



Debates

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Wednesday, 22 June 2011

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Wednesday, 22 June 2011

MR SPEAKER (Mr Rattenbury) took the chair at 10 am and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

Petition

The following petition was lodged for presentation, by Mr Doszpot, from 1,568 residents:

Schools—absence records—petition No 122

TO THE SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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

We, the undersigned, oppose the **new fortnightly absence record procedures** imposed by the Department of Education and Training on ACT public school teachers. These procedures are an unnecessary administrative burden which takes teachers away from their primary responsibility of planning and delivering quality education to students.

Your petitioners therefore request the Assembly to:

Call upon the government to immediately cease the new fortnightly absence records procedures and for the Department of Education and Training to implement a simple process that addresses leave matters in an efficient and common-sense manner.

The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petition would be recorded in Hansard and a copy referred to the appropriate minister for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petition was received.

Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo): Pursuant to standing order 246A I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure.

In response to recommendation 4 of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in its report No 15 entitled *Inquiry into the ACT Auditor-General Act 1996*, the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure recently agreed to put forward an amendment to the standing and temporary orders to allow committees to conduct their proceedings in forms other than the standard private meeting and public hearing. The proposed new standing order will allow committees to meet in a range of forums best suited to their requirements, including public meetings, roundtables, seminars, workshops or informal discussions, while maintaining the usual practices set out in the standing orders relating to the conduct of committees of the Assembly.

The standing committee also agreed to propose to the Assembly that all bills presented to the Assembly be accompanied by an explanatory statement. Current practice is that all executive bills have an ES but only a small number of private members' bills present explanatory statements with them. The committee considered that the requirement for all bills to be accompanied by an explanatory statement provides a more complete legislative package that the public, interested community groups and the judiciary will be able to use.

In response to a recommendation of the Select Committee on Privileges 2010 the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure is also proposing that the Assembly adopt a procedure for dealing with claims of public interest immunity. The proposed continuing resolution is based on the practice in the Senate.

It is expected that notice of these proposed amendments will be lodged on the notice paper and debated during Assembly business.

Electoral (Donation Limit) Amendment Bill 2011

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

Title read by Clerk.

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

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to present the Electoral (Donation Limit) Amendment Bill 2011 today. The basis for this bill arises from the concerns raised by members of the community with me about a certain organisation which, it is understood, could be considering arranging to make a substantial donation to a political party operating in the ACT. The manner of this donation is reputed to be of such a significant size, and to be contemplated in such a way, as to raise the concern that it is a deliberate attempt to circumvent the inquiry into campaign finance reform, which is being conducted by the justice and community safety committee of this Assembly.

In the lead-up to the prospect of long-term campaign finance reform following the report of the justice and community safety committee, this bill has a very simple objective. It is to ensure that donations which are made to political parties in the ACT do not exceed \$50,000. It includes situations where the same source, be this an individual or an organisation, provides a number of donations which aggregate to \$50,000.

Moreover, there are concerns that the potential donation is being planned before the conclusion of the federal campaign finance reform and before the impending changes to gaming machine regulations. We see this as an interim measure, until such time as the Assembly's committee report has been dealt with by this place.

Apart from the prospective size of the donation, a related concern arises from the way in which many relevant organisations in the ACT operate as integral parts of their local communities. All of us are aware that the provision of licences to operate gaming machines, for example, is based on a strong sense of the community agreeing to entities operating gaming machines and that the benefits generated by the entities operating gaming machines are to be returned to the community in various ways. It would be an absolute travesty if an organisation which had benefited from the fundamental community focus of accessing gaming machines, for example, abused this privilege by not returning the benefits of that privilege to the community. It is only the clear and credible reports of the prospect of a massive donation based on the operation of gaming machines being made ahead of the impending legal changes which cause us to introduce this bill.

I note one significant feature in the bill. In the commencement clause, clause 2, there is a provision for the provisions in this bill to operate from today—that is, 22 June 2011. This is a necessary change which has been forced on us to prevent such an inequity from happening.

We do not want to make this law. It is only because, if the reported donation is true, it is the ruthless exploitation of the goodwill and proper processes of this Assembly, and it would make a mockery of any changes if a vast donation were shifted forward simply to circumvent due process.

As such, we recognise that this approach involves providing for the commencement of a law before that law has been passed by the Assembly, and we also recognise that the provision in this bill includes offences.

It is important that people and organisations are aware of any offences which could be committed if this bill is enacted. At the same time, I must emphasise that this community should not and will not tolerate electoral practices which have no place in an open and transparent democracy.

I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Electricity Feed-in (Renewable Energy Premium) Amendment Bill 2011

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

Title read by Clerk.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (10.08): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

It is actually really unfortunate that we are here tabling this bill today. This is a bill that would not have been required had the government listened to the arguments that

the Greens made in this place back in February this year when we debated the feed-in tariff legislation then. Indeed, if the government and the Canberra Liberals had supported our amendment that we put forward then, we would be facing a different situation now and we could have made some different and possibly better choices.

In February when the government sought to expand the feed-in tariff scheme to include medium-scale generation, they also sought to place caps on both the medium and micro generators of 15 megawatts each. At that time, the best information at hand was that there was already around nine megawatts of micro solar installed and that the cap of 15 megawatts was at least 18 months away, or at least that is what we were led to believe.

It is fair to say that the overheating of the ACT solar industry in the past few months is not of the ACT government's doing. There has been some shifting of policy in both New South Wales and in regard to the federal solar rebates. The New South Wales scheme was dismantled by the previous ALP government and killed off by the new Liberal government. The federal solar rebate scheme has been wound back such that up-front rebates after 30 June this year will be less. All of these factors have meant that the ACT over the past few months has seen a high level of interest in the household sector, and the market has been quite overheated. The symptoms of that include the large number of companies offering great deals to consumers on solar panels as well as many installers operating from outside the territory.

So while the ACT feed-in tariff policy itself did not drive the rush on capacity of micro generators, we have ended up reaching the micro scheme cap of 15 megawatts very quickly. Indeed, we debated the last feed-in tariff bill on 17 February, and at that time the minister indicated the ACT was installing at a reasonably constant rate of around one megawatt per quarter. At that rate everyone—except, it must be said, some in the industry—believed that the micro scheme would last another seven quarters or so, perhaps 18 to 24 months. And yet what has actually happened is that, just 3½ months later, the micro scheme cap has been reached. The solar industry in this town had 3½ months to prepare for their order books to stop. It was not even that time really, as they did not see it coming up quite so fast, and it certainly did not allow for any transition.

I want to go to the arguments I made back in February in favour of removing the cap and reducing the premium tariff as a better way to manage a phase-down of the micro scheme. It will perhaps serve to remind members as to why we have put this amendment today. We do not necessarily oppose the government's policy objective of containing the micro scheme. But we need to ensure that solar businesses in Canberra have a fair and reasonable chance of transitioning to the new environment of installing larger systems. We are concerned about the mechanism that the government was using to remove support to the industry—that is, capping the scheme in the bill. The cap on the micro-generation scheme at 15 megawatts was always going to have at some point a sudden impact on the industry, some point where the industry would hit the brick wall. We believed a better way to do it was to reduce the feed-in tariff over several years, the way a feed-in tariff scheme is supposed to work.

We also noted at that time that businesses were concerned about the cap on the micro scheme, unanimously expressing a preference for a gradual winding back of the tariff rate over a cap and that a wind-back of the tariff would give more time for the industry to adjust and transition. We believed and argued that the mechanism to wind back the tariff already existed in the legislation and that we would be able to see the cap approaching, unlike New South Wales. We therefore argued that we would be able to meet the policy objective of containing the scheme, keeping costs on consumers within the amount that had already been passed through by the Australian Energy Regulator, thereby having a system that was more considered. Funnily enough—and unfortunately—those arguments turned out to be true, truer perhaps than even I would have wished for.

I want to be clear here: we did not just make up the stuff about caps being bad for industry. Experience of feed-in tariffs around the world has already shown that when you cap a scheme, the industry goes into a slump. It is just a ridiculous way to manage an industry incentive. It is why modern feed-in tariff schemes are built around digression rates that gradually phase out support for industry over a longer period of time so that they can stand on their own two feet and compete effectively in the marketplace.

The government back then failed to support my amendment, and I am going to review the reasons given by the minister for energy for dismissing my concerns about what would happen when the industry hit the cap. Firstly, the minister said that the ACT would not emulate the New South Wales boom and bust cycle. After all, he said that it was the dramatic change in the premium price in New South Wales that drove the boom-bust cycle there. Well, going from 45.7c to a one-to-one scheme seems fairly dramatic to me, which is what we here in the ACT have managed to pull off.

The minister also argued that our annual review of the tariff rate, with advice from the ICRC, would mean that the boom-bust cycle would be prevented. He talked about the scaling back of the price as affordability of small-scale solar PV improved. Indeed, he hinted that the premium rate would drop. The minister said:

We have seen already a scaling back of the price as the affordability and the efficiency of small scale PV has improved. That, combined with the strength of the Australian dollar, I think will compel the ICRC to have further regard to the premium price in its advice to me later this year.

