. As I say, how does that send the message in relation to driver change? And the use of the term “any” in prescribing a concentration is ambiguous. Is a zero concentration actually or rarely any concentration? Can you do it? Are you convinced that you can? How can any concentration be a zero concentration? If it is a zero concentration, it is no concentration. If so, everyone would be guilty of an offence, whether they used drugs or not. But the offence is said to be committed if a person has “a concentration of drugs in the person’s blood equal to or more than the prescribed concentration”. If the prescribed concentration is none, and we all had none, we would have a concentration equal to the prescribed concentration.

It really is a very flawed approach. This is what happens when you have got an essentially flawed piece of legislation. You belatedly seek to amend it to overcome the flaws and you simply create more ambiguities such as these. Is a zero concentration any concentration? If it is no concentration, and I have no concentration, do I have any concentration? I can see the fun that lawyers would have with it.

I look forward to debating this again. I regret that I was not able to have a brief available. I do apologise for that. I regret it. It would have been far easier for us all if we had the two proposals to debate side by side. I am happy for this matter to proceed in June and look forward to debating it cogently then.

**MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (10.38):** The ACT Greens will be supporting this bill in principle, and I will be moving to adjourn this bill at the commencement of the detail stage. It is the ACT Greens party policy to support legislation that makes driving

under the influence of illicit drugs a traffic offence, and it is on this basis that we support putting the framework of this legislation in place to be amended upon receipt of the government's consultation paper and the results from that consultation.

We have had concerns with both the government and the opposition approaches to implementing random drug testing legislation. On the government side, we have seen delays to considering and releasing a legislative package, and I appreciate that the Chief Minister did note that they had intended to have that tabled this week. However, whilst the government have taken a step of conducting wide community consultation, we have been somewhat left in the dark as to the form of the legislation that is being considered by the government.

We have been asked to adjourn or oppose the opposition's legislation based upon future government legislation on the same topic, which is an approach we have had concerns with as we cannot judge the relative merits of legislation which does not yet exist. In light of this particular bill having remained on the notice paper for over six months, we believe we cannot continue to delay the in-principle debate on this issue.

Additionally, we have concerns about statements the government have made regarding opposition to this bill—we have heard some of them today in the Chief Minister's speech—in particular, statements made through media releases and today that this bill cannot be practically implemented when it is clear that the central operative elements of this bill are based upon the Victorian model of legislation which has been in effective operation for a number of years.

On the opposition side, whilst they have put together a basic legislative model that has been based upon the operation of random drug testing in Victoria, the ACT Greens do not believe there has been sufficient consideration in consultation with ACT-based groups that have interests in road safety and drug legislation, nor has there been sufficient detail provided to address the specific human rights concerns about this legislation.

We acknowledge and thank Mr Hanson for passing on to us his response to the scrutiny of bills report. However, whilst we agree that, legislatively, the provisions regarding drug testing are similar to those for drink driving, there does need to be consideration of the fact that the impact on human rights may be greater due to the technology used possibly being more invasive. We acknowledge and understand the urgency Mr Hanson has expressed in regard to implementing a form of random drug testing measure. However, it is the position of the ACT Greens that we must take the opportunity to gather input from the community in order to have the best possible model for drug testing legislation.

Furthermore, consideration will need to be given to practical elements of implementation. Whilst we understand that Mr Hanson has held discussions with groups such as the NRMA and the AFPA, we expect that the consultation report will provide guidance as to how the legislation can best interact with other elements of a successful anti drug driving strategy.

The ACT Greens, as Mr Stanhope did note, made a submission to the ACT government's discussion paper on drug driving in the ACT. In that submission we

outlined five principles which we think are going to be important to achieving best practice random drug testing legislation. Firstly, drug driving as a traffic offence. This offence should be based around our current drink-driving laws and established solely as a traffic offence with equivalent penalties to a low to moderate drink-driving offence.

The second principle we outlined was that a positive test not be used to justify further searches. We support the comments that are made in the government's discussion paper that set out the need to specify permitted uses for evidence gathered under any RDT legislation. In order for any RDT legislation to be accurately described as a road safety measure, the use of evidence must be restricted to prosecutions for drug driving or drink-driving offences.

Thirdly, all technology should be fully considered. There has been quite some discussion about a \$40 figure that has been quoted a number of times, but we believe that we should be looking at all possible technologies that can be used. We recognise that oral fluid analysis is the technology used in all Australian jurisdictions where random drug testing takes place, but we do not believe that this should prevent the ACT from examining other options, including trace particle detection.

Principle 4 was government responsibility for drug-driving education. I think we should note that there is a concern that research on drug driving has indicated a low level of understanding of the effects of drug use upon driving ability, particularly among drug users. Research conducted in Victoria showed that over 90 per cent of alcohol users understand that alcohol seriously impairs the ability to drive, but up to half of drug users do not believe that drug use negatively affects their ability to drive. This highlights the fact that education will be a very important part of it along with whatever legislation is implemented.

Principle 5 was that all drugs that can impair should be included. I do appreciate and understand, as Mr Hanson has outlined to us, that his legislation is constructed in a way which allows for regulation guidelines to enable the inclusion of other drugs in a scheme if the technology becomes available. I do think we have that flexibility there in the legislation we currently have and will agree to in principle today.

The ultimate goal of this bill is to reduce the incidence of drug driving, and the experience of both drink-driving campaigns and drug-driving campaigns in other states has demonstrated the importance of community engagement with the process, something that we feel the government approach offers.

I reiterate that the ACT Greens support drug-driving legislation, which is why we are agreeing to this bill in principle today. However, we believe it is important to ensure we get the most appropriate legislation. We support the basis of the legislation put forward by Mr Hanson but believe it is very important for the government's consultation process to be allowed to proceed and to come to a conclusion to inform the legislation that is eventually implemented in the ACT.

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo) (10.45), in reply: I find it remarkable that the Chief Minister has deserted his post. If he took this issue seriously, he would still be down

here. Some 50,000 drug tests were conducted in Victoria this year, 80,000 were conducted in New South Wales and absolutely none were completed in the ACT. For seven years this government has sat on its hands. In fact, when a similar bill was introduced by Mr Pratt in 2005, Mr Stanhope described it as a redneck bill. After seven years of demands of urgency from the community, from the AFPA and from numerous organisations, and even after I tabled my bill in December that sparked this government into some form of action in February, the government has still been too lazy and too inept to actually bring forward what it promised—that is, draft legislation.

They have had their opportunity; they have had more than enough chances. Whilst this government sit on their hands—the bulk of Mr Stanhope’s energy was spent criticising me for my legislation—this government have done absolutely nothing in terms of practical action to introduce this very important road safety initiative into the ACT.

What we know is that there are people on our roads right now driving under the influence of drugs. We know that that impairment will cause traffic accidents, and we know that people in the ACT have died on our roads and will continue to die or face serious injury as a result of people on our roads driving under the influence of drugs.

I turn firstly to some of the comments Mr Stanhope made in criticism of my bill. When Mr Stanhope realised that we were actually going to be debating this in February—actually we then deferred that based on agreement with the Greens after discussion—he put out a very rough series of press releases and this new model of consultation, funnily enough on the same day that the bill was due to be debated in February. At that stage, he said Labor’s scheme was based on Victoria’s successful model in that it tested for the presence of a drug. So he said then that he had a government scheme and it was based on the Victorian model. Where is this scheme? There is not a scheme. That was a fiction.

He said it was based on Victoria’s model. He has today come into this place and said, “Actually, I do accept that Jeremy’s model is based on the Victorian model, but we don’t like that; we’re going to come up with something else.” Was he lying or was he mistaken in February when he said that his own scheme was based on the Victorian model, the model that he spent 15 minutes here today criticising? There is an utter contradiction, and what is quite clear is that Mr Stanhope’s agenda in this, now that he has been dragged kicking and screaming to a point where he is going to have to introduce random roadside drug testing, is, “I don’t care what the legislation is, as long as it’s not the Liberal legislation.” He will do everything in his power to avoid that. “We want the Victorian model. Oops, that’s Jeremy’s model—mistake. No, we support something else.” We are still waiting to see what that is.

Let me turn to the other great fiction in Jon Stanhope’s argument, and that fiction is that we are going to prescribe a safe level of random drug testing. I will go through some of the press releases and some of the false claims that Mr Stanhope has made about the technical elements of this bill. In a press release dated 24 February, Mr Stanhope asserted my bill intends to allow a safe level of consumption for illegal drugs by prescribing limits for illegal drugs. However, if you read the bill—Mr Stanhope clearly has not—what it says is that for a prescribed illicit drug any

concentration of the drug present in the blood or oral fluid of a person would be an offence. What that is saying is that any concentration of an illicit drug is an offence.

The reason that we prescribe a level is because Victoria's model is a drug and alcohol bill. Obviously, alcohol is a legal substance and there is a prescribed limit, and we know that that is .05. But for illicit drugs the quantity is zero. That language that I have used is the exact same language from the Victorian bill, and I will read now from the Victorian legislation, which Jon Stanhope supported in February and said his own scheme was based on but which he is now criticising. The Victorian legislation states:

... "prescribed concentration of drugs" means, in the case of a prescribed illicit drug, any concentration of the drug present in the blood or oral fluid of that person.

It is exactly the same language. Every single argument Mr Stanhope has raised today is based on the absolutely false premise that my legislation would allow safe limits of driving under the influence of illicit drugs. This is a scheme, I would like to add, that has been successfully implemented in Victoria since 2003. It has been running there very successfully. As far as I am aware, there have been no court cases that have challenged those results, and what we find is that 50,000 tests a year in Victoria have been conducted. So Mr Stanhope's whole argument attacking my bill is based on an absolute falsity.

It is quite clear that the government does not want to work with the opposition on this bill. When I tabled the legislation in December I said:

... I wish to state that the opposition is happy to work with the government and the Greens on this bill. The community expect us to act on this and they will not tolerate any political party that plays politics with road safety and with people's lives.

I have worked with the Greens. I have to say that we have had a number of meetings on this and they put in submissions and they have worked cooperatively with us on this issue. But I have had absolutely nothing from the government except for false criticism put out in very hurried press releases. In fact, I wrote to Mr Stanhope in February and implored him to work with me on this. I have received no response. The only response that we have seen from Mr Stanhope has been a series of press releases that he has put out that have criticised my legislation absolutely falsely. There is absolutely no argument in any of his criticisms.

The second point that he has made in his press release—I am not sure if he is sticking by this one now because it was hurriedly issued in February—is that my legislation requires the police to prove that the impairment was directly caused by the drug rather than some other factor such as fatigue or illness.

**Mr Seselja:** Was he not telling the truth in his press release?

**MR HANSON:** I think there is quite a clear indication that he was not. My legislation does not do that. It actually states that if a police officer has reasonable cause to suspect that a person's behaviour or appearance indicates that a person may be

impaired for a reason other than alcohol alone, the police officer may require the person to undergo an assessment for impairment.

We are still waiting to see the government's legislation. But the criticism of mine went even further. In the press release dated 24 February, Jon Stanhope said that my bill would allow a driver to get behind the wheel high on cocaine or LSD as long as their blood levels did not exceed an unspecified safe level. If that is not scaremongering, if that is not trying to say to the community, "Under Hanson's bill, people are going to be driving around on cocaine and LSD as long as their levels don't exceed an unspecified safe level," I do not know what is. That is scaremongering. A very simple reading of my bill, which is based on the Victorian legislation, would have shown that, for an illicit drug, any concentration is an offence. Everything he said in his scaremongering press releases has been false.

Another criticism he made was in terms of the number of drugs that I prescribed. I prescribed two drugs. Victoria has three, but when they first introduced their legislation they prescribed two, the same two that I have prescribed. But the regulations allow the minister to prescribe further drugs. That allows flexibility in this legislation. It does not mean that for all drugs that are not listed you simply get away with it. It is now for the minister to determine, based on the testing regime and equipment that is introduced by the government, what drugs will be tested for. Again, that is a point of false criticism from Mr Stanhope.

It is true that I have introduced an amendment. I circulated that on 17 March, but I would like to specify that that is an important technical amendment that was picked up by the drafting office. It relates to using the results of oral fluid tests and proceedings for an offence under the act. This was an omission that was identified following the tabling of the bill in December, and it is central to the operation of the bill. I accept that. I note that the scrutiny of bills committee also identified this, and I thank them for their comments in picking that up. I also thank the parliamentary counsel's office, who have been invaluable in their assistance in drafting this. It was a technical amendment; the bill is entirely workable.

We have reached a point today where we will agree in principle, and I am very glad of that. That sends a very clear message to the community that random roadside drug testing is coming. The community has got to a point where it is doubtful after seven years of inaction by the Stanhope government that this is ever going to happen. We have seen that confirmed by their failure to do what they promised and actually bring forward any legislation, even draft legislation, for us to look at to compare. Maybe that is because when Jon Stanhope said in February that his regime was based on the Victorian model and then realised that mine was also, he has had to reverse his position and come up with something new and he is struggling to do it. I simply do not know.

I look forward to the results of the consultation, but I note that back in 2008 and since this legislation was introduced in Victoria and since the opposition brought in a bill in 2005, there have been numerous roundtables and consultations. In fact, there was a government paper, and submissions were received from ACT Policing, the Australian Trucking Association, Civil Liberties Australia, Clinical Forensics ACT, Drug Free

Australia, Australasian Institute of Drug and Alcohol Testing Incorporated, Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform, Guardian Interlock, UnionsACT, DIRECTIONS ACT, Social Research and Evaluation Pty Ltd, NRMA Motoring and Services, ACT Democrats and so on. To suggest there has been no consultation on random roadside drug testing in this community would be somewhat misleading.

However, I do want to make sure that this legislation is as good as can be. I would like to have seen this debated and agreed to in February so that we could have had this legislation out there in the community and giving police the power to get drug users off our roads. But I accept that we are working in the environment of the Assembly and that the Greens want to wait until they have seen the results of the latest round of consultation. When that comes forward, I look forward to working collaboratively with the other parties.

The time has passed, Mr Stanhope, for nitpicking. I think you need to look at the concerns that you have raised about my legislation and realise that they are not correct. You need to understand the way the legislation is written is entirely appropriate. I welcome any government submissions that are put forward or amendments to my bill. I welcome them from the Greens and I welcome them from the government.

Obviously, what we want to do is make sure that any legislation that is passed in this place relating to random roadside drug testing is the most effective legislation that we can have. I welcome that. That is something that we should have done in February. Having tabled the legislation in December, we had ample opportunity, after all the consultation over years in this community, to look at that legislation in that period. We could have come back in February to debate that legislation and say: "These are some amendments, some from the Greens, some from the government. Let's have this legislation enacted into law." The Greens asked at that stage that I delay until March so they had further time to look at it, and I agreed. In March we could have done that, but we find ourselves again—although we have agreement in principle here today, and I certainly welcome that—with extra delay, and we are waiting now until maybe June before we can get to that point.

I implore the government and I implore the Greens, but particularly the government in this case, to sit down and read the bill, make sure that you understand it, try and work with the bill rather than simply looking at it from a point of view of criticising and opposing it, and come to me with constructive amendments. I will welcome them. We will work together and make sure that we get a bill in this place that gives our police the powers to act. We will fully support you when you want to then move out into the community and introduce random roadside drug testing. There will be resource implications that we will need to look at, but we will give you our in-principle support for what it is that you want to do. We know that there will be education programs that you will need to run, and there may be other procedural changes that flow. We look forward to working with you on that.

What we do not want to see, and what the community does not want to see, is the opposition and the government squabbling over "my legislation's better than yours". We have reached a point now where that decision has been made. It will be the opposition's legislation that will be tabled in this place that will be agreed to in

principle, and I implore you, Mr Stanhope, to work constructively with that. I think the community will react very poorly if you fail to do so.

In closing, this is a very welcome day for the ACT community. This is an important day for our road users, most particularly. I am hoping that what this signals today is the fact that we will remove a good quantity of drug-affected drivers from our roads, and our roads will be safer as a result of this vote we will be taking today. I thank the Assembly for their support.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

### **Detail stage**

Clause 1.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Bresnan**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Radiation Protection (Tanning Units) Amendment Bill 2010**

Debate resumed from 17 March 2010, on motion by **Ms Bresnan**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MS GALLAGHER** (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Health and Minister for Industrial Relations) (11.01): I will just speak briefly to this. The government does not support this bill, although I do acknowledge that Ms Bresnan has moved some amendments which significantly improve on the bill that was tabled. However, the government also has a regulation drafted to endorse the national scheme that has not yet been approved by the health ministers conference, and I acknowledge the delays there. It has been frustrating.

I would like us, and we have discussed it with the opposition and the Greens, to adjourn this matter today, circulate the government's regulation and explanatory statement around that and then bring both of those matters back to the Assembly for a more thorough debate with both the regulation and the legislation that Ms Bresnan has tabled. The regulation is ready to be tabled now. I could table it now. However, I think probably in the interests of a fairer debate and the opportunity for everybody to participate, I will hold off notifying that regulation until we debate this bill in its entirety. So I will move, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the debate be adjourned.

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** You cannot move that motion. You need another member to do that.

**Mrs Dunne:** I am sorry. Did I misadvise you?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I sought advice.

Motion (by **Mrs Dunne**) put:

That debate be adjourned.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 11

Noes 4

Mr Barr	Mr Hanson	Ms Bresnan
Ms Burch	Mr Hargreaves	Ms Hunter
Mr Coe	Ms Porter	Ms Le Couteur
Mr Doszpot	Mr Smyth	Mr Rattenbury
Mrs Dunne	Mr Stanhope	
Ms Gallagher		

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Debate adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Dunlop—shopping and community facilities**

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (11.07): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT government has neglected the residents of Dunlop;
- (b) the residents of Dunlop have been waiting too long for shops to be constructed in their suburb given that the Land Development Agency advertised in 2004 that a local centre would be constructed on section 133;
- (c) the ACT government has mismanaged the facilitation of the construction of shops in Dunlop;
- (d) communities need to have a place in their neighbourhood to congregate; and
- (e) as of 10 July 2009, the Chief Minister did not know that shops were planned for Dunlop; and

(2) calls on the government to:

- (a) write to all members of the Legislative Assembly by 14 May 2010 with answers to the following questions:
  - (i) why Dunlop residents have been waiting so long for shops to be constructed;
  - (ii) will shops be constructed in Dunlop; if so:

- (A) when construction on the shops will commence;
  - (B) when will the shops commence trading;
  - (C) how many parking spaces will the centre contain;
  - (D) how big (floor-space) the shops will be; and
  - (E) will there be any indoor space available for community use, for example, hall, meeting rooms, etc;
- (iii) has land been allocated for the construction of a childcare facility in Dunlop; and
  - (iv) what other community facilities will the government deliver, facilitate or support in the suburb; and
- (b) work with the owner of the land to facilitate the construction of the shops as quickly as possible.

The issue about the Dunlop shops has been a saga for many years. It has been years since the suburb of Dunlop was gazetted and many years, of course, since the first residents of Dunlop moved in. Of course, they have been waiting for shops in their suburb for a very long time. But, unfortunately, the people of Dunlop are not the only people in the ACT community to be regularly and constantly shafted by the ACT government, by the Jon Stanhope Labor government.

Whether it be poor buses, whether it be poor roads, whether it be the land release strategy, whether it be house prices, whether it be betterment taxes, whether it be the generally misplaced priorities of this government, whether it be school closures or the provision of GPs the people of Canberra, and especially the people of the outer suburbs in Canberra, are regularly shafted by the ACT Labor government.

The saga at Dunlop shops is a classic example of the neglect this Labor Party have shown the people of Belconnen and, in particular, the people of Dunlop, Macgregor and Charnwood. The people of Dunlop have been waiting too long and they have indeed been neglected. My motion does point that out. It is not the ACT government's responsibility to actually deliver shops in a suburb, but it is their responsibility to facilitate it, and that is something they are certainly not doing. It is also their responsibility to ensure that communities do have a fighting chance of being able to grow up in a friendly neighbourhood, grow up with amenity, and grow up with facilities that are in order and facilities that can support a vibrant neighbourhood. Of course, the ACT government has not done that when it comes to Dunlop.

In fact, there really is nowhere in the suburb of Dunlop where the people can congregate, where the residents can congregate and where they can actually develop a vibrant community centre. This, of course, is not too dissimilar to the suburb of Flynn, which now does not have a vibrant community centre after the closure of the school a few years ago. My motion today is not attacking a developer; quite the opposite. It is

actually having a go at the ACT government for dragging their feet at every opportunity and not actually supporting an industry to get a shop up and running there in Dunlop.

I would like to point out some words said by Gordon Ramsey of the Kippax Uniting Church when he appeared on 23 May 2008 before a hearing of the estimates committee that was examining the estimates for 2008-09, just a few months before the election. He said:

I want to highlight the situation of Sharon, who lives in Dunlop. Sharon's local community has no community facilities. There is no school, there is no library, there are no shops, there is no school that has been closed that can be refurbished and made available in Dunlop for people there. I understand that the absence of community facilities was a deliberate government policy in the design of the suburb of Dunlop. Sharon attends playground in the park, which is run by Belconnen Community Services each week—that is, at times when the weather does not preclude it from being run, and that playgroup needs to shut down during winter. There are no facilities in which the group can meet in bad weather or in winter, because Dunlop has none. At those times Sharon's social interaction with other parents, carers and children is lost.

There is not just a commercial interest in there being a community centre in Dunlop. There is also a very strong social interest in there being a community facility, whether it be shops or other facilities, in the suburb of Dunlop. Unfortunately, this saga, as I said, goes back many years. In fact, it was a Liberal member who asked a question of Mr Corbell in 2004 about whether there were any future plans to put shops or a shopping centre in the suburb of Dunlop. Mr Corbell responded on 11 March to a question on notice:

The site is on Lance Hill Avenue (**Section 133 Dunlop**) and is scheduled to be released at auction in the 2004/05 financial year.

He said it would happen in the 2004-05 financial year. So the people of Dunlop should have their shops by now. The people of Dunlop should have a facility where they can congregate and their social cohesion could be on the rise. Instead, that is not how it has turned out at all.

Let me give a brief time line of what has actually happened in Dunlop. In June 2004 the LDA undertook a site investigation report for section 133, blocks 2 and 4. On 11 November 2004, a site investigation report was prepared. Also in that month, Mr Corbell was provided with a brief regarding the proposed land release. Then later that month a community newsletter was put out by the ACT government which talked about the proposed shops. It also says that “the ACT government intends to sell a parcel of land to allow for the development of a local shopping centre in Dunlop”.

However, of course, it did not quite happen when it should have. On 17 November a community consultation paper was released. About six months later draft leasing and development conditions were prepared. These L and Ds did receive a number of responses—positive and negative—and some proposed changes.

Then, a few months later—we are up to September 2005—we see the first sign that there is going to be a delay in the release of section 133 in Dunlop. A few days later, ACTPLA recommended that an issues management strategy be implemented for Dunlop local centre. A month later in 2005 the then planning minister, Mr Corbell, confirmed the scheduled release was originally going to be for April 2005 but had been delayed pending further detailed planning. Ten days later, a retail study was undertaken and then a few days later the auction of block 4, section 133, Dunlop commenced. It was actually sold for \$1.09 million. That is a couple of years later than when the ACT government said it would actually take place.

A DA was lodged soon after and it took many months for ACTPLA to actually get back to the developer to give further information. After some toing-and-froing again, another DA had been lodged. It was lodged on 11 November 2009 with comments closing on the ACTPLA website by 29 April this year.

We do seem to have a little while yet to wait before the shops are constructed. However, my concern here is not with the developer. It is not with their plans for the site. My concerns are with the ACT government and the tremendous delay there has been in getting this community centre underway.

It is worth noting that Labor and the Greens have been silent on this issue. This has been a big issue for the people of Dunlop. It has been a big issue for many years. Mrs Dunne, who has been here since 2001, would know very well that the people of Dunlop have been concerned about their shopping centre for a long time. Not everyone in Dunlop is for the shops and it is fair to say that some people are not concerned about the local shopping centre.

However, in recent years we have seen that there has been a resurgence in local shopping centres. Any doubts about whether it would be viable, I think, are probably not as strong as they perhaps once were. But it has been an issue for many years and there has been an acute lack of leadership from the Labor Party. There has been an acute lack of leadership from the members for Belconnen, the members for Ginninderra, they being Jon Stanhope and Ms Porter and, of course, from Ms Hunter for the Greens since the last election.

So bad was the neglect of Jon Stanhope on this issue, despite this saga lasting years and years, that he did not even know Dunlop was planned to have shops. I will quote from a transcript of what he said on 10 July last year—nine or 10 months ago—on ABC radio at 9.35 am. The presenter on talkback radio said:

Good morning, Keith.

Keith said:

G'day, how are you doing?

Mr Stanhope said:

Good morning Keith.

Keith said:

G'day, Mr Stanhope, thanks for taking my call. I understand that Dunlop's going to be one of the biggest suburbs in Canberra and at the moment it doesn't have any shops at all and the nearest ones are at Charnwood, and like, they're a virtual traffic jam trying to get in there sometimes—

which they are, minister. Mr Stanhope said:

Yes, I must say, my understanding is the same as yours, Keith. Though I know there are no shops there, but my understanding is that it was envisioned by our plans at the outset that there wouldn't be shops and I believe simply that there wouldn't be a school in Dunlop; that it was always intended that Charnwood would act or operate as a suburban centre for Dunlop along with Charnwood. It's a group centre there at Charnwood I think that was the decision taken at the time. The state development plans for Dunlop were laid out and agreed and approved. Do you find it a particular inconvenience? There are a number of suburbs that don't have shops and I think working off the experience of those suburbs that did have a shop, that the shop which wasn't sufficient because of perhaps the size and shopping centres that have closed; and I think that's one of the issues that very many suburban shopping centres have struggled; and I think the view is taken that to ensure the viability of shopping centres generally, that we shouldn't continue to just add them as a matter of course.

**Keith:** I just thought that seeing as it was going to be one of the bigger suburbs in Canberra, it would just be nice to have like, you know, it would be nice to have its own shops ...

**Stanhope:** I'll take your number Keith and get back to you.

Jon Stanhope, as of July last year, did not even know that there was a block of land that had been sold in Dunlop for shops. He did not even know it. He did not know that there had been DAs. He did not know that ACTPLA and LDA had held up the development. He did not know that ACTPLA and the LDA had letterboxed the suburb.

This is how out of touch Mr Stanhope and the Labor Party are. It all goes to show the extreme neglect the Labor Party shows the people in our outer suburbs. Being a member for Ginninderra, Belconnen, Nicholls and Hall, I do know and I see so many examples of the extreme neglect that the ACT government shows for the people of those communities.

As I mentioned earlier, whether it be the state of the buses, whether it be the poor roads, the Gungahlin Drive extension, whether it be land release strategies, whether it be the house prices, whether it be the betterment taxes, whether it be the misplaced priority for their budget measures, whether it be the school closures or the provision of support for GPs, this government regularly shows contempt for the people of the outer suburbs in Canberra. My motion today seeks to bring some clarity to the situation. It seeks to deliver some answers for the people of Dunlop, because to date they simply have not had them.

I find it very hard to believe that the ministers and the members opposite have not received dozens of emails over the years from people in Dunlop asking about the situation. Why doesn't Mr Stanhope know about it? Why doesn't he? Why? It is probably because he does not care. He simply does not care. My motion calls on the planning minister to provide the Assembly with some information in a timely manner. He should be able to provide all the information by next week, and that is why my motion says "by 14 May".

I want to know when the construction of the shops will commence, when the shops will commence trading, how many parking spaces there will be, how big they will be and whether there will be any indoor space available for community use—for example, for a hall or meeting rooms. I also want to know whether there is scope for a childcare facility in Dunlop and whether there will be any other community facilities in the suburb.

Of course, as set out in paragraph (2)(b) of my motion, I want the government to actually work with the developer to make this happen, and to make this happen quickly. However, given the evidence, given the information we have heard, I think it is very unlikely they will do so. Hopefully, by this motion being on the agenda today, and hopefully by this Assembly passing it, it does put pressure on the government to change the way that they react, to change the way they approach the situation and to change their attitude to the people of west Belconnen.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Minister for Gaming and Racing) (11.21): There are a number of misconceptions in Mr Coe's motion and in his speech that need clarification in order for the Assembly to properly consider the matters this morning. The government agrees retail and community services are of vital importance to the social fabric of our suburbs and that these services are highly valued by residents and in many ways provide the glue which cements communities together.

From what we have heard from Mr Coe, it does appear he is aware that the development application for commercial development in Dunlop was assessed by the Planning and Land Authority and approved in March 2009. It also appears he is aware that a further application was recently lodged for a revised development. The Planning and Land Authority has been working with the leaseholder to move ahead with the development but of course it cannot compel development on the site.

The government has introduced an extension-of-time fees law for residential and commercial development, to provide an extra incentive to develop in accordance with lease covenants. However, if a lessee seeks an extension of time, there is little capacity for ACTPLA to decline the request. The alternative, and Mrs Dunne might want to listen, is for the government to resume the land, which would of course raise a range of complex legal questions in relation to property rights and would create an ongoing sovereign risk. If Mrs Dunne wants to be party to scaring investment out of the city by supporting the government resuming the land in this particular circumstance, let her get up now and say that.

As Mr Coe has indicated, two blocks of land in Dunlop are zoned under the territory plan as being commercial zone 4, local centre. These blocks are 2 and 4, section 133 Dunlop. The Dunlop local centre site, block 4, was sold to a developer in October 2007 and a lease was granted in November 2007. Development approval was granted on 18 March 2009 for a mixed-use development on the corner of Lance Hill Avenue and Shoobridge Circuit.

This development proposal consisted of a single-storey building to accommodate 400 square metres of commercial use and a single-storey building to accommodate four single, attached residential units. The current development approval is to commence within two years after the day the approval took effect and to be finished two years after the day development begins.

As I indicated earlier, a new development application has been received by the ACT Planning and Land Authority that now proposes an 800-square-metre, single-storey commercial facility and no residential units. That development application was publicly notified from 7 April to 29 April this year, and I am sure Mr Coe has studied it in detail.

The Planning and Land Authority will continue to independently assess this application under the Planning and Development Act. The ACT government cannot and will not interfere in that development assessment process as we are determined to keep politics out of planning.

For that reason, the government will not support Mr Coe's motion this morning. We do intend to support the Greens' amendment as proposed by Ms Le Couteur but perhaps with one tiny factual change. In proposed paragraph (1)(b) there is a statement that the application has yet to be notified. My advice from the Planning and Land Authority is that it was notified from 7 April to 29 April. So if Ms Le Couteur is amenable to making that change to her amendment, the government will happily support the Greens' amendment this morning.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Molonglo) (11.26): I would like to thank Mr Coe for raising this issue today. I think we are all in furious agreement about the importance of communities having local shops and local facilities. They are the hubs of local communities, just as schools are. The Greens, of course, want to support suburbs being developed in a way that encourages people to walk and ride to their local shops and their local community facilities. So from that point of view, the Greens support the aspirations behind Mr Coe's motion today. But, unfortunately, we cannot agree with the detail of it and I will go through the reasons for that now.

In his motion he starts off by saying:

- (a) the ACT Government has neglected the residents of Dunlop.

I guess that public transport in Dunlop is very poor and, as we have just heard, there are no local facilities; so there is some reason to agree with that statement of Mr Coe's.

The second one is:

- (b) the residents of Dunlop have been waiting too long for shops to be constructed ...

Mr Barr gave us a much better summary of the situation than I could give on that. Yes, there still are not shops in Dunlop. However, the land was sold to a private owner and it is still within the time scales for development.

In (c) Mr Coe says:

- (c) the ACT Government has mismanaged the facilitation of the construction of shops in Dunlop;

I will have to talk about this a bit more here. I am not quite sure what Mr Coe thinks the government should have done differently, given the situation that the land is privately owned and a development application has been lodged and notified. The owner has taken all the legal steps that the owner is required to go through, and no-one has suggested, to my knowledge, that the government has done anything to make the construction of the shops difficult.

As Mr Barr alluded to, and I will talk a little more about, the government has very limited control of what happens to land once it is sold. This is, I think, a very significant issue for planning systems in capitalist economies such as ours. Mr Barr talked about it. There is a very limited amount of things the government can do. The government could resume the land, which would be interesting, and I believe the government might also be in a position, once the developer has exceeded the time the development application is valid for, to sue them for not actually completing the development application. But this is a really significant issue in Canberra and all capitalist economies.

This is not a new example. Other examples are the disused service station, petrol station, sites such as Page and Campbell and many others throughout the suburbs of Canberra. These are sites where everybody agrees that something should happen to them but we have had a briefing from the government and there appears to be very limited scope for the government to actually achieve change on those sites, to have the site in Page, which is also part of Ginninderra, turned into something that the people of Page would like to see.

We note that in the last budget the government extended the concession on development application fees for this. We think this is a very good move. And I would welcome debate about better ways, more effective ways, of getting these petrol station eyesores changed in our suburbs.

Last year and earlier this year, we had a debate about Deakin pool. Deakin pool is somewhere where the pool size has halved, despite the fact the government said a number of years ago it would not do so.

In the Ginninderra electorate there is the matter of the Giralang shops. They have been vacant for—one of the Ginninderra members could tell me the number of years but as far as I know—five or six years already. I think we are up to our third development application on this. Clearly, we do have a real problem with development controls once land has been sold, because there are only a very limited number of things that the ACT government can do to ensure that development actually happens the way it would like it to happen. As I said, I would very much welcome a debate about how the government can do these things better.

Moving past there, because that is not really the focus of this motion, although it is a problem this motion talks about, subparagraph (d) states:

(d) communities need to have a place in their neighbourhood to congregate;

Again, the Greens are in furious agreement with this. As we said earlier, as we all agree, there are no local shops there. It would be great if there was more of a community hub in Dunlop. There are the nature parks and there are some wonderful parts of nature in Dunlop but no community facilities.

The next one is:

(e) as of 10 July 2009, the Chief Minister did not know that shops were planned for Dunlop;

I do actually have quite a degree of sympathy for Mr Stanhope for not knowing every item of development in the ACT. I am prepared to admit that I do not know every item of development in the ACT. I think that there are more important matters. It is quite forgivable that the Chief Minister is not fully aware of the state of all development applications in the ACT.

In paragraph (2), Mr Coe called on the government to do a number of things and, to quite an extent, Mr Barr went through that in his answer. But I guess, more broadly, I touch on one of the really frustrating things with the current system with ACTPLA and its website, which is that once a development application has had its two weeks notification period it then disappears off the website. So if you think, “Yes, there might have been a DA and it might have happened a few months ago,” you have got no way of finding out.

I can understand that for the residents of Dunlop this is a frustrating thing. If they happen to miss the DA, which would be quite easy to do, they do not know that it even occurred. And, once it has occurred, they have got no way of finding out the progress on it. So I agree possibly with the intent behind Mr Coe’s comments here. And this is something I have been bringing up for some time, that ACTPLA clearly keeps development applications on disk somewhere. They should also be accessible through ACTPLA’s website so that members of the community can find out what is happening in their suburbs.

The next item is that land be allocated for the construction of a childcare facility in Dunlop. My colleague Ms Hunter will address this as she is more familiar with the

state of childcare provision in Belconnen. And I think she will also talk about other community facilities in Belconnen.

In paragraph (2)(b), Mr Coe suggests that the government “work with the owner of the land to facilitate the construction of the shops as quickly as possible”. I would be really interested to know more precisely what Mr Coe actually thinks the government should be doing here because he has not said that they have done anything to slow it down.

There probably are some other planning issues. Is Dunlop, in fact, a viable local centre and would its development impact on Kippax and Charnwood? To make Dunlop a viable local centre, does the rest of Dunlop need to be developed? There is some future urban area next to the ACT-New South Wales border. Do we need more development there? As I said before, the question comes back to what levers, if any, the government has to ensure development in the situation, as we have here, that the developer has the land, has put a DA in but does not appear to be overly enthusiastic to actually develop.

I will now, at this stage, move the amendment which was circulated in my name and just go through that very briefly. First off, we are noting that there is a DA and it is still within the legal time frame to be built, which is the fact. In (b), I am happy to take on Mr Barr’s suggestion but I am just not quite sure how I actually do that. I do not think I can move an amendment to my amendment. Possibly Mr Barr has to move that amendment. I agree to delete the words.

Then item (c), as we have all been saying, states:

- (c) the residents of Dunlop, like the rest of the ACT, need good access to local shops and community centres;

So in (2) we call upon the ACT government “to work with the owner of the land through any problems there may be in the construction of the shops”.

In (b) we state:

- (b) provide the Members of the Legislative Assembly with a link to the current development application information on the ACTPLA site and to the new development application;

In (c), I am happy to agree basically with Mr Coe that members of the Legislative Assembly should be informed of progress. But I think we should wait until the end of 2010. So, hopefully, there will be some progress to inform us.

With that, I would like to move my amendment, preferably with the two changes that I just foreshadowed, getting rid of the incorrect reference to the application yet being notified. Could the clerks tell me if I cannot do it?

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** You need to seek leave to amend your amendment.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I seek leave to amend my amendment.

Leave granted.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Thank you. I now move my amended amendment:

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

“(1) notes that:

- (a) the owner of the Dunlop shops site has a development application approved to build on the site, and is still within the legal timeframe to build;
- (b) the owner of the site has recently lodged a new development application with ACTPLA that proposes an 800 square metre single storey commercial facility and no residential units; and
- (c) the residents of Dunlop, like the rest of the ACT, need good access to local shops and community centres; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) work with the owner of the land to work through any problems in the construction of the shops as quickly as possible;
- (b) provide the Members of the Legislative Assembly with a link to the current development application information on the ACTPLA site and to the new development application; and
- (c) inform the Members of the Legislative Assembly of the progress on this issue by the end of 2010.”.

**MS HUNTER** (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (11.37): I would like to thank Mr Coe for bringing this motion to the Assembly. I have been interested in the contributions so far. The subject of community amenity in our suburbs is an important one, particularly in our outlying suburbs such as Dunlop. The history of Dunlop goes back some time. Unfortunately, it was developed in a way that led to it becoming a dormitory suburb—a suburb right on the border of New South Wales with housing and little else.

As Ms Le Couteur has noted, the positioning of this suburb provides some unique challenges for community amenity and services and it will need careful work to address them. However, as she has put forward in her amended amendment to this motion, there is currently movement in addressing the need for shops in Dunlop. I look forward to receiving information from the government about the progress of the development application on section 133.

Ms Le Couteur has just said that there are a number of planning issues across all electorates, Ginninderra included. She highlighted the issue of disused petrol stations. Mr Coe made some comment before about the Greens not having a good understanding of these issues. We have a very good understanding. We understand the

importance of good planning. We understand the importance of allowing the social fabric to be nurtured and to grow in suburbs right across the ACT.

The issue of the disused petrol station sites is one I have had many emails on. The Greens have taken a very active role in moving it forward. We acknowledge the concessions that have been put forward by the ACT government, which have been, I understand, rolled over again to this year because it is quite a complicated process. We want to see some good progress made and I am working closely with a number of residents across the suburbs and, most recently, in the suburb of Page.

We do know people in Dunlop and we do have a good understanding of their issues. I know that Mr Coe would like to see himself as the white knight striding across the electorate of Ginninderra with nobody else around, but there are a number of very active members out there who have continual, ongoing contact with constituents and actively take up their issues in the Assembly.

As we know, there are concerns about the traffic problems and the capacity for the current roads to deal with future development. Constituents have contacted me about this, amongst other matters. They have stressed that traffic and transport issues are especially important given that you need some form of personal transport in Dunlop if you hope to get anywhere. Bus services are not great. In some parts the bus stops are a long way apart and there is little shelter.

I think part of that comes back to the design of Dunlop. Unfortunately, Dunlop has quite narrow streets. It really was not built with a view to getting a bus through the suburb. The route, in a sense, goes around the suburb and people have quite some distance to walk. When we plan suburbs we need to include these sorts of amenities up-front because retrofitting later is quite often impossible. Of course, this can have quite negative impacts on a range of people who may not be able to afford a second car or who may choose to use public transport. There are a range of reasons why we need to provide options in the transport area. Trips to nearby shops at Kippax and Charnwood, while it is quite an easy trip by car, can be difficult if you need to rely on public transport.

My constituents have also raised with me problems around things like internet access to the suburb. Compared to many other suburbs in the Belconnen area, the internet speeds are slow and unreliable, with congestion, particularly at peak times. This really causes some frustration. Unfortunately, at this point, it would seem that there are no immediate plans to upgrade this service.

Problems such as these highlight the need for a formal and recognised precinct planning process that is more than just the residential blocks—more than just the houses that are going to go in. We need to ensure that when we develop suburbs and plan for that development government takes into account the social needs of people who are going to live in these areas. These needs can be around local shops, community facilities and, as I have said, good public transport coverage. They are also around footpaths. Many of these suburbs will contain younger families who will have children on bikes and will be pushing prams. These sorts of issues need to be looked at. They are not minor when you are developing areas such as these.

It is important that we address the problems behind these decisions so that in future these greenfields developments do not end up with the same challenges that many of those who live in Dunlop are facing at this time. It is vital that we work with local communities in our suburbs which are looking at community amenity shortfalls to ensure that their concerns are addressed.

The consultation needs to include all stakeholders, not just the residents of the suburb in question. We need to look at other areas around those suburbs. Recently we had the case of the Giralang shops. Developing shops on that site will probably have an impact on Kaleen and other small local shopping centres. With these things we need to look at the bigger picture and not take a piecemeal approach. That is why we think that a good approach to planning includes all of these issues.

As we have heard today, there is a DA out there for Dunlop. It has been notified. I urge the government to work with the owner of the land to develop shops or to develop something that is going to be viable in that area—something that is going to provide an opportunity to build the social fabric of that suburb.

In his motion Mr Coe raises the issue of childcare facilities. That is one that probably needs a little more investigation. It was announced in the budget that \$4 million over the next two years will be set aside to redevelop part of the closed Flynn primary school for childcare. We need to look at what is out there. Would it be viable to put childcare into Dunlop? Maybe it would. These are important things you need to be looking at. You need to ensure that you have the right information so that you do not set things up to fail. We know that 110 childcare places will be going into Flynn. Of course, Flynn is very close to Dunlop. For many parents, it would be quite convenient to drive past Flynn and drop off their children on their way to Belconnen or the city or wherever their workplace may be.

West Belconnen has been shown to be an area which needs increased attention to address issues of social inclusion. The problems in Dunlop concerning transport, access to community facilities and access to services can be echoed across many suburbs in the area. I note the government's plans so far include their measures for increasing health services in the area and I ask them to consider further planning and consultation around a holistic approach to planning and providing services for west Belconnen. This includes further funding for the development of the remainder of the former Flynn primary school into a community hub so that it can provide a range of community services to the suburb of Flynn and also the surrounding suburbs.

Again, I thank Mr Coe for giving us this opportunity to discuss Dunlop today. I look forward to seeing the future provision of services in this suburb. I commend the amendment that has been put forward by Ms Le Couteur.

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (11.48): I congratulate Mr Coe on bringing forward this motion on Dunlop today. There are important issues for me, as a member for Ginninderra, in this motion today. As Mr Coe has pointed out—via the caller who rang the Chief Minister last year about this—Dunlop is a very large suburb by ACT standards. For whatever reason—and the Chief Minister was right—it was originally

planned to have no community facilities in it. That was a substantial planning mistake. Let us be frank, when the planning was done originally, they got it wrong. Back in 2003-04 it was realised that they got it wrong, but somewhere along the line Mr Stanhope was never brought up to date with this. Mr Coe is not criticising Mr Stanhope for not having a detailed knowledge of every development application that goes on in his electorate. He is criticising him—and rightly criticising him—for not knowing when there was a major planning change—

**Mr Coe:** A territory plan variation.

**MRS DUNNE:** A territory plan variation in relation to one of the biggest suburbs, perhaps the second biggest suburb in his electorate, and he did not know anything about it. He did not know that we had done that. We know that the Chief Minister does not read reports. He is above all of that. Obviously, he just takes for granted the people of west Belconnen—people who live in Dunlop will vote for him, even if he shows that he does not care about them at all.

Mr Coe has rightly said that local centres do a great deal for the local community. They provide a focal point for many aspects of local community life. They create an interaction between business and the community which we see in so many other places. There is local business support through things like sponsorship for local community activity. There is the potential for social interaction and community support for one another because we provide a place where people can meet. There is, of course, local amenity. The suburb of Dunlop is sadly lacking in local amenity. If anyone drives around it they will find it is a suburb with a beautiful aspect. The new parts of the suburb are developing around the water features—

**Mr Coe:** Outside of Kerrigan Street.

**MRS DUNNE:** on the outside of Kerrigan Street, on the far west of Dunlop, right up near the border. There are fantastic aspects. Great work has been done by the developer in creating a great environment. Members have touched on the fact that public transport is dreadful. It is very difficult because of the shape of Kerrigan Street—that long, looping street. It is a very long walk for most people from where they live to where the buses go, through the main part of Dunlop. It is badly planned.

This was a very important issue at the time of the 2003 bushfires. There is, effectively, only one exit from Dunlop. The other end of Kerrigan Street, where it goes through Fraser and onto Tillyard Drive, is Lhotsky Street—all the way up to Tillyard Drive. There are huge traffic problems for the people who live in Fraser. There are considerable issues about access to and from the major part of Dunlop. This was highlighted during the bushfires in 2003 when people were asked to evacuate the suburb. There is, effectively, only one way out—through Kerrigan Street where it joins Ginninderra Drive. That is a particular problem for us.

Another issue which is important to us relates to the interaction between any potential local centre and any potential childcare. When I have visited and spent time in Dunlop, I have found it a bit hard. You cannot go and visit the local shops. I recall one hot, windy February morning I was spending time trying not to be blown away when

carload after carload of people came and talked to me about the thing that was most important to them—what was going on with their shops. They wanted to know whether they were ever going to get shops and whether there was any potential for childcare in Dunlop.

On that morning there would have been perhaps 20 families who came to the site of the shops to talk to me about the fact that they wanted childcare in their suburb and there was no scope for that at the moment—that eventually, when these shops were developed, it would be really great to see other community facilities attached and if there was a childcare centre it would be quite well supported.

Ms Hunter has said that we need to have more research into that, and of course we do, because the government do not know where the demand for childcare is. We do not know where the demand for childcare is. We know that the government have no idea because they do not collect the data. They do not know where people are living who want childcare and where the shortages for childcare are. They have no idea how long the waiting lists are and where the shortages are.

We know this because the opposition has made inquiries under the Freedom of Information Act. Almost two years after it made a commitment to build two new childcare centres, the government is still scratching its head about where they might be. It does not have the data that would help it to make these decisions. Ms Hunter is right, to an extent—we need to drill down into that—but from my experience of standing on street corners in Dunlop talking to people about what they need in Dunlop the number one message is that we need childcare facilities.

It is only anecdotal, but it is about the best information we have. It is better than the information that the ACT government currently has about demand for childcare in Dunlop. By its own admission, when it provided documents to us under the Freedom of Information Act it had no idea. There are no documents. The people of Dunlop, like everyone else, are not being served by this government when it comes to childcare because this government has no idea where the demand is or what the quantum of demand is. It does not have the capacity at the moment to collect the information and it seems uninterested in doing so.

I need to congratulate Mr Coe on bringing forward this important matter today. What he has asked for in his motion is straightforward. It is really that the government account to the Assembly for what is going on or what is proposed to be developed at the Dunlop shops. He is also asking for supplementary information in relation to the possibility of childcare facilities in Dunlop and whether any provider is interested in providing such facilities. The people of Dunlop are missing out. They are missing out, in some ways, much more than people in other suburbs. Like Flynn, they have no community facilities. The lack of community facilities means that there is no community in Dunlop. It is very hard for people who are trying to maintain Neighbourhood Watch, which we will talk about later in the day, simply because there is no place for people to congregate in the suburb.

I congratulate Mr Coe on his motion. I look forward to the government providing useful information to the Assembly and, through the Assembly, to the people of Dunlop about the future of their suburb.

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is that Ms Le Couteur's amended amendment be agreed to. Mr Coe, are you speaking to the amendment and closing the debate?

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (11.57): I can do so, Madam Deputy Speaker, if that is the will. The opposition is not really happy with the amendment that the Greens are proposing. When you actually go through it, it lacks meat. Having listened to their speeches, I fail to see what part of my motion they actually disagree with. Do you not want the government to write to members to inform us? Do you not think Dunlop residents have been waiting too long? Do you not want to know when construction of the shops will commence? Do you not want to know when trading will commence? Do you not want to know how many parking spaces there will be? Do you not want to know about the floor space, or whether there will be any room for community use? Do you not want to know about community facilities? Do you not want to know what other community facilities are like, such as a childcare facility? I do not understand. They spoke about each of these and said how important it was to get it right. Well, do you want to know or not?

Then we heard from Ms Le Couteur and Mr Barr. What is it that we actually want the government to do with regard to facilitation? I find it very hard to believe that this knockout punch that Ms Le Couteur had would be contradicted by her own party leader who said, "I urge the government to work with the owner of the land to deliver shops." How does that differ from the point that she took fault with—"work with the owner of the land to facilitate the construction of the shops as quickly as possible"?

Ms Le Couteur said that (2)(b) was a gutless clause and that it was worthless. Ms Hunter said pretty much the same thing. She said, "I urge the government to work with the owner of the land to deliver shops." Instead, I wrote, "Work with the owner of the land to facilitate the construction of the shops." The knockout blow that Ms Le Couteur had seems to be contradicted by her own party leader. I am led to believe that that is actually a regular occurrence in their party room. I am led to believe that there are some interesting rifts in that party room and one that I am sure will play out as we get closer to the election.

Ms Le Couteur's amendment really does lack grunt. This amendment to my motion is yet another form of neglect for the people of Dunlop. Do they not think the people of Dunlop should know sooner rather than at the end of 2010? Do they not think that it would be reasonable for the government to provide this information by next week, given they have 17,000 full-time public servants that might be able to put this together very easily? I find it very hard to believe that the motion that we have put forward could not be fulfilled very easily by ACTPLA.

It is extremely disappointing that the Greens and the Labor Party should do this disservice to the people of Dunlop. That is after bashing the suburb and saying that it was not the best place to live, that it really was a second-rate suburb. I do not think that. I think Dunlop is a great suburb. I support Mrs Dunne's comments that it is a lovely suburb and that we should not be bashing the suburb.

In conclusion, we will be voting against the amendment moved by Ms Le Couteur. We urge the Assembly and the government to take a different stance on this issue and to show some leadership for the people of Dunlop.

**Ms Le Couteur:** I understand I can close the debate on my amendment.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Le Couteur, you have spoken; I am sorry, you cannot have the call unless you seek leave.

Question put:

That **Ms Le Couteur's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 10

Noes 5

Mr Barr	Ms Hunter	Mr Coe
Ms Bresnan	Ms Le Couteur	Mr Doszpot
Ms Burch	Ms Porter	Mr Hanson
Ms Gallagher	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Seselja
Mr Hargreaves	Mr Stanhope	Mr Smyth

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## **Land—release**

**MS PORTER** (Ginninderra) (12.07): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) last month's CommSec State of the States report, which ranks the ACT as the best performing economy in the country;
- (b) CommSec commentary that this performance is, to a considerable degree, attributable to the ACT government's accelerated land release program, and the impact of these releases on residential construction activity; and
- (c) the recent Access Economics Business Outlook released 27 April 2010 which stated "... the ACT benefited from being one of the earlier jurisdictions to recognise the need to increase the pace of land release ... the greater availability of land and houses means that population growth is still on the up at a time when it has turned down for Australia as a whole"; and

- (2) acknowledges the massive provision for accelerated land releases in the 2010-11 ACT budget, which will allow for the release of a record 17 000 dwelling sites over the next four years.

Mr Speaker, it is with a great sense of pride that I rise today to speak on the motion standing in my name. Members of this place will be well aware that in the latest *State of the states* report issued by CommSec Economics, the research arm of the Commonwealth Bank, the ACT was ranked as the number one economy in the nation.

So what was it that led Craig James, CommSec's chief economist, to come to the conclusion that the ACT has the nation's best economy? To find that answer we need only to go to the summary provided by Mr James in this report where he says:

The Australian Capital Territory now clearly occupies the position as best performing economy in the nation.

In the previous survey conducted in January, the ACT and Western Australia were jointly on top, but in the latest report the ACT has leapfrogged WA and now is in the number one position. According to Mr James, this has resulted from solid housing and broader construction activity in the ACT which is driving economic growth and keeping unemployment at historically low levels.

In the December quarter, the ACT's economic output was 28 per cent above the territory's decade average level of output, and I am sure that all those opposite would agree that this is an outstanding achievement. However, Mr James goes even further and says that not only is the ACT's economic activity above long-term averages but that the territory's annual growth of 6.9 per cent is the fastest in the nation.

So what else can we learn about the ACT's economy from CommSec's *State of the states* report? Perhaps we should turn to the level of investment in equipment. Craig James tells us that in this area the ACT has been performing well and has been:

... super-strong over the past two years. In fact equipment spending in trend terms in the December quarter was at record levels, more than double the decade average.

Just in case those opposite did not quite get that last point—and I see there are very few of them paying attention, as usual when we talk about good news from the government—let me repeat what Craig James, the chief economist for CommSec, said about investment spending in the ACT:

... super-strong over the past two years. In fact equipment spending in trend terms in the December quarter was at record levels, more than double the decade average.

Just to put this into some context, this investment in equipment in the December quarter was up 76 per cent on investment a year ago and it is even starker when compared to that of the jurisdiction which came in second in the investment category. That state happened to be New South Wales, which had an annual growth of

17.5 per cent. So the ACT recorded investment growth of 76 per cent and the economy that came second was New South Wales with annual growth of 17.5 per cent. In racing parlance, may I suggest that it would be ACT first and daylight second.

Perhaps now we should turn to the area of housing finance and see what Craig James, the chief economist at CommSec and author of the *State of the states* report, has to say here. According to Craig James, housing finance is not just a lead indicator for real estate activity and housing construction but also an indicator of activity in the finance sector. And who do you think came out on top in the area of housing finance? Correct: the ACT—and not only on top by a small margin but, according to the CommSec report, far and away the top position for housing finance in the nation—far and away the top position for housing finance in the nation.

While annual growth for new lending has slowed since June last year, the trend number in the ACT is 28 per cent above the long-term averages. This is another area where it is the ACT first and the proverbial daylight second, with Victoria the next jurisdiction in the housing finance category, with an increase of five per cent above the long-term averages.

I would now like to inform the Assembly about the territory's performance in the area of dwelling starts. This category measures the trend number of dwelling commencements and compares them with the long-term average levels of starts. The figures are sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. And again, according to CommSec's chief economist, Craig James, just as the ACT has topped the leader board in housing finance so it has topped the leader board in dwelling starts. Craig James tells us that the number of dwelling starts in the ACT during the December quarter was, to use Mr James's own words, "a staggering 85 per cent above the decade average".

Mr James also goes on to say in the CommSec report:

Further dwelling starts in the ACT are currently 82 per cent higher than a year earlier, underpinned by a strong job market, increased land production and rising population growth.

As is the case with other indicators, it is also interesting to look at how far in front the ACT is compared to other jurisdictions. The state running second in this area is Tasmania, which recorded an increase of 33 per cent over the decade average. So there you have it in Craig James's own words: the ACT has recorded "a staggering 85 per cent increase above the decade average" and the state that came in second, Tasmania, has recorded an increase of 33 per cent.

So the obvious question to ask when looking for an explanation as to the outstanding performance of the ACT economy on so many fronts is, to use the old question by Professor Sumner Miller: why is it so? Well, according to Craig James, the answer is clear: the ACT economy is being driven by solid housing and broader construction activity, and in the case of housing starts this is being driven by the ACT's increased production of land.

But of course it is not only CommSec Economics that believe the ACT is getting things right. Another highly respected research company, Access Economics, in their business outlook released only last week, stated that the ACT benefited from being one of the earlier jurisdictions to recognise the need to increase the pace of land release. Doing that enabled the ACT housing construction sector to swim strongly against the national tide, with activity strengthening remarkably, up by more than 40 per cent through the course of 2009.

I will repeat that: the ACT benefited from being one of the earlier jurisdictions to recognise the need to increase the pace of land release. Doing that enabled the ACT housing construction sector to swim strongly against the national tide, with activity strengthening remarkably up by more than 40 per cent through the course of 2009. The Access Economics report goes on to say that housing construction in the ACT has “sprinted” through the course of 2009 and far exceeded any other jurisdiction.

There you have it: two of the most respected economic research organisations in the country both believe that one of the reasons why the ACT economy is so strong is its land release policy.

So what specifically has the ACT government done that has resulted in the ACT leading the nation in all these areas of economic growth? It is no coincidence that these outcomes have coincided with the implementation in 2007 of the very innovative affordable housing action plan. This government’s affordable housing action plan has seen the following initiatives.

Under accelerated land supply, 3,470 dwelling sites were released in 2007-08, 4,339 new sites were released in 2008-09 and in this financial year we will again bring in excess of 4,000 dwelling sites to market—a further demonstration of this government’s commitment to maintaining a very high level of supply of land in the light of ongoing demand for residential housing.

Increased supply of community housing is another aspect of this affordable housing action plan. The government has provided a \$50 million revolving finance facility to the not-for-profit housing organisation CHC Affordable Housing to enable 1,000 new affordable dwellings to be built within 10 years. The OwnPlace initiative is delivering 15 per cent of affordable housing in new estates. 247 blocks have been taken up by the OwnPlace builders panel to date. More than 70 of these homes have been built and 145 are currently under construction.

Then we have the land rent scheme, a scheme that was much pilloried by those opposite. Under the land rent scheme, as of Friday 29 April, 41 blocks have settled and a further 180 blocks have been exchanged. I think you would say that was a success. And I have no doubt that many more young Canberra families who thought that the dream of home ownership was beyond their grasp will take advantage of the land rent scheme with the latest offering of land which is currently occurring at Bonner.

I am proud to be a member of a government that has as one of its highest priorities the provision of affordable housing. And, as members would have heard in the

Treasurer's budget speech yesterday, this government is determined to continue to build on the great work it has already done by releasing a record 17,000 dwelling sites over the next four years.

I would commend the *State of the states* report and also the Access Economics report to those opposite. They might like to have a look at those and agree with us about the outstanding results that the ACT has achieved, now being ranked the first by all these measures.

I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Molonglo) (12.19): I thank Ms Porter for raising this issue today. Land release is a very important issue for the ACT from both the financial aspect and the planning aspect. This motion highlights one of the ACT's unique features. The ACT government owns all the land in the ACT, and the sale of land is a substantial portion of the ACT's budget every year. One of our concerns is about how financial issues about land development impact upon planning issues about land development.

There are two issues in this motion: the ACT economy and urban development. Going to the ACT economy, I will quote from CommSec's recent report, which is the one that Ms Porter is referring to. It says:

While the ACT is perched at the top of the leader-board, the question is what happens when the strong housing market matures early in the second half of the year.

That is an excellent question, which I imagine the Leader of the Opposition will probably talk about more in his speech, but I think we all agree that there is a need to diversify the ACT economy. The housing boom cannot and should not go on forever; there is a need for a diverse economy in the ACT, and there is a need for a green economy. The CommSec report goes to the reason that we have basically the best performing economy. It says that previously the ACT and WA were on top, but that now we have solid housing and broader construction activity, and that is what is keeping the ACT on the top.

Basically that says that, because we are not as resource dependent as other states, we are set up to be a sustainable, green economy. What the ACT desperately needs for this work is for the government to work on a diversification strategy. A large part of this, we hope, is in the green economy paper which the government commissioned the University of Canberra to scope. This, of course, was part of the Greens-ALP agreement. At this stage, I believe that it is well and truly over time for delivery. I understand that it is now with CMD's Business and Industry Development Branch; I look forward to hearing the results and to the government moving forward on growing a sustainable knowledge economy.

Canberra is uniquely placed to be a knowledge economy. Most of the work of our public servants in the ACT is knowledge economy work. We have very great tertiary institutions in the ACT. We have got the ANU, which is a world-class institution. We

have the University of Canberra. We have ADFA. We have the Catholic University. I cannot off the top of my head go through all our tertiary institutions, because we have a lot of very good ones. This is a strength which we should be building on, because they will, hopefully, be there when we have sold all the land.

As Ms Porter's motion suggested, in yesterday's budget Mr Stanhope announced that 17,000 dwelling sites would be released over the next four years, while 444,561 square metres of commercial land and 440,616 square metres of industrial land will also be released over the same period. This land release will be supported by a huge capital works program to deliver new roads, new intersection upgrades, water, infrastructure et cetera. It has a double benefit for the ACT's economy because, as well as supporting housing, it supports the allied construction trades, which are a very important part of the ACT's economy.

What is quite frustrating for the Greens in this is how little sustainability has been prioritised in planning for this infrastructure. The Greens are going to continue to push for infrastructure to allow new residents to live more affordably and more sustainably. That is a large part of our push in Molonglo, for a more sustainable Molonglo. We see Molonglo as being more sustainable and more affordable, both for the people who live there and for the ACT government. I will talk more about that in a minute.

As I mentioned, one of the things we are concerned about is that the income the ACT government gets from land sales is distorting our land release program. We think it is really important that the ACT should get the financial balance right between greenfields and infills. It is partly about financial balance with the ACT government's budget. I note in this context that the change of use charge is expected to be considerably higher than it was. But going to the financial balance in the long term, we need to look at the long-term costs and benefits of infill and redevelopment as well as the long-term costs and benefits of greenfields.