I can only imagine the minister must have forgotten everything he said in this speech when in April he announced that the premium tariff for micro generators for 2011-12 would stay exactly the same as it had been the year before—45.7c per kilowatt hour. That was in spite of the good advice he received from the ICRC that, indeed, took into account those factors and recommended that the premium be reduced to 39c a kilowatt hour. While this did not affect what happened in the last three months, it would be fair to say, it will affect the nature of the bill I am tabling today, and I will return to that point a little later.

The second point the minister made was that he had the capacity to allocate elements of different categories within the overall scheme cap, for example, to move a level of

megawatts from the medium category to the micro category. That is okay; the minister can, in fact, fix some of his problems, but he has not exactly made any moves to do that as such so far. If you review exactly what he said, the hint was always there. He said:

I am not suggesting that it will be, but it does have that capacity.

The final point that the minister made was that the government has:

... a close monitoring occurring of what is going on in the industry. We have the regular reporting to the ICRC on the level of take-up, the level of demand, and that has remained pretty constant since the scheme commenced. We see about a megawatt installed every quarter.

Well, that was not right either, as it turned out. In fact, I still do not know where that close monitoring was occurring, and I certainly do not know where it is publicly reported for the industry. But that said, it certainly did not stop the cap creeping up from behind the government and whacking it on the head with a great big stick. I do not know exactly what the government was monitoring, but it was not the micro solar industry in the ACT, it would appear. And that was that. The minister said:

So for all of those reasons we will not support Mr Rattenbury's amendment.

I would like to talk about feed-in tariffs in a more general sense. They seek to spread the cost of renewable energy generation across the whole community while providing an incentive to those who make the private investment in renewable energy infrastructure. The intent is, in effect, to provide a small financial incentive to encourage investment in solar or other renewable infrastructure.

The Greens wholeheartedly believe that feed-in tariffs are a good policy to bring on the development of a whole range of renewable technologies and that they should be used more widely and be subject to less political hysteria. Indeed, one of the failings of feed-in tariff policy in Australia is perhaps that they have been too readily applied to household solar and not applied widely enough to industrial-scale projects.

As part of the marketing of solar panels domestically, there has probably been too much focus on how a household's feed-in tariff can reduce your electricity bills and not enough focus on the fact that feed-in tariffs are a power purchase agreement with a built-in incentive to repay the up-front cost of investment by the person putting the panels in. Feed-in tariffs do not actually reduce your electricity bill; they repay the up-front capital investment made by private investors at a rate of return that makes the investment viable. Indeed, using less electricity is probably the best thing anyone can do to reduce their electricity bill.

So we are supportive of the government's general direction on feed-in tariffs towards industrial-scale projects, but we do not believe that there is any excuse to kill off one sector as we move forward to building another. This should never have been an either/or situation. We want to see small-scale solar play its role while also seeing the big players starting to build industrial-scale plants.

That brings us to the potential impact of this bill on the medium-scale generators. I imagine that one reason why the government may consider not supporting the bill I am tabling today is because of its concern about the medium-scale generators having to share capacity with the micro-scale generators, and that the micro generators will suck capacity away from the medium-scale projects.

It is possible there would be less capacity for medium-scale generators, but I think the government needs to start being realistic about exactly how many medium-scale projects are going to be viable. From everything we are hearing, there are around 12 medium-scale projects on the books. Say they averaged at around 100 kilowatts each, that is 1.2 megawatts of installed capacity out of a potential 15.

Obviously one would hope there would be more projects, but from everything we are hearing, the medium-scale projects have questionable viability. For one thing, connection fees look like they will be a substantial component of the project costs to such an extent that, in spite of community groups wanting to engage in larger projects, we are hearing that they would be grateful to be able to participate in the micro scheme again, which comes without the headache of \$60,000 connection fees.

Even large companies are raising eyebrows at the connection fees being in the vicinity of 10 to 20 per cent of the project costs. We must remember that we are talking about investments of hundreds of thousands of dollars, so these are not investors who can just participate for a feel-good reason. They are looking to see real returns on their investments.

That brings me to the point of how the minister determined the rate for the medium-scale generators anyway. This was something we discussed in the estimates process. I know that the ICRC was supposed to investigate what the rate would be, but I still have not been able to find the advice that was provided to the minister. I think in estimates the minister indicated that there was something around, but I have thus far been unable to track it down. If the rate has been set too low, I think we can be sure that there are plenty of other places that people can invest their money for a fairer return.

I do not want this to necessarily be the outcome—that we have no medium-scale projects—but the risk of the government failing to listen to the industry about what incentives it needs and failing to listen to the ICRC about what the premium rate should be means that they may have got this all wrong and are not going to be able to achieve the outcomes that I think we are all looking for.

So let me turn to the specifics of the bill that I have put on the table. The purpose of the bill is to allow micro generators to access the cap that currently applies to the medium-scale generators at the same premium tariff rate. The commencement date of 1 September 2011 is to ensure that the cap is not open to micro renewable energy generators at the new premium rate until three months after the previous micro scheme cap was closed on 31 May this year. This will allow for installations that have been approved as compliant under the previous micro scheme to be connected before the new tariff rate is put in place. However, any installations that are not connected prior to 1 September will receive the lower tariff of 75 per cent of the premium.

Subsections 5E(1)(d) and (e) change the meaning of “compliant” for the category of micro generators. It replaces subsections 5E(1)(d) and (e) with a single clause that makes micro and medium renewable generators compliant if the total capacity of all micro and medium-scale generators connected to the network is below 30 megawatts or below another capacity that the minister sets, which is a power that exists in the current legislation. Thirty megawatts is the combined capacity of the previous micro and medium caps, and the clause retains that ability of the minister to determine another capacity.

Clause 5—section 8(1)(a)—changes the percentage of the premium rate that a micro renewable energy generator must be paid from 100 per cent of the premium rate to 75 per cent of the premium rate. This is an important feature of the bill today. This bill does not seek to change the impact of the current feed-in tariff regime on electricity consumers in Canberra. I think it is very important to be clear about that. This does not result in any additional cost.

We understand that, given the view of the Assembly back in February, we could not come back in here and propose a measure that left the scheme uncapped, as we would prefer. We also understand the views held by some in this place about the value and cost of the scheme. While we do not necessarily agree with those views, that is not what this bill is about. We can have that debate another day, and I have no doubt that we will. But this bill is about proposing a way forward that sits within the existing parameters.

Again, the date of 1 September makes it clear that micro generators connected prior to this date are eligible for 100 per cent of the premium rate, and that micro generators connected after 1 September are eligible for 75 per cent of the premium rate. We realise that it needed to be explicit in the legislation to avoid changing the payments to people who have already signed 20-year contracts. Currently, the act ensures that if the premium rate changes, generators are eligible for the premium rate as it was set in the year they became connected for the entire 20-year period, but they are not immune from changes to the percentage. In the past this has been dealt with in the determinations made by the minister, which have been specific about the year that a new percentage has applied to, and so we needed to deal with this in the bill as well.

Clause 6 repeals a determination made by the minister that commenced on 1 July 2010 which set the percentage for generators between 10 and 30 kilowatts capacity at 100 per cent.

In summary, I do not think this is an ideal situation, and perhaps one can assert it is not an ideal solution. Frankly, the Greens continue to hold that the micro scheme could be uncapped and the premium turned down over a period of a few years. That, of course, is how feed-in tariff schemes are supposed to work. But because the minister insisted on leaving the tariff at 45.7c for the next financial year, using the mechanism of rolling in the micro to the medium scale was the easiest and cleanest way of getting some immediate relief to the ACT solar sector, which has hit a brick wall.

The bill, in itself, does not impose any extra costs to the Canberra electricity consumers as the cap and the tariff remain constant, and that is the central point of this. We have managed to find a way through that provides some certainty and provides the possibility for transition to the local solar sector without increasing the cost of the scheme.

Effectively, what will be happening is that these micro generators will be installing solar on the roofs of Canberra houses at least as efficiently as the medium-scale generators. We do not think it is ideal that the capacity is used up from the medium-scale cap, but we think it is a better outcome than killing off the local solar sector, which has been spending time over the last couple of years building itself up, developing skills, employing staff, investing in facilities, investing in infrastructure, and has now hit this brick wall, and that is a real possibility.

These consequences are very real. One company owner reported to me that they have had no orders, no emails and no phone calls for consultations for people in the ACT since 31 May, the night the minister closed the micro scheme. In six to eight weeks the back orders for companies will start to dry up and they will begin to lay off staff, staff who want to work in solar but have nowhere to go. We lose skills, the industry loses confidence, and the solar capital is starting to look like a pipedream.

I would like to add here that the industry has been proactive about putting forward to the minister and to me a restrained model of support that it thinks will see it being able to keep going. In fact, some companies have advocated an even lower tariff rate than the 75 per cent of the premium immediately, and they have all put forward that the tariff should be progressively dropped over the next three years at around 3c to 5c a year until we reach grid parity—perhaps five years away in the ACT. They would be happy to operate in that environment, with clear signals from government about the direction of policy.