I am concerned that the government is understating the costs of greenfield development. For that reason, and also because it gets considerable income from it, we are not seeing much urban infill in the ACT. From this budget, it appears that there are going to be only 700 sites identified for urban infill next year and only 1,000 expected to be developed over the next four years. I note that that would only be the land that the ACT government currently owns; presumably there will be infill brought on stream from land which is currently owned by private owners, but nonetheless we need to shift.

The government's own plan, its own target, is that there should be 50 per cent greenfield and 50 per cent infill development. At this stage we are going nowhere close to that. I am concerned—the Greens are concerned—that this is not sustainable. This is not the way that the ACT should be developed, and financial imperatives are one of the reasons why development is as it is.

We think that it is time for the government to shift the income model for the ACT government. It is simply unsustainable, environmentally and land-resource-wise, that we continue to release land on the outskirts of town in places where it is difficult to

service residents with good public transport and other facilities. A few minutes ago we had the debate about the situation in Dunlop, which is a suburb clearly on the outskirts of the ACT. It is very close to the border of New South Wales. That is a good example of the issues with greenfield development. The public transport there is very poor; there are not facilities. We need to look at the long-term costs. We also need to look at the fact that in the long run the ACT is going to run out of land that it can develop, so the source of income is going to dry up. Financially, the ACT government needs to look at more income sources for the long run.

Let me go to another advantage of having less greenfield and more infill development. This is the International Year of Biodiversity. If we have infill development, this will not be impacting negatively on biodiversity. The greenfield development that we are having all impacts negatively on biodiversity; it is just a question of whether it is a major bad impact or a minor bad impact. We would like to see Canberra's urban density change. We would like to see more infill development on transport corridors, which will leave the biodiversity areas intact.

Ms Porter talked about housing affordability. That is something which is very dear to the Greens. The government claims that more land release is good for housing affordability. The government has also claimed that the ACT is very good from a housing affordability point of view.

In this context, I would like to say that statistics are an interesting thing. Although the ACT housing affordability figures show that proportionately our housing is more affordable, they also show that the ACT's median family income is around 70 per cent higher than the median for Australia. In real figures, our housing costs are close to the average for New South Wales—that is, higher than all other states except WA. So although we are termed the most affordable, to someone who is moving to Canberra, to someone who does not have one of the higher ACT incomes or to someone who simply has a lower income we are not the most affordable at all; we are one of the most expensive.

It is worth noting that, although people with higher than average incomes may find housing affordable in the ACT, people with lower incomes—such as people in service industries, pensioners, students, people who work part time, people with disabilities and a whole range of people in our society—can have severe home ownership problems due to the high cost of housing in the ACT.

The cost of mortgage repayments and the cost of rent in the ACT are very similar. The issue in the ACT, in terms of whether you are a renter or a purchaser, tends to be a division as to whether you happen to have the deposit already saved and whether you have got a permanent job, which is obviously what you have to have to get a mortgage, or whether there is a house available that suits your needs.

In this context, I would be interested to know if the ACT government has looked at the Henry tax review in terms of the comments it has made about housing affordability. One of the things that he specifically talked about was stamp duty, which is another state-level tax. He pointed out that the high levels of stamp duty in the ACT and every other jurisdiction encourage renovation rather than house

movement. This can lead to overcapitalisation of houses and decreasing housing affordability. I wonder whether the ACT government will be lobbying for an abolition of state stamp duties and their replacement by other commonwealth income.

The other thing about housing is our population growth, which is driving our housing demand. The question needs to be asked: is the ACT's population growth sustainable? I am sure that all members will be aware that part of the ACT Greens agreement with the Labor Party when we supported them to become the government was an inquiry into the carrying capacity of the ACT region. This is very important for housing demand.

I would like to conclude by saying again that better housing development is more affordable housing development—such as what the Greens have been talking about in the context of Molonglo. We launched a paper about better development in Molonglo. More efficient housing in the long run improves housing affordability. This is because houses which are better built cost less to heat and less to cool. Water bills will be lower. They use water more efficiently. Transport costs will be lower if we develop Molonglo better. If we have a good public transport system, and if we have a good walking and cycling network, then people will not have to always have two cars to live in Molonglo—if we have a good public transport system, if we have a good, sustainable, active transport system.

In the context of housing affordability, it is also worth noting that Australians have the largest new homes in the world, so any modest increase in capital cost through building better houses—and it would be a very, very modest increase—could be offset by a small reduction in the average size of houses. Houses in Molonglo could possibly be closer to the size of the average house in Canberra rather than the largest sizes of new houses in Canberra.

As Ms Porter's motion is basically a statement of facts, the Greens will be supporting her motion today.

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

**Sitting suspended from 12.33 to 2 pm.**

## **Ministerial arrangements**

**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): Members are aware that the Attorney-General, Simon Corbell, is unable to be in attendance today for question time. If there are questions that people are minded to ask the Attorney-General, I am happy to take those today.

## **Leave of absence**

**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) (2.01): Pursuant to standing order 22, I move:

That leave of absence be granted to Mr Corbell for this sitting day, for family reasons.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Questions without notice**

#### **Taxation—change of use**

**MR SESELJA:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, this morning you confirmed that your government is pursuing your massive tax on homes via the change of use charge. This massive tax on homes will act as an impediment to higher density living in and around town centres. What other negative impacts will your massive tax on homes have?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for this surprise question. We had not expected to get one on the change of use charge. I also acknowledge the language around a tax grab or a great new tax. It seems that the opposition are taking their instruction from Tony Abbott around big taxes.

The feeling and the theme I am picking up from the opposition is that they do not believe that the territory, the community of the ACT, should receive appropriate revenue for granting development rights that yield significant profits to the private sector and private developers in the ACT. We do not apologise for pursuing adequate, reasonable revenue growth in applying the change of use charge, as was intended when the legislation was put in place.

I would ask the Leader of the Opposition how the government can ignore advice that we receive from independent analysis around the change of use charge—

**Mr Seselja:** Point of order, Mr Speaker, on relevance. The question was very specific: what are the negative impacts of the massive tax on homes? Ms Gallagher is not here to ask us questions. It is a very specific question about the impacts of this tax outlined in this budget.

**MS GALLAGHER:** There is not one. We do not believe that there will be any negative impact from this. And there should not be. This extra revenue being factored in is applying the law as it exists at this point in time. What it is saying is that site-by-site valuations should be conducted under the change of use charge. There should not be a fixed fee. That is the intention of the legislation. The government has received advice through the report that was done into codification. If the opposition had bothered to read that report—it has been out for some time, and I have not heard a peep out of you on it. I have not heard a peep from the opposition—until it is the only thing that they can find in the budget that they can whine and whinge about: that the ACT budget is given the revenue it deserves from granting additional development rights to developers who get large windfall gains from that development.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Seselja, a supplementary question?

**MR SESELJA:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Treasurer, will your massive tax on homes assist or hinder the long-term approach to sustainable public transport?

**MS GALLAGHER:** As I have already outlined, I do not believe there will be negative impacts from applying the law as it is now, and we have done some pretty rigorous work around this. This revenue forecast is based on looking back five years, applying a site-by-site valuation, applying the legislation as it stands now, and putting a bit of conservatism in it. That is what we have done with the revenue forecasts around change of use. I do not apologise, and I do not think the community would expect me to ignore advice that says, "You are not recouping as much revenue as you should under change of use." If you do not like change of use then bring the legislation forward and have an honest debate about it. But this is legislation that has been debated in this house and approved by this Assembly.

**Mr Seselja:** Mr Speaker, on a point of order, I know she does not want to answer specific questions, but it is on relevance. It is about whether or not this tax and the enforcement of it through the budget will hinder or help the long-term approach to sustainable public transport. She has not addressed the question.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I have, Mr Speaker. Whether it is the answer he wants, I have said that we do not expect to see negative impacts from applying the current change of use arrangements across the board. We will work with industry and we have heard what industry have said about concern about development. I have listened to them and I have met with them and we have had many discussions about change of use. And do you know what? Industry accept that they need to pay more around some of these developments. They have said that to me. They have acknowledged in person that they have been getting it pretty good under the fixed charge arrangements and they understand the government's need to respond. The disagreement, I think, is around how much the increase is, and there are mixed views around that. But I do not believe that this government can ignore the law as it stands, and that is what the opposition wants me to do.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hargreaves, a supplementary question?

**MR HARGREAVES:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. My question to the Treasurer on this issue is: how is the government working with industry to address this change of use charge?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I thank Mr Hargreaves for the question. We have been working with industry on the change of use charge codification project since last year's budget. There is a draft report that has been put out that has received mixed responses from industry. I think if anyone reads it they can see in the attachments at the back what industry is saying about it.

In response to industry concerns, we have not sought to codify in this budget. We have extended the consultation time allowed for submissions to be fed into the draft

report. The government has not received the final report and some of the extra work that has been done through that—for example, a cost-benefit analysis that the government will consider before moving to codification.

I have met, over the last day in fact, with a range of stakeholders who are concerned about this. I have given them my commitment that I will work with them over the next 12 months to see whether we can address their issues to their satisfaction. That is the way I have always worked. That is the way I intend to work on this. But in the meantime we cannot ignore the fact that we do not believe—and if you have read the report, and I do not believe anyone in the opposition has read the report—

**Mr Smyth:** I've read the report.

**MS GALLAGHER:** So you just ignore all the parts of it that say you have not been collecting enough revenue, do you? You ignore those parts and think that that is not correct? I do not apologise for the fact that we are responding to an anomaly which appears that we have not collected as much revenue on change of use as we should have and that we have put in place steps to fix that.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Le Couteur, a supplementary question?

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Treasurer, do you believe that this change of use charge will change the balance of development between infill and greenfield sites?

**Mrs Dunne:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker, that is asking an opinion and therefore out of order.

**Mr Hargreaves:** On the point of order, Mr Speaker, it is reasonable, in fact, for any minister to be asked about the implications of the impacts of a given government decision. That is all we are talking about here. Mr Speaker, I would remind you that, in this instance, what Ms Le Couteur is asking for is the impact of the budget on this particular issue.

**MR SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. Treasurer, the question.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I am allowed to answer the question?

**MR SPEAKER:** You are allowed to answer the question.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Again, the government's view is that this is not changing the policy; this is not changing the way change of use has been set out to operate. It only affects residential where it appears that a fixed charge arrangement has been in place and that that has undermined the revenue that should have been coming to the community in terms of the additional granting of those development rights. This does not change the system at all.

I accept that industry and developers are concerned about it. I guess that comes as no surprise, because they have been, I think, enjoying a fairly profitable situation where, for a dual occupancy which may sell for \$1 million, they have been paying \$3,750 for

the development rights. I understand that, but I do not think governments can ignore it. I do not think we are elected to this place to ignore advice that says, “You have not been collecting as much revenue as you should under these arrangements.” That is obviously the attitude the Liberal opposition would take. It is obviously a very lazy view from the opposition, and it is an opposition that obviously never intends to be in government.

**Mr Hanson:** You call us lazy when you’re heading off on a holiday.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Mr Hanson, I do not apologise for having a holiday, my friend. And you can go as hard as you like on that. I have been pretty clear about my intention to have a holiday, and you can go as hard as you like on that. You can go as hard as you like, mate; it does not matter to me. I do not think the community worries about it either. I think they acknowledge the fact that people are entitled to a holiday, not that this relates to the question at all.

### **Family and youth services**

**MS HUNTER:** My question is to the Minister for Children and Young People. Minister, the responses to the family services program and youth services program discussion paper closed on 5 March 2010. As I understand it, the FSP and YSP providers’ contracts will be rolled over while the process continues. Can you advise what interim contractual arrangements will be put in place?

**MS BURCH:** Thank you, Ms Hunter, for the question. Yes, we are reconfiguring the youth and family services funding streams, and existing providers have had their contracts extended. So the contracts that currently exist and the services they are providing will be extended under contract extensions until our review of the feedback and comeback from the community sector on that realignment is completed and we are able to go back to the community about what the new program and alignment look like. So the existing contracts will be extended until we finish this process.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Hunter, a supplementary?

**MS HUNTER:** Thank you. Given that workers in these programs are not sure if they will have ongoing employment, minister, how will you alleviate the strain and uncertainty this review is placing on the sector and their ability to plan and deliver services into the future, including how long that rollover will go for?

**MS BURCH:** I recognise that changes to contracts do create stress and strain and some level of angst around community providers. I have worked in the community sector long enough to understand that funding cycles do have that impact. The realignment of youth and family services is also part of a broader purchasing framework that we are progressing. One of the key aims of the new purchasing framework, once we get our organisations through a prequalification period, is that we will be able to afford longer term contracts—so funding cycles of up to 10 years, conditional on deliverables and milestones being reached. I understand and recognise that this transitional period is difficult, but I think that once we come out of that the community sector will indeed be more stable. We will have prequalifications. We will

have a clearer framework around purchasing so they can forward plan over a much longer period.

**MR SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Ms Bresnan?

**MS BRESNAN:** Minister, can you detail when information about the new merged model of service delivery and time line of implementation for tendering will become available to the sector?

**MS BURCH:** I can take on notice the time line. The work is in the department; they are finalising the way forward on this. I am happy to come back with some details. But, in recognition that the community sector is indeed having those pressures and that that workforce is hard enough to keep and retain and we do not want the valuable workforce within the sector getting skittish and leaving and going elsewhere, I have a personal view that it needs to be done as quickly as we can. But I will get an update on the time line to you.

### **Budget—community reaction**

**MS PORTER:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, what has been the community reaction to the release of the 2010-2011 ACT budget?

**Mr Hanson:** This should be good.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I thank Mary Porter for the question and I hope Mr Hanson will sit back and enjoy it. The budget I presented yesterday is about the growth of the city. It makes new investments in vital community services and infrastructure and it also progresses our budget plan and brings our target year to return to surplus forward by two years. In this tight fiscal environment the government has had to weigh up our priorities, the community's needs and our commitments to the people of Canberra. As I said yesterday, while it might not be everything to everybody, this budget gets that balance right.

The budget has been received well by many in the community. Our new investments are in capital works and infrastructure, health and education, disability services and child protection, municipal services and transport, protecting our environment, tackling climate change and creating an environment that supports local business, jobs and the economy.

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MS GALLAGHER:** Mr Hanson, I think, was referred to by Mark Parton yesterday as a bit of a wind-up doll—and, gee, we enjoyed that.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Treasurer.

**MS GALLAGHER:** We enjoyed that because we do not see that side of you, Jeremy. No, we do not see it all. On an otherwise quite stressful day, I did enjoy it.

**MR SPEAKER:** Treasurer!

**Mr Hanson:** I will try more.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I am just drawing to the Assembly's attention that he is living Mark Parton's dream there. He is the wind-up kid, the wind-up doll.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Treasurer. The question.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Well, it is hard to respond here. It is hard to respond, Mr Speaker.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, members!

**MS GALLAGHER:** A better way to have approached that, Mr Speaker, was perhaps to draw your attention to the constant interjecting, also known as wind-up doll-like, that Mr Hanson is doing.

**Mr Coe:** You're a bit precious about the cartoon, aren't you?

**MS GALLAGHER:** Alistair, you live for the day you are made into a cartoon, my friend. It will happen. It will happen. Don't worry. It will come and we will all enjoy it.

*Mr Coe interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, Mr Coe! Treasurer, let's hear about the budget.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. We have had a range of feedback today and throughout the day. I acknowledge that some of that has been positive and some of it has been negative. I think that goes exactly to the point that I have been making over the last days—that not everybody gets everything in a budget. Sometimes it is about taking half a step forward if you cannot take the whole step. And that is the environment in which we put this budget together.

Even those who have negatives with the budget are also drawing our attention to the positives. For example, the Property Council, while they do not like the change of use charge, although they have again indicated their willingness to engage with us on that in a very positive way over the next few months, have also acknowledged the positives in the budget, around land release particularly. Indeed, another one—a favourite of the Liberals—the Canberra Business Council, are supporting our vision for the future in our spend on the arboretum; again, a positive in the budget.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS GALLAGHER:** The chamber of commerce, again, encouraged us to hand down a business as usual budget and they feel quite positive about the budget that we have put together.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS GALLAGHER:** The Master Builders Association: again, they have concerns around the change of use charge but, again, they accept and they support our ongoing land release program and our infrastructure spend.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS GALLAGHER:** I think there have been a number of positive responses.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**MS GALLAGHER:** The wind-up doll is contagious because it is moving down the line here.

**Mr Smyth:** Oh!

**MS GALLAGHER:** It is very difficult to answer questions in the Assembly—

**Mr Seselja:** You're very sensitive, Katy.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I am not sensitive at all.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you. Ms Porter, a supplementary question?

**MS PORTER:** Treasurer, has there been any criticism of aspects of the 2010-11 ACT budget?

**MS GALLAGHER:** As I said, there has been a recognition, I think, from most in the community that this budget is under pressure and that we have had to balance the need to return the budget to surplus and restrain spending with the needs and demands of a growing city and its population. Not surprisingly, the opposition have criticised this budget. It is disappointing, because there was the opportunity. Indeed, in previous years, the opposition have identified things that they support in the budget. I have not actually heard of any initiative; it has just been downright negative and critical right since the minute those budget papers were released.

The Leader of the Opposition quite proudly had his very comprehensive and complex three-slide show out today, this morning. Gee, the team must have been working at 150 per cent of capacity to deliver that last night. That is one of the things I enjoy the most about budget night—the fact that the opposition has to do a little bit of work in formulating a response.

We have had three slides put up by the Leader of the Opposition today. We had three slides. Again, when I was looking at them, I thought, “I don't trust these slides.

Maybe it is because I don't trust the opposition." I was right. The opposition are out there saying, "There has been no GFC. There has been no loss of revenue. It has just been an increase in revenue." The reality is that if you go back to last year's budget papers you will see that there was a loss of \$1 billion in revenues. It is correct that we have seen recovery, but if you also go back to the 2008-09 budget review you will see that GST revenue has gone back by \$600 million in aggregate. The other thing—the other little issue with your slide—(*Time expired.*)

**MR HARGREAVES:** A supplementary, Mr Speaker.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Mr Hargreaves.

**Mr Hanson:** But that's not what happened, Katy.

**Ms Gallagher:** It is what happened, Jeremy.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! Mr Hargreaves has the floor.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would like to ask the Treasurer whether any slide show presented recently was inaccurate and also what commentary there has been on revenue measures in the ACT budget.

**MS GALLAGHER:** With respect to the opposition's slide where they have included in their revenue line the commonwealth stimulus money that flows through over three years, you cannot include that in your base because it comes in and out.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, members!

**MS GALLAGHER:** But we are recording the two different—

**Mr Seselja:** It's the only way you can claim a surplus.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Seselja, you will have a chance to ask your question in a moment.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Mr Seselja, we report both the lines. We report both of them, in the interests of transparency—transparency that you were unable to do in your slide show today. You were unable to do it. And what you can see—

*Mr Smyth interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, members!

**MS GALLAGHER:** Mr Smyth, I have said a number of times that the reason we are in surplus is because of the nation building and jobs plan. I have said that and I have acknowledged it. But you cannot include it in your long-term base. You cannot, because it does not appear. We have reported it separately, specifically in the interests

of transparency and accountability. And what the opposition does is to completely ignore it and pretend that it is there for the long term, which is absolutely incorrect. But it is lazy and it is what we expect from this opposition.

### **Taxation—change of use**

**MR COE:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, this morning you confirmed that your government is pursuing your massive tax on homes via the change of use charge. You indicated that, whilst you were still consulting on the massive tax on homes, you would pursue the tax anyway, as stated in the budget. Treasurer, how can the community have any confidence in your consultation if you have clearly made up your mind on the massive tax on homes?

**MS GALLAGHER:** The answer to the question is that the consultation is on codification. The increase in revenue is about applying the law as it was intended, and that is the difference in the revenue. So the consultation is about a different matter, Mr Coe.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Coe, a supplementary question?

**MR COE:** Treasurer, have you discussed the viability threshold of new developments under the massive tax on homes, and are you satisfied it will not detrimentally affect housing affordability?

**MS GALLAGHER:** Under the codification process, a cost-benefit analysis is being done, which will be provided to government. The government has not taken a view on codification at this point in time.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Seselja, a supplementary question?

**MR SESELJA:** Treasurer, what will be the average impact on the cost of a unit in the suburb of Braddon under your proposed changes to how you interpret the change of use legislation as set out in the budget?

**MS GALLAGHER:** It depends on the value of the property.

**Mr Seselja:** You don't know the average?

**MS GALLAGHER:** It depends. I think I would refer Mr Seselja to the schedule of tables which indicate it, so it is very clear from that that it would be a significant increase on what is currently being paid now under codification, and we expect it to be in that order under a site-by-site valuation process.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Smyth, a supplementary?

**MR SMYTH:** Yes, Mr Speaker. Minister, what impact will the massive tax hike have—

*Members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, members! Mr Smyth is asking his question.

**MR SMYTH:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Treasurer, what impact will the massive tax hike have on the rental market in the ACT?

**MS GALLAGHER:** The opposition fail to understand the issue here. They fail to understand that the community have not been receiving their share of the windfall gains of granting extra development rights. We are applying the law as it is set out. The community share is a part of that windfall gain. We do not expect, nor should they, to pass those costs on.

**Mr Smyth:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the question is about the impact on the rental market.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I have answered the question.

**Mr Smyth:** She has not even mentioned the words “rental market”.

**MR SPEAKER:** The Treasurer has sat down, I am afraid, Mr Smyth. Any further questions without notice?

### **Budget—goods and services tax**

**MR SMYTH:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, in the budget that you brought down yesterday, you show that revenue from the goods and services tax will fall in the 2010-11 budget by \$25.4 million, from \$904 million to \$879 million. Treasurer, when the report from the Commonwealth Grants Commission was released in February this year, you were quoted as saying that the ACT would “lose more than \$80 million” in GST funding in 2010-11. Treasurer, why is there a difference of \$55 million in the estimate of the loss of GST revenue?

**MS GALLAGHER:** The pool has grown, Mr Smyth, in short. I have said it a number of times at forums where you have been—

**Mr Barr:** Such a moron.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I accept that you do not listen to what I say, but the expectation—and I think it is in the budget papers, if you read them—is based on information. Our best modelling when we were putting this budget together was that the GST pool has grown nationally and that we will benefit from that, and it has partially offset the \$85 million loss. But you will see going forward that the losses continue to grow.

**Mrs Dunne:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker, could I ask you to ask Mr Barr to withdraw the word “moron”. He called Mr Smyth a moron.

**MR SPEAKER:** I am afraid I did not hear it, Mrs Dunne, I have to say.

**Mrs Dunne:** Mr Barr called Mr Smyth a moron. I think that is unparliamentary language and it should be withdrawn.

**Mr Hargreaves:** On the point of order, Mr Speaker, I am not sure whether the word “moron” as applied to those opposite is actually an unparliamentary term, and to ask Mr Barr to withdraw the term “moron” is a moronic sort of a view.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hargreaves, resume your seat, thank you.

**Mr Hanson:** Mr Speaker, I remind you that you did warn me yesterday about frivolous points of order.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Barr, did you describe Mr Smyth as a moron?

**Mr Barr:** Not recordable, I would have thought. It was an interjection across the chamber.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Barr, I think you are splitting hairs there.

**Mr Barr:** Okay. Well, it is certainly recorded now. Yes, I may have, in interjecting across the chamber with Mr Smyth, referred to him as a moron, amongst other things, and if he takes offence at that, I withdraw.

**Mrs Dunne:** No, it is not a matter of whether he takes offence; you just withdraw.

**Mr Seselja:** It has to be unqualified, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Barr:** I withdraw that Mr Smyth is a moron. He is many other things.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Barr. Mr Smyth, a supplementary question?

**MR SMYTH:** Treasurer, how did you determine that the ACT would lose \$80 million in lower revenue from the GST in 2010-11, as you have now admitted that the ACT is doing its own revenue estimates?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I think the question was: how did we predict that we were going to lose \$85 million? Did you say that? Was that the question? We did not predict that; that was the outcome of the Commonwealth Grants Commission in the change of relativities. But in terms of our own modelling, we have sought information from federal Treasury, but I do acknowledge that these are estimates based on our modelling at this point in time, and it has not been confirmed by federal Treasury that the national pool has grown and that we will benefit in the order of an additional \$50 million.

**MR SPEAKER:** Supplementary question, Ms Porter?

**MS PORTER:** Treasurer, what is the economic—

*Members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! Ms Porter has the floor.

**MS PORTER:** Treasurer, in relation to this, what is the economic forecast for the ACT over the forward estimates?

**MS GALLAGHER:** In relation to the GST pool, we have, as I said, included for the first time increases based on what we understand the national pool take will be and our share of that. But you can see also that that does not offset the full loss of the Commonwealth Grants Commission outcomes. That grows over the forward estimates to in the order of \$101 million by that final year. You can see that flow through in the reductions to GST revenue over that time. But, yes, I do not think that it has been any secret that the \$85 million loss has been partially offset with additional GST revenue. I think I have acknowledged that publicly a number of times.

**Mr Smyth:** You have hidden behind the \$85 million loss, though. You have consistently—

**MS GALLAGHER:** It is still a loss, but it has been partially offset. You can see that our deficit situation has improved, and we have acknowledged that it has improved, because of additional revenue that is coming through the budget. Because of that, we have made the decision to return the budget to surplus two years earlier, acknowledging that our budget will continue to grow over the next four years and that we expect revenue to grow and that we can pull it back.

**Mr Smyth:** That is slightly different from what you have been saying.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I do not understand what the opposition's line on this is. They are saying that we are not spending enough, that the deficits are too big—

**Mr Smyth:** You just don't understand.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I do not get it. It does not add together as a budget plan. We cannot not spend enough, have smaller deficits, not be indexed at all and completely ignore some of the revenue write-downs that we have had to experience. You would have us believe that there has been no impact on our budget from the GFC or the Commonwealth Grants Commission, and that is not true. You can see that that is not the case.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Doszpot, do you have a supplementary?

**MR DOSZPOT:** Yes, I do, Mr Speaker. Treasurer, why did you mislead the community by not including the gains from growth in the GST pool?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I have not misled the community. These are expected gains and we have got them in the budget. I do not know what the issue is here. In February we were informed that we had lost \$85 million in GST revenue through the Commonwealth Grants Commission. That is the result of the change in relativities. I think what the opposition are struggling with here is that there are two 50s. I have got

it. There was the \$50 million upgrade in the GST pool that was announced as part of the commonwealth's updated economic forecast in December and that was built into our budget review. We built that in, then we lost 85 and now we have included a revision of further growth in the GST pool over and above what was announced in the updated economic forecast for the rest of the financial year, and that is in the budget as well. So I think that is the mistake. We are talking about two 50s here—the 50—

**Mr Hanson:** Stop hiding behind your 80 million.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson!

**MS GALLAGHER:** The 50 that I think Mr Doszpot refers to is the 50 from the updated economic forecast, which was already built into our bottom line for the budget review. Then the Commonwealth Grants Commission report came out. We lost \$85 million through that. We now expect to get a further 50 back through extra activity in the GST pool, and we have factored that in.

### **Childcare—costs**

**MRS DUNNE:** My question is to the minister for community services. Minister, what steps is your government taking to lessen the burden of childcare costs on Canberra families, and where can those steps be found in the budget?

**MS BURCH:** I thank Mrs Dunne for her interest in childcare. In fact, in the budget we announced \$4 million over four years to go to the former school site at Flynn, and to invest in childcare places. We are earmarked to deliver 110 places. We could get more, depending on the final design, but certainly 110 childcare places in the Flynn and Belconnen region are welcomed by all families on the north side of Canberra.

There has been overwhelming support for the addition of childcare places. Even the John Flynn community group, whilst not happy with some elements of that proposal, recognise that childcare has been unanimously supported to be developed on that site, and that is what we will be delivering over the next two years.

**MR SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mrs Dunne?

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, how many places will be available through the new plan for childcare at Flynn, and will the Flynn childcare centre be managed by a community-based or private sector operator?

**MS BURCH:** As I have said, our planning is for 110. Through design and planning, we could get a tad more, but we will say it is 110. The procurement process is yet to be commenced, so the answer about whether it is community based or private based is yet to be determined. I support our community-based childcare sector here in the ACT. This will bring online more childcare places. Last year we delivered over 660. This year we earmarked 450-plus. Now this announcement delivers another 110 places. That is an incredible increase in childcare places to best serve the families here in the ACT.

**MR SPEAKER:** A supplementary, Mr Seselja?

**MR SESELJA:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, what are your plans for increased capacity across the rest of Canberra?

**MS BURCH:** We have done some scoping work about childcare needs across the ACT, which is why we are very comfortable that the 110 childcare places will be utilised and welcomed at the Flynn site. I continue that conversation around the second childcare centre that we have committed to and that it will be delivered. We work in partnership with the sector. The Children's Services Forum and I meet regularly. This is indeed the detail about how we best serve ACT families in regard to the location of the second childcare centre.

### **Public housing—Bega, Currong and Allawah flats**

**MS LE COUTEUR:** My question is to the minister for housing and concerns the Bega, Currong and Allawah flats. Minister, if the government intends to pursue a salt-and-pepper approach to public housing, why does the government propose to locate all the public housing tenants within the same area of the proposed new development?

**MS BURCH:** The proposal for the redevelopment of the flats is an exciting opportunity for a number of people here in Canberra. We are committed to peppering and salting our public housing tenants and to pull down concentration of disadvantage. There have been some public forums, which I understand you have attended.

This is in the very early stages. This is thinking, and thinking about how we can move forward. This work is to engage in a conversation with those tenants, but also people in Reid and Braddon, who will be sharing this community. We need to look first at how we draft a way forward through a draft master plan and a variation to the territory plan. That conversation is ongoing.

There is no final detail about who will be housed where other than our commitment to peppering and salting, to offer affordable housing and social housing. Any design will be environmentally friendly and will reach a six-star rating. There were some comments that they looked a bit wrong facing, but these were just almost design plug-ins so that people get a sense of the space and height of those buildings. There is no way that the future developments will look like a graphical representation of space and height.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Le Couteur, a supplementary question?

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Minister, is the development contingent on the Catholic Church agreeing to participate, and what negotiations have you had with them?

**MS BURCH:** Indeed, we are looking at that whole block, which does include land owned by the Catholic Church. The department is in active discussion with the Catholic Church, and they are willing participants in the discussion. They see the benefits of having that whole site offered for housing. It is a prime bit of real estate. There will be many people with an interest in investing in that area. Those discussions are continuing in a positive way, and they will certainly inform the draft plan as we move forward.

**MS BRESNAN:** Supplementary, Mr Speaker?

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Ms Bresnan.

**MS BRESNAN:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, what is your response to the Canberra Business Council on their proposal that the government commission a study into the costs and benefits of selling public housing properties near Civic and replacing them with a better public and private sector housing mix?

**MS BURCH:** I welcome any discussion that looks to how we better manage our social housing properties. As I have said, we are about breaking down the concentration of disadvantage and that means that there will be a mix of social housing, affordable housing, high-end housing, around Civic. The reason why we are moving forward with this is that we believe it is the smartest way forward to redevelop that asset. The current stock sitting on there certainly needs some work to it. It seems a bad use of funds to go in and keep on fixing stock that is past its use-by date. But, in making that change, we need to get a return on our money that allows us to reinvest in public housing stock. I have no intention to move into this redevelopment, should it progress, without an increase in our public housing stock.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Hunter, a supplementary?

**MS HUNTER:** Yes, Mr Speaker. Minister, there are about 450 public housing units in total in Allawah, Bega and Currong at the moment. After the redevelopment, how many public housing units will there be in the Civic area?

**MS BURCH:** The final number cannot be prescribed now because we have not gone through the planning process. The buildings are not constructed. Currong was decanted a number of years ago. There are no public housing tenants currently in Currong. They are international students. They are students that are there on a year-by-year basis. There are 114, or similar number, across Bega and Allawah. We have made a commitment to a minimum of 10 per cent return to public housing stock. Again, we are in the early conversation. We are nowhere near planning and getting an absolute yield of what the number of units will be. Until we move towards that, our numbers will not be prescribed, other than our commitment to maintain, as much as we can, equal numbers on the sites.

### **Budget—transport**

**MR HARGREAVES:** My question is to the Chief Minister in his capacity as Minister for Transport. Minister, a substantial part of the budget handed down by the Treasurer yesterday included funding for transport initiatives. Can you please inform the Assembly about some of these initiatives?

**MR STANHOPE:** I thank Mr Hargreaves for the question. Indeed, as all members are aware, the government's determination to deal with issues around the development of sustainable transport for the ACT, for an enhancement of our public transport and for initiatives that will support our determination for our sustainable

transport plan to achieve a significant modal shift, was a central part of this budget. I think it can be said fairly and honestly that this is the most targeted, significant investment—an investment of \$100 million designed to deal exclusively with issues of public transport, cycling, walking and initiatives that will lead to an enhancement of public transport in a significant way—which governments previously have been able to achieve.

It is a very broad package that has sought to identify all of the different sorts of infrastructure that will lead to people feeling more comfortable about walking if they wish to walk, about cycling if they choose to cycle, or about seeking to access ACTION for public transport. It does, in the context of the entire package, seek to deal with those various push and pull factors that are part and parcel of seeking a change in behaviour and a move to, most particularly, public transport but also to make cycling and walking, in particular, more attractive through a focus on where we can design and build transit ways and how we can encourage greater usage or sharing of vehicles along our major carriageways.

That is the philosophy which underpins this particular package that comes out of the detailed work that has been done over recent years as we develop a transport for Canberra plan, a transport action plan. Members would be aware by perusing the budget of the very significant range of targeted initiatives that it contains: \$4.8 million for park-and-ride and bike and ride facilities at places like EPIC, Erindale shopping centre, Phillip pool, Cohen Street in Belconnen, Gungahlin and Tuggeranong. There is \$3.5 million for lighting in the city, understanding that, if it is very dark and not friendly after one gets off a bus, say, at a major bus station or interchange, there is an inhibition against walking, and we are seeking to address those sorts of issues as we develop the package.

There is \$2.7 million for new bus stops, shelters, signs, lights and bike racks and \$1 million for new on-road and off-road cycling community paths, accepting and acknowledging that it needs to be understood that there was in excess of \$2.8 million provided in this financial year in the capital program for enhanced cycle and community paths. This \$1 million is a top-up of money that was provided last year.

There is \$14.7 million provided for a third lane on Parkes Way and the Glenloch interchange to the Acton tunnel, acknowledging issues around congestion and the fact that there is a very complex matrix of transport initiatives that need to be pursued. There is \$7.1 million to upgrade that part of the Cotter Road from the expressway to Adelaide Avenue, in acknowledgement of the pressure that will be brought to bear on that particular transit way as a result of the development of Molonglo. There has, too, in recognition of the need to deal with some of the complex issues around buses—*(Time expired.)*

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hargreaves, a supplementary?

**MR HARGREAVES:** Thanks, Mr Speaker. Can the Chief Minister please tell us more about the transport initiatives in the budget which are not necessarily related to the transport for Canberra plan?

**MR STANHOPE:** I am more than happy to do that. It does need to be acknowledged that some of the central aspects of the plan go to an acknowledgement of the need for us to bite the bullet on issues that have been raised here repeatedly. I acknowledge that they have been raised over the last two years regularly in discussion and, indeed, within the chamber by members of the Greens party, in relation to dedicated transit ways and the suite of initiatives that need to be taken or addressed to attract people more readily to use public transport, to make it more reliable, more regular, more appealing and more used. The government has been pleased to respond to an ongoing conversation with the Greens party in relation to issues such as the need for a dedicated transit way between the ACT and Queanbeyan. We will, in this financial year, begin the process of feasibility and design and we will, through that work, develop a dedicated transit way to Queanbeyan. This is something that has been raised with me on a number of occasions by the Greens.

Similarly, there is Northbourne Avenue. Northbourne Avenue probably represents, in the context of retrofitting an existing road, the greatest challenge to road and transport planners and engineers. Exactly what do we do to deal with the issue of easy bus transport? It is incredibly complex; it is difficult. It is a narrow corridor, relatively. It has established avenues of trees that the people of Canberra will not part with easily. It is difficult to widen the verge on the outer edge of the roads. There will be issues around the central verge, not just because of the trees but because of the very significant services that are laid down the middle, and it will require a detailed community conversation as we move forward on the design of Northbourne Avenue.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Bresnan, a supplementary question?

**MS BRESNAN:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, what is the increase in the ACTION budget as part of this investment in public transport?

**MR STANHOPE:** The entire public transport package, or transport for Canberra package, is a package of just under \$97 million, \$86 million of which is capital and \$10 million of which is additional operating expenditure—essentially direct budget funding for ACTION services. The most significant part of that is, I believe, a \$6 million commitment over four years to the maintenance of the Redex route. The Redex route will now be incorporated within the network. It was initiated as a trial, as you would recall, Ms Bresnan. I acknowledge the conversations that were held with you and your colleagues and the government's response to your representations and position in relation to this. The Redex will now become an entrenched part of the network. In addition, it will be extended to Fyshwick, and \$6 million has been provided in the ongoing operation of funds to ACTION to ensure that the Redex is an incorporated part of the network.

In the context of that, as I have just indicated, Redex will be extended to Fyshwick. At Fyshwick it is our intention, as we connect eventually, over the next few years, to a transit way to Queanbeyan, to develop a park-and-ride at Fyshwick—hopefully a park-and-ride where we can, in consultation with the Queanbeyan City Council, ensure some integration between the two transport providers—ACTION and most probably Deane's—in relation to how we connect our two communities.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Porter, a supplementary question?

**MS PORTER:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Chief Minister, how does the funding in this area announced in this year's budget build on projects currently underway?

**MR STANHOPE:** I thank Ms Porter for that question. Indeed, as members are aware, there are very significant roads and transport works currently being pursued in the ACT. I am sorry; I am happy to pursue this on another occasion.

As I indicated today, there is in transport or roads at the moment works of somewhere in the order of—I believe the precise number is \$186 million in contract work on roads currently being delivered: a very significant investment, an investment which at one level responds to the need for upgrades to deal with congestion, the need for just maintenance and the fact that our road infrastructure is perhaps the most expensive piece of infrastructure requiring constant, regular maintenance that is vested in the territory, in addition perhaps to our housing stock. It is an asset that requires a very heavy level of continuing maintenance.

This very high level of current work that you will see around town, which I am receiving some representations on—I have asked the public, the people of Canberra, to be patient, to understand the need to invest in roads, to maintain, to upgrade, to extend, to expand. We have roadworks—indeed, I understand that there are currently, in operation or active, 40 roads-based contracts in excess of \$1 million being executed throughout the ACT.

Part and parcel of that large level was a deliberate decision taken in last year's budget to ensure that we supported this community, supported jobs, supported the economy through that particular budget to do what government can do to ease us through the global financial crisis. It is a great credit to the Treasurer, Katy Gallagher. As a result of the spectacular success of last year's strategy, we find ourselves able today to—*(Time expired.)*

### **Childcare—numbers**

**MR DOSZPOT:** My question is to the minister for community services. Minister, the agreement of COAG for changes to childcare arrangements includes a significant alteration to ratio numbers. What impact will this have on the existing childcare numbers in the ACT?

**MS BURCH:** I thank Mr Doszpot for his interest in childcare. The COAG reforms are around quality services for our childcare sector. Indeed, the clock starts ticking in July of this year and you will find in the budget an allocation that will support our sector move through that transition. The COAG reforms—we have been through this—are around increasing the quality of the workers, increasing the standards and qualifications of workers, within the sector. It is also about improving the worker-to-ratio.

Every mother and father and family that I have spoken to actually welcomed the improvements of quality in the childcare sector. There is no reason to think that

childcare places will be negatively impacted by improvement in quality. We are factoring in growth; indeed, the investment in Flynn allows for a growth of childcare places across the ACT. That is what families are telling me. They are telling me they want childcare places, and that is what we are delivering.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Doszpot, a supplementary?

**MR DOSZPOT:** Minister, has any audit of childcare in the ACT been completed by you to ascertain the level of impact of the regulatory changes, including current and anticipated demand, and if not, why not?

**MS BURCH:** It is a little bit of *deja vu*. We have done some work. You know that there has been work done on looking at the costs. We have done work around what these programs and the COAG improvements are going to do for us here in the ACT. There is no negative impact. The impact is that the workforce within the childcare sector will be supported. They will be better trained. We have CIT providing wonderful graduation rates of childcare workers being trained. So COAG will improve quality in the childcare sector. This is what the families are welcoming and this is what we are delivering.

**MR SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mrs Dunne?

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, will the changes in ratios force any childcare centres to reduce the number of children that they will be able to accept?

**MS BURCH:** I have not been approached by any childcare provider, whether community sector or private provider, telling me that they will be reducing childcare places. Certainly it has not been raised in the children's services forum either. I do not expect it to happen.

### **Housing—community**

**MS BRESNAN:** My question is to the minister for housing and concerns community housing. Minister, I understand that an independent review was recently conducted, investigating the impact that the government's funding formulae for community housing had on Havelock Housing. Minister, could you please inform the Assembly what findings the review made?

**MS BURCH:** The department has been working with Havelock Housing over some time. Indeed, there was a review done by Oakton, an independent accounting firm. That draft report is finalised and has been released to Havelock Housing for comment. We are working with Havelock, as we have done on a weekly and monthly basis, to come to an end of this process, and to work with them to ensure that they have a sustainable business model so that they can continue to do their work in this sector. We are waiting for them to provide final comments to the department. The department will work through those final comments. This is an ongoing discussion with a view clearly to working with Havelock to ensure that they have a sustainable business model.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Bresnan, a supplementary?

**MS BRESNAN:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Given that Havelock Housing have said that they are willing for this review to be made public, could you please table this paper in the chamber by the end of today?

**MS BURCH:** I will have to take that on notice. I have concerns. Without talking directly with Havelock and having assurances from my department that there are no conflict of interest or confidential matters, I do not think I am able to do that. But I am quite happy to provide a brief to you and to do what I can to share with you what information I can.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Hunter, a supplementary?

**MS HUNTER:** Yes, Mr Speaker. Minister, does the government contribute to the lack of viability of community housing organisations when it rents housing properties to community housing at 35 per cent of market rent, despite many tenants only being able to pay 30 per cent of their income in rent?

**MS BURCH:** I would say that Housing ACT works well with the community housing sector. This is not about taking the community housing sector—we are investing in the community housing sector. Community Housing Canberra has been given transfer of property. It has got a line of credit. The government have made a commitment to increase our numbers—to maintain our numbers and increase, where possible, our numbers—in our social housing, but we also have a commitment to work with the community housing sector to make sure it is viable, that it has business models and that it provides alternatives across the housing continuum in the ACT.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** A supplementary, Mr Speaker?

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, Ms Le Couteur.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I am probably just a bit confused, but, given that it costs the community housing organisations 35 per cent and they rent them out at 30 per cent, how is the extra five per cent covered?

**MS BURCH:** There are different business models for the different community housing providers here in the ACT. Without the detail of all of those business models and how they are costed, I cannot go to the answer to that. But we have, I think, five or six different organisations that are providing social housing. Some are very small organisations that manage a very, very small stock and have a targeted client base, for want of a better word, and others go up to Community Housing Canberra, which is a large organisation and very forward thinking. Without the business model, I am happy to take that on notice and see what I can get back. But suffice to say that this government is interested in maintaining and supporting social housing, community housing, as an alternative on the housing continuum.

### **Disability services—kinship carers program**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services. Minister, I note that the tender for the kinship carers program

for 2010-13 was advertised in today's *Canberra Times*, at page 26. The advertisement says:

Documents for the tenders advertised below may be downloaded from the Procurement website ...

**Mr Hargreaves:** You got that off Brendan, didn't you? You told him the page number.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, Mr Hargreaves! Mr Hanson has the floor.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, the website states:

Please be advised that the Kinship Carers Support Program request for Proposal is scheduled to be released on Saturday, 8 May 2010.

The website also describes the contact person as an "interim officer". Minister, why did you advertise the tender for this program when the tender documents are not available?

**MS BURCH:** The procurement process is such that I certainly have a hands-off approach to that. It would be inappropriate for me to do that. But any advertising to let the community know that we are progressing with this procurement and that we are investing in support for kin carers and foster carers is a good thing.

**MR SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Hanson?

**MR HANSON:** Minister, are the tender documents ready, and if not, why not?

**MS BURCH:** Just so we can cut to the end of this, I will find out. It would not be advertised if they were not available. It is a Procurement Solutions bid. But to satisfy those opposite, because I know that many over there have an absolute interest in how this government provides support to kin carers, I will find out.

**MR SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mrs Dunne.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, why is there only an interim officer allocated to this tender?

**Ms Gallagher:** These are matters for the department.

**MS BURCH:** Yes, I am having trouble, because I just do not understand how Mrs Dunne thinks it is appropriate for me to know the wherewithal of the over 1,100 staff that are in the department, if they are interim, if they are full time, if they are casual, if they are acting up or acting down. I know that many of her questions on notice actually want that level of detail, so that will be provided in many ways to her in good time.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mrs Dunne, a supplementary question?

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, Mr Speaker. Minister, are you embarrassed that, after all this time, you have failed to deliver a key 2008 ALP election policy?

**MS BURCH:** The short answer is no. I met with a number of representatives from kin carers. We had a very positive discussion. They are looking forward to ongoing work with me around how this government supports foster carers and kin carers who are doing an absolutely fantastic job.

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

## Paper

**Mr Speaker** presented the following paper:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to subsection 31(3)—Performance audit—Report on the Independent Performance Audit of the Operations of the ACT Auditor-General and the ACT Audit Office, prepared by R J Sendt, Director, Bob Sendt and Associates, dated 3 May 2010.

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella), by leave: Mr Speaker, I think this report is welcomed by the Assembly, and I am sure members will read it with interest. I am sure the Chief Minister will read it with interest. For the information of members, Ms Le Couteur, as the chair of the PAC, was sent an embargoed copy by Mr Sendt, and that was distributed to members for our interest. But now that embargo has been lifted by the tabling of the report, there are a few comments that are worth making.

It is important that we get the arrangements for the Auditor-General right, and it is important that we have an Auditor-General's Office that is working effectively and efficiently and that is well resourced to scrutinise the government. That is the nature of the report that you have just tabled, Mr Speaker. We have only had it since early today so I have not had a chance to go through it comprehensively, but it is interesting, and I will just read some of the things that the independent performance auditor had to say.

If you go just to the first paragraph on page 1 of the executive summary, it says:

Based on my Review, I believe that the ACT Audit Office is providing an important service in an efficient and effective manner, and the Legislative Assembly and people of the Australian Capital Territory are achieving good value from the Office's use of the taxpayer's dollar. It achieves this notwithstanding the relatively small size of the Office, the complexity of its role and the demands upon it.

I think the Chief Minister has opened the report, and I hope he heard me quote what Mr Sendt said—what we have is a good office, an effective office; it is efficient and it is value for money. He goes on to say:

In my view the Office has enthusiastically embraced the challenge of the tougher new auditing and quality control standards of recent years.

This is an office doing its job, despite the constant attacks from the Chief Minister. Further down on page 1 the independent auditor actually says—

**Mr Barr:** It would benefit from more extensive benchmarking of its performance against other audit offices, though.

**MR SMYTH:** Well, just wait, Mr Barr:

I found that the Office is open and accountable about its performance.

Mr Sendt has made a number of findings, and he has made some suggestions about improvement. I think we would all acknowledge that everything can be improved. In regard to its financial audit, what he finds on page 8 is:

The Office's financial audit function is generally well-managed and professional.

If there were any doubts about the professional nature of the office, I think we can say that they have been allayed by the inquiry by the independent performance auditor. On page 15, under "Performance Audits", the finding of the auditor is:

The Office's performance audit function is generally well-managed and effective, and meets the requirements of ASAE 3500 *Performance Engagements*, but there is scope for attention to some of the aspects.

Again, it is generally well managed and effective. At the bottom of page 15 the auditor says:

Overall I believe that the ACT Legislative Assembly and the public obtain a valuable and professional service from the Office for the funds allocated to it for undertaking performance audits.

So it is value for money. It is good value for money according to the independent performance auditor, Mr Barr.

**Mr Barr:** There you go. So no need to give it another cent. We don't need to give it more money then.

**MR SMYTH:** Well, just wait. The automatic teller machine of the ACT should just wait a moment. Let me read that one again:

Overall I believe that the ACT Legislative Assembly and the public obtain a valuable and professional service from the Office for the funds allocated to it for undertaking performance audits.

The independent auditor then goes on and talks about the office's selection of performance audit topics:

The Office has a very well-established and robust process in place to guide the selection of a performance audit program.

So what they have got is good processes, so we are getting a well-established and robust selection of topics that are discussed. Mr Barr has now vacated the chamber, and, yes, on page 29 the independent performance auditor does look at the financial impacts of whether we get value for money. There is a discussion on page 29 where the independent auditor looks at the financial management of £9 for every £1 it costs to run the UK's National Audit Office. I think what he is saying in this section—people need to read the section—is that auditors and audit offices that are well run, well received by government and acted upon by government actually do help the bottom line of the budget.

Often governments think auditors are out to get them—obviously the Chief Minister does. But at the bottom of page 29 the independent performance auditor says:

The fourth observation I would make is that I see no inherent or inappropriate bias in the ACT Audit Office against topics that might achieve savings.

He goes on to say:

Recent topics such as the *Maintenance of Public Housing, Government Office Accommodation, Collection of Fees and Fines* and *Credit Card Use, Hospitality and Sponsorship* all have elements that could result in savings through improved management practices.

So there we have the opportunity for the government to use the good work of the auditor. Instead of attacking the audit office, it should take on board what is said and make sure it gets the dividend, make sure it gets the return.

The Chief Minister was quite concerned that the Auditor-General was over-resourced and was mismanaging those resources, and we heard his attacks. So what does the independent performance auditor say? Over on page 31 under “Management and Resources” he says:

For a small organisation, I believe that the approach taken by the Audit Office demonstrates a sound commitment to strategic planning.

So it is well run, we are getting value for money, and it has got a strategic view, unlike this government. There is actually quite a nice section on page 33, and I am sure the Chief Minister will read this. The independent auditor talks about judging small jurisdictions against large jurisdictions and using the whole per capita thing. Under section 5.5, “Diseconomies of Small Size”, the finding is:

The ACT Audit Office's relatively small size does not appear to have impacted significantly on its cost structure or the quality of services it provides.

It is a small office, but it provides good quality service. That is the judgement of the independent auditor. If you go across to page 34 there is a section—it needs to be read properly—that finishes with the paragraph:

... based on the relatively unsophisticated analysis allowed by the available data, it is apparent that the ACT Audit Office has been able to operate in a way that achieves high productivity of its staff, despite the small size of its operations.

So it is small, but it is very productive. That is a compliment to the staff of the audit office, but it is also a compliment to the leadership of the Auditor-General. He then goes on to a finding at the top of page 35:

Notwithstanding the small population of the ACT, the Territory Government delivers much the same range of services as the larger State governments. To provide the ACT Legislative Assembly with a comparable level of assurance as to the efficiency and effectiveness of those services, there is a need for a broadly comparable performance audit program in the ACT.

That is what many of us have been asking for for years—that is, that the auditor be funded to deliver that comparable performance audit program in the ACT. What does he say about the current performance audit program? On page 37 he says:

In my view the existing performance audit function is viable, but just so.

It is hanging on there by the skin of its teeth; it is just viable. We should not have a just viable performance audit. This is where the savings can be made. He goes on to say:

The size of the program provided by the current funding level makes it difficult for the Office to plan a series of successive audits on a particular theme (such as environmental protection, governance, risk management).

It is difficult for the Auditor-General to deliver ongoing advice on how to improve the services of the ACT government, thereby making savings and hopefully achieving that \$1 to \$9 ratio.

He goes on to finish this section by saying:

It is an inevitable consequence of the small size of the Territory's population and tax base that some services will cost substantially more in per capita terms than in the larger states. How much the people of the Territory should pay towards the Audit Office's performance audit program is a decision that its elected representatives must judge.

I welcome that last paragraph, because that is what I am attempting to do in my legislation. The independent performance auditor goes on about the quality of the material coming out of the ACT audit office. In section 6.1.2 on page 39 he finds:

The Auditor-General's various reports are well-written and effective in informing Members of the Legislative Assembly and other readers of matters that are relevant to them in meeting their roles and responsibilities.

She is value for money, they are doing a good job, they are well organised, we are getting good results out of it. Apart from that, the reports are well written and

effective, which is what we should be after from an auditor. The last paragraph of page 40 is an analysis of whether the reports are well balanced:

In my opinion the Office's performance audit reports satisfy all reasonable criteria for good reporting.

So we are getting good reports. The paragraph continues:

They were well-structured and the layout and language used made for easy reading. Findings and recommendations were clearly expressed, as was the rationale for each audit having been undertaken.

We are getting value for money, we are getting good reports out of them, they are clear and easy to understand. It would appear the only person who does not understand them or like them, of course, is the Chief Minister.

But what about the Auditor-General's relationship with the people she undertakes these audits of and for? We go across to section 6.2, "Relationship with Audit Clients", on page 42:

The chief executives I interviewed were generally complementary about the Office.

Almost unanimously they indicated that they had few if any issues with the way the Office undertook its financial audit work.

Even the people the audit office and the Auditor-General deal with say they like the way she does the job. That is to the credit of the auditor's staff. We go across to timeliness on page 46 under "Benchmarking". The finding is:

The Office has one of the best records of all state and territory audit offices for completing its financial audit reports in a timely manner. Where it has not completed an audit according to its own timing benchmarks, this has largely been due to the agency concerned being late in submitting its financial report.

It keeps to its benchmarks. The standards that it sets are met. Again, that is to the credit of the way the office is ordered and structured and its use of the resources. That is certainly not the impression the Chief Minister presented. The finding under "Timeliness and Cost of Performance Audits" on page 49 states:

Despite the difficulties associated with high levels of staff turnover, the Office has a consistently good record in completing its performance audits in a short timeframe and at an average cost significantly below other jurisdictions.

They are cost effective. Rather than being overfunded and fat, as the Chief Minister has tried to portray, they are actually cost effective. They are bringing in these reports at an average cost significantly lower than other jurisdictions.

I have only had a cursory glance at the report. There is plenty in it. There are suggestions for improvement. I do not think the auditor has ever said that they could not improve on what they are doing. But I think it debunks and refutes the Chief

Minister's ill-founded claims and accusations about the audit office. It would be lovely if the Chief Minister would simply stand and apologise and let the Auditor-General and her office get on with the job.

### **Active transport plan Paper and statement by member**

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Molonglo), by leave: I present the following paper:

Active Transport Plan for the ACT—ACT Greens, dated March 2010.

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

Leave granted.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** This paper is about active transport. Active transport is physically active transport. Walking is part of it, cycling is part of it. And active transport needs also to integrate with a strong public transport system. In the ACT our public transport system is our bus system. Active transport is an important part of our transport system. It is an important part of our sustainable transport system but it is, of course, not the only part of our transport system. And the Greens have never said that it is. It is an important part, and a good transport system, a sustainable transport system, is a key to the planning of Canberra's future. So I commend this paper to you.

### **Closing the gap on unmet legal need—the ACT Greens' 5 point action plan Paper and statement by member**

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

Closing the Gap on Unmet Legal Need—The ACT Greens' 5 Point Action Plan, dated April 2010.

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

Leave granted.

**MR RATTENBURY:** The Greens believe equitable access to justice is a cornerstone of a modern democratic society. Having the ability to speak to a lawyer and get their advice is one fundamental way to ensure that individuals can uphold their rights. Any legal issue that arises can be an unexpected and highly stressful event for the individual involved. Where legal need is unmet and people go without advice, the quality of justice and of our society is diminished. And that is why we have developed this action plan.

People are currently falling through the gaps and not getting advice when they need it most. This only adds to their stress at what is often already a difficult time, such as the end of a marriage or a de facto relationship. Unmet legal need is a shadowy problem which we know exists but which has not been quantified or acted on. This plan addresses that issue.

The action plan puts the spotlight on a number of examples. One we put in there is Jenny, which is not her real name but is a real example. Jenny lives in rental accommodation, works part time and has sole responsibility for her young child, while her ex-husband lives in the matrimonial home. Jenny cannot afford a private lawyer, does not qualify for legal aid and has no prospect of securing the property settlement she is entitled to. Jenny is just one example of someone who has fallen through the gaps in our legal system.

There are a number of possible initiatives to help close the gap. Our action plan particularly identifies investment in community legal centres as a strategic option that can be implemented locally by the ACT government. Investment in community legal centres is a smart use of public funds, as not only will it allow greater access to lawyers but it is also an investment in education and preventive programs that can reduce how often people actually end up needing to take their issues to court.

As I said, it is a five-point action plan. Actions 1 and 2 represent the most immediate needs of community legal centres and include securing funding for the Women's Legal Centre Indigenous liaison officer and address the urgent short-term accommodation issues the community legal centres face, which at the most basic level prevent them accepting offers of pro bono work from private lawyers for the simple reason there is not enough physical space for them to do that pro bono work in. Actions 3 to 5 set up an integrated long-term strategy to be rolled out over multiple budgets. These actions are sequential and are required to quantify unmet legal need and then fund and house community legal centres to help them meet that need.

As part of yesterday's budget, we had the government release its own 2010 access to justice initiative. I welcome that and it is now clear that unmet legal need and access to justice are issues the ACT must address. And we hope that, in light of the government's focus on this issue as well, 2010-11 will be a year of real action on this very important issue.

## **Land—release**

Debate resumed.

**MR SESELJA** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (3.25): I thank Ms Porter for bringing the motion forward. It is good to have a debate about land release in the territory in particular. I think that there is no doubt that this has been an issue that has been very poorly handled by the ACT Labor government over many years. In fact, if anything, the announcement that we saw in the budget, which is referred to in Ms Porter's motion, about a massive provision for accelerated land releases is an acknowledgement of that failure. It is an acknowledgement that they simply have not kept pace with demand for many years.

Speak to any young first homebuyer and they will tell you that it has become more and more difficult in the territory to buy a home. It has become more and more difficult because the land price has been pushed up considerably. The land price in the ACT has gone up very quickly. I will refer to some statistics soon which demonstrate

really how wrong they got it. They particularly got it wrong several years ago, and I have made this point on a number of occasions in this place. There was a squeeze on land supply at just the wrong time in the cycle back in 2002, 2003 and 2004. We saw this massive gap open up between the growth in ACT house prices and the growth in total earnings in the ACT.

We have this graph which demonstrates that. I will show it to you, Madam Assistant Speaker, but I will talk to it. It shows very clearly the fact that what we saw from March 2002, and particularly from June 2002, was this massive gap begin to open up. If you look at the total earnings in the ACT, they have tracked fairly steadily up over the period from 2002 right through to 2009. They have been pretty consistent.

Wages growth in the ACT has been very strong for many years, stronger than in the rest of the country most of the time. It has not always been the case, of course. The mining boom states will often outstrip us from time to time. But in terms of consistency, we have been strong, partly because of the commonwealth public service being here. Of course, we have seen that around the nation. Wages growth, particularly under the Howard government, was very strong for many years.

What we saw though, despite that growth in wages, was the squeeze on land supply that occurred around 2002, 2003. This massive gap opened up where from March 2002 to December 2003 house prices in the ACT went up around 50 per cent. So that happened in only a little over a year. They went up over 50 per cent in that period. Wages growth could never, ever keep pace with that kind of increase. It simply would not be sustainable in any way for wages growth to catch up in any way to that.

That is what we have seen. We have seen since that time that that gap has never closed. I will get to some of the reasons why I think we see some of those issues. Because of the government's very slow land release policies, a lot of strain has particularly been put on first homebuyers in the territory.

The announcement in yesterday's budget referred to in Ms Porter's motion I think is a reflection of that. It is a reflection of that failure. It is a reflection of the fact that this government has not got it done. I have got to say this, and I have made this point a number of times: once you let that genie out of the bottle, once you really squeeze that supply at times of high demand and you see unsustainable prices going up, it is very difficult to actually put that genie back in the bottle. It is very difficult because the policy fixes are mainly unpalatable.

It is actually not sensible to try to quickly correct that because that can have very bad consequences. It is not sensible to turn around once you have pushed prices up in that unsustainable way through squeezing land supply and try to quickly correct it, as I say, through flooding the market. We have never advocated that because that would have serious impacts for those who have purchased, particularly recent purchasers.

It might be okay for those who have a lot of equity in their homes, although they would not be comfortable with it, but particularly it would hurt those people who have recently bought, who may not have much equity in their home and who are relying on some growth in their house prices. This is the vicious circle we get into once you let that genie out of the bottle.

But there are things that can be done. For a long time we have been calling for land release that is genuinely responsive. What we often see, and I suspect that this is what we have seen in this budget, is that the government pick out round numbers. They do not do analysis. They know inherently that there needs to be a little bit more. They know they need to be seen to be responding; so they come up with a round number. We have seen it in the last couple of years. They say, "We are going to urgently release 1,000 blocks." Often that urgent release of 1,000 blocks takes a long time actually to get to market, but it is this round number. What analysis has been done to know what demand is projected to be?