Anyone who doubts that should not. Presumably most of the members made their way through the gathering of protestors outside yesterday morning—perhaps the happiest protestors I have ever seen; everyone was smiling and very friendly out there—but they are passionate about their industry. You just needed to see the placards, where, even on their placards they were advocating that the tariff continue to drop. We saw placards saying, “25c will be fine in the next couple of years.” The industry knows that costs are coming down; it just knows that these sudden lurches destroy confidence and have the potential to undermine all the good work that has been done in the last couple of years.

There is some irony that in this sad story it appears to be the Greens who have understood how these small business people operate. Perhaps that is because we took the time to listen. But I am hopeful that both the government and the Canberra Liberals will give consideration to debating this bill next week. We will be seeking an urgency motion to bring it on, because this obviously is the last chance to do this and provide that continued operating environment for the industry. Hopefully, then, the bill will also be passed.

Unless this Assembly passes the bill, there will be companies who were relying on our support—that is the support of all the parties in the chamber—that will go to the wall. Given that these are exactly the sorts of businesses we want here in Canberra to create a green, sustainable city, we ought to be encouraging and supporting these small businesses. It would be a very sad thing indeed if we cannot.

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

Roads—Majura parkway

Cognate motions

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Le Couteur): I understand that it is the wish of the Assembly to debate this motion cognately with private members' business notices Nos 4 and 5. This being the case, I remind members that in debating notice No 3, private members' business, they may also address their remarks to notices Nos 4 and 5.

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (10.28): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

(a) that the Majura Parkway is an important new road development for the ACT which will:

- (i) provide a major freight route linking the Federal Highway in the north to the Monaro Highway in the south;
- (ii) provide better access to the Majura Valley which will become more important as the Canberra airport area continues to grow;
- (iii) facilitate the movement of traffic from Gungahlin and the Federal Highway to Canberra City and other destinations to the south without unduly negative impacts on the residential environment of North Canberra; and
- (iv) enable traffic from Sydney and other northern destinations to the Monaro region to bypass Canberra, functions which are currently served by Majura Road which does not have the capacity to accommodate the future traffic volumes that will arise as Gungahlin increases in population; and

(b) that the Majura Parkway will also result in:

- (i) improved traffic safety due to additional lanes and grade separated entry and exit;
- (ii) safer on-road cycling;

- (iii) increased accessibility for local traffic;
 - (iv) more efficient functioning of the ACT's arterial road network; and
 - (v) provision of access to all the existing and future developments in the Majura Valley from Majura Road; and
- (2) supports the Government's continuing commitment and determination to build Majura Parkway as a critical part of the ACT's transport infrastructure and supports its efforts to secure a Commonwealth funding contribution for the project.

There has been some discussion in the last few weeks about reallocating the funding set aside in the 2011-12 budget for Majura parkway for a mass transit project like light rail. This is a false choice, and I shall explain why. In any transport network, freight movement is about efficiently connecting freight generating hubs, such as the airport, Fyshwick and Hume, with the national freight network to ensure the unimpeded movement of freight that would otherwise result in traffic congestion and increased travel times for all road users.

Rapid transport networks serve a different purpose—they are about connecting people from home to major activity and work destinations—the majority of which are located in the city, parliamentary zone and town centres. The rapid transit network for moving people will be located on the transport corridors between the town centres and future development areas. It is detailed in the 2009 strategic public transport network plan, which will be updated as part of transport for Canberra later this year.

So freight is about moving goods, while transit—public transport—is about moving people. Freight and mass rapid transit planning and investments are not mutually exclusive—in fact, they need to be considered as part of a single, integrated transport system developed alongside and forming part of strategic land use planning. Majura parkway is an important, strategic connection to the national freight network and will also help freight and vehicles bypass the central spine of Canberra.

Every major infrastructure project should be considered on its merits and with full consideration of its purpose—in this case, to move people or to move goods. So the ACT government will continue negotiations with the federal government and plan for Majura parkway at the same time as we explore the light rail and mass rapid transit options for movement of people around the urban centre.

Why Majura parkway? The Majura parkway involves the construction of some 11½ kilometres of dual-carriage parkway commencing at the Monaro Highway near Pialligo and ending at the Federal Highway. There are three broad objectives in progressing the Majura parkway project. Firstly, in the national context, the Majura parkway will provide a high-volume, direct connection between the Federal and the Monaro highways, two important freight routes. It will also assist in improving freight access into and from regional New South Wales and Canberra.

As an island city in surrounding New South Wales, we rely on the national freight network to access the goods that keep Canberra's economy strong. The amount of

freight that will be carried on roads will double in the next 10 to 15 years, and improvements such as the Majura parkway are important in addressing this future freight demand.

Majura Road, which currently connects the Monaro and Federal highways, does not have the capacity and is not in a condition to accommodate current vehicle volumes and cope with future predicted traffic growth. The completion of the Majura parkway has the potential to transform the movement of freight along the north-south corridor and remove a significant bottleneck.

Secondly, in the regional context, Majura parkway will provide better access to Canberra airport, which is developing as a transport hub, given its 24/7 operations with no curfews. The expansion of the Canberra airport as a major international and freight hub and a viable alternative to Sydney airport will result in significant increases in traffic, as noted in the Canberra airport master plan. The Majura parkway represents a key infrastructure investment to enable the airport to realise its potential as a multi-modal freight hub, supporting and complementing regional economic development.

The eastern broadacre study has identified the corridor on either side of the Majura parkway as a future major commercial hub, given its close proximity to the airport and the Hume Highway, which will enable it to service both Canberra and surrounding regions in New South Wales. The Majura parkway will also address the key infrastructure deficiencies identified in the eastern broadacre study that would allow the development of this new freight corridor in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Thirdly, in a local Canberra context, the Majura parkway will provide improved capacity and safety on the main road system in north Canberra by removing heavy vehicles and by diverting traffic movement away from major corridors like Northbourne Avenue.

The Majura parkway was first identified in “tomorrow’s Canberra” in 1970 as a component of Canberra’s peripheral road system. This system is designed to provide efficient traffic movement between towns without impacting unduly on residential areas. Subsequent planning studies, including the metropolitan Canberra 1984, the Canberra spatial plan 2004 and the ACT sustainable transport plan 2004 have identified and retained the parkway as a key component of the primary road network.

The Majura parkway will be an important north-south ring road. It will cater for the growing traffic demand, particularly as northern Canberra expands, and the expansion of the Canberra international airport as a significant freight hub. It will also assist in improving safety and amenity and reduce the level of traffic using residential streets in north Canberra as rat-runs during peak periods.

The parkway will also have some, albeit limited, use for public transport, as it links suburban areas in Canberra’s north to destinations in the south, including Tuggeranong, the airport and Fyshwick. These destinations have mostly peak demand and will continue to be served by peak express buses rather than an all-day transit network.

As to funding and federal government support, Infrastructure Australia, an organisation set up by the federal government to identify and assess projects that can contribute to the country, has assessed Majura parkway as a national priority, a project that can contribute to improving the productivity of the nation by making freight movements more efficient in a national and regional context.

The ACT government also recognises this priority and the contribution that the Majura parkway can make. When appraising projects, both costs and benefits need to be assessed, and the work that has been done to date has confirmed the Majura parkway to be a very cost-effective project on this basis.

The ACT government has committed \$144 million towards a fifty-fifty shared funding arrangement for the \$288 million construction of the Majura parkway. The ACT government will continue to lobby the federal government to fund the balance of the \$144 million. The ACT government is separately seeking options to stage and/or progress this project with or without federal funding. This work is expected to be completed in the coming months. Preliminary work associated with the Majura parkway, including the environmental impact statement and commonwealth statutory approvals, are complete and are available for the public to review on the Majura parkway website.

As I have said, any major infrastructure project should be considered on its merits and with full consideration of its purpose. Developing a transport system for moving goods and a transport system for moving people are not mutually exclusive. They need to be considered as part of a single, integrated transport system developed alongside and as part of land use planning. Majura parkway is an important, strategic connection to the national freight network and will also help move freight and vehicles away from the centre of Canberra.

Other mass rapid transit systems, including light rail, will continue to be considered on their merits to move people around the city on the “rapid” corridors, including Gungahlin to Civic via Northbourne Avenue. Moving people and moving freight are equally important in creating a sustainable and efficient transport system for Canberra and driving a strong and sustainable economy for the ACT and region.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (10.38): Whilst I am not formally moving my motion quite yet, I will be speaking, of course, to the very brief, very concise motion I have on the table and also to Dr Bourke’s and Ms Bresnan’s motions. I have got to say that whilst I am somewhat biased, I do not think that Dr Bourke’s or Ms Bresnan’s motions really articulate the stance of the Assembly as clearly as mine does. I do urge all in this place to adopt this kind of strategy when putting motions on the notice paper in the future.

It is interesting that we should be debating this. It seems to me that in a very perverse relationship it may well be that the Liberal Party is in cahoots with the Labor Party on this particular motion—on this particular motion—in so far as I think there is broad agreement that Majura road in its current form is really not adequate and it does need to be upgraded to the form of Majura parkway.

It is interesting that of the 17 people in this place there are four that really should come out and say that they do not want the road to be built, because they have skirted all around it. They skirted all around that. I want them to actually be honest and to come out and say the road should not be built. Whether it is because of the legless lizard, the moth or an ideological objection to cars, the fact is that the four Greens should come out and say that they do not want the road to be built and that the 50,000-odd people in Gungahlin who are likely to use this road do not deserve it. They do not deserve it because that is the undertone of what the Greens are saying here.

They have tried to wheel out every excuse in the book as to why we should delay this but really they want to delay it indefinitely, which is code for canning the whole thing. What they want to do is cite every reason under the sun as a potential roadblock to construct the Majura parkway.

Look at some of the things that they have cited: they have cited problems with ACTION buses, they have cited problems with greenhouse gas emissions, with transport modal shift issues et cetera. These may well be current problems but it is not an either/or situation. I do not think that by constructing the Majura parkway suddenly that means all these problems are going to be fixed, nor does it mean that suddenly the opportunities to fix these issues, whether they be real or perceived, cannot be addressed later on.

I find it particularly interesting that in a press release of just a few days ago the Greens did cite the Victorian Auditor-General's report into management of major roads. It is an interesting report. I think it certainly does provide some very important information and perspective on some of these issues. But, really, it is largely irrelevant when it comes to Majura parkway. Let us look in particular at the part that Ms Bresnan has singled out. She has singled out induced transport or induced traffic caused by the new road.

If you actually go to the report and you look at examples of induced traffic—that is, ways that people and business could respond to a road improvement that could actually generate more traffic—they talk about changing route, whereby drivers would make the same journey but use a new improved route. To be honest, Majura Road, as it currently is, is the only way really to get from Gungahlin to the airport and the Monaro Highway, in effect. So I do not think people are going to be suddenly switching to Majura parkway.

They talk about changing destination, whereby people will now decide to travel further because of the new road. I do not know who is going for a joy ride from Gungahlin down south other than for reasons of necessity, namely, work. We have got changing mode—that is, whereby people would now choose to drive because of the Majura parkway instead of catching a bus. I do not think there are going to be many situations where somebody getting a bus from Gungahlin out to the airport or further south is suddenly going to drive.

Then you have got making additional journeys whereby people are willing to make additional car journeys because of the improvement. Again, I do not think too many

people in Gungahlin are going to be making joy rides on the Majura parkway simply because they can. Really, it is a pretty absurd notion and yet another example of the Greens' selectively quoting.

There are many other examples in this report but I do note that the two examples that the Victorian Auditor-General cites for induced traffic are two roads very similar to the Majura parkway. One is the M25 orbital motorway in London and the other is the Pakenham-Hallam bypass in Victoria. Look, as comfortable as these roads might be in that they are bitumen and they have cars driving on them, I think that is pretty much where the commonality with Majura parkway ceases. I think it is a pretty poor example of the Greens trying to use a government report from another jurisdiction to back up their ambit claims which really are, in fact, ideological claims that this road should not be built.

Dr Bourke has noted a number of things in his motion. Whilst I do broadly agree with most of what he has included in this motion, there are still one or two issues. For instance, it is stated that the Majura parkway will also result in safer on-road cycling. Whilst it may, insofar as riding a bike on the current Majura road would be pretty dicey at best, this may well be in fact an opportunity to create a segregated bike path which would be better than an on-road bike path. Of course, it has to be costed. But I think our best practice when it comes to cycling is a direct segregated bike path parallel to the road rather than an on-road cycle path.

The motion is also somewhat partisan in that it says that it supports the government's continual commitment and determination to build Majura parkway. Really, I do not think that sort of language is absolutely necessary. In fact, much of it is not necessary and that is why I believe my proposal that this Assembly supports the construction of Majura parkway is indeed a better way forward.

The saga of Majura parkway has gone on for a little while now. In fact, it was in 2009 that there was a *Canberra Times* article—almost exactly two years ago, on 9 July—where the Director of Roads ACT, Mr Tony Gill, who I notice is in the gallery today, told a meeting of about 50 people that “while the federal government have given \$30 million for the first stage of the proposed road he did not expect it to hand over the money, \$220 million, for about another five years”. That was how the article was written in the *Canberra Times*. Whilst the situation may have changed somewhat, in 2009 they thought it was five years to go. So I just wonder how far away it actually is.

This brings me to the point that I just wonder how committed and how determined this government actually are to building the road. How hard are they actually lobbying the federal government for the other half of the money?

Ms Gallagher: What have you done, Alistair?

MR COE: I get the impression that they go pretty hard and they go pretty fast when it comes to lobbying for the arboretum. However, when it comes to core infrastructure for people in Gungahlin, this government do not seem to go in to bat nearly as hard.

It is interesting that Ms Gallagher should try to interject, “What are you doing?” Isn’t it just amazing? It is amazing that we have the Chief Minister here, who is the Treasurer for a few more days as well. She is obviously not getting very far with her federal Labor colleagues, but then again many federal Labor colleagues are also not getting on well with their federal Labor colleagues. However, here we have the Chief Minister, in effect, putting a plea out to the opposition to help her lobby, because in spite of going for a powwow with Ms Gillard last week, she still cannot get the major road investment that this government keeps harping on about.

It really does make you question just how determined, just how committed they actually are to this project. That is why I do object and have that concern with Dr Bourke’s motion where he refers to “support the government’s continuing commitment and determination”. To be honest, I think if they really were committed and they really were determined, perhaps we would already have the money that we need to have this road under construction.

The people of Gungahlin have been dealt a pretty bad hand when it comes to infrastructure. We all know the ongoing saga of the Gungahlin Drive extension. It is worth noting that even though the Labor Party stuffed up just about every stage of the construction, planning and management of that road, they did, by and large, at least want it to be built. However, that is in contrast with the four members at the other end of the chamber. Of course, in their continued ideological objection to the construction of roads, their leader herself said on 24 March 2010: “I think that is probably a straightforward one for the Greens. We didn’t believe that was the right road to build in the first place.” That was Meredith Hunter’s comment in regard to the Gungahlin Drive extension.

It is interesting that Ms Bresnan’s motion also talks about capital works funding in the ACT transport budget overwhelmingly favouring the building and upgrading of roads over public transport. When you have got a public transport system—namely, buses—which uses roads, surely you could say that by investing in roads, you are actually also providing bus infrastructure. Surely you could make that case. However, here we have the Greens saying otherwise.

What sort of capital works can you have when you are running a bus company? What are the capital works you could do? I guess you could build a depot. You could build a refuelling plant and you could probably build roads for the buses to travel on, because that is what capital works are. When you have got the public transport system that we have, a single modal system which uses buses, pretty much the only capital works you can do for a bus system is to build more roads. Whether they are bus lanes only or whether they are roads that cars drive on as well, the fact is that they are still roads. Any investment in roads which buses can or will travel on can in part be attributed to infrastructure spending or capital works spending for a bus network.

It seems to me that the Greens are trying to pivot this so it is an issue of Majura parkway or light rail. It is as simple as that, according to the Greens. It is not as simple as that in reality. The fact is that there are thousands of hours of lost productivity and damage to people’s quality of life every single day because of roads such as Majura parkway and also the Gungahlin Drive extension.

I believe that this government and this Assembly have a commitment to those in the northern suburbs who desperately need this infrastructure to actually get on and do what they are elected to do, and that is to govern for all Canberrans, including those in Gungahlin. The people of Gungahlin get a raw deal from this government and I believe they get a raw deal from this Assembly to a large extent. It is time that we stepped up and actually provided the infrastructure that they so desperately deserve.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (10.52): Before I discuss the Greens' motion, I will address the motions presented by Mr Coe and Dr Bourke. Although obviously we are debating these motions cognately, as has already been discussed, and they all refer to Majura parkway, I should note that the Greens' motion is the only one that is actually about sustainable transport and strategic transport planning. The motions from the government and the Liberal Party give no attention to strategic and sustainable transport at all.

Strategic and sustainable transport is key to the issue of Majura parkway. The project raises fundamental questions about how we plan our city and how we want transportation to work in Canberra now and in the future—not to mention the type of transport priorities the government is entrenching through its budget allocations.

I welcome Dr Bourke's entry into this debate. But I am disappointed that he has used his inaugural motion in the Assembly to simply repeat the government's arguments about Majura parkway.

As you will see from the text of my motion, there are serious weaknesses with these arguments. The Greens are asking the other parties to scrutinise and address these weaknesses. A repetitive government motion does not answer any of the Greens' legitimate questions about the Majura parkway project.

The one-line motion offered by Mr Coe neatly encapsulates the Liberal Party's complete lack of scrutiny on the Majura parkway project, and indeed on transport planning in general. The motion simply asks the Assembly to support building a new Majura parkway—no questions asked. It is a blinkered approach that skips a crucial step. The debate right now is not about how the project will be implemented; it is about whether this is the right infrastructure project for Canberra. It is negligent to fail the task of scrutiny.

What happened to the Liberals' apparent scrutiny of major projects—the line we keep hearing from the Liberal Party, the great party of scrutiny? Their approach to this issue suggests that their decisions are guided solely by short-term politics.

The motion that the Greens have presented, which I will move later, is about two things. Firstly, it is about the direction that the ACT government is taking Canberra in with its transport planning, whether that direction is compatible with a sustainable Canberra and whether it will deliver the transport solutions that Canberrans need. Secondly, it is about the proposed Majura parkway and whether the government has properly and clearly made a case for funding this project.