We have argued for a long time that we need to get in front of this situation through infrastructure planning but also through better forward planning in ACTPLA, through actually having resources particularly targeted towards ensuring that there is a serious pipeline of supply and that we reduce the gap between when a land release is announced, when it is initially put on the market to when we actually see houses being built on it. There is a number of things you can do on that.

As I said, infrastructure planning is critical. When you speak to groups like the HIA they will tell you that. They will tell you that it is indeed some of the infrastructure delays that prevent the houses from being built. We are seeing now Molonglo is finally being marketed. This has been years coming. We expected it would come several years ago and it is now finally being marketed. I have seen the ads on the tellie. We are very pleased to see some blocks going in Molonglo. But I understand there is still going to be, again, a gap between when people can build. There will be a significant gap. There are things that can be done to narrow that gap. There is better planning that can be done.

We heard today at the budget breakfast about looking at things like contestability of supplying electricity. Issues like that actually delay things. It actually adds to costs because we have generators on site for builders and the like but it also delays things when we have to wait for some time for these basic services to be hooked up.

There are a number of other things that need to be done. I refer to genuine competition in the market which this government has been so keen to stop. Simon Corbell, on behalf of ACT Labor, really helped to cause this housing affordability crisis. He helped cause this housing affordability crisis, as demonstrated in this graph. It shows that massive and sudden jump and the gap open up between the growth in wages and the growth in house prices. Not only did he help cause that on behalf of ACT Labor but we also saw the way that the LDA was established and the desire to see a monopoly there. Later on there was a reluctant acceptance of the fact that something different had to be done and then we saw some englobo release added to that.

We say there should be more of that. We say there should be more of those types of releases but not just large parcels for one developer. What we would want to see is mixing up the way we release land, mixing up the types of releases we have: some off the shelf, some going in parcels of 100 and 200 and indeed up to sometimes 500 and 1,000 where one developer does most of it. That lack of competition, which has been actively encouraged by this government, has made things worse as well.

We have got the issues around land supply which have never properly been addressed and now we are seeing an acknowledgement of that, I think, with a massive catch-up. We have issues relating to competition and the way the LDA operates, issues around infrastructure and the gap between when a subdivision is released or announced and when that comes to market.

Then, of course, there is the planning system, how responsive the planning system is. We have always acknowledged that some of the legislative changes that were made by the government, which we supported, should help that, in part, in greenfields. But it is worth reflecting on some of the other threats. I circulate an amendment now. It is an amendment that just looks at some of the other issues. I have highlighted the fact that the price index for the ACT has risen much faster than in other capital cities and, of course, the failure of government to manage land supply, which has led to ACT house prices rising faster than in other capital cities.

But my amendment also talks about this other threat, and that is the additional collection of a massive \$68 million in tax over the next four years through the change of use charge and the impact that will have. We need to think for a moment. The Treasurer confirmed today both at the budget breakfast and in this place in the tables we have seen as part of the codification process that we will see massive per unit taxes right across the board.

We use the example of Braddon where the minimum tax for a unit is \$37,500. That is the minimum. That is if you have got 100-plus units. We know that a lot of the unit complexes in Braddon are much smaller than that. The types of developments that we see in Braddon are often small unit developments. They might be four units, six units, 10 units, 15 units. They will be taxed much higher per unit. They will actually be taxed upwards of \$40,000 and \$50,000 per unit.

It defies belief that you can turn around and take what is a relatively small tax at the moment that was forecasting at \$2 million and then at \$5 million this year, increase it in some suburbs by something in the order of \$30,000, \$40,000, \$50,000 plus and much more for dual occupancies. In some cases, it is something like \$150,000 for dual occupancies in some areas. You cannot put in place such a massive tax—a 185 per cent increase in this tax—and say it will have no impact, that it will not impact on homebuyers. It defies belief that this would not have an impact on the people purchasing a unit and that it would not have an impact on renters.

Let us remember that there are two aspects primarily to this affordability issue. There is the issue of people trying to buy into the market and there is the issue of people in a very tight rental market paying very high rents. The two are often linked, because it makes it very difficult to save for your home when you are paying very high rent and much of your income goes to your rent.

This tax that is being ramped up by this government, this massive tax on homes, will make homes less affordable. It will make renting less affordable; it will make purchasing a unit less affordable. And it will not just be in the inner suburbs. It will be across the board. The rates vary but they are significant across the board. The ones

quoted in places like Braddon with a minimum of \$37½ thousand are just one example. They are not the highest example. We used Braddon because I think it is an example of where we do want to see development. We do want to see infill. I want to see more people living in Braddon. The government claims to want to see more people living in Braddon. We want to have a vibrant precinct there. There are plans for it but what we are going to do is turn around and slug a tax of a minimum of \$37½ thousand on it.

What is that going to do for affordability? What is that going to do for rent? What is that going to do for young families who are looking to rent while saving for a home or who are looking maybe to enter the market and who have chosen to purchase a unit, often because they see little other choice? People buy units for all sorts of reasons but some buy them simply because units may be the only thing that they can buy. They want to buy something. They want to have something that they own and this government is saying to them, “We will slug a \$40,000 tax, a \$50,000 tax, a \$60,000 tax.

I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all words after “notes”, substitute:

- “(a) Australian Bureau of Statistics’ figures which show that the price index for established houses in the ACT has risen by 122 per cent since March 2002, while the price index for established houses in the eight capital cities of Australia has risen by 100 per cent;
- (b) the failure of this Government to manage the land supply which has led to ACT house prices rising faster than other capital cities;
- (c) the additional collection of a massive \$68 million of tax over the next four years through the change of use charge, and the negative impact that this tax will have on the housing industry which, according to the CommSec report, has kept unemployment in the ACT at ‘historically low levels’; and
- (d) the HIA-Commonwealth Bank Affordability Report which shows the ACT to be the second least affordable jurisdiction for first home buyers.”.

This amendment is again saying not just what I have set out, but that this tax presents a major threat to families in Canberra. It presents a major slug on families in Canberra who are seeking to buy a unit, who are seeking to rent a unit. Anyone who believes that you can slug such a massive tax and that it will somehow be absorbed, that it will not affect affordability and that it will not affect rents has rocks in their head. This is a bad tax, and I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (3.40): I thank Ms Porter for bringing this motion on today. I listened to her this morning in her fulsome praise of CommSec and their report. And I think she is right. Craig James does a pretty good job in putting these reports together.

One of the things that have emerged, certainly from the debate today, following the budget yesterday, is the Treasurer’s reliance on and her ability to hide behind the

global financial crisis and the supposed \$85 million cut to GST revenue that we were meant to have suffered. I just want to remind members that, given that Craig James and the CommSec *State of the States* report is such a well-endorsed document by the ACT Labor government, we need to go back a little and see what they said in January 2010. On page 6 of the January 2010 report, under “Economic Insights”, what does it say about the ACT? It says:

The leader-board of state and territory economies is useful to get a big picture perspective.

The ACT and Tasmania have been insulated from what he calls the US financial crisis. It is no longer a global financial crisis. Let us face it: this is a US financial crisis that has had impacts around the world. But he says the ACT has been insulated from the US financial crisis.

Again, that crutch that the Treasurer has been leaning so heavily on to cover up their economic mismanagement, their inability to control their budget, their ability to spend more than they earn, is knocked away because CommSec, in the report that Ms Porter praised so highly and quoted from so extensively this morning, says: “The Treasurer cannot use the GFC as an excuse for the state of her budget. She has a budget that was insulated from the GFC.”

We all know that there have been effects from the GFC. But in the main, according to CommSec, the document that Ms Porter and the Labor Party quoted from this morning as being such a wonderful source and endorsement for their policies, they also said, “You were insulated,” which brings us back to the economic management of the ACT, which brings us back to the land release program, which brings us back to all of those things that Mr Seselja just finished talking about. It is about how this government is squeezing young homebuyers out of the market, is creating inefficiencies in the market by not putting incentives in place to get older Canberrans to downsize into more appropriate accommodation and, probably worst of all, is affecting renters. Those who cannot afford to buy are probably, in my opinion, the most likely to be affected by this.

What it means is that when you add it to the 10 per cent increase in land rent that the government expects in this budget, what you are seeing are huge impacts on the marketplace. That is a 10 per cent increase in land rent from \$95 million to \$105 million this year. Some of that, of course, will be growth of the ACT. But basically what you have got is a greedy grab for tax to cover the mismanagement over nine years of the ACT economy. Remember, this is the government that budgeted for deficits at the height of the economic cycle.

I read with great merriment in the paper this morning Mr Stanhope saying, “Yes, but we budgeted for nine surpluses.” It is not true. At the height of the cycle, 2006-07, we were having deficits. We had more money than we knew what to do with but we were having deficits. That is the economic record of this government. They have not managed the economy or the budget of the ACT at all well.

The economy is doing very well. CommSec is right. The economy is doing well. But as some of the recent census reports also said, the business community has no faith in

this government and their policies when they saw a 21 per cent drop. And that is the problem for us as a territory. Thankfully, the business community is doing well. Not all of them are. There are people who are struggling out there. I get reports that it is very patchy. Industry by industry, it is very patchy. But they have no confidence in this government. In a way it is kind of surprising to see this motion, to see the Labor Party has finally discovered a matter of economic relevance to the ACT.

Unfortunately for the Labor Party, it is not a matter in which they have performed with any credibility at all. Labor will claim that over the next four years they will deliver 17,000 new blocks but there is absolutely no mention in this motion of the problems that have existed and that were created by Labor in their failed land release policies, particularly by Mr Corbell, who was stripped of the portfolio in a stoush with the Chief Minister, and by Mr Corbell's policies.

We only have to go back to the report of the UDIA, the Urban Design Institute of Australia, that said two things were ruining housing affordability in the ACT. They were the land release policy of the government and the high taxes that this government charges. They purport to have 17,000 blocks on the way. We will see. But the already high taxes criticised by the Urban Design Institute of Australia just got higher. They are now going to reapply the change of use charge in a different way and take a staggering 185 per cent increase.

I do not see any of that in Ms Porter's motion. That is the shame about this motion but that is what we expect from Labor backbenchers. There is no mention by Ms Porter in her motion of the consequences of Labor's failed land policies, a policy failure that is forcing housing more and more out of the reach of first homebuyers and more and more out of the reach of those on lower incomes.

Let us put some parameters on the housing problem in the ACT. In the *Australian Financial Review* report last week, on 29 April 2010, there was an analysis of growth in house and unit prices across Australia. In the ACT, in March, the following was the situation: for houses, the median price—with the emphasis on median price; that is, the price that is in the middle of all the prices paid—was \$550,000, more than half a million dollars. Moreover, over the year to March 2010 prices had increased by 14 per cent. And this is directly attributable, I believe, to Labor's policies. Let me repeat: in the ACT at the present, the median house price is \$550,000 and the rate of increase in prices is 14 per cent. That is not a situation on which any government should be congratulating themselves.

Let us consider the situation for units. The median price for a unit is \$412,000 and the rate of increase in prices is 13 per cent. On top of that, we are now going to change the way we apply the change of use charge and add \$10,000, \$20,000 \$30,000, \$40,000 or \$50,000, depending on where the accommodation is, to a unit. And it is even higher for a dual occupancy. A dual occupancy may have accommodated mum and dad, or an older relative, or somebody else might have moved out of the existing house and leased it to the kids.

So let us pause for a moment in relation to units. The more usual entry point for people seeking to enter the housing market is to buy a unit. Now what do they face?

A median price of over \$400,000, an increase to date of 13 per cent, and Jon Stanhope and Katy Gallagher's massive tax hike through change of use charge. This is not a situation on which any government should be congratulating themselves, and yet congratulation is implied in the motion from Ms Porter.

The problem for Ms Porter and for the Labor government is that there is no mention of the history of land release policy in the ACT, the legacy of which is seen in the numbers I have just presented. Let us go on and consider a report, also in the *Financial Review* from last week. This report, on 28 April 2010, analyses the housing deficit in Australia. Nationally there was a housing deficit of 178,000 dwellings at June 2009. This deficit was forecast by the National Housing Supply Council to grow to 200,000 by 2010, more than 300,000 in 2014, and more than 600,000 by 2029. This is a staggering deficit in the supply of dwellings across Australia over the next 20 years. And according to the National Housing Supply Council in June 2009, the ACT faced a deficit of 5,000 dwellings. While the details are not provided for individual jurisdictions beyond that point, the clear implication from the national analysis is that this deficit will continue to grow.

It is in this context that we need to consider the motion from Ms Porter. And the context is clear. It is the context of poor public policy relating to the release of land. Pent-up demand continues to be unsatisfied, despite the response of this government. Poor public policy in regard to fees and charges and poor public policy in relation to the application of the massive increases in the change of use charge continue.

This is not a time for congratulation, Ms Porter. It is a time for your government to acknowledge that your tardiness in releasing land has added to the pressure on prices, prices which even for units are now racing out of sight of the first homeowner and people on lower incomes. But I suppose, as always, your government is not concerned about these people. As if this situation was not bad enough, we now have rises in the interest rate and we now have rises in taxes in this budget.

**MS HUNTER** (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (3.50): First of all, I will start by saying that we will not be supporting Mr Seselja's amendment to Ms Porter's motion. There are some ideas in there and if they had actually come and had that consultation and had a discussion with us earlier, we may have been able to work through some of those issues; but not when it is dropped on us at the last minute and when there seems to be some conjecture in there. We are not even clear about the particular reports that are being referred to, as there are no dates on these reports. They would have been some of the issues we would have talked through if we had been given notice of this amendment. So we will not be supporting that.

Ms Porter's motion sets out a series of facts. The underlying premise, it appears, is that the ACT government is doing a good job at managing the economy and that the land release policy is positive for the ACT. Firstly, it must be said that, according to all the traditional indicators, we are doing very well. State final demand is strong and we assume, given that quarterly figures are unavailable, that gross state product is also growing. We have low unemployment, a strong housing and construction industry and relatively strong business confidence. We have an improved budget position from where we thought we would be this time last year and things generally seem to be rolling along quite smoothly.

However, we do not have a plan for long-term prosperity. We have had and will continue to have next year huge infrastructure investment. Targeted infrastructure investment is essential if we are to build a sustainable city for the 21st century economy. Unfortunately it appears very little long-term planning or cost-benefit analyses have been done on how that investment will position us for the economic challenges that face us ahead.

The Access Economics report cited in the motion states very clearly just how vulnerable we are to the economic slowdown as a result of a decline in commercial and residential construction. The report also says that a piece of good news of late is that the federal government has not been able to restrain itself thus far, still doling out dollars when bad publicity hits the front page. That is poor policy making but it is keeping the ACT's economy ticking over.

The report also states that the territory's medium-term prospects have hung in the balance ever since it became clear that federal government expenditure needed to be reined back over the next few years. This is a serious economic issue for the ACT. We do not want to be subject to the whims of the commonwealth and we should be working towards establishing our own sustainable industries for which we know there will be long-term demand and a good return on investment. Land release is set to be a significant part of government revenue stream and we will be dependent on it for the delivery of services throughout the forward estimates.

Canberra is growing and we need to address that growth. People need a place to live and our residents have a right to government services. People also have a right to a healthy environment and we have a collective obligation to provide intergenerational equity and ensure we do not reduce future generations' ability to meet their needs.

Unfortunately, the fact of the matter is that resources, none more so than land, are finite. We will have an Assembly inquiry into ecological carrying capacity which I suspect will identify that we are already using far more than our fair share of resources. What are we going to do when that land runs out? We know that our ecological impact is unsustainable. The figures are alarming. Our state of the environment reports show a continually declining environment.

Of course, as we move to release more and more land the challenge for the ACT as the bush capital is obvious. Not only does the conversion of land to urban development actually put at risk many of our natural values and unique biodiversity as we chew our way through box gum woodlands and native grasslands, this development also increases the challenge in terms of managing the reserve areas that are left adjacent to the urban development.

On the first point, we know, for example with the Molonglo Valley development, that the government's plans are to build on some highly sensitive ecological areas, including critically endangered yellow box woodlands. While it seems that current thinking is to merely offset those areas with areas of land or other ecological programs, we know that offsets are, firstly, very difficult to assess and, secondly, are

rarely able to effectively replace habitats that are lost in urban expansion. On the second point, it is far harder and requires far more effort and resources to manage areas that are adjacent to urban areas, purely because of the impacts that we as humans have on our natural environment.

Putting aside reserve areas throughout the land release program is not the end of the story. In fact, the opposite is true, that management of those reserve areas needs to be more active than before the urban development started and a portion of the resources that we raise by selling the land must be allocated for protection of our parks and reserves that will surround our urban footprint. Too often the natural areas are left until the end and have to fight for resources, whereas in fact plans and funding should be built into the process and acted on.

I note that the ACT government will have some obligations out at Molonglo under the federal EPBC Act, though I appreciate they are not yet locked in. And it is precisely these kinds of obligations that the government should roll into their planning, not tacking it on at the end. The Kama woodland out at Molonglo, for example, was declared two years ago; yet the current proposal is that a management plan for Kama should not be required for at least another three years. And why would it not be undertaken now so that the woodland can be protected early and the management plan set in place before the development pressures increase?

Selling government assets is easy. What is more difficult is creating an economic environment that fosters growth in future sustainable industries that will support the underlying economic future of the ACT. Our economy must change. We must move away from such a heavy reliance on land release and the old carbon-intensive way of doing things. And we must move towards the green economy.

Low carbon is not part of the future economy. It is the future economy. Economic leaders the world over have acknowledged this fact and the sooner we act and take advantage of skills, the greater the benefits that will flow to the territory. It is interesting to note that Access Economics, if we go back to the quote that I noted earlier in this speech, praises us for acting early. And I hope we can learn the lesson that it does pay to act early.

There are significant challenges in front of us. Acknowledging and implementing measures that address climate change and an ageing population and move us to a more productive, green and sustainable economy are the most important issues for us to address now.

Through the discussion on a larger Canberra, I would also like to take the opportunity to reiterate the Greens' commitment to public housing and to make the point that it is critical that the ACT government continue to consistently work towards public housing making up 10 per cent of housing stock in the ACT, as detailed in the ALP-Greens parliamentary agreement. The federal government's stimulus housing package does make a significant contribution towards the ACT meeting this goal but it is also important that the ACT government back them up and sustain and build on these numbers.

Whilst we are enjoying economic prosperity, our reliance on some inherently unsustainable industries and revenues must be addressed. We have a great opportunity to address the skills shortage and invest in green jobs so that our city can become more sustainable.

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo) (3.59): It is with great pleasure that I rise to support Mr Seselja's amendment. I would like to focus briefly on the issue of interest rates. That is very topical, given the fact that yesterday there was an interest rate increase of 25 basis points. The impact of that on families should not be understated. We have now seen six interest rate rises under the Rudd Labor government.

Given the inflationary pressures and the spending that we have seen on stimulus—the reckless spending we have seen from the Rudd government on stimulus—we can only anticipate that for families who are already struggling to pay off their mortgages there will be more pain to come in the form of interest rates.

If we look at the increases that have occurred, there is an increase of about \$300 a month on the cost of an average mortgage of about \$300,000. If you think about a young family that has moved into their first home, it is difficult to find a house in Canberra where your mortgage is less than \$300,000 if it is your first home. That is an annual increase in your payments of \$3,600. If you put that into the context of many of the other charges that have gone up here in the ACT community—be it rates, parking or the massive increase that we know is coming in our water bills, particularly after 2013, after the building of the Cotter Dam—it is just another nail in the coffin for young people and it is why we see so many in the Canberra community saying that they simply cannot afford to buy a home.

I raise this although it is a federal issue. I do understand that, but the Chief Minister and the Labor Party more generally were very quick to criticise John Howard whenever an interest rate increase occurred. Here we have had deafening silence from the ACT Labor government every time there has been a Rudd Labor government increase. Obviously, it is by the Reserve Bank, but the responsibility, in many ways, is from the mismanagement of the federal economy. We have had deafening silence. Rather than Jon Stanhope standing up for the Canberra community and saying, "This is unacceptable; we have got to do everything in our power to look at whether we should be winding back some of the inflation pressures, particularly the stimulus spending," we have seen him saying, "No; we want more of that."

That is a real shame. He really should be standing up for Canberrans. He should be standing up for those young families with a mortgage. But he is not. He is just letting them spend that extra \$3,600 a year on their mortgages, which they simply cannot afford, whilst, on the other hand, putting up rates—putting up fees and charges across the board.

When you see these fees and charges go up in the budget, it might look as though they are insignificant in themselves. Individually, they are probably not a huge amount. It might only be a dollar or two here for parking. The problem is the incremental effect. When you add that to the rates and the volume of the other fees and charges going up

in this community, it is significant. The impact of interest rates needs to be understood by this government when it is making decisions in its budget about what fees and charges it is going to put on. When it is talking about home affordability and housing affordability here in the ACT, to ignore the impact of those interest rates would be flawed.

If the Chief Minister were to read today's *Financial Review*, he would note the impact of those interest rates on disposable income. He would see that total interest payments as a proportion of disposable income have increased. That not only has a real implication for people's ability to pay their mortgages, but has an impact on other elements of our community, including the business community, and our ability to spend on retail. What happens if people have less money in their pockets because of the amount of money that they have got to put on their mortgage, because of the failure of land release by this government, through the new big tax on homes that we have seen in the ACT budget or by the interest rates going up on a regular basis because of the reckless spending by the federal government? What we see are these inflationary pressures that are causing real pain to families.

They are federal issues, but they are being ignored by this government. We have had a deafening silence from this government. When it was the Howard government, people across on the benches here would be squealing. But now we have deafening silence. Where is Mary Porter on interest rates? Where is her criticism of the Rudd government's fiscal management of their reckless spending? Where is that criticism? What is the impact on young families out in Gungahlin who now have to pay an extra \$300 a month because of those interest rate fees on houses that are already exorbitantly expensive because of a failure of land release by this government?

What we see out of the ACT budget this week is yet more pain. This time the pain is a massive tax hike on homes. It is not just the failure of this government policy on new homes—the cost of that and the slow land release. Now it is on urban infill. The ability for young families who want to get into an apartment has just become that bit harder. Retirees are moving out of the older suburbs—places like Weston Creek, where I live. Retirees want to scale down; they want to get a unit. I have heard many of them say, "This is just going to make that harder for us now. We know that it is going to slow the amount of development that occurs and the number of developers that even want to take the risk." Let us not forget that it is these developers that take the risk. If they think that the profits will not be there or that there is a risk that if they try and pass that on to buyers they will not go for it, they simply will not develop. I have had conversations with developers to that end.

What we have seen from the government in recent times—from Labor, be it from federal Labor and the impact of interest rates or local Labor and their new tax on homes—is just going to make it harder for young families who want to get into apartments and it is going to make it harder for retirees. It is a shame. For Mary Porter to stand up in this place and try and laud what this government has done over eight years for housing affordability—if she thinks she has done anybody a favour, I suggest she go out to Gungahlin, talk to some retirees who want to try and find an apartment to live in as they scale down, and ask them what they think. Ask them what they think about the percentage of their income they are now spending on their mortgages—bigger than at any previous time in the history of the ACT.

Compare the facts. Mr Seselja has got a very good graph which shows that widening gap from when this government got into power and the gap between income and the amount of money that is being spent on houses. That is a failure of this government. What we are seeing is a continued failure of Labor at the federal and local levels.

**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) (4.07): I thank Ms Porter for this motion and the debate that has ensued as a result of it. I note the extent to which the Liberal Party have chosen to ignore the motion completely and move an amendment to essentially negate the motion so as not to debate the significant successes that we have achieved and the linkage between the successful land release program that the government have pursued and the economic strength that we now experience as a community.

That is at the heart of Ms Porter's motion. It is a position that Ms Porter has pursued as a result of the latest CommSec report in relation to economic performance around the nation and the extent to which CommSec quite deliberately connected the relationship between the fact that, over the last two quarters, we have had the strongest performing economy in Australia and land supply.

The chief economist at CommSec, Craig James, commented that when there is a strong demand for housing, when land has to be created, the ACT government has been creating that land and putting it onto the market. He goes on to say this, and I acknowledge this quote with great respect to New South Wales. He says:

That's the real difference between the ACT and NSW. The ACT is number one in the rankings, NSW is number eight in the rankings ...

In the ACT the economy is being driven forward because when more housing is required, the government just releases more land onto the market and the economy cranks over ...

That is what the chief economist said in relation to that very significant achievement of the ACT.

Of course, we have all acknowledged that there are risks. There has been a slowing, most particularly over the last year, in relation to commercial construction. The commonwealth has perhaps peaked in relation to its program of renewing its office accommodation in the ACT, and there is no doubt that the flow-on effects of that softening of commonwealth activity in the commercial market will, over this next period, begin to show.

It is in that context that we continue to look at all of the other indicators that are relevant to the decisions we make in relation to land supplies. Population growth, most particularly, pent-up demand, the strength of the market demand and our assessment in relation to all those issues have led us over each of the last two years to release over 4,000 sites—over 8,000 sites in the last two years—for new housing in

the ACT. That does not include the about average 1,000 other alternative sites identified by the private sector and brought to the housing market.

We have heard the plaintive cries of the opposition, a party which in government did nothing in relation to these issues to meet the longer term needs of the territory. In its biggest or busiest year of land supply, it managed to get out 900 blocks. That is the record of the Liberal Party in relation to this when in government.

Under the Real Estate Institute of Australia's affordability index, what do we find in the ACT? We acknowledge that, when one averages out, it is always the case that there will be a significant cohort who struggle to achieve that great Australian dream of homeownership—what I think is an inalienable right, the right for appropriate accommodation, and a heartfelt desire of all of us to own our own homes. In the context of the affordability indicator—the most reliable, the most predictable and the most relevant, that of the Real Estate Institute of Australia—when one looks at the proportion of family income needed to meet either mortgage payments or rent payments, the ACT is far and away, on that indicator, with that methodology, the most affordable jurisdiction in Australia.

In relation to some of the comments that have been made as the Liberal Party talked down our economy and talked down the ACT, it is interesting to note that, on the Australian Bureau of Statistics price index figures for December, the most recent quarter available, the ACT recorded the second-lowest quarterly increase in house prices of any of the capital cities across Australia.

The ACT is mindful of the role that land supply and construction play. Both Ms Le Couteur and Ms Hunter have gone to some of the longer term issues—the issues that are with us now but which we must grapple with with a greater sense of urgency—around the nature of our greenfields development, the level of infrastructure and the quality of infrastructure that is going into greenfields development, the costs and benefits, and the fact that it is a finite resource.

We do need to adjust our thinking, and we are moving to do that; we are striving to do it. We have set ourselves a target of 50 per cent of land in the future being infill, but it is not something we can ramp up immediately. We believe that we have identified somewhere in the order of 700 blocks in this first year. We would like it to be more, but it is not as simple as that. I have to say in relation to that issue of infill that we look to the support of all members of this Assembly, as we had that conversation with the community in relation to the implications of infill and a far more densely populated city than we have experienced in recent times.

The issue of affordability and our affordability action plan is something that is close to my heart—something that I have involved myself in personally and deeply over the last three to four years, I believe successfully. Through the 60 separate initiatives that we have pursued, we have made significant, enormous inroads into the issue of capacity by first homebuyers and others—battling families—to access affordable housing.

We see that in the great partnerships that have been developed—most particularly, and I think most pertinently, with companies such as the Village Building Company

and Bob Winnel. The Village Building Company in the last two years has built in excess of a thousand houses for under \$400,000—house and land packages. It is an enormous achievement by that company and it is a great credit to them that they have sought to address issues at the entry level and for people looking for an affordable product as an entree into homeownership.

I conclude with just a brief comment on the amendments and the campaign which the Liberal Party have started today in response to the budget and the indications within the budget that the ACT government has determined or foreshadowed that it intends that the issues in relation to the change of use charge and its collection and appropriate administration will be pursued. I find this a remarkable campaign that the Liberal Party are now beginning. It is as if, in government, they did not support change of use. It is as if, in government, there was no change of use charge. The essential philosophy has not changed one iota. This is a valuable, finite community resource and the community has a right to expect that any increase in the value of that resource will be returned to the community. It is a very simple policy position and it has been generally accepted by all parties in this place since self-government.

Now we have this magic wand being waved by the Liberal Party: “Oh, we didn’t really support change of use when we were in government. We didn’t utilise it.” We did not advance the argument that it was a fundamental principle that the community had a right to a return. Of course it has a right to a return. It is a philosophical policy position that we have adopted and that we will continue to maintain.

All we are saying today is that there has been an anomaly in the administration of the valuation of blocks subject to change of use and that we will address that anomaly. This is not any new tax; it is a change of use charge. It is being collected under the same formula, except that we are changing the administration to correct an anomaly.

**Mr Smyth:** It is a massive reapplication of the tax.

**MR STANHOPE:** It is not a massive reapplication. It is a determination to implement this charge as it was always intended to be implemented. There is this scare campaign—I find it remarkable to hear the Leader of the Opposition out there—that it will attack first homebuyers and young people trying to enter the market. As if it applies to greenfields! As if it applies to that great vast bulk of the 5,000 blocks that we will be releasing over this next year or the 8,000 blocks we have released over the last two years! It is completely irrelevant to them. It does not apply. It does not apply to greenfield estates. But we have this fear campaign—“a massive tax on families”. Families moving into Forrest? It is a scaremongering campaign with no foundation—absolutely no foundation. It is just the Liberal Party doing what the Liberal Party does, basically running a line from the Property Council and a few developer mates that are a bit upset that they are going to actually have to pay the real value of the change of use. *(Time expired.)*

**MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (4.17):** I thank members for their comments in support of the motion. I will say at the outset that the government will not be supporting Mr Seselja’s amendment. I am, however, most impressed that after their initial disinterest the opposition suddenly woke up and decided to take an interest. I thought

at the beginning of this, before lunch, everyone was asleep over there—in fact not only asleep but absent.

I note that Ms Le Couteur says that the Greens will support the motion and not the amendment and largely because what I have outlined is, in fact, fact. Yes, it is fact, and the fact is that we have behaved in a very strong way over the last two years. It is fact that the ACT comes out on top in the area of housing finance. It is fact that in the area of dwelling commencements we are a staggering 85 per cent above the decade average. It is a fact that the ACT economy is being driven by solid housing and broader construction activity and in the case of housing starts this is being driven by the ACT's increased release of land.

Indeed, it is true that two of the most respectable economic research organisations in the country both believe that one of the reasons why the ACT economy is so strong is its land release policy. And there is no coincidence that these outcomes have coincided with the implementation in 2007 of the very innovative affordable housing action plan.

I will go to some of Ms Le Couteur's comments first. Whilst I understand the point that she was trying to make with respect to housing affordability—that a strong average income will push the price of houses up which renders them affordable to many but decidedly expensive for a few who may not be in full-time employment or who are studying or who are limited in their work capacity due to a disability or the like—as I said earlier, we are addressing the situation and the Chief Minister went to this at some length.