The crux of the motion is that the Majura parkway, as it is proposed, will not deliver the solutions that Canberrans need. The other parties are overlooking or wilfully ignoring this. It is easy and politically comfortable to just claim that the parkway is a panacea for all transport ills. But we in the Assembly have a critical obligation to assess these projects and to make decisions that will genuinely deliver the best outcomes for Canberra. My motion calls on the other parties to put the proposed freeway in its full context and to properly scrutinise the proposal and the government's broader approach to transport planning.

The people of Gungahlin and Canberra's north need solutions to their travel problems. But contemporary and modern sustainable transport planning tells us that building a new Majura freeway is not the solution to these problems.

The Majura freeway concept originates in a transport plan for Canberra conceived in the sixties and seventies. Dr Bourke actually said that it was something from the 1970s, which is interesting; he actually quoted that in his speech. That was the same era when planners openly aimed for a city dominated by car travel. The vision was for the private car as the principal mode for all trips. Today we know that this is an unsustainable strategy that has failed wherever it has been implemented.

Yet this debunked 40-year-old vision is the one the government are still pursuing, seemingly ignorant of the problems that it entrenches for the city and its commuters. Modern, sustainable and strategic transport planning shows us that what does work is the provision of a high-quality network of public transport. This creates a convenient, healthy, sustainable city, resilient to the challenges of the future.

The government has tried to paint the freeway as a solution for traffic congestion and a way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Evidence shows that these claims are not real or accurate. Building these new roads and freeways actually increases the amount of road travel and the amount of traffic. In doing so, the freeway creates an overall increase in emissions and pollution and it fails to reduce commuters' travel times. This well-documented concept is called "induced traffic". It was not covered in the government's EIS.

The government's Majura parkway website also falsely claims that the freeway will reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Victorian government recently earned criticism from the Victorian Auditor-General for taking the same short-sighted approach. The induced traffic phenomenon is observable and documented in cities all over the world. Is this what we want for Canberra—a future where Gungahlin residents have no option other than to drive cars on big, congested roads?

On the other hand, improving public transport will reduce travel times. This, too, is documented all over the world. Vancouver, Canada, for example, demonstrated this over the last 15 years in being the only Canadian city that was able to lower the average time taken to travel to work. The city achieved this by implementing an explicit policy to improve public transport and to build no new major roads. The city has grown in both population and employment, but it has accommodated new trips by public transport and active transport. Canberra can do the same, as long as we make the right decisions.

The government argues that a new freeway will improve safety. But in fact the evidence suggests that multilane freeways will not improve our accident statistics. Freeways cause people to drive further, to drive more often and to stop using other modes of transport such as public transport. This in turn increases the risk of crashes.

Canberra's accident statistics back this up. Significantly more crashes occur on our wider dual-carriageway roads than on the existing Majura Road. Again, the key way to improve road safety is to provide convenient public transport alternatives, which are much safer than car travel. A modal shift to public transport is the best way to improve safety for Canberrans, followed by initiatives such as speed checks, random breath testing and programs to change driving culture.

Then there is the government's argument about freight. The government's plan to make Canberra, and specifically the airport, a hub for freight is not one that will benefit Canberrans in the long run. A new Majura freeway might help the airport but it will not solve the emerging congestion problems facing Canberrans. The ACT Chief Minister partly acknowledged this when she said the Majura freeway is "an infrastructure project that is essentially for the nation". She said:

We've got plenty of other infrastructure projects we need to fund from this tax base.

These other infrastructure projects could be high-speed, high-quality public transport solutions. This would put Canberra's tax revenue into projects which directly benefit Canberrans. The freight growth is short-sighted and does not take account of the critical way our economy must and will change in the future. We must focus on building a green economy rather than relying on industries built around road and air-based freight.

We have heard a lot of noise from the government recently about the need to build a new freeway in order to stop freight travelling through urban Canberra. But we revealed recently that the government has no data on the amount of freight travelling through urban Canberra, where that freight originates, or how much would be diverted by a new freeway. Without this data, the government is making a supposition, at best—certainly not a justification for a \$288 million freeway.

The Greens' argument is that the best way to create real transport solutions—solutions that will contribute to a convenient, sustainable and equitable Canberra—is to invest seriously in a rapid, high-capacity public transport network. Public transport such as light rail or prioritised high-capacity buses could carry hundreds of passengers from Gungahlin to key destinations in a single trip. It would be faster than driving, and a new public transport route like this would attract commuters who may formerly have driven on Majura Road, freeing up its capacity for those people who do need to drive.

The \$144 million the ACT government has committed to a freeway would go a long way to funding a light rail system between Gungahlin, Barton and Kingston, as well as an improved public transport network to connect into these light rail routes.

Members may have seen that today I have released a public paper about transport options for the north of Canberra. I seek leave to table the paper now.

Leave granted.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, members. I table the following paper on the transport options for Gungahlin:

A Better Transport Solution for Gungahlin and Wider Canberra, dated June 2011, prepared by Amanda Bresnan, ACT Greens MLA.

The paper contains more detail about public transport options and how they can serve Gungahlin and the rest of Canberra. It outlines a fast, frequent, prioritised, well-connected transport system. This can be done in Canberra with the proper commitment. Do the other parties support this or not?

The lack of commitment to strategic and sustainable transport is of real detriment to Canberra. In my motion I have pointed out just a few facts about Canberra's public transport system.

Canberra has the highest car passenger kilometres per capita and the lowest per capita use of public transport of any Australian capital city, and the share of trips made on public transport has been decreasing. Other Australian cities are improving while Canberra languishes. All these statistics are available in the most recent data produced by the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics.

Why is this occurring? Because the government is focused on an unsustainable approach to transport planning. This approach prioritises roads instead of public transport. It is reflected in the government's Majura parkway proposal right down to the detail of the freeway itself, which does not even include bus lanes. It is a proposal that plans for, and encourages, growth in car travel only.

The government does not have to realise the 40-year-old freeway prophecy. It could instead make a strategic, sensible upgrade to the existing Majura Road—things like upgrading intersections where collisions tend to occur. The traffic data suggests that a large proportion of collisions on the Majura Road route occur at particular intersections such as Majura Road and Fairbairn Avenue. Other sensible upgrades could include a short stretch of extra lane to assist traffic at peak time bottlenecks, such as at the southern end of Majura Road, and better lighting for vehicles using the road at night.

The massive savings from this approach could be invested into quality public transport solutions specifically designed to serve the busy, growing areas of Gungahlin. That will bring real solutions in terms of congestion, travel time, safety, and sustainability.

All of us in this Assembly are very concerned about the costs that Canberrans have to bear, at the community, family and individual level. We are obliged to consider the

negative costs that arise from planning our city for automobile travel at the expense of public transport. Increased pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, oil dependence, social exclusion, impacts on health, traffic congestion and urban sprawl are all serious, long-term costs that we cannot overlook. Applying dollar figures to these burdens puts the cost in the billions.

Cars are also expensive to run. By planning a city that expects and relies on car travel, the ACT government locks Canberrans into car ownership and into paying the ongoing costs. The approximate average time that a resident of Canberra has to work for in order to pay for their car is 550 hours a year, or 1½ hours every single day. Families in outer suburbs already suffer the most cost-of-living pressures, and locking Canberrans into car reliance, particularly as oil prices rise, will cause significant economic stress.

The arguments I have outlined today are not just the belief of the Greens. You will find sustainable transport planning experts all over the world who back up this view. You will find many in the Canberra community who argue the same as us—people who are concerned about their own transport options as well as the future of our city. This includes Light Rail ACT, who have recently talked about this topic, as well as Paul Mees and other transport experts.

Perhaps the most damning fact is the revelation that the government has not even done any analysis of the benefits of building new, quality public transport links for the people of Gungahlin compared to building a freeway. It has just gone straight for the 40-year-old freeway option.

My motion calls on the government to halt funding to Majura parkway until an independent expert in sustainable transport planning has assessed a variety of issues such as the benefits of building public transport instead of the freeway; the ongoing impacts of a new freeway on Canberra; and the impacts on our modal shift targets and greenhouse gas targets. This is quite different from an EIS or engineering study. It will examine the decision to actually build a freeway and whether it is the right solution. At the moment we are just getting hollow justifications from the government and no scrutiny from the Liberal Party.

The Greens will not support the government's motion, which simply repeats the same spurious arguments, or the Liberals' motion, which unthinkingly demands support for one of the biggest and most consequential projects for Canberra's transport planning. Over \$144 million of taxpayers' money is being spent with no scrutiny.

Instead we ask that you agree to our reasonable asks to prioritise public transport solutions and to have a proper analysis done on this project from an independent sustainable transport planner as well as to provide other relevant data. A government and an Assembly that are committed to proper scrutiny and to delivering the best outcomes for Canberra now and into the future should not have any problem agreeing to these asks.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services and Minister

for Police and Emergency Services) (11.07): I thank Dr Bourke for moving this motion today, his first motion in the Assembly, highlighting the priority he puts on the importance of important infrastructure projects for the ACT community. I want to turn immediately to the criticisms we have heard from Ms Bresnan this morning as part of this cognate debate. And it is with a somewhat wry consideration that I think about Ms Bresnan's lecture about the relative economic efficiency measures when it comes to transport. Of course, this comes from the party that insisted on an expanded Nightrider service that resulted in a cost per customer of \$157.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members!

MR CORBELL: We made it very clear from the outset that we had serious reservations about this project. But of course that was the price for a very important reform: the government's Nightrider service.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Corbell, could you resume your seat, please.

Mrs Dunne interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, Mr Corbell's coming to his feet is not an excuse for those opposite to break into interjections. Will you please remain silent?

MR CORBELL: But of course that was the price for very important reforms to improve community safety.

Mrs Dunne interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, I will warn you.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Coe, I will warn you.

MR CORBELL: But now that the evidence in relation to that public transport project is in, I would have thought the Greens would be a bit more circumspect about their lectures in this place about what is the most cost-efficient measure when it comes to transport policy in this place. But clearly, they are not.

I want to respond to the assertions made by Ms Bresnan which are—and I have to agree with Mr Coe to an extent here—simply a smokescreen for opposition to any development along Majura Road. If they oppose the project, they should just say they oppose the project rather than wrapping it up in this whole range of caveats, requirements, investigations and studies. They should simply say they do not support it. They should say, "Do not build that road," and that would be a more honest position from the Greens.

The fact is the Labor Party's position is this: this is not an either/or proposition. This is not about saying you either build the Majura parkway or you invest in better public transport. Both of those things need to occur, and that is the government's position.

Why do both of these things have to occur? They both have to occur because one is a recurrent cost that fundamentally is about improving frequency and improving the delivery of public transit services to the community. It is not about infrastructure costs. The overwhelming and ongoing demand that our budget will face if we are to improve public transport services in our city is a recurrent cost. It is about paying for more routes. It is about paying for more drivers. It is about paying for greater frequency of services. It is not about an infrastructure investment. It is about a service delivery cost to the community.

The concern I have in this debate is that the Greens are always fixated on a technological solution. And the technological solution will not deliver, on its own, what we need when it comes to public transport. What we need to deliver is greater frequency, greater reliability, greater network opportunities. These are the things that will make public transit work in this city, not the assertion that we choose a particular technology. And unfortunately that is the approach we get from the Greens.

We have also heard the criticism from the Greens that the government's assertions about the viability and appropriateness of this project are based on some false assumptions. They are wrong. They are wrong to assert that. This project has been assessed multiple times in terms of its economic benefit, in terms of its contribution to the national freight task. It has been assessed in detail not just by the ACT government but by Infrastructure Australia, who has ranked it as one of its top priority projects.

The federal government is not going to say that in principle this project warrants federal funding unless it meets the very strict criteria that are imposed in relation to the assessment of national infrastructure projects. The same criteria they have used to tick off projects such as the Gold Coast light rail project are being applied to this project.

If the federal government is getting it right when it comes to infrastructure funding for the light rail project on the Gold Coast, using these criteria, the same criteria that they have used to say this project also stacks up in terms of its economic benefit and its social benefit, you cannot have it both ways. You cannot argue that some decisions using those criteria are right and other decisions using those criteria are wrong.

The fact is this project stacks up. It stacks up. And why does it stack up? It stacks up because overwhelmingly it is about connecting freight links. It is about upgrading a key link between major highways that service south-eastern Australia, the Federal Highway through to the Monaro Highway. It is about the increasingly important role that the Canberra airport will play in terms of delivery of freight to the city and the region and the fact that industrial uses on the eastern side of the city continue to grow. We heard no mention from the Greens of issues such as the fact that there is significant growth in our own industrial estates.

What does that growth mean? That growth means extra freight. It means more goods in stores, in warehouses, in factories. Where do the Greens think this freight comes from? How do they think it is going to be managed? For example, 98,000 extra square metres of industrial land is to be released this financial year alone. And of course the Greens would be aware that the eastern broadacre assessment has identified future opportunities for industrial uses along this corridor, exactly where the Majura parkway is to be built. The freight task will continue to be managed to a very significant degree by road, and Majura Road is not up to the task of meeting that demand now, let alone into the future. So that is why the government is supporting the development of this very important project.

Do the Greens seriously want to say to the people who live in the inner north of Canberra that fewer heavy vehicles on Northbourne Avenue is a bad idea? That is exactly what they are saying, with the position they are adopting today. The fact is at the moment Majura Road is not able to accommodate the range of heavy vehicle movements we currently see on it—2,800 heavy vehicle movements a day and growing. It is growing because we know the national road freight task overall will continue to grow.

If we can see some of those vehicles come off Northbourne Avenue, is that not a good thing for our city? Is that not a good thing for the community that lives adjacent to that very busy transport corridor? Of course it is. And that is why the government supports this project.

So the Greens' arguments try to paint this as an either/or, black or white, proposition. It is not. It is about building an important piece of infrastructure to service freight, to connect a major regional transport hub, to support growth in industrial land uses around the road and along the road corridor and to connect it up with the national freight network service by the major highways, the Monaro and Federal highways.

But the project is also important in terms of the government's work in liaising with our federal colleagues. And the Chief Minister has worked very hard in negotiating with the federal government, lobbying and advocating the importance of the federal government following through on its own assessment about the viability of and the ranking that this project has been given by Infrastructure Australia. We remain hopeful that we will get a positive outcome in relation to that matter, and our advocacy will be continued and will be sustained as we seek resolution of that.

This is an important motion today. The government will not be supporting the motion proposed by the Greens and I urge members to support the motion moved by Dr Bourke.

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (11.17): Before I start with what I was going to talk about, I think I should respond to Mr Corbell's comments about Nightrider. Mr Corbell, if a service is not advertised, it is not surprising that we do not have as many people catching it as we would have liked. And that is what happened to Nightrider. I am not sure if the word "sabotage"—

Mr Corbell interjecting—

MS LE COUTEUR: should actually be used.

Mr Corbell interjecting—

MS LE COUTEUR: There has simply been insufficient publicity.

Mr Corbell interjecting—

MS LE COUTEUR: The other point that has been made—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Corbell, please remain silent.

MS LE COUTEUR: as well as—

Mr Corbell interjecting—

MS LE COUTEUR: Madam Deputy Speaker, it is impossible for me to speak with Mr Corbell continually interrupting. I cannot hear myself talk.

Members interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Stop the clock again, please, Clerk. Members, Ms Le Couteur has the floor. Please remain silent. Thank you very much.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The other problem with the Nightrider was that it was a three-month trial. As we all know, it takes people a while to become accustomed to the public transport options available to them, and three months—

Mr Corbell interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Corbell.

MS LE COUTEUR: most of which was over university holiday time, which was simply not long enough to establish—

Mr Corbell interjecting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Corbell, please!

MS LE COUTEUR: I would also—

Mr Hanson: Madam Deputy Speaker, it is unlike me to get up to defend the Greens, but there is a point of order here. You have called on Mr Corbell repeatedly. This is exactly what he did yesterday, ignoring the Speaker's rulings. If this was a member of the opposition, he would have been named by now. I ask that you apply the same consistency to Mr Corbell that you do to the opposition or the crossbench.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Hanson. Ms Le Couteur.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The next thing I will talk about—again, you would expect me to talk about it, given the subject, but it must be mentioned—is peak oil. Those people who looked at the IEA's *World Energy Outlook*, the 2010 one, will find that there is a graph in there. I unfortunately cannot read out graphs, but it shows that 2006, according to the IEA, was the peak of conventional crude oil production. While there have been other liquid fuels increase since then, and I do admit that the IEA does in fact predict that there will be an increase if you take the total amount of liquid fuels, it is all hypothetical things which have not been found at present. There clearly has been, the IEA acknowledges, a peak in conventional oil production.

We need to do all our transport planning bearing this fact in mind. Planning for a more and more car and truck dependent future for Canberra will not serve Canberra in the long term—or even, I believe, in the medium term. It also will not serve from a financial point of view.

The Liberal Party has talked a lot about costs of living. One of the significant issues of cost of living is transport. If a family has to run two cars, as my colleague Ms Bresnan said, it costs them a lot of money. If we could have a decent public transport system, if we could have a system which encourages people to walk or to ride their bike because it has become safe for them, it would be a lot cheaper for Canberra families. It is also a lot healthier. And there are a lot of other environmental benefits, but I will not go there because we do not have a lot of time.

Climate change is the other thing that we must mention in this debate. Last year this Assembly committed to a 40 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. The question that the government needs to answer is about how building another large road will contribute to a 40 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The government simply has not answered that one.

I would also like to point out that Mr Corbell was misrepresenting the Greens' position. The Greens are talking about improving the existing Majura Road. We do acknowledge that work is needed on that. What we are saying is that we should improve the existing road rather than support a new road. Mr Corbell, I live in Downer. I go up and down Northbourne Avenue virtually every day, as I live in Downer and I work in Civic. I am well aware of the congestion issues on Northbourne Avenue. What I am not aware of is that building a four-lane highway in the Majura Valley is going to solve those issues.