I would just like to reiterate two excellent programs: the OwnPlace initiative, which is delivering 15 per cent affordable housing in new estates, and the land rent scheme as examples. You have heard, as I said, from the Chief Minister that we take this matter of housing affordability very seriously and we are stepping up to meet that challenge.

I also understand Ms Le Couteur has concerns about the progress of the clean economy strategy. I understand this project has now been transferred from business and industry development to policy division within the Chief Minister's Department in recognition of the need for a whole-of-government approach. I would like, therefore, to reassure Ms Le Couteur that we are treating this matter with the seriousness that it deserves and agree that it could potentially provide another piece in the jigsaw puzzle.

I also thank Ms Hunter for her remarks on all aspects of this policy and in particular her remarks before in regard to the way forward in implementing this policy and the factors that we must, in fact, take into consideration.

Mr Seselja could not help himself before. He tries to undermine and refute these excellent reports, as do Mr Smyth and Mr Hanson—these excellent reports, these excellent figures and the performance of the government. Out comes the draft that he spent hours slaving over last night. It is not the first time I have seen this draft, of course; I saw it at the breakfast—and I was not impressed then and I am not impressed now. He talks about the announcement of forward land releases as though

we suddenly woke up to this new idea and that this is an initiative rather than the continuation of a sound land release policy that this government has.

As Mr Stanhope has articulated, it is a deliberate policy of our government to be proactive in its land supply releases. This will result in the release of around 4,000 dwelling sites on average each year over the next four years, supported by significant capital works—\$55 million worth, in fact—to support the land release program.

I refer again to the *State of the states* report by CommSec. It has a heading “ACT on top of the state/territory rankings” and goes on to state:

The Australian Capital Territory now clearly occupies the position as best performing economy in the nation. In the previous survey conducted in January, ACT and Western Australia were jointly on top. But solid housing and broader construction activity in the ACT are driving economic growth, keeping unemployment at historically low levels. The strong performance of the ACT economy highlights the value of having a powerful growth driver.

As members can see, the results we have achieved are evident in this CommSec report and in the Access Economics data. It is proof that our strategy is achieving the desired results. I thank members for their contributions and I will not be supporting Mr Seselja’s amendment.

Question put:

That **Mr Seselja’s** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 5

Mr Doszpot  
Mrs Dunne  
Mr Hanson  
Mr Seselja  
Mr Smyth

Noes 10

Mr Barr  
Ms Bresnan  
Ms Burch  
Ms Gallagher  
Mr Hargreaves  
Ms Hunter  
Ms Le Couteur  
Ms Porter  
Mr Rattenbury  
Mr Stanhope

Question so resolved in the negative.

Motion agreed to.

## Neighbourhood Watch

**MR DOSZPOT** (Brindabella) (4.28): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

(a) that residents have a right to feel safe in their neighbourhoods;

- (b) the important role that is played by Neighbourhood Watch, which is a valuable component of the overall crime prevention activity that is undertaken by the community in association with the police;
  - (c) that Tuggeranong and Woden account for approximately 52 per cent of the total number of criminal incidents in the ACT; and
  - (d) the ACT government's lack of substantial ongoing support for Neighbourhood Watch which does not allow the program to operate effectively as it might; and
- (2) calls on the government to:
- (a) explore ways to better partner with Neighbourhood Watch, especially in higher crime areas such as Tuggeranong and Woden;
  - (b) work productively with the Neighbourhood Watch program to improve the effectiveness of the program and, through it, safety of the community; and
  - (c) commit to fair ongoing funding for the Neighbourhood Watch program.

Last Saturday the *Canberra Times* carried a front page story by David Stockman headlined "Woden capital's crime hot spot" and I quote from that article:

Police in Woden have been Canberra's busiest according to a suburban breakdown of crime across the city.

The region, including the inner south and Weston, recorded the highest reports of burglary, car theft, property damage and theft in March.

The city precinct recorded the highest rates of assaults and sexual offences, with Belconnen police receiving the most reports of robberies.

Our ACT residents have a right to feel safe in their neighbourhoods and, while our hardworking ACT police are trying valiantly to assure that safety with the manpower at their disposal, it is a difficult task.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contribution of a very effective group of community-based individuals—volunteers who work within many suburbs in Canberra—the Neighbourhood Watch groups of the ACT.

As we already know, Neighbourhood Watch groups work with the police to not only help keep our neighbourhoods safe; they also impart a sense of community and belonging by improving the flow of information between the police and the local community. The Neighbourhood Watch volunteers keep our communities informed of crime in their local neighbourhood as well as policing issues impacting the community. Their interaction with the local police and the reporting of crime statistics in their local suburbs have enabled the communities to be aware of what is happening in their local area so they can take preventative measures.

That said, I speak today to highlight an urgent need in our local communities to assist the growth of these volunteer community groups who make such a valuable contribution to the safety of their neighbours. Currently, there are around 50 Neighbourhood Watch groups around Canberra, and the benefit to the ACT community if they could be increased by 20 or 40 more Neighbourhood Watch groups would certainly assist our ACT residents to feel safe in their neighbourhoods and would also give further assistance to our hardworking ACT police.

The father of modern policing, Sir Robert Peel, observed that “the community are the police and the police are the community”. The Neighbourhood Watch groups provide the link, the cooperation and the local awareness that can be invaluable to our police in their work, gathering evidence against criminals.

The Neighbourhood Watch volunteers do a great job but they are stretched for resources. That is why we, the Canberra Liberals, made a commitment during the election campaign of 2008 that we would contribute \$50,000 per year to reinvigorate the Neighbourhood Watch program.

The Stanhope government, in its usual policy-on-the-run approach, went from a nil commitment to Neighbourhood Watch prior to the Liberal policy announcement to a now well-rehearsed backflip and a token funding of \$20,000 per annum.

As we have seen in the budget just delivered, this government can afford an additional \$22.6 million for the arboretum, that memorial to Jon Stanhope. I call on this government to consider a fairer approach to funding the Neighbourhood Watch program, a community safety program that could go a long way to enable ACT residents to feel safer in their local neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood Watch is a philosophy and an approach to working together as a community to reduce crime and enhance community safety. The ACT Neighbourhood Watch celebrated its 25th anniversary last year and it encourages the ACT community to join together in small informal groups for the purpose of improving the safety of their families and neighbours. It also encourages interaction and a shared sense of responsibility between individuals, neighbours and communities for preventing and reducing crime.

Traditionally, Neighbourhood Watch has focused on improving home security, reducing the fear of crime and reporting suspicious activity to police. As the individual Neighbourhood Watch groups have evolved, they have become involved in broader community safety issues, working with local businesses and church groups and schools to identify and address a variety of local problems.

By way of example, in my own electorate in Brindabella the Calwell Neighbourhood Watch group has been successful in building community cohesion and improving relationships between neighbours. This has been based on a strong and committed volunteer base and a lot of credit must go to Tuggeranong district officer Nick Tsoulias and his committee, Eliza Zekalo, Ron Brown, Garry Cosgrove, Marlene Keltie, Patricia Hartwig, Robyn Fitzgerald and Melanie Roberts, for their energy and

drive that has seen further expansion into the nearby suburb of Theodore, where Russell Morison and Werner Albrecht are working hard at energising their community. Gay Davis is also heavily involved in the newly established Monash Neighbourhood Watch and Carol Vincent, similarly, in the soon to be established Neighbourhood Watch group in Bonython.

I also wish to give credit to Nick Tsoulias, the Tuggeranong district officer for Neighbourhood Watch, for his suggestion for and commitment to a closer working relationship between Neighbourhood Watch and the schools in that area and a suggestion to set up junior Neighbourhood Watch and mirror the models already used in Victoria and Queensland. I understand that moves are afoot to trial such a junior Neighbourhood Watch program with MacKillop Catholic College in Isabella Plains.

The ACT Neighbourhood Watch board of management have performed miracles to date with their limited resources and hardworking Canberra-wide network of volunteers. President Margaret Pearson and her committee of Graeme Hush, Clare McGrath, Brian Schiller and Christine Coulthard have done wonders. I strongly suggest that they deserve the support of this Assembly to enable progress and recruitment to be enhanced for the benefit of the ACT.

The *Canberra Times* recently reported that the police patrol zones of Woden and Tuggeranong account for approximately 52 per cent of crimes in the ACT. Woden alone leads the crime statistics for property damage, with 197 incidents; burglary, with 113 incidents; and motor vehicle theft, with 60 incidents. Equally, city accounted for 32 per cent of assaults and 53 per cent of sexual offences.

Some might say that these figures highlight nothing more than the status quo. However, for me, the time for the government to support organisations like Neighbourhood Watch and to find more effective ways to work with them is now.

I seek the support of this Assembly to join me in calling for this government to explore ways to better partner with Neighbourhood Watch, especially in higher crime areas such as Tuggeranong and Woden; to work productively with the Neighbourhood Watch program to improve the effectiveness of the program and, through it, the safety of the community; and to commit to fair, ongoing funding for the Neighbourhood Watch program.

**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) (4.36): I welcome the opportunity to talk to this motion. The ACT government acknowledges that people have a right to feel safe in their own community, and the government has confidence in ACT Policing in safeguarding this community. The government recognises the significant role that Neighbourhood Watch plays in preventing crime in the ACT. It is generally said that \$1 saved through prevention activities is \$8 saved in later intervention, support and the impacts arising from crime. So investments in crime prevention initiatives save us money as a community.

Crime prevention covers a broad spectrum of strategies, from early intervention through to what some call tertiary intervention—that is, working with those already in the criminal justice system. Crime prevention is about engaging the whole community and all service providers to work cooperatively together to address the underlying causes of crime. It includes community initiatives such as Neighbourhood Watch.

In the ACT we are lucky enough to have a very effective suburban policing strategy which is the key to the relationship with Neighbourhood Watch and other community programs. The suburban policing strategy was implemented by ACT Policing in 2006 to formally consolidate community-oriented policing with new technologies, creating an approach tailored to meet Canberra's unique needs.

ACT Policing continues to focus on increasing visibility, accessibility and community engagement through their suburban policing strategy, commonly called SPS. In the period between 1 July 2009 and 31 March 2010, ACT Policing undertook 17,890 SPS-related activities, of which 75.9 per cent were high-visibility jobs which involved proactive drive-throughs of areas of high crime and community interaction with patrols. Some 13.6 per cent of these 17,890 SPS jobs were accessibility jobs that involved uniformed police conducting beat, foot or bicycle patrols, talking with members of the public as required and providing patrols in areas that are not easily accessed by vehicles in an effort to ensure safety and confidence in areas such as public parks, bicycle pathways and shopping precincts.

A further 10.4 per cent of the SPS jobs were called engagement jobs. These involved a much larger commitment and included such things as talking to school staff and principals, meeting with and discussing issues with shop owners, commercial residences and licensed premises or engaging and participating in other community activities and forums.

In February 2010, ACT Policing reviewed their internal guidelines regarding SPS engagement and amended them to make it even easier for patrols to engage with the public and community groups. The development of the ACT Policing website has been finalised and will be launched on 14 May 2010. This site will provide an excellent communication forum platform between police and the community, and it will contain updated crime prevention and community engagement information, including portals for SPS as well as business and news sectors, in an effort to provide personal and property safety advice. Further information will also be provided to assist in contacting police and to provide information to victims of crime.

ACT Policing has gone further and made available crime statistics by area for the public to read and see, thereby providing a level of transparency to the community not often seen in other jurisdictions. ACT Policing has also undertaken significant community engagement activities, including holding major stalls at both the Multicultural Festival and the Royal Canberra Show. The creation of new positions in senior—that is, aged—as well as youth liaison has also increased the engagement capabilities of existing business, Indigenous and multicultural community liaison functions. I had the pleasure to meet a youth liaison police officer during the recent youth week in the ACT.

Neighbourhood Watch is a partner of ACT Policing, and they work closely together to ensure that neighbourhood safety is a community responsibility. The relationship between the two parties has never been stronger, and the president of Neighbourhood Watch advises that the support they received from ACT Policing has never been as valuable. This support extends to working with them at community events, providing invaluable assistance in the provision of information and preparation of newsletters, attending numerous meetings and hosting the coordination meetings and responding with little delay to all inquiries from the Neighbourhood Watch executive.

ACT Policing also assisted the Neighbourhood Watch executive prepare a strategic plan so they could prepare for strong growth into the future and strategise how they can foster and harness participation by the younger generation. Neighbourhood Watch in the ACT is unique from other jurisdictions in that it is a totally voluntary organisation and, therefore, does not expect support or funding. The ACT government has committed to providing funding to this essential community organisation, however, between 2009 and 2013, with the first payment being \$20,000 for this financial year, growing each year to a final payment of \$22,000. This funding provides greater flexibility for Neighbourhood Watch to run its core activities and to expand the network even further throughout the ACT.

ACT Policing also contributes to this funding. In an effort to increase the profile and effectiveness of the program, it now funds the attendance of a Neighbourhood Watch president and a member of the ACT Policing SPS team to attend the national Neighbourhood Watch meetings that occur three to four times a year.

Neighbourhood Watch is a grassroots crime prevention program and is a leading example of how the community and police can work together to combat crime in our suburbs. Crime prevention is an effective and crucial policing tool and has come a long way in the last 25 years. The ongoing work carried out by Neighbourhood Watch has played an enormous part in this progress.

Even though in the ACT we are lucky enough to have the suburban policing strategy, such a strategy is, of course, ineffective without community support and assistance, and Neighbourhood Watch provides the perfect conduit for this. By promoting and facilitating community engagement and developing safety initiatives and education programs, encouraging neighbours to get to know each other and fostering partnerships with other organisations such as scouts, schools, business and local residents associations, Neighbourhood Watch bridges that gap between the police and the community.

Neighbourhood Watch is an extremely effective way of keeping residents informed of the incidence of crime in their local areas, through the internet, newsletters and advertising. Providing residents with advice on personal and household safety allows householders to effectively secure their homes and increase their personal safety and the safety of those around them.

There are approximately 3,000 members of Neighbourhood Watch, which is a reflection of just how far the association has come since its humble beginnings in

Kambah in September 1984. Over the past 18 months, the Neighbourhood Watch program has gone through significant rejuvenation, including the creation of the first Neighbourhood Watch program in Tuggeranong since its inception. These include the Calwell, Theodore, Monash and Richardson chapters. Two new groups are expected to be created in late May, with meetings planned for Isabella Plains and Bonython. Further groups have been seen rejuvenating in Belconnen, with higher participation rates and closer engagement with the police and the community throughout. I would just like to personally acknowledge and thank those volunteers that work across the Neighbourhood Watch sector for the contribution they make to our community.

I will move an amendment to the motion that has been circulated in my name. I ask the Assembly to note that the government has committed to funding of Neighbourhood Watch of \$20,000 per year to 2013; ACT Policing has committed further funding to assist their attendance at the national Neighbourhood Watch meetings; and the president conveys that they have never enjoyed such a relationship with and as much support from ACT Policing as they currently do. Effectiveness has, is, and will continue to be improved through government and ACT Policing support.

I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit paragraphs (1)(d) and (2), substitute:

“(2) notes:

- (a) the ongoing commitment of the ACT Government and ACT Policing to work with Neighbourhood Watch to explore better partnership arrangements to improve the effectiveness of the program; and
- (b) that the Government has committed \$20 000 per annum, over the next three years, to support Neighbourhood Watch in its activities.”.

Just before I close, I want to make note of a further amendment to be proposed by Mr Rattenbury and indicate that we will be supporting that amendment when that comes on.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (4.46): The Greens welcome the motion brought forward by Mr Doszpot today and appreciate the opportunity to talk about Neighbourhood Watch, because we believe that Neighbourhood Watch does a great deal for our community to help build a sense of community, to give local businesses and residents the opportunity to contribute to the development and growth of their area and to build community safety and prevent crime through educating about measures to increase safety and prevent crime. They give very simple and practical advice on their website and through their publications. Neighbourhood Watch meetings also provide a safe place for people to get together and discuss things that are important to them and provide a sense of wellbeing and safety.

I believe that, over the course of their history in the ACT—as a very young man in Canberra, I remember Neighbourhood Watch being around at those times—they have established themselves as a significant community representative. What is exciting about Neighbourhood Watch—a number of members from Neighbourhood Watch

came to visit me recently at the Assembly to tell me about their work—is that there is clearly a new generation of people reinvigorating Neighbourhood Watch. The perception in the community might be that it is an old people’s thing, that the older members of the community drive Neighbourhood Watch. There is actually a new generation putting real energy into the organisation, and I think that is exciting and good for the Canberra community.

With regard to Mr Doszpot’s motion, the Greens fully support the statement that everyone has the right to feel safe in their own neighbourhoods. Recently, the Greens have been actively engaged in the ongoing debate around the need for a safe and vibrant Canberra nightlife. That discussion is focused on Civic and other entertainment areas. However, the starting premise for that work was the belief that everyone has the right to feel safe and secure in public. Canberra should be a place for everyone, but the unfortunate thing is that that is not the reality.

We certainly learnt through our consultation process that not everyone does feel safe at night. As I say, that is particularly in our entertainment areas but, thinking about Neighbourhood Watch today and general community safety, there is an important role for Neighbourhood Watch in educating and informing people about how they can take steps to live more securely, about how they can be conscious of their own personal safety and how they can contribute to their community and that safety across the whole community.

One important point that Neighbourhood Watch make very clear is that misinformation can cause people to be more fearful than they need to be. To that end, they have published on their website the “Personal Safety Ten”. It is a list of 10 principles that I think we should all bear in mind. I would like to discuss the first two principles briefly in the course of this debate.

The first principle is:

We all have the right to feel safe and the responsibility to ensure others feel safe as well.

Mr Doszpot’s motion reflects this principle very well. The second principle that Neighbourhood Watch state is:

Don’t let the fear of crime hold you back—Quite often the fear is much greater than the reality.

This is a salient point when it comes to paragraph 1(c) of today’s motion, which is presumably based on—Mr Doszpot has touched on this—a recent *Canberra Times* front page article. The police data that that article reports comes to a total of 52 per cent of those crimes being reported occurring in Woden and Tuggeranong. However, I do not believe this information should be used to place those communities under a fear of crime. To build on fear would be irresponsible and ignores that second principle of Neighbourhood Watch.

There are two key ways in which these statistics can be misunderstood, and I think, unfortunately, some of that does come through in Mr Doszpot’s motion. In

paragraph 2(a) he takes that 52 per cent figure and refers “especially to higher crime areas such as Tuggeranong and Woden”. When you go to the *Canberra Times* article, I do not think one can necessarily extrapolate that these are higher crime areas. What it actually notes is that the Woden police area—it says this in the second paragraph of the article—includes the inner south and Weston.

That actually triggered me to look a little deeper, as it is always good to do. I actually went to the AFP website to look at what the Woden patrol zone includes. It is all of the suburbs of Weston Creek, all of the suburbs of the Woden Valley and all of the suburbs that most people would traditionally call the inner south—Yarralumla, Deakin, Forrest, Red Hill and the like. What we actually get when we break this down is that the Woden police area and the Tuggeranong police area are everything south of the lake. Most people consider that to be 50 per cent of Canberra, give or take.

So we are looking at 52 per cent of Canberra’s crime being committed in 50 per cent of Canberra. You cannot call that “higher crime areas”. Maybe it is not exactly 50 per cent, but you get the general idea that it is important not to create fear or to use numbers in ways that may excite the community and give them a sense that they are somehow unsafe when, in fact, the statistics do not necessarily make that point.

The second is that crime statistics can only ever be a snapshot in time. The article reported crime statistics from March. Again, if you go to the police website, the information on that website has now been updated with data for April. I have not done a complete comparison for the purposes of this debate. However, taking the number of assaults as one example is illustrative of the danger of raising fear based on crime statistics.

There were 90 assaults in March in the Woden and Tuggeranong areas combined. Bear in mind that that is everything south of the lake. These made up part of the 52 per cent figure that the *Canberra Times* reported and that is included in the motion’s text. There were 61 assaults for the same area in April. That is a significant drop of 30 per cent on the previous month.

I make that point simply to underline the fact that the statistics can be quite variable, particularly on relatively low numbers. So while we recognise that paragraph 1(c) is based on verifiable statistics and is, therefore, an accurate statement for a point in time, we are cautious by saying that we should think about the way we use those statistics when we debate them.

I would like to now turn to Ms Burch’s amendment on behalf of the government. We will be supporting the government’s deletion of paragraph 1(d). We do not agree with the statement that there is a lack of substantial ongoing support for Neighbourhood Watch. As Ms Burch has indicated, the government has provided \$20,000 of funding for Neighbourhood Watch. My understanding is that this is the first time that Neighbourhood Watch has had an ongoing commitment from government. There has been one-off funding in the past, but this is actually a commitment that continues over a number of budgets.

There is an important discussion to be had about whether this is enough money, and that is why we will not be supporting paragraph 1(d). I understand Mr Doszpot will

move a further amendment which will pick up the important point that the government's amendment in the new paragraphs 2(a) and 2(b) acknowledges that new level of funding. I think that is a fair statement of fact. There is an important discussion to be had about whether Neighbourhood Watch needs more money than that and whether more money would make them even more effective and enable them to make an even greater contribution to our community. We know—this has been touched on in the debate and my own discussions with Neighbourhood Watch—it is growing; there is more demand; there are more people who want to be involved; and more resources could enable Neighbourhood Watch to do an even better job in our community than they already do.

They are the comments I would like to make on the government's amendment, which we will be supporting. I would also like to move the amendment that has been circulated in my name, and I will speak briefly to that. I move the amendment circulated in my name.

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Mrs Dunne): Mr Rattenbury, you cannot move that amendment at the moment because there is already an amendment on foot.

**MR RATTENBURY**: Of course I cannot, sorry.

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER**: The Assembly will have to come back to that and you will have to seek leave.

**MR RATTENBURY**: The irony, of course, is that I already had said to Ms Burch that I would do this later, and I forgot my own advice. I will simply conclude by saying that we welcome Mr Doszpot bringing forward this motion today. Neighbourhood Watch plays a very valuable role in the community. The Greens will be supporting the essence of Mr Doszpot's motion but also the government's amendment.

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (4.56): Madam Assistant Speaker, I thank Mr Doszpot for putting this motion on the notice paper. There is nothing better when a community looks after itself and is supported by its government to do that; so I completely support the thrust of this motion. Involving the community in safety and security measures is very, very important. It gives ownership, but at the end of the day it is the people on the street that know what is going on in their street. If we can harness that power, if we can assist them to look after themselves, it does build community spirit, community support and, in the end, better communities.

I do recall the farce of Labor's approach in the lead-up to the 2008 election when, of course, Neighbourhood Watch was a dirty word with the government, which ran it down for years and completely defunded it. We went to the election with an announcement that we would, of course, support Neighbourhood Watch. Suddenly, there was Simon Corbell—two hours later, I think it was—after our announcement calling Neighbourhood Watch in. Suddenly, \$20,000 a year appeared in the budget for Neighbourhood Watch. It was quite funny to watch and quite hilarious.

You have to look at Labor's support of Neighbourhood Watch and come to the conclusion that it is shallow at best. It really was driven by crass political expediency.

There was no concern for the community because it had rejected the community. Indeed, there was an enormous amount of hypocrisy, particularly on the part of the minister—I guess you could call it a naked vote-buying attempt—whereas the policy we took was well founded.

The history of it, for those that do not recall it, was that on 7 October 2008 Mr Corbell announced the ALP's policy of providing \$0.3 million for suburban policing consultative committees. Do you remember those—suburban policing consultative committees? There is a Neighbourhood Watch network across the country and it is a really effective program. But no, it is not good enough for Simon Corbell. He wanted suburban policing consultative committees. Immediately after this announcement, the president of Neighbourhood Watch spoke on the radio of her extreme disappointment that Labor had acted in this way.

On the Ross Solly show on the ABC on 8 October before 9 am, Mr Corbell attempted to defend this decision. He said that these committees were different from the Neighbourhood Watch approach and that the government had always been in consultation with Neighbourhood Watch in any event—"as recently as yesterday", meaning 7 October 2008.

Madam Deputy Speaker, just remember this, and get the timing right: before 9 o'clock, no money for Neighbourhood Watch. No, it was not going to happen. We were told that we have got our suburban policing consultative committees. But then, suddenly, on ABC radio at 11.30, Mr Corbell rang in. He was busy out there on the hustings, but he had time. Somewhere between 9 am when he got off the phone and 11.30 am when he got back on the phone to the radio station, Mr Corbell announced that, after further consultation, the ALP would suddenly provide Neighbourhood Watch with \$20,000.

That is how you develop policy. At breakfast he said, "No, I will think about it at morning tea." And there for lunch is \$20,000 on the plate. Beautiful! It really is a sterling commentary on how the Stanhope Labor government develops policy and funds. In monetary terms, the quantum of funds for Neighbourhood Watch is minor. I think the perception of Labor with respect to Neighbourhood Watch was obviously hurting quite broadly across the community.

I remember the phone-in. Corbell sounded very, very weak. There he was trying to claw back the ground, trying to build some goodwill and recognising that Neighbourhood Watch was across the community. It was another significant Stanhope backflip moment—eager at breakfast, no money; drinking your cup of tea with a bit of sugar in it perhaps at morning tea—

**Mr Hanson:** He might have got a phone call.

**MR SMYTH:** He might have got a phone call and suddenly, there you are at 11.30 in the morning, with some money for Neighbourhood Watch. It is interesting. I am delighted that the motion is here. It truly shows that somebody like Steve Doszpot has got his roots right into the community. He is in touch with what people are saying; he knows what people want; that is a good thing. But there is a dividend for this. There is a community dividend for all of us. This is truly effective money to mobilise the

community to look after itself because at the end of the day the community can best look after itself. Thanks, Mr Doszpot.

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (5.01): I thank Mr Doszpot for bringing us this motion today which, of course, is a very important one. I commend him for his ongoing commitment to Neighbourhood Watch, particularly in the Tuggeranong Valley where he is a resident.

The Neighbourhood Watch Association has been a valuable part of the Canberra community for many years. In fact, Neighbourhood Watch recently celebrated its 25th birthday—25 years of active participation of many individuals in the pursuit of the prevention of crime in our suburbs. I and a number of members from the Assembly went to the celebratory dinner held in Woden.

The first public meeting of a group of like-minded individuals committed to preventing crime in their community was held in September 1984 in the southern suburb of Kambah, then one of the most distant southern suburbs. The group quickly grew to include suburb-specific groups and continued with the good old-fashioned notion of looking out for your neighbours. Twenty-five years on, Neighbourhood Watch has over 3,000 members in 45 areas across the territory, with growth in the Belconnen area continuing to be strong.

Neighbourhood Watch uses a number of initiatives to tackle the ongoing issue of crime prevention. These include education initiatives about safety and security, keeping an eye out for suspicious activity and crime, and promptly reporting anything out of the ordinary to police. Neighbourhood Watch also actively pursues improved communications between ACT police and the community. While the prevention of crime is the main aim of Neighbourhood Watch, working closely with ACT police to ensure our suburbs are protected from criminal activity remains a key priority as well.

Neighbourhood Watch also serves as a valuable conduit for the coordination of community events. Recent newsletter items in the Aranda-Cook newsletter, for example, include information of coming events like the Friends of Mount Painter working group gathering and also information on adult evening woodwork classes. The newsletter also provides tips for recycling and reminders of garbage collections. So the scope of their work goes well beyond the immediate issues of crime. It goes to linking the community together.

My colleagues have spoken today about the activities of Tuggeranong and Woden Neighbourhood Watch and I, as a member for Ginninderra, would particularly like to pay tribute to the many Neighbourhood Watch members in the Belconnen area. In particular, I join with my colleague Mrs Dunne in commending the district officers for Belconnen, Matthew Watts and David Ault. These groups continue to thrive due to the contribution of countless volunteers. I encourage all members here to get involved.

Once again, I commend the work done by all members of the organisation and I encourage the government to explore ways to better partner with Neighbourhood Watch. Working productively with Neighbourhood Watch adds to the effectiveness of the program and subsequently the safety of our community.

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (5.03): I would like to commend Mr Doszpot for this important motion about this most important community-based organisation. Neighbourhood Watch is one of the many organisations in our society which creates part of the glue. According to its website, Neighbourhood Watch is a community-based crime prevention program. Members of particular neighbourhoods accept that they have a personal and social responsibility to assist in the promotion of a sense of wellbeing, safety and security.

The site goes on to say that the program is also aimed at reducing crime, especially property crime and crimes against the person. It is directed primarily at reducing the incidence of burglary in residential areas but it is also aimed at reducing crime generally. The aim of Neighbourhood Watch is to promote a safe and secure environment.

Across Canberra there are some 50 local Neighbourhood Watch groups. In Belconnen, in my own electorate of Ginninderra, there are groups in Cook and Aranda which also cover Macquarie, Charnwood, Dunlop, Emu Bank, Fernhill Park and Flynn which, as members here would remember, was the group that was the genesis of the West Belconnen Health Cooperative. So not only does Neighbourhood Watch look at public safety and crime. It was also looking deeply into the needs of the society and the community as a whole. The groups also cover Fraser, Jaramalee Park, which is also in the other part of Dunlop closer to Macgregor, and Melba-Spence.

It is typical that these groups are run by volunteers drawn from the local community. These volunteers devote an enormous amount of time to raising money, mounting awareness campaigns for local residents, liaising with police and just generally keeping an eye on things. Local residents are engaged through membership of their groups and look out for each other in the community.

In a sense, Neighbourhood Watch is a good Samaritan in our community. It and its people are good neighbours in our community. They keep watch on things; they help people to improve their personal security; they show them how they can better protect their property. Most importantly, the people engaged in Neighbourhood Watch programs are the personal link between residents and the police. They provide that link in a proactive and friendly manner that removes the formality that necessarily rules the way residents often deal with police.

It is pleasing too that the relationship that Neighbourhood Watch has with ACT Policing is such a positive partnership. And it is a partnership—a partnership that is strong and robust, mutually supportive and beneficial, and one that delivers positive results for our community. Indeed, given the enthusiastic support that comes from ACT Policing for Neighbourhood Watch, it would be interesting to speculate just how much higher our levels of local crime might be without this program. It is a wonderful service and it is deserving of more support than it gets.

In talking with the president of the central committee of Neighbourhood Watch, Margaret Pearson, I noted that the government this year has provided \$20,000 for the work of the committee. More than a third of that money goes to the payment of public

liability insurance; so not a lot is left for the extensive communication and awareness programs that are the hallmark of Neighbourhood Watch.

Whilst this support is welcome, this is the first year that government funding of this level has been provided since ACT Labor was elected to office in 2001. The last time Neighbourhood Watch received any significant level of support was during the time of the previous Liberal government. Perhaps it is in response to, although it falls well short of, the Liberal's 2008 election promise of \$50,000 annual support for Neighbourhood Watch. Mr Smyth has dealt with this at length, as he should have done.