I will briefly talk about two other issues. Mr Corbell and Dr Bourke talked quite extensively about freight and that this is a reason for doing what they are proposing. As far as freight goes, I should point out, as the Greens pointed out in the eastern broadacre study, that we do not support the concept of Canberra Airport becoming a 24-hour airfreight hub. I mentioned peak oil and climate change earlier; those are two good reasons why, probably regardless of whether or not the Greens support it, it is unlikely to happen. The economics is going in a different direction. It is not going to increase airfreight. Oil prices are going up, whatever you might think about it.

Our recommendation to this study was that our freight hub should be transitioned to a rail-based system rather than the currently proposed major air-truck freight hub. We would like to see Canberra plan for the future, not the past. In the future, trains are going to be more important than planes. This is where we should be planning. If we are planning any sort of freight hub, it should be a rail-based freight hub. I am not totally convinced that a freight hub is really where Canberra should be going for the future; we should be looking at a clean, green economy, and I do not think freight warehousing is a big part of that.

The other thing that the Greens are very concerned about from the eastern broadacre point of view is that we keep enough land in that for agricultural purposes. Food is very important. We have very little local production. We have some in the Majura Valley. We would like to see that preserved and, if possible, increased.

In the remaining time left to me, I would like to talk about Northbourne Avenue, because that is a significant part of solving northern Canberra's transport problems. The first comment I would like to make is that I would really like to know what is happening with the Northbourne Avenue feasibility study. On the website it says that members of the community will be invited to comment on options identified as part of the study and that the consultation will take place in May and June. This consultation, as far as I can tell, simply has not happened.

We asked questions about this in estimates, and the timetable had not been updated. I appreciate that there was consultation with a small, targeted group of people—the community councils, Pedal Power and the like—but I am not aware of public consultation on this. As far as I know, there is still a closing date of the end of June for community submissions. The Greens have asked—we asked quite a few weeks ago—for a briefing on what is going on here. We have not been able to obtain one as yet. So I think there is a real issue with the Northbourne Avenue consultation.

That brings me to one thing that the government did do consultation on with Northbourne Avenue. I have in my hand part of the 2005 SMEC bus priority feasibility study for Northbourne Avenue. This was a study which, had it been implemented, would have meant some considerable improvements in Northbourne Avenue. It had a plan for building bus priority lanes and it had a plan to have a dedicated space for light rail in the future. It did talk about putting light rail in from the beginning, and I think it was quite positive about that, but whether you went with light rail or bus it had a plan for that. And it had a plan for additional space for cycling. This was in 2005. As far as I can tell, the government has not done anything to implement it.

That brings me to a concern about what Mr Corbell has said. Basically he was saying that it is not reasonable for the Greens to be concerned about Majura parkway because we can have it all: we can have a perfect public transport solution down Northbourne Avenue and everywhere else and we can spend a large sum of money on Majura Avenue. That is great as a best of all possible worlds.

One of the things I am concerned about is that clearly the government are aware of the issues with public transport. Just read this study or read any of the other studies that

were referred to in this. But this is six years ago. Why have they not done anything about it? I am less than convinced that we are in a position to do everything. I certainly want to see that one of the things that we do is give serious priority for public transport.

I would also note that, as part of this study, the consultants looked at some of the alternatives like Monash drive and the Gungahlin Drive extension. They did not, anywhere in the document, mention Majura parkway as an alternative for reducing the problem of inner north transport. It simply is not going to solve the problem.

Ms Bresnan's proposed motion has a list of items to go through to actually address the issues, and I will be commending her motion to the Assembly. (*Time expired.*)

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (11.27): First I would like to reflect on what the Labor members and the Greens have said in this place. It is quite clear—and I think Simon Corbell made this point—that the Greens are trying to have a bob each way. They want to cloud the fact that they do not support this road in some mumbo jumbo about public transport, and you can read their motion and listen to the two speeches that have gone before to see that. But the point is that this is a question of: do you support the road—yes or no? That does not mean that you do not support public transport; it does not mean that you do not support other sustainability measures that the government may be introducing. The question is: do you or do you not support the Majura parkway?

Simon Corbell made that point quite eloquently. In doing so, he supported Alistair Coe's motion, which is the most simple of the three and which goes directly to the point. I will read the motion:

That this Assembly supports the construction of the Majura Parkway.

So, if we want to have a very clear opinion from each of the parties in this place on whether they support the parkway or not—without the distractions, without the gloss—then let us vote for Alistair Coe's motion when it comes to that today.

It is quiet clear that the Greens are trying to cloud their dislike of roads and their dislike of cars and their dislike of the Majura parkway with a delay motion—"Let's delay and have a bit more of a look at this"—when it is quite clear that this has been an infrastructure priority for Canberra since 1970. I am not sure what it is that the Greens want to have more of a look at. The case, I think, has been very well made over a number of years.

So when we come to the vote on this—this is the point I want to make at the outset—let us make sure that we support Mr Coe's motion. The Labor motion, although there is much in it that makes sense—and I think Dr Bourke made some very good points in his speech—contains some distractions; there is politics in it. There is reference to continuing commitment and determination and so on that is unnecessary. We do not need to turn this into who is better at this or who is worse at this—"I am more in support of the road than you are," and so on. If we want a clear definition of do we support the road—yes, or no—then let us vote on it. Let us make sure that we support Mr Coe's motion.

In my view, the case has been well made for the Majura parkway. The principal concern I have is one of safety. I will quote from an article from the *Sunday Canberra Times* of 16 May 2010:

Every two months on average a crash on the Majura Road leaves someone injured, police figures show. Six crashes resulting in injury are reported on the road each year on average over the past five years, and ACT Policing reported three since the start of the year. The ACT Policing Head of Traffic Operations, Superintendent Mark Colbran, urged motorists to take extra care on the Majura Road given it lacked barriers.

And so on. And of course, the high amount of freight on that road is a significant concern. I will quote from the Majura parkway EIS report that makes out the case for the road as well:

The need for the Majura Parkway was first identified in 1970 as a key component of Canberra's peripheral road system. The system is designed to provide efficient traffic movement between the town centres and other destinations, such as Queanbeyan and Canberra Airport, without impacting unduly upon residential areas. Traffic in the vicinity of Canberra Airport has increased considerably over the last few years with the continued growth in Gungahlin and increased employment at the airport.

Roads in this area play an important role in the ACT economy, the surrounding New South Wales region and nationally, given the importance of the Monaro Highway as a freight route connection to the Federal Highway.

The parkway will considerably improve the traffic flows on the road network in the area between Duntroon and Canberra Airport as at this location five major arterials converge. This affected area also extends north up to the Federal Highway as the proposed Majura parkway runs parallel to the west of the existing Majura Road.

And so on. So the case has been made, and I refer people to the EIS, which really extends the points made by Mr Coe and Dr Bourke about the need for this road, a need that has been established for a long time. In principle, it is about safety. It is about making sure that we have freight taken away from other arterials, including and probably most particularly Northbourne Avenue. It is about making sure that we have more traffic options and less congestion for Gungahlin residents. It is about making sure that people do not have to go through Canberra if they are intending to go on routes, for example, between Sydney and Melbourne.

A point of disagreement I have with Labor is whether Labor are doing enough. The motion from Dr Bourke talks about Labor's commitment and determination. But whether they are committed or determined enough I suppose is a point for debate, but whether they have achieved an outcome is quite clear—they have not. They have failed. This is a little bit more of Labor's grand agenda—Labor are doing this, Labor are going to do this, but the reality is they have not. They have failed dismally. They have failed to build the road and they have failed to secure any funding from the federal government.

I note that they were able to secure funding for the arboretum. When they want to get money for something they want, they will go and get it from the federal government. But when it comes to a priority that might be there for Canberra residents, particularly those in the outer suburbs, they fail dismally.

Part of the reason, of course, for this is the dismissive attitude from the federal government towards the Labor government here. What we see is that Katy Gallagher's mates—Julia Gillard in particular—are so busy shovelling money into the electorates of Rob Oakeshott and Tony Windsor and Andrew Wilkie that they simply do not have enough time—

Mr Corbell: Relevance?

MR HANSON: The relevance, Mr Corbell, is to provide the \$144 million that is being requested to support the building of this road. Labor federally and Labor locally between them cannot get the job done. Locally they do not have the attitude or nous or the negotiating skills—we have seen Katy Gallagher's negotiating skills with Calvary—and they do not have the backing of their federal Labor colleagues who are so desperate to cling to power that they are shovelling all the priorities elsewhere, despite Infrastructure Australia putting this road forward as a priority.

When it comes to outcomes it is clear that there is a similarity between the government's position and that of the Liberal opposition—we want the road built. Of that there is no question; we both want the road built. The difference of opinion here really is with the Greens. When it comes down to it and when you listen to Amanda Bresnan's speech and that of Caroline Le Couteur, they are quite clearly anti road. They are anti car, and Ms Bresnan talked about the problems with cars.

It is bizarre that the Greens all of a sudden are starting to talk about the cost pressures of driving cars. If you are going to put a bus on every corner or a train route from every suburb into Civic, I would like to add up the cost of that. We can see from the Nightrider example that when you replace individual cars with a public transport system the way the Greens want to replace the need for everybody to get into their cars, it will be monumentally expensive. They are using the costs argument here, but I do not think I have ever heard the Greens use it elsewhere.

What is the cost of not doing it? What is the cost of not building the Majura parkway? I will tell you what it is—more lives will be lost on the Majura Road, more people will be stuck in traffic on the GDE and more freight will be on Northbourne Avenue preventing the free flow of traffic on that major arterial that we need to free up.

I notice that Dr Bourke, who is new in this place, rolled his eyes on a couple of occasions as the Greens were speaking. He seems to have some quite left-wing icons—Gough Whitlam and Don Dunstan. But what you find from the Greens is that their icons are people like Wilma and Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble. If you get back to the quotes that you hear from the Greens, you know that what they want to do is take us back to the cave. That is a quote from Caroline Le Couteur in the media that you may not have heard. It was Caroline Le Couteur who said, “We don't want to get back to the caves, yet.”

That is exactly where the Greens are at. They do not like cars, they do not like roads and they have this view that everybody should be able to catch a bus that is going to drive past their corner every five minutes. It is fanciful, and we know that the cost of that is simply unaffordable for the people of the ACT. So let us build this road. Let us make it clear what we support. Do we support this road—yes or no? Let us support Mr Coe's motion that asks that very question.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Health, Minister for Industrial Relations and Treasurer) (11.37): I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the Majura parkway, a very significant project for our community and also our region—we are a member of the region—and on the role that this road, when finished, will play in supporting both Canberra residents but also national traffic and our regional economy.

The government is determined to build the Majura parkway for many of the reasons that have already been outlined this morning. Indeed, so determined are we that we have included very transparently allocations for our share of the road—\$144 million—to progress the parkway in the budget currently being considered before the Assembly. But we are also determined to get federal funding assistance to build this road. It is a road with a national role and, therefore, we believe the federal government needs to pay its fair share of the delivery of this major national piece of infrastructure. It is one of the priority projects for our government, and I outlined that yesterday in the government priorities.

I think it is important that—I support the efforts of Dr Bourke in bringing to the Assembly this motion today—in supporting my advocacy at federal parliament I have very clear support from all members of the elected parliament here in the ACT. I have been spending a fair bit of time on this over the past year. Indeed, I have had numbers of meetings with the infrastructure minister, Minister Albanese. I have had meetings with the federal Treasurer. I have now met with the Prime Minister. I have met with the minister for territories, Simon Crean, in the last week as well. I have very much been putting forward the government's view. It is the government's view that this road is important, supported, of course, by the extensive analysis that has been done by our public service, particularly through Roads ACT, but also through the ranking of this project through Infrastructure Australia's own extremely thorough processes.

I think it is a little unfortunate that the Greens are running the line that there has not been enough analysis and data collected around this road. Perhaps not for their purposes or for their argument, but for the purposes of planning a road system for the ACT and surrounding region, this project has been through far more analysis than other roads would be given, particularly as it has gone through the very detailed analysis of Infrastructure Australia.

As my colleague Mr Corbell said, it is not an either/or; it does not mean because you build the parkway to the specifications that are required based on the data that we have that you take your eye off other improvements in delivering a sustainable public transport system. You can do both and, indeed, we need to do both. We cannot solve some of the pressures around traffic and traffic congestion not only for our own

commuters but for the commuters around New South Wales without the Majura parkway.

We are not building the road because we like building roads; we are building the road because we need to build the road. That will also mean that we need to look at other and increased funding going into other public transport options. All of that work is currently being done. It is the government's priority, and it is being led by Minister Corbell.

But it is important, I think, that the motions before us today send a very clear message to the federal government in my quest to get the additional funding for this road that we need to proceed by July next year and that we are able to say in the meetings that I will continue to have with federal representatives that we have the support of the Assembly. I would prefer that it is a unanimous view, but it does not appear that we are going to get a unanimous view this morning. But I will take a majority view, even if that means us entering into some unholy alliance with the Liberal Party. In the end, that will deliver the result that we want, which is that the road is acknowledged as a major project, that the Assembly supports it and that it adds further weight to my advocacy when going up to federal parliament.

I note we have been advised that the Liberal Party will not be supporting our motion. I just think that is pathetic. They have decided that, after doing absolutely nothing in terms of support or work or advocacy around the road, they now want to make sure that it is their motion that gets up for the Majura parkway. How pathetic. It has to be their motion, not the Labor Party's motion. It needs to be Alistair's motion. What they will do is they will risk having no motion get up this morning, because the Greens will not support our motion, we will not support the Greens' motion, and the Liberals will not support our motion, and young Alistair has to have his motion get up. How pathetic. I cannot wait to see the media release—"The Liberal Party deliver the Majura parkway through Alistair Coe's motion." Let us pat ourselves on the back. That is apparently the important issue here today. Well, it will be seen for what it is—just pathetic.

The issue for the government is getting a view from this Assembly. If that means Dr Bourke's motion goes down in order for us to get the result, then we are bigger than that, and we will vote to support Alistair Coe's motion in the interest of getting a result on the Majura parkway.

There is sympathy for some of the issues, I think, that the Greens have raised around looking at and examining and always trying to find alternatives to just building roads to deal with some of our traffic issues. The Labor Party is open to all of that. But, in the instance of the Majura parkway, we are absolutely convinced that this road needs to be built. There is a timetable for delivery of this road. We are very keen to get the road underway in July next year. We will do everything we can to make sure that the road is shovel ready for construction so that the minute the commonwealth come to the party—I have not given up on that—we are able to proceed with this very important project for Canberra and the surrounding region.

Because of the credit that the Liberal Party will no doubt take from today, I look forward to hearing from them exactly the efforts that they have put in to advocating on behalf of their community. Mr Coe went to the issues of the residents of Gungahlin. I have not heard of one meeting that has been held over the Majura parkway, one effort that has been made by any of you opposite to argue for this road and to make those arguments heard by the decision makers. I do not mean just a meeting between yourselves—a meeting with someone who has actually got some influence around delivering this road.

It is opposition for opposition's sake; sitting around and never lifting a finger to deliver an outcome for the people of Canberra. Here is your opportunity. Take credit, Mr Coe, your motion is going to get up. Why do you not head up to federal parliament, have the meetings with all the people that I have been meeting with say, "My motion got up; therefore I'm here to argue for this road." The silence from those opposite has been noticeable. The lack of advocacy around this road has been noticeable until it got to the point where you sweep in and take credit.

The Labor Party, the government, are bigger than that. We will support your motion at the expense of our motion in order that we have a view expressed from the Assembly that this road is important and that members of the Assembly support its construction and the timetable for construction.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (11.46): I think this is one of those debates this morning where, if you were coming in from outside and you did not really know the context, you would be perhaps wondering what the hell was going on. But it became clear that a certain amount of this morning's debate was an opportunity for the other parties to verbal the Greens. We have seen a fair bit of verballing this morning about what we do and do not believe. We have seen some selective quoting; we have seen a range of things. So I am very pleased to have this opportunity to talk about the Greens' actual position on Majura parkway as opposed to what other members of the Assembly might assert it is.

Mr Hanson: Will you be voting for the motion?

Mr Coe: Does that include the other members that have spoken or not?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

MR RATTENBURY: And if you actually listen long enough, you might hear it. But I know that derision and rudeness are your preferred style, Mr Coe; so why don't you stick with it? What the ACT Greens want is to actually see real transport solutions, solutions that will contribute to a convenient, sustainable and equitable Canberra. We believe that instead of building a new four-lane Majura freeway, the ACT government should make a strategic upgrade of the existing Majura Road and invest in rapid, high capacity public transport. We believe that is a real solution for bringing convenient, effective and sustainable transport to north Canberra. So for those that were not listening, what we said was that there should be a strategic upgrade to the existing Majura Road.

We do not believe that a brand new gleaming four-lane highway down the middle of Majura Valley is necessarily the answer that we need. We think there are other possibilities here that will ensure that the people of Gungahlin get offered real transport solutions, not some of the false promises that are blindly being put forward to them by those in other parts of this chamber. We believe, and we will put this out in writing today, that roads play an important role in Canberra as part of our overall transport network. So all—

Mr Coe: Why do you need to clarify that?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Coe!

MR RATTENBURY: Because, Mr Coe, you keep coming up with the sort of verbal garbage that tries to make some other impression for the people of Canberra. So just for your sake, so you do not have misquote us in the future, here is what the Greens believe. We also know that the Majura Road is a busy single-lane route and it does need improvement. There is no doubt about that and, again, we state that very clearly. It is currently used by many commuters as well as freight traffic. It carries around 16,000 to 18,000 vehicles a day.

We believe that targeted upgrades can be made to the existing Majura Road for significantly less than the cost of the new Majura freeway and with much less impact on the ecosystem of the Majura Valley and existing land uses such as the various recreation facilities in the Majura Valley—the mountain bike facilities, the Girl Guide facilities and the various things that take place in the Majura Valley in its current form.

We also believe that the considerable savings achieved by the upgrade approach can be invested into quality public transport solutions specifically designed to serve the busy, growing areas of Gungahlin. We also, as Ms Bresnan, I think, has spelled out quite well, believe