The motion brought forward today by Mr Doszpot is an important one and deserving of this Assembly's support. Neighbourhood Watch is like an insurance policy for the ACT government. It has a positive impact on reducing crime in our local communities and therefore takes some of the pressure off our already stretched police services. This saves the government money; so a premium paid by way of adequate funding to and support for Neighbourhood Watch is not only justified but is appropriate. I thank Mr Doszpot and I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MS BRESNAN** (Brindabella) (5.08): The Greens do thank Mr Doszpot for bringing on this motion today because I think Neighbourhood Watch is a very important community organisation that does really offer that sort of grassroots connection to communities and also that safety and security which it does bring.

Neighbourhood Watch is one community organisation that gives local businesses and residents the opportunity to contribute to the development and growth of their local area. Being based in local suburbs and having residents at the forefront of running the Neighbourhood Watch groups makes them very much a grassroots group who have an excellent understanding of issues in their suburb.

I have had a lot of contact with Neighbourhood Watch, particular with Nick Tsoulias, who represents Neighbourhood Watch in the Tuggeranong area. I know that Mr Doszpot is in contact with him also quite often. I can see that he and many of the key figures of Neighbourhood Watch are some of the most enthusiastic and energetic people who work tirelessly in the community. I have regular meetings with Nick and these have been a key part of knowing what issues are important for people in their community. I know that Neighbourhood Watch have identified that they would like to work more closely with the police and do actively engage them in various forums, including inviting police to take part in community forums.

It is important to note that Neighbourhood Watch, with all the dedicated volunteers, is able to point things out that can sometimes be overlooked by police and authorities. They have an ear to the ground and work closely with families and local businesses to identify issues that are important to the community.

Mr Rattenbury has amended this motion today, or will be amending this motion today—I am unclear what has happened—as the ACT Greens recognise the role Neighbourhood Watch can play in planning and development forums. I think it is important that they are included in community consultations as well because, again,

they do have a very good understanding of what are the important issues in their local areas. Accordingly, I think they can offer an input that other groups cannot.

Young people living in Tuggeranong are sometimes isolated, with a higher crime rate in some instances. There is not always the range of facilities and job options that there is in some other areas. I think these are issues we do need to address. It is important that we do try to engage young people. As Mr Rattenbury said, Neighbourhood Watch is often looked at as an organisation which young people do not necessarily get involved with, but I think it is making much more effort to engage younger people through various forums that it undertakes.

Although the foundation of Neighbourhood Watch is in crime prevention, over the years it has become quite a larger organisation that deals with a whole variety of residents' concerns. I know that in a conversation I had with Neighbourhood Watch recently it is looking to trial a Junior Neighbourhood Watch branch. A young branch could engage people in the school system and get young people engaged in community projects and better strengthen their relationship with the police.

In the *Talking Tuggeranong* paper recently released by the Tuggeranong Community Council, graffiti and crime have been raised as community concerns. Neighbourhood Watch has been working very hard to recognise possible solutions at a grassroots level. I think it is important to note that, while police intervention is vitally important, preventative crime measures can be found in the community itself and Neighbourhood Watch does this in a very good way.

I have attended a number of local events run by Neighbourhood Watch. They are an excellent way of bringing local communities together and, of course, engaging them to be a part of Neighbourhood Watch itself. There was an event some months ago at Theodore shops which Mr Doszpot, Ms Burch and I attended. I think this was another excellent example of engaging the local community in activity. Neighbourhood Watch was looking to paint a mural on the shop wall there, which I think adds to the attractiveness of the local shops. It was also engaging the schools in the area. Again, this was the sort of grassroots activity that it does so well.

I also attended a community forum at Monash, which was run by Neighbourhood Watch. Nick Tsoulis invited me to that and it was a really good opportunity to meet local people. It drew a large number of people and was looking at establishing a Neighbourhood Watch group in the Monash area. I think it was encouraging to see that so many people attended this. There were people of all age groups as well, which was really good to see.

As I have already said, Neighbourhood Watch brings communities together as well as providing that preventative crime approach. I think that, particularly for older people or people who might be isolated, it offers them safety and reassurance, which is also a key part of the group.

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo) (5:14): I thank Mr Doszpot for his words and the valuable contributions by a number of members who have spoken today. The motion highlights two very important issues. One is the great work of Neighbourhood Watch within

various communities across Canberra and the other is the rate of crime more generally in Canberra, particularly in the inner north, I think, and Woden and Tuggeranong.

It is worth highlighting the fantastic work that Neighbourhood Watch performs in our community. I note that Neighbourhood Watch last year turned 25, which is a remarkable milestone. It has been built up from the grassroots. A number of my Assembly colleagues and I attended the Neighbourhood Watch dinner. I know that Mr Doszpot did. Many of the people who started that organisation, a grassroots organisation that was formed 25 years ago, were at that dinner. It is wonderful to see how it has grown in our community, and rightly so.

I will declare that I have a conflict of interest in that I am a member of Neighbourhood Watch. I am a member out at Weston Creek, in Holder. It is something I am very proud to be a member of. It is truly one of the community-operated organisations which seek to instil a sense of safety, security and wellbeing in the community. Neighbourhood Watch provides an invaluable service to the community, there is no doubt. Many people will be familiar with not only the work it does but also its history and its role. Since the 1970s, Neighbourhood Watch has acted to prevent crime and antisocial behaviour; reduce the fear of crime; assist local police in detecting crime; enhance the relationship between the police and the community; and promote community spirit.

There is really no other organisation that performs the same range of community services to the Canberra community. It is unique. Neighbourhood Watch serves as a very important link between the police and the community. It also serves to instil a sense of community spirit by fostering communication and awareness between people and families living in a particular community.

I think we would all be familiar with the Neighbourhood Watch logo. It is one of the most recognisable logos in Australia. We see it plastered on people's wheelie bins—I have got one on my own wheelie bin—and it is on street signs. That logo is a symbol of the collective responsibility felt within our community to look out for each other and to look out for our neighbours.

There are more than 3,000 members of Neighbourhood Watch in over 45 locations across the ACT. I think that is a remarkable number. There is a central management committee and I will just highlight the members—they have been noted by others—Margaret Pearson, Graeme Hush, Clare McGrath, Brian Schiller and Christine Coulthard. I commend them for the great—

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, could you resume your seat for a moment, please. Are members who are having this discussion—Mr Stanhope, Mr Coe and Ms Le Couteur—nearly finished? Your voices are carrying quite a lot down here. Thank you, Mr Hanson. I could not quite hear you.

**MR HANSON:** I know that members were avidly listening to what I had to say and would not want to be disturbed from hanging off every word that I was saying.

ACT Neighbourhood Watch operates across a number of districts in the ACT. There are two Belconnen districts. We have David Ault and Matthew Watts in Belconnen. In

Canberra north we have Mick Motion-Wise. In Canberra's south there is no-one listed at the moment, but it is a district. In Gungahlin we have Christine Coulthard. In Tuggeranong we have Nick Tsoulias, who has already been mentioned today. In Weston Creek we have Lex Clark and in Woden we have Shirley Lithgow. I note that she is also the secretary of the Woden Valley Community Council.

In addition to the other work that it does, Neighbourhood Watch distributes regular newsletters to over 15 locations across the ACT, including places like Woden, Chifley, Curtin, Garran, Pearce, O'Malley, Lyons, Isaacs and many other suburbs. As we all know, Neighbourhood Watch is a completely volunteer-based organisation. Essentially, it runs on the smell of an oily rag—the result of a lack of funding and disdain by the Stanhope government over a number of years for that community organisation.

The Canberra Liberals remain absolutely committed to organisations such as Neighbourhood Watch. That is demonstrated, I think notably, by the commitment at the last election to provide \$50,000 in recurrent funding to Neighbourhood Watch to support that important work. That was in contrast to the government's \$20,000 offer. I think Mr Smyth made a point of the fact that that was only announced after the Canberra Liberals announced they would provide \$50,000. In the morning Simon Corbell said, "No, there will be no money," and then by lunchtime he said, "Yes, here is some money." I can only imagine the phone calls that were occurring between Simon Corbell saying no in the morning and yes in the afternoon. This demonstrates that the Labor government does not have a genuine concern for that organisation. It was done simply to take the heat out of a political issue on the eve of the election.

We have also seen the setting up of the suburban consultative committees. That was an election promise by the Stanhope government. They were essentially set up somewhat in competition to Neighbourhood Watch. Neighbourhood Watch was very critical of that move. Money was promised by the Stanhope government for those committees. That money has never been delivered. The latest I have heard is that they have now been absorbed and information on their status is something I eagerly await when we conduct estimates hearings.

We remain committed to Neighbourhood Watch, regardless of the government's lack of commitment. I know, through ongoing dialogue with Neighbourhood Watch, that it continues to face significant pressures and is unable to provide the level of service that it would like to or indeed that the community requires. It is, of course, important to recognise that government simply cannot do everything and organisations such as Neighbourhood Watch provide an invaluable link between the community and the police. In many ways I think they provide good value for money. Money that is invested in Neighbourhood Watch is money wisely invested.

One of the functions an organisation like Neighbourhood Watch can do, in particular, is have its ear to the ground in our communities. It is something that the police, with their stretched numbers, simply cannot do. Neighbourhood Watch members are members of the local community and have the best understanding when there is an issue or a problem. They really understand what is going on in their community. We

need to enhance Neighbourhood Watch's ability to embrace that level of information so that the intelligence that can then be provided to police really supports our law enforcement in the community.

When we look at our levels of crime within the community, we highlight the role of and the need for Neighbourhood Watch. When we look at the latest ABS crime victimisation rates we find that, although the ACT is not the worst jurisdiction in Australia across the board, it has some concerning levels of crime and we are the worst for particular areas. You would think that in a place like Canberra we would have some of the lowest crime victimisation rates. If anyone is interested, I can provide them with a link to the ABS data.

It is quite concerning how high some of those victimisation rates are. Of particular concern are things like threatened assault, break-ins, motor vehicle theft, theft from motor vehicles and malicious property damage. I also know, from reports from constituents, that a number of crimes are seriously underreported in the ACT. Of course, all crime remains a serious concern for Canberra Liberals. We would encourage all initiatives from the government that would see a reduction in crime in our community, not only law and order based activity.

Neighbourhood Watch is important, but I also support, as the shadow police minister, the need for a well-resourced and well-supported ACT police force. I note that there were some additions to police numbers in the budget, but those police are not front-line police officers as such. They are aimed at the RAPID system and liquor licensing. When it comes to crime in our community, the property theft and assaults that we are talking about, there is nothing that the government has provided in this year's budget for the police to support Neighbourhood Watch. There was nothing additional for Neighbourhood Watch and that is somewhat disappointing.

I would conclude by highlighting, again, the great work of Neighbourhood Watch. I commend Mr Doszpot for his motion. I understand that it is being somewhat altered through amendments. I am disappointed because I think the motion covers all of the pertinent issues. I think there is little in the motion that people could have cause to argue with, but I understand that is the way these things work. I commend Mr Doszpot for his work and I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Amendment agreed to.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (5.21), by leave: I move:

Add:

“(3) calls on the Government to invite Neighbourhood Watch to attend the regular Planning and Development Forum run by the ACT Planning and Land Authority.”.

I will speak briefly. I seek to insert this amendment which asks the government to invite Neighbourhood Watch to the regular planning and development forum. The community councils are already invited to attend and to have input into planning

matters. Neighbourhood Watch has been discussed at some length today. A group of people who are engaged community members would have, I think, a lot of valuable local information to add. They may or may not take up the invitation at every forum, but it would be a sensible move to at least invite them along. I would urge the government to consider this and support this amendment to the motion.

**MR DOSZPOT** (Brindabella) (5.25): We support Mr Rattenbury's amendment. I foreshadow that I have one further amendment to make. It has not been circulated and I apologise. There is a motion in my name calling on the government to recommit to reassessing the \$20,000 per annum funding commitment to Neighbourhood Watch as the organisation and its requirements grow into the future.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion (by **Mr Doszpot**), by leave, proposed:

Add:

“(4) calls on the Government to commit to reassessing the \$20 000 per annum funding commitment to Neighbourhood Watch as the organisation and its requirements grow into the future.”.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (5.27): The Greens will be supporting Mr Doszpot's amendment. What Mr Doszpot's amendment recognises, and we support this, is that the government has committed \$20,000 a year of funding to the Neighbourhood Watch program. As Ms Burch said in her speech earlier—I was not aware, but she mentioned this—there seems to be some level of indexation attached to that.

However, what we know is that, through the energy of new members, Neighbourhood Watch is growing. There seems to be a new enthusiasm being injected into the organisation. As the organisation expands it may well be that some additional funds from the government will enable it to do an even better job than it is already doing and that perhaps an extra bit of money here or there might provide the critical mass to enable Neighbourhood Watch to simply do something even more innovative in the community.

It is important—and Mr Doszpot's amendment picks up this point—that the government keep an open mind to reconsidering the level of funding that it is giving to Neighbourhood Watch because it may be that, over the next couple of years, \$20,000 is simply not enough. The amendment does not seek to commit the government to a specific amount of money. It simply seeks to have the government commit to reassessing that funding and keeping an open mind as to whether some greater level of funding may be called for in the future. I think this is a good thing to do. It is an important point that Mr Doszpot is making in his amendment because of the growth that we are seeing in the Neighbourhood Watch program. I welcome Mr Doszpot's amendment. The Greens will be supporting it.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## Active transport

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Molonglo) (5.30): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the Government released a Sustainable Transport Action Plan in 2004, however:
  - (i) the Government did not implement many of its recommended actions and priorities;
  - (ii) road transport in the ACT creates about 24% of the ACT's total greenhouse gas emissions, which remains the highest per capita CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of any capital city in Australia; and
  - (iii) Canberra has the highest use of motor vehicles (84%) and lowest level of public transport usage of any Australian capital city (8%);
- (b) increased levels of active transport—which is primarily walking, cycling and catching public transport—bring health, environmental and economic benefits to the community; and
- (c) there remain many barriers in Canberra for walkers, riders and public transport users, especially as government funding strongly favours car travel; and

(2) calls upon the Government to:

- (a) prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and public transport in planning, traffic and urban design policies and fund appropriately;
- (b) formalise the principles from the *Healthy Spaces and Places* design guide and the *International Charter of Walking* into the Territory's planning rules, so that active transport and healthy living are prioritised in new developments and in upgrades for existing areas and this includes ensuring that active transport networks link people's homes, shops, schools, public transport interchanges and other important destinations;
- (c) use travel demand management techniques, including by:
  - (i) converting appropriate areas into pedestrian priority spaces;
  - (ii) removing the mandatory minimum car parking requirements for new suburban developments, but encouraging space for car sharing; and
  - (iii) introducing a sustainable transport contributions fund to allow developers to limit parking spaces in city and town centres;

- (d) improve safety for active transport users by:
  - (i) implementing a “safe routes to school” project, involving children in the planning process; and
  - (ii) reviewing lighting for paths and at public transport stops;
- (e) investigate building improved cycling infrastructure in Canberra—including cycle highways, Copenhagen-style cycle lanes, paths that are compatible with increased use of electric bikes, green waves of traffic lights for cyclists, and more convenient, secure bicycle parking—as well as locations for this infrastructure;
- (f) engage in projects to benchmark walkability and cyclability in Canberra as compared to other cities around Australia and the world;
- (g) provide improved active transport facilities at bus stops and interchanges and provide bike racks on all ACTION buses;
- (h) redesign Northbourne Avenue to improve transport options, including more efficient and safe travel for bus and bicycle commuters; and
- (i) report to the Assembly on the progress of these items by December 2010.

This motion is about active transport. The Greens are calling on the government to take actions to help achieve a change in Canberra’s transport patterns so that more transport is done by active transport.

“Active transport” is a term to describe physically active travelling. This mainly means walking and cycling. It also includes public transport that is effectively integrated with walking and cycling. People generally need to walk or cycle, of course, to get to public transport stops.

A key feature of active transport is that it replaces trips by private cars with transport that is healthy, sustainable and beneficial to community life. Increasing the percentage of trips made by active transport is critical to help address some of the biggest challenges we are facing, such as peak oil and climate change. Active transport is one of the keys to sustainable transport.

There is a clear need for action in the ACT in the area of transport. As we know, we are facing a climate change emergency. On top of this, the most recent research says that peak oil occurred two years ago. So we need to ensure that we have a resilient city to adapt to life with constrained petrol supplies.

To sum up the situation, the Greens want to see real, strong action on transport issues. When it comes to addressing these problems, the government is good at rhetoric: it identifies the need for change. But when it comes to actually implementing the difficult political and funding decisions on the ground, we are not seeing real action.

Take these examples of the government attitude. In their election policies they said:

ACT Labor is preparing for the future. ... We're investing massively in road infrastructure ...

ACT Labor has also made it easier ... to travel by road ...

But the government submission on light rail to Infrastructure Australia, a document which it did not want to release, says, in fact:

If one of the key objectives and goals of the Sustainable Transport Plan is to decrease carbon emissions then the building of more roads to reduce congestion is not ... a sustainable approach.

In fact, in the submission's analysis of different solutions for Canberra's sustainability and congestion problems, building more roads comes out as the worst option. It is assessed as having a negative impact against criteria such as reducing carbon emissions, reducing accidents and improving equity. In fact, the only criterion on which building more roads scored positively was consumer preference. And this, I think, is a telling indictment of the government's short-term approach to transport issues.

In the Assembly's last sittings, Mr Corbell said:

The government recognises that climate change is the most crucial issue facing us today as a community. ... The policy we set today locally, nationally and internationally will face judgements over many generations to come.

These words are true and I fear that, unless things really change, this government, and in fact the whole Assembly, will be judged very poorly. Transport is a critical part of the climate change problem. The ACT has a unique greenhouse gas emissions profile, with transport making up a significant percentage of our emissions—25 per cent. Canberra has a small population and relatively low density, so changes in transport patterns offer a good opportunity for significant improvement in our per capita emissions.

But where is the ACT going with transport and where are the big changes we need? I acknowledge that the budget yesterday made an effort to respond to some of these transport issues, primarily in the area of public transport infrastructure. A number of items funded are actually leftover or overdue actions from the 2004 sustainable transport plan. At least the government is looking at them, even if it is late, but of course we need much more.

I am glad to see that the government is also responding to some of the urging of the Greens, not just in public transport but also in cycling and walking infrastructure—things such as lighting for the path networks, for the bus interchanges and the major bus stops. These are things that we have been talking about and asking for for a long time. So I encourage the government to take another step and to support this motion today.

There has been a lot of government rhetoric. But so far at this stage it has been a small shift compared to what we really need. We are concerned that, while the increased

expenditure on active transport and sustainable transport is positive, it is being squeezed in what is in fact still a very car and road focused government. I believe Mr Stanhope said earlier today in question time that there is currently \$186 million in road contracts currently being worked on, which rather dwarfs the \$97 million over a number of years which was announced in the budget yesterday for more sustainable transport options.

Canberra still has the lowest level of public transport usage of any Australian capital city and the budget, unfortunately, reveals that the number of public transport patrons dropped last year. The budget does not fund more services, which are a key to more usage.

Road transport in the ACT also creates almost one million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent annually. Per capita, this is the highest amount of emissions from passenger vehicle use for any capital city in Australia—and it is largely government policies which have created this.

As I have said a number of times, the ACT government's transport policy still strongly favours roads and cars over active and sustainable transport modes. This has been verified by a University of Melbourne study from December 2007. It analysed transport patterns and policies in Australia for the last 30 years and noted that we have not taken advantage of opportunities that we had for better transport because transport policies have remained car dominated. It said that "the car remains king in Canberra" and that "transport policy remains dominated by road building, with public transport treated mainly as a social service".

Mr Stanhope's response to our questions in the past in the Assembly on transport indicates a strong belief on his part that roads and cars need to stay the focus of our transport system. He cites the economy and Canberra's geographic and density issues as among other excuses for not making significant changes. But these are just excuses. Other cities around the world have shown how to overcome them. Copenhagen, for example, has the third largest urban sprawl of any European city. Copenhagen was also a city completely car dominated in the post-World War II period, yet it transformed into a modern leader in sustainable and active transport. It did this because its leaders made brave political choices. That is what we need for Canberra and we need it now.

The lack of action by the government in the past prompted the ACT Greens to release a policy discussion paper about active transport in March this year and I tabled it earlier today. Mr Seselja's reaction at the time was "They want to force people out of their cars. This is an anti-car, anti-family plan."

The question is, really, who is being anti-family? The Liberals appear, on the basis of Mr Seselja's reaction, to have no interest in improving Canberra's transport options. It appears that they want to lock people in Canberra's fringes into car travel, forcing families to own two cars. While this may sound nice at present, what do the Liberals offer to Canberra's families when petrol prices rise and when peak oil changes the way our community and society work? What do the Liberals plan to do to stop the increasing costs of petrol and car use hurting Canberra's families? Does Mr Seselja

know that our planning laws require developers to build multiple car park spaces in apartment blocks and that this of course increases the cost of housing? In fact, you could call it, as they have been calling a different charge today, “a massive tax on homes”.

Do the Liberals or Mr Seselja consider how planning for more roads and more driving disproportionately impacts on Canberra’s low income families, who already own fewer cars and who are less able to afford to run them? What about the fact that car-reliant societies foster social exclusion because the disabled and the disadvantaged cannot travel. It would be great to see the Liberals’ own ideas for improving sustainable and active transport and tackling these problems.

Mr Stanhope responded to the launch of our active transport plan by saying, “They’re all things which are incorporated into the briefings and the planning which we’ve shown to the Greens, so basically what she’s doing”—and he meant me in that—is just trying to steal thunder from the fact that we’ve done all this work.”

Mr Stanhope, the work in our plan does not come from briefings or planning shown to us by the government. In fact, we have not been briefed or shown planning on these issues, and the government clearly has not done all the work already. Just look at the 2004 sustainable transport action plan, which had so many good ideas—but many, many of its key actions have been ignored. There is a lot to be done, and that is why the Greens have written an active transport plan. We really hope that now the government will start addressing the problems, not just writing about the problems.

I will just take a couple of examples from the Greens’ active transport plan. The plan asks the government to sign on to the International Charter for Walking. The charter sets out principles for policies and planning which help the walkability of our city. For example, it says we should put pedestrians at the heart of urban planning and give slower transport modes priority over fast modes, or human-based modes priority over vehicular modes. It talks about ensuring that pedestrian networks link people’s homes, shops, schools, parks, public transport interchanges, green spaces and other important destinations. I raised this with Mr Stanhope in the Assembly last year, but there has been no action.

The plan also calls for conversion of appropriate parts of Canberra into shared spaces. These have been shown around the world to improve our urban environment for walkers and riders, and the general community. There is still no action on this front, despite the Greens calling for it for over a year. Others that have been echoing this call as well included the Gungahlin Community Council, who would love to see a shared space in Hibberson Street, and Pedal Power, who have been campaigning for this in Bunda Street.

The plan calls for the introduction of a sustainable transport contribution fund for commercial developers. It would allow developers to put money into a fund for sustainable and active transport-related initiatives and infrastructure, instead of having to always build parking spaces in new developments. The ACT territory plan notes the possibility of such a scheme, but the government has never actually used it.

At a broader level, the Greens' active transport plan covers six key areas, and I will try to comment briefly on these in the time remaining to me. Firstly, the government must more effectively use the planning system for active transport. This means formalising best practice principles of active transport planning into our planning system. These can be found in guides such as the healthy city and healthy places planning principles. It means ensuring cycling and walking networks are high quality, smartly planned, safe and integrated with public transport. It also means shifting Canberra towards denser, transport-orientated development, clustering a mix of urban and residential land uses around public transport nodes.

We also want to see the government carefully use travel demand management strategies to encourage alternative transport, as has been done successfully in other cities around the world. This can mean restricting car flow into certain parts of the city; for example, by converting appropriate parts of our town centres into pedestrian prioritised areas. The reality is that this can work for the community and for sustainable transport.

Another effective strategy is to address car parking issues intelligently. But so far we have only seen simple action by the government on this issue, just increasing fees. We also need to give much more priority to walking and cycling. Walking is the undervalued glue that holds our whole transport system together. Almost all people who are not disabled are pedestrians at some stage, even if they are only walking to and from the bus or the car park. Cycling levels are good in Canberra compared to many other cities, but there is still a lot of work to be done, and I think probably a major reason that Canberra is so good is that, compared to other Australian capital cities, we are comparatively flat, not being on the sea.

Lastly, I just want to briefly discuss our call for a redesign of Northbourne Avenue to improve transport options, including more efficient and safe travel for bus and bike commuters. As the Greens have already made clear, our position is that Northbourne Avenue is a key commuting route and needs to be improved. Its problems radiate out to inner north suburbs and Gungahlin as well. We have been asking the government to build bus priority measures, a Mitchell park-and-ride, as well as an improved cycle path. We suggest that down the median strip is a place where it could fit and it could have a crossing priority.

I see that funding has now been provided in the budget for a park-and-ride in Mitchell, which is great, and there is also funding for investigating bus priority lanes and all the options for Northbourne Avenue, which is great news.

I have been concerned that the *Canberra Times* reported that Mr Stanhope might remove the on-road cycle lanes on Northbourne Avenue and combine pedestrians and cyclists on a widened footpath. This seems to us to be very problematical. One of the keys to commuter cycling is providing a safe space for cyclists to ride and a safe space for pedestrians.

**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) (5.45): I am more than happy to discuss issues around active transport, sustainable transport. I certainly acknowledge the interest of Ms Le Couteur and others in the issue and welcome the very positive contribution that members of this place make to a discussion about how to develop a truly sustainable transport system for the city. And it is not easy.

In the context of some of the aspects of the nature of the city, some of what we have inherited—essentially the historic nature, most particularly, of the Y plan which is in position and our inheritance of that from the commonwealth—means the capacity of successive governments to deal with some of the implications of that represents mighty challenges for an ACT government. It is a challenge that governments have tussled with and I think it is probably fair to say never achieved the outcomes or the results that any government would perhaps particularly like.

I do think, though, that it is unfair to the effort of governments, not just this but of all governments, for Ms Le Couteur, in the rather snippy presentation that she has just provided, to ignore the enormous issues that ACT governments face with our revenue base, with the size of our budgets, and the nature of the city. And that is reflected in an issue that is dear to Mr Coe's heart—issues around dead running and the implications of dead running, the dispersed nature of the city and the development of appropriate bus networks that deal with some of the design features. These are issues that we have inherited.

We see it in the context of the issue with which Ms Le Couteur concluded her presentation now—issues around how do we genuinely and seriously convert the Northbourne Avenue channel, one might call it, or entrance to the city into an area that deals with the aspirations and hopes of bus travellers, cyclists and the users of cars. You cannot just wave a magic wand in relation to an issue like Northbourne Avenue. I have no doubt that every government since self-government has looked at some of these issues and thought, "If only we had the wherewithal, if only we had the cash, if only we could deal with the issues around a growing city and the need to expand the network of roads and communication opportunities, and the capacity at the same time to deal with some of those things at the end of the day." As one struggles to meet the pressure of meeting the needs of an expanding and growing city, we would all love to do what successive governments over the last 20 years have found it very difficult to do.

I do think that Ms Le Couteur, on behalf of the Greens, does the Greens a disservice in not acknowledging the significant steps and efforts that successive ministers and governments have made in grappling with and seeking to deal with these issues around sustainable transport, sustainability, to deal with the aspirations of pedestrians and cyclists and people who wish to drive their car or who have no option but to drive their car, whilst moving towards a more sustainable transport arrangement for the city. I think at one level a positive contribution loses some of its impact or its force when there is a refusal to accept some of the realities that governments deal with.

In regard to the proposals in relation to Northbourne Avenue, if I can go to this, I am advised, anecdotally and informally by the department, that any of the options that

would realistically deal with freeing up bus transport down Northbourne Avenue would cost tens of millions of dollars—not a few million dollars, not \$10 million, but tens of millions of dollars. Imagine the sort of engineering that would be required to achieve some of those outcomes. And it is not helpful to dismiss the reality of that in the airy way that Ms Le Couteur dismisses it now.

There are many aspects of this particular motion that the government has absolutely no concern with. I am sure Ms Le Couteur, in a slightly more benign frame of mind and in a frame of mind more inclined to work productively with the government and others, rather than standing on a soapbox and asserting or taking the high moral ground in relation to everything that might be associated with sustainability of public transport, if she evinced a genuine interest in actually working with others, would be prepared to acknowledge that significant amounts of the very nice document tabled today—her active transport plan, a very nice production—were taken from work done by previous governments, most notably this government, in relation to the development of sustainable transport plans. I have no doubt that if we actually go through it closely, charges of plagiarism would probably be almost appropriate in relation to the extent to which it takes from sustainable transport work done by others in this place over many years.

So I think a little less of the moralising in future, Ms Le Couteur, and I am sure our relationship will go from strength to strength rather than actually being debilitated by that moralising “you can trust us and nobody else, only we are interested in these issues and it is only us that you can trust” sort of attitude that was really the feature of your speech today—either that or get a new speechwriter. I must say that was a snippy, vindictive, quite nasty little effort, Ms Le Couteur, most unbecoming of you, and it leads me to actually believe that it was not really your own words.

It is ironic—and I think perhaps this is the cause of some of my angst—that in a budget delivered yesterday, unacknowledged generally, talked down completely in Ms Le Couteur’s presentation now, not reflected in the motion but certainly in the speech, this government yesterday signalled in a way that no other government has before in the ACT its utter determination to deal with the very issues that are the subject of Ms Le Couteur’s motion. Perhaps that is the problem for Ms Le Couteur and the Greens today. They are worried about an appearance or a perception that perhaps the government is doing something and they do not actually like it because it might reflect on them.

It really is a pity, the day after a budget which includes \$97 million of funding attributable directly to sustainable transport initiatives, there is no acknowledgement of the government’s commitment. There is just this great berating of the government’s lack of effort or interest in the subject—the day after this government delivered, through its budget, the most comprehensive, detailed, determined, committed effort at enhancing across the spectrum of transport initiatives, including for pedestrians, including for cyclists, and most particularly in relation to buses, the first steps, the building blocks. We did not overexaggerate it, we did not claim it was the panacea, we did not insist that it would deal with all of the issues that we need to deal with. I even announced yesterday that I foresaw the cabinet coming back next year and the year after and the year after with bids for at least another \$200 million to build on the

work that will be generated by the design and feasibility studies, by the work that is at the heart of the \$97 million package. I foreshadowed that yesterday. It was reported today that we acknowledge this as the first steps, the building steps.

But I do not know how much more comprehensive you want a government to be than to go to issues around street lighting; to go to issues around pavements and footpath upgrades; to go to issues about how we design and improve our cycle ways; to tackle the hard issues of dedicated transit ways and busways, to actually fund two of them, to plan for a range of others; to increase to 100 the number of bus shelters that we push out this year and in subsequent years; to introduce up-to-date, modern, state-of-the-art technology to our bus fleet; to continue to grow the bus fleet; to embed Redex, to extend it to Fyshwick; to provide half a dozen park-and-ride facilities for cars, the same number for bikes; to provide for bike lockers across the town; to install 25 large, in other words multi-capacity, bus stations along busy routes. There are none at the moment. We have just funded 25. We propose another 100 bus shelters through this budget over this next year.

We are funding half a dozen park-and-rides, planning others, and tackling the difficult issues particularly around areas like Northbourne Avenue, dealing with the transit way to Queanbeyan, beginning the design and feasibility for dedicated transit ways all the way from Gungahlin town centre to the city. That is at the heart of the proposal. We have undertaken in this budget and funded design work for bus or dedicated transit ways from the city to Gungahlin town centre.

We are funding bus transit ways on Barry Drive to complete the entirety of Barry Drive. We have funded a design study for how to deal with the issue of a dedicated busway from Macarthur Avenue through to Calvary Hospital. And do not tell me that is not a difficult issue, a vexed issue, a controversial issue. We have suffered that controversy over recent years. We have funded in this budget the study.

As for Northbourne Avenue, as I informed you this morning, Ms Le Couteur, the government have funded a feasibility and design study of what to do. We do not have a predetermined position. We do not have the answer when asked what sorts of options will be looked at. The last study that was undertaken in relation to this identified 10 options. And I responded to that question, as I explained to you this morning, by saying, "One of the options, of course, is to provide a dedicated busway in the middle." That is one of the options. I am not sure it is the preferred option.

Another option, of course, is to remove the bike paths from Northbourne Avenue—I am not saying that is a preferred option; it is problematic; it looks like a backward step but it is one of the options—into a shared path. One of the options would involve probably the removal of every single tree on the outside verge of Northbourne Avenue. I look forward to those that actually endorse that particular option ultimately—and I have to say I think road engineers think it is probably the most feasible option, to actually pinch a bit of both sides of Northbourne Avenue and face the wrath of the community as you mow down every single one of the significant trees all the way from the city to Dickson—and I look forward to you leading that particular community consultation, Ms Le Couteur, as the first chainsaw hits the first tree.

Having said all that, it is a pity that, through this motion, Ms Le Couteur, you adopt the usual adversarial approach to these issues of the Liberal Party. Perhaps you are just rubbing shoulders a bit too closely with them, Ms Le Couteur.

I have circulated an amendment. Ms Le Couteur, the government are happy to support the vast majority of your motion, about 90 per cent or more of it. There are a few issues in there, as I explained to you, that I believe the government would require some further advice on before we commit to them. I have proposed that we investigate some of the matters that you would call upon us to simply deliver. I seek leave to move the amendments circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

**MR STANHOPE:** I move:

- (1) In paragraph (2)(b), omit “formalise”, substitute “investigate formalising”.
- (2) Omit paragraphs (2)(c)(ii) and (iii).
- (3) In paragraph (2)(d), omit “improve”, substitute “investigate improving”.
- (4) In paragraph (2)(d)(i), omit “involving children in the planning process”.

We support the thrust, the intent and the good intentions of Ms Le Couteur and look forward to working with her as we pursue those investigations and further studies in relation to each of those issues. And I hope we get some positive outcomes from them. There are a couple that we would prefer to remove. At this stage I simply do not know enough about the implications to actually send even a signal that we would commit to those. The others I see as essentially something we are more than prepared to investigate, to study, to take advice on and perhaps to adopt. But there are a couple of notions there that I simply do not know enough about. I will accept that. I need to take some advice on it and, subject to the outcomes of that, it might be that we are happy to revisit them in the future.

*At 6.00 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.*

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (6.01): The opposition are satisfied with some of the items in this motion but there are quite a few that we are not satisfied with. To that end, we will be supporting Mr Stanhope’s amendments because we do believe they do make the motion a better motion but, on balance, we will not be supporting the motion even if it is amended, simply because we think there are a number of issues in here that have either not been thoroughly thought out or that we actually do disagree with.

On the issue of sustainability, one of the things that we so frequently forget about is economic sustainability. If we do not have sustainability when it comes to the economics, it means that we are not actually able to do things into the future. I fear that that is what will happen with many of these initiatives that have been discussed

today. Initiatives such as perhaps putting a bus lane down Northbourne Avenue may or may not be economically viable. There would have to be some pretty serious studies done into that, in addition to many other different transport proposals that have been mooted in this motion either directly or indirectly.

Of particular concern would be, for instance, prioritising pedestrians, cyclists and public transport in planning traffic and urban design policies and funding them appropriately. I do not think that we could necessarily prioritise that for all the people in Canberra. It might be, for some people in Canberra, we are able to make such a priority but, for other people, it is simply not going to be possible. It seems to me that the underlying sentiment in this motion really is a vendetta on the car. Of course a vendetta on the car is a vendetta on families. It seems to me that this motion is far more about moral high ground than it is about genuine transport policy. We all know that, if this policy was to be implemented in full, it would have a detrimental effect on the vast majority of Canberrans who depend on their cars to actually operate on a daily basis.

There may well be some barriers in Canberra for walkers, riders and public transport users but there are also some barriers for people who drive cars. I think anyone driving down the GDE would see that as a pretty big barrier for cars when you are actually caught in a traffic jam near a car park in the morning or in the evening. So to that end, I think we do have to be consistent and we do have to be reasonable when applying these policies.

I understand that Mr Stanhope's amendments will remove 2 (c) (ii) and 2 (c) (iii), which state:

(ii) removing the mandatory minimum car parking requirements for new suburban developments, but encouraging space for car sharing; and

(iii) introducing a sustainable transport contributions fund to allow developers to limit parking spaces in city and town centres;

Let us have a look at that one. Subparagraph 2 (c) (ii) is removing the mandatory minimum car parking requirements for new suburban developments but encouraging space for car sharing. This, to me, seems to be totally inconsistent with what the Greens say they stand for when they want high density.

It is all very well to have high density on transport corridors—and that is something that the opposition firmly believes in—but we also think that people who live in high density should have the option to have a car. Whilst living on a transport corridor may well make it more convenient to actually catch a bus or to use other public transport should it be available in the future, I do not think such people should ever be denied the opportunity to have a car if that is their wish. So to that end I am very glad that Mr Stanhope's amendments will be removing 2 (c) (ii).

The Canberra Liberals do have a proud history when it comes to cycling and we are very proud of the policy we took to the last election. Indeed it was a policy that was widely supported by Canberra's cycling community and one that I do hope will be implemented. That policy talked about connecting missing links in the off-road

network, an appropriate signposting network and conducting a maintenance blitz to make sure that our off-road cycle path network is actually given the attention it deserves so that it can be fully maximised and fully utilised by Canberrans who do ride their bikes.

But when it comes to the installation of cycle lanes, whether they be on road or off road, it is by far and away preferable that the work is done at spec stage for a road. To retrofit a road with an on-road cycle lane is potentially very hazardous and extremely expensive. I think we have seen that on Northbourne Avenue in terms of some of the many problems that exist on Northbourne Avenue. As I have said in this chamber before, I particularly point out the problem with the on-road cycle lane on Northbourne Avenue and London Circuit. I have said that before and I really do fear that an accident will occur there because of the very dangerous conditions that cyclists face when they use that on-road cycle path in amongst the three lanes of traffic and the bus interchange stops that are there as well.

As I said, the Canberra Liberals do support cycling and we do support making our public transport system more efficient and better for everyone but we do need to make sure that we have a very reasonable and very measured approach to this; otherwise we run the risk of not being economically sustainable at the expense of some very short-term methods that may well make us feel good but will not actually result in a lasting, positive legacy. As I said, we will be supporting Mr Stanhope's amendments which make the motion better but we will not be supporting the motion on the whole.

**MS BRESNAN** (Brindabella) (6.07): I am proud to be standing in support of this important motion, discussing the future directions of transport here in Canberra. As a capital and as a city, Canberra has very much been lauded as a leading light of planning and urban design, and Canberra once again can become a leader when it comes to public transport. Leadership means using the power granted to us by the people of Canberra to stand up and talk about the hard decisions we are required to take for the future of our community.

It is lamentable that governments often struggle to focus beyond the next re-election. The challenges that face us—not only environmental, but social, demographic and economic—are all challenges where our actions now determine the quality of life for those that follow us. Investments that are deemed optional, that are put in the too-hard basket, are often the investments that are not optional for the next generation and must be paid for at much greater cost.

We recognise that improvements to transport infrastructure capacity do come at a cost now. However, the cost of building these improvements now, of laying the groundwork, ensures that our community is not burdened with a greater cost later. We must build to a high standard of economic and environmental sustainability now, instead of retrofitting our roads and suburbs with the required infrastructure after the fact.

The government have said much in the last 24 hours of their commitment to transport in the ACT. We acknowledge the benefits of these measures, although some measures provide only marginal benefits compared to improvements to the capacity of the fleet.

While the transport elements of the budget do bring long overdue improvements to infrastructure, and again we acknowledge that, there is still an inability to have vision beyond a small predicted modal shift that the government seeks to cater for. The proposed priority lanes and new stations provide increases to the amenity and timeliness of some services, but the system does not provide services to everywhere in Canberra or the ability to have an effective bus service that can compete on timeliness with private car transport.

Before I go on, I need to briefly comment on some of the narrative coming from members of both the government and the opposition regarding our approach to cars and transport in general—that we are somehow seeking to force people out of cars. We believe that it is the responsibility of government to give people affordable, effective and sustainable choices so that more people can make the economic decision to use alternative modes of transport. It is regrettable that, rather than talk about this seriously and engage in a debate about the long-term future of transport in Canberra, people have dismissed us as pushing people out of cars.

All parties in this place know that the cost of private car transport will go upwards regardless of what actions governments may take. We are approaching the point where most, if not all, of the easily accessible fossil fuels in the world will be being drained, and logic dictates that this restriction to supply capacity can only lead to fuel prices far higher than anything we have experienced before.

It is clear that public transport wins cost arguments when it comes to the family budget. However, as was proven by the Redex trial—which we acknowledge has been an extremely successful trial; we acknowledge the government for that—the choice of transport mode is primarily influenced by time considerations, significantly frequency, and time-to-destination factors. Timeliness of service is dictated by priority, limited stops and route decisions. We welcome measures that the government has taken to improve on these factors on major routes. Unfortunately, this is undermined by areas of the coverage network not providing a sufficiently rapid connection to the frequent express network. We hope that this will improve with the commencement of the new ticketing system and route changes that will provide much-needed information about where those routes need to go, and when and where people are getting off buses.

This is about providing an economic, effective and sustainable alternative right now and into the future. The total cost of running a car is a large and growing cost to people, one which many choose to bear because of the perceived time savings a car offers. I believe that the people of Canberra, if provided with a fast, comfortable, affordable and world-class public transport system, would make use of this.

I realise that this might be a bold statement to make, but it is one supported by precedent—precedent set by a Liberal administration. I speak of the decision by the Brisbane City Council under a Liberal lord mayor to invest heavily against popular opposition in their busway system, a system which has delivered overwhelmingly large increases in public transport usage and which has since secured popular support. More importantly, that infrastructure decision will support generations to come. It is a one-off investment that will pay dividends in social and economic costs for decades.

I must also speak of the health implications of active and public transport here in Canberra. This is a government which has a number of initiatives encouraging a more active lifestyle, such as the “find 30” campaign. One of the best ways we can encourage a healthier lifestyle is to make it easier to walk or cycle to and from work, or to and from the local bus stop.

There are substantial public health costs associated with inactivity in people’s lifestyles. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the country, with approximately 23,000 deaths in 2007. In Canberra, around 32 per cent of people are above a healthy weight. Over 15 per cent of the ACT population suffer under a long-term cardiovascular disease. Mental health problems can also be a direct result of the lack of physical activity.

Exercise and healthy lifestyles are an important factor in preventative health. When our health expenditure is rising, and when the diseases associated both with pollution and with sedentary lifestyles are placing pressure upon our acute care systems in hospital, small improvements that can improve lifestyles pay big dividends down the line.

We believe that the current set-up of walking and cycling infrastructure can be improved to encourage healthier options for travelling to and from work, bus stops or shops. Where walking and cycling paths are pleasant, attractive and well maintained, it does encourage their use. We believe that the high level of bike ownership shows that there are many people in Canberra who are willing to make the healthy choice to ride and walk, but they may be discouraged from doing so.

We believe that it is the duty of a responsible government to provide effective alternatives. We believe that failure to invest in public and active transport infrastructure drives up everyday costs of living, both now and in the future. We believe that it is better to invest while we can choose to rather than be forced to by circumstance. This is not a criticism of the investment choices the government has announced in the budget but, rather, a call for the government, and any future governments, to invest in transport leadership.

We believe that if the people of Canberra are provided with effective and affordable alternatives they will take them up. We believe that the government should be aiming high. It should not be aiming to meet projected demand based upon parking and petrol price increases but should be using initiatives that improve service to stimulate demand.

The successes of the intertown, Redex and school bus routes, and the increase in cycling with the introduction of cycle lanes, all demonstrate the ability of the government to influence demand through improved service, not just provide supply. People can and will choose sustainable, healthy and cost-effective transport options provided that these services support their needs. People should be provided with meaningful transport choices. When we look at what is happening in other states and territories in Australia, cities are moving towards increasing investment in public transport. We are simply putting forward a proposition that brings us in line with what these cities are doing and looks towards the future and innovation.

I will briefly comment on the two speeches I have heard. I think Mr Stanhope may have taken Ms Le Couteur's speech just a tad personally. I think it was a very good speech and a very well-written one. I did acknowledge in my speech that the investment the ACT government has made is welcome. We have acknowledged that. We have already had good discussions with the government, and we look forward to further discussions. With bated breath, as always, I also look forward to the Canberra Liberals' public transport plan. I commend Ms Le Couteur's motion to the Assembly.

**MS HUNTER** (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (6.17): Just to start with, let me say that the announcements in the budget about a significant investment in our public transport system are welcomed by the ACT Greens. My colleagues and I have made statements to that effect. I am also very pleased to hear that in the next couple of budgets we can look forward to ongoing significant investment in that area.

In relation to Mr Coe's contribution around the Liberals loving their bicycles and their cycling, all I can say is: "Heavens above. We've already got Tony Abbott; we really do not need any more Liberals out there in lycra at this time." That is something to think about.

The Greens recognise that Canberra faces a troubled future if we do not adapt to our mounting transport problems. Climate change, peak oil, congestion, pollution, economic loss and social inclusion—they are all intertwined with our transport policies. Mr Corbell was right a couple of weeks ago when he said:

The policy we set today locally ... will face judgements over many generations to come.

That is true. We in this Assembly need to be effectively engaged in ensuring that we change the way that we do transport here in the ACT. The Greens think that it is possible to turn around our transport patterns. Other cities have done it. It needs a dedicated, coordinated effort, not excuses.

Dr Paul Mees, an expert in transport planning from RMIT, says that it is wrong to argue that we cannot have effective sustainable travel because our city is not compact. We hear arguments that Australia is not like Europe, but European urban regions are not as dense as we tend to think. Beyond the city boundaries almost everywhere in Europe has suburbs and even semirural areas which have been integrated into a single metropolitan unit economically and in terms of transport. There, you can live on the outskirts and still do everything you need without using a car. You have that option.

As Paul Mees points out, cities that offer excellent sustainable and active transport facilities are not just in Europe. Canadian cities are now doing it as well. Canadian cities like Ottawa, Vancouver and Calgary have similar urban densities to Australia's, but they have learnt the lesson of how to provide more effective sustainable transport.

The reality is that people in Europe, Canada or Australia are all the same. They will use sustainable transport options when it is convenient. According to the research of

Dr Mees, we have fallen into the trap of using density as an excuse for doing nothing or doing little. The Greens believe that it is wrong to argue that the Y-plan, or Canberra's geography or density, means that we cannot revolutionise our transport and match the efforts of other progressive cities around the world.

I want to point out some of the other benefits of increased active transport. As Ms Le Couteur mentioned, cities that embrace active and sustainable transport reap significant and ongoing benefits. Some of these are obvious every day, such as reduced air pollution. Others are more indirect. For example, active transport is a great way to create vibrant public spaces. These are endangered in our modern cities. Neighbourhoods and city centres that have high levels of walking and cycling strengthen the community through increased social interactions. They also improve safety by getting more people on the streets. This is endorsed by people like Cheryl Wright from the Heart Foundation of Australia.

Fostering active transport also addresses inequalities across age, gender and socioeconomic status. Research suggests that it is a more equitable and inclusive form of promoting physical activity than organised sport and exercise programs. When policies focus on private vehicles, they can increase the risk of social exclusion for disadvantaged groups.

Making a city friendly for active transport also makes it child friendly. Children have special mobility and safety needs. Part of Ms Le Couteur's motion calls for the development of a safe routes to school program targeting one of the easiest areas where we can help children—to walk and ride to school safely. We need to be looking at getting them back on the bike, getting them back walking, getting that culture going. Not so very long ago it was rare for a child to be driven to school. The health benefits for children through the exercise involved in walking or riding in an active transport manner are quite obvious.

Safety is another benefit of active transport. Places that are peopled are safer places, places that have natural surveillance. Where people feel safe, they are more likely to walk and ride. One of the items in Ms Le Couteur's motion recognises how important it is that people feel it is safe to walk or ride, especially at night. The motion calls for a review of the lighting on pedestrian and cycling paths around Canberra. I am pleased that in this budget the government has started to provide more lighting for cyclepaths and walking paths in Civic and Ginninderra.

Increased active transport also brings considerable economic benefits to a city. Recent research commissioned by the federal Department of Health and Ageing quantified the overall benefits to the community of the current level of cycling. It determined that it was worth over \$220 million each year just through reduced congestion, reduced emissions and reduced disease and health problems. Australia's level of cycling is very low.

Research from around Australia and the world has shown how slower travel creates more business for local shops and cafes. A recent report from the non-profit group Transportation Alternatives aggregated studies of liveable streets performed in other cities around the world that found significant economic and social benefits that could

be replicated here. For example, pedestrian zones in city centres can boost foot traffic by 20 per cent and retail sales by at least 10 per cent. This makes sense if you think about it. It eliminates the kind of drive-by shopping that usually characterises streets that are dominated by cars. Instead, people linger and enjoy the space. We see good examples of this in places like Melbourne, where there are a lot more outdoor cafes and so forth.

As Ms Le Couteur and Ms Bresnan pointed out earlier, Canberra's existing transport system is imposing significant costs in the ACT economy. These costs will grow if we do not change. The impacts of peak oil will change our way of living and cities that remain car dependent will become very vulnerable. As the ACT government's light rail submission to Infrastructure Australia pointed out:

Canberra's existing transport system is not sustainable from an environmental, economic and social perspective and is already imposing significant costs on the ACT economy and society.

We really do need to have that commitment to building an active transport option here across the ACT.

The Liberals' position is less clear. Possibly the Liberal Party denies that costs to the ACT will spiral higher if we do not change our current transport patterns. Mr Seselja cares about economic costs to Canberra, so he should be very supportive of changes that will mitigate our future costs.

As Ms Bresnan has already flagged, increasing active transport will also bring huge savings by reducing the risk of preventative disease and easing the burden on the health system.

These are enormous benefits. We need to be supporting this move, this direction that we all need to go in. We in the ACT Greens have not just stood on the sideline and thrown rocks. We have been actively engaged in this area. We comprehensively researched and put out a paper that was tabled here in the Assembly today. It has a number of options, ideas and ways forward. We believe that is our genuine contribution to this matter. We look forward to continuing to work with other members of the Assembly to look at how those ideas may be implemented and what other ideas may be out there that we could put in place in the coming years.

It is something that we do need to tackle. As I said, we genuinely want to participate in a good debate, to be active participants in that. We look forward to further discussions with the government and with the opposition. It would be good if they could also participate in this matter.

I commend Ms Le Couteur's motion for making excellent recommendations to increase active transport and help make Canberra a healthier, happier and more sustainable city.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Molonglo) (6.26): I will speak briefly on the amendments and then close the debate. The amendments which Mr Stanhope has moved en bloc we

will oppose, although we do not oppose all of them. I will just go through each part. The first part would change paragraph 2(b) to read “investigate formalising”. Given the issues with changing things in the territory plan, that is probably a reasonable change.

His second suggested change is to omit paragraphs 2(c)(ii) and (iii), and we do not agree with that. Paragraph 2(c)(ii) removes the mandatory minimum car parking requirements for new developments. We see this as a step towards affordable housing. Why should people be forced to pay for car parks they do not want to have? This is something where we could let the market choose. People will pay for a car park if they need one and not pay for one if they do not. I am really surprised that this is something that the Liberal Party, at least, have not supported.

I am very surprised that Mr Stanhope has problems with paragraph 2(c)(iii), because a sustainable transport contributions fund is already part of the territory plan. It has just never been implemented. It was also part of the draft—I am afraid it is still a draft—ACT government car parking strategy 2007. The government does, I believe, already support this, and I am just disappointed to find that Mr Stanhope no longer does.

The third amendment changes paragraph 2(d) to read “investigate improving” safe routes to school. I do not think we need to investigate it, but okay.

Paragraph 2(d)(i) refers to involving children in the planning process, and it is something I find very bizarre that neither the Liberal nor the Labor parties support this. The government has already signed on to child-friendly principles, of which this is one. I do not want to see us go back to the Victorian age where children should be seen and not heard.

On a more positive note, I thank both the Liberal and Labor parties very much for their contributions to this debate. I am very pleased that the motion will largely be supported. I am also very pleased about the government’s recent financial contribution towards active transport.

Amendments agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## **Adjournment**

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## **Lyneham high school**

**MR DOSZPOT** (Brindabella) (6:30): On 20 March this year I attended a council meeting of the ACT branch of the Australian Education Union at the invitation of Ms Penny Gilmour. I spoke to the council members on my role as shadow minister for education and my commitment to listen to the principals and teachers throughout all

the schools in the ACT. At the end of the AEU branch meeting, I was approached by a councillor, Michael Denmead, inviting and challenging me to prove my commitment to learning about schools by spending an entire day with him at his school, Lyneham high. I accepted his challenge and, after some negotiations, I did receive permission to go the school as per Michael's invitation.

I turned up at Lyneham high on 1 April to get a firsthand look at what goes on in the life of a maths coordinator on a typical school day. After a brief introduction to school principal Ms Colleen Matheson, I followed Michael about as he started his daily activities.

The preschool social networking by the students was in full swing as we made our way up the stairs to the maths teachers' common room, I met Michael's maths colleagues, Ross MacDonald, Glenn Currie, Julie White, Lily Harada, Ben Solly, Mark Drummond and Premila Chand. They made me welcome and went about their preparations for the day's teaching—class lists were checked, rosters compared. Then we went on a tour of the school before Michael's first teaching duties.

We met Sandra Parker, deputy principal of students, and Kay Allen, administration and student attendance. We also passed acting deputy, staff, Graeme Budd, as he was carrying stuff to the bin. I found this typical in the school, as everyone was very hands on. We also met John Barker, building services officer.

I learned about the school in short bursts from various people we met. Lyneham high school is a multicultural school with students from a wide range of countries with different cultural backgrounds. This was quite evident as we made our way through the busy corridors. I also found I was almost in breach of school policy, as mobile phones are not to be seen or heard during school hours. My mobile was quickly confiscated by Michael.

We next visited Brad Lynch, PE teacher, doing health lessons in the computer lab, where I learned from some of the students about the school motto—*vera semper solere*: always tell the truth. I had a momentary thought of suggesting that we introduce this in the Assembly.

Principal Colleen Matheson hosted a visit to a rehearsal of the year 10 band conducted by Debbie Masling. I found out from various students that they came from all over Canberra especially, because of Lyneham's high reputation in music, even winning a number of CAT award nominations. We met Margie McMahon, the drama teacher who was involved in the school production of *Aida*. We also met Beth Way, music teacher, and Pinky Munshi, science teacher.

I was keen to visit the school LSU, and met Viktor Halas, acting science SLC, and from special needs I met Tina Williams, Tracie Smith, Sue Dyer and Chris de Witte. We also met learning centre staff, Josephine Deo and Georg Cygan.

Then it was lunch time and we adjourned to the staffroom where, in between the constant stream of students coming in for advice, the maths staff managed to get a few moments to have some lunch, I also learned that Ben Solly was not related to

Ross Solly, or at least he would not admit to it. I also had the privilege to sit in on a few maths lessons where the free-flowing communication between the students and the teachers I found very impressive.

After the final lesson we met Steven Bardwell, head of SoSE and who also teaches the DARE program, and his colleagues, Brenton Mikk and Anthony Batten. The DARE program is a program for 60 boys in PE and SoSE. It aims to keep boys with a love of sport engaged in school. The teachers target about 10 students at risk of dropping out of school and 50 students as positive role models. They also endeavour to develop leadership skills and encourage participation in community projects. The DARE lesson on the day was a PE lesson, where I finally realised my limitations as I tried to keep up with 16-year-olds in 100-metre sprints. I have asked Michael Denmead to please give my apologies to our group's captain, Noah, for my coming in last in the final sprint and costing our team valuable points.

I would like to thank Michael Denmead for his courage in inviting me, and Principal Colleen Matheson for approving it, and also all the teachers and students at Lyneham high school who accepted my presence. I am grateful for the opportunity and very much impressed with the dedication and professionalism of everyone I met at Lyneham high school. Finally, I did get my own back at Michael by inviting him to spend a day with me at the Assembly, which he did on the last Friday of the April school holidays.

### **Canberra and Region Heritage Festival**

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (6.35): I rise this evening to speak about the Canberra and Region Heritage Festival which has recently been held here in and around the capital. The festival was held from 10 to 24 April, and I would like to start by commending Gerhard Zatschler and his team for putting together what really was a very impressive program.

What was so good about the program was it involved so many different organisations. It demonstrated that government is not the sole repository of information, especially about history and about heritage. It did go to show that there are so many different organisations, whether they be community groups and even businesses, that hold and value their heritage and their history.

I think the history of Canberra is one which is very much about people that came to Canberra, whether that be in the early days well before it was called Canberra through to the early days of the capital and the construction of the capital or when the public service moved up from Melbourne. What is clear throughout that whole period was that you had people who really had a strong sense of service and a strong sense of commitment to their families, to their country and to the region as well. That really comes out when you look at some of the specific stories and read some of the tales of the last 150 or so years here and around Canberra.

Over the couple of weeks there were a number of different events, and I would like to highlight a few of those. There was a "heritage at risk" bus tour, which was put together by the National Trust ACT branch. They put together a bus tour which

visited a number of places where they discussed some of the issues that confront some of the heritage locations here in Canberra.

We also had events at the Queanbeyan Printing Museum, the Queanbeyan library and the Golden Brewery amongst other places around Canberra. The Heraldry and Genealogy Society of Canberra, also known as HAGSOC, had a couple of events, including a family history open day where they offered people help in how and where to hunt for your ancestors and collect their stories. They have got a wealth of information and access to a tremendous amount of resources. It would be great for more people to get to know about that.

The Tuggeranong Homestead had an event or two, and I commend Neil Gillespie for the great work he does there. At that event, the historic machinery collection from Malcolm Vale was launched. In addition, visitors got to have a look around the site.

The National Archives of Australia was involved, and Dr David Lee presented some insights into the Australian Prime Minister Stanley Bruce, amongst other things. We also had the Australian Railway Historical Society host a number of events, including a couple of railway journeys. The railway society is an organisation I have spoken about once or twice here in the chamber before.

The Hyatt Hotel, once called Hotel Canberra, delivered a presentation about some of the rare items they have and about the history of the building. St John's school house, as well as the church itself, hosted a number of events, as did the Canberra Archaeological Society. I commend Helen Cooke, the President of the Archaeological Society, for the work she does, and her committee.

It was a great festival and I commend all those involved. Like other members in this place, I look forward to the 2011 festival and the many things that are in store and to engaging more people in the history and heritage of Canberra and the region.

## **Anzac Day**

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo) (6.39): It was a great honour over the last few weeks to participate in a number of Anzac Day events. In the lead-up, I spent quite some considerable time at Cooleman Court selling the Anzac Day pins and badges. I would like to pass on my thanks to the Woden Valley sub-branch of the RSL, of which I am a member, in particular to John Kent, who was the organiser at Cooleman Court in Weston Creek. He got us all working, and I note to a couple of fellows that I sold pins with—a guy called Merv Armstrong, a World War II vet, and another World War II vet called John Reilly, who is actually a veteran of Kokoda. Those guys have been out there either selling things for Anzac Day or Remembrance Day probably for longer than I have been alive. They have been stalwarts of our community, looking after their mates who have aged and looking after the widows. It was a great honour to do that with them.

I joined the Woden Valley sub-branch for the Anzac eve dinner, on the 24th, obviously. It was great to see that the National President of the RSL, Ken Doolan, joined us to speak, as did the New Zealand High Commissioner, John Larkindale.

There were a great many people at the dinner and I do not have time to mention them all, but I pass on my thanks to the president of the sub-branch, Peter Collas. It was a great night enjoyed by all. Sadly, the numbers are thinning. The names of those who had passed from the sub-branch were read out at the dinner, sadly many of them being World War II veterans. A great number of names were read out, and that was very sad to hear.

The next day, Anzac Day, I had the great honour of marching with the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam. There is a loose affiliation—a brotherhood, should I say—between the Training Team Vietnam, and the Australian Army Training Team Iraq. They have made me most welcome in their ranks on Anzac Day. I think it is, in part, a conspiracy that, as they get a little bit longer in the tooth, I will be there to push their wheelchairs up Anzac Parade. The Australian Army Training Team Vietnam is probably one of the more distinguished Australian Army units. It was the longest serving unit in Vietnam; it was the first unit in and the last unit out, and all four Victoria Crosses that were awarded in that conflict were awarded to members of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam. To march with those guys is a fantastic honour, and I would just like to pass on my thanks to a couple—Simon Hearder and Ian Gollings, a couple of great guys.

I was then invited by the Belconnen sub-branch of the RSL to join them for lunch, and they gave me the honour of speaking after lunch. That was another great group of men and women. There were a lot of service men and women, but also their partners were there. It was a wonderful event, great comradeship, and they made me most welcome. I would like to pass on my thanks to all the members of the Belconnen sub-branch of the RSL, in particular, their president, Mac Weller, for their wonderful hospitality.

Although Anzac Day has passed, let us not just remember our veterans on that day; let us remember that while we are sitting here in the relative comfort of the Legislative Assembly our service men and women are out there on patrol in Oruzgan province in Afghanistan risking their lives for us, as they are elsewhere across the globe.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.43 pm.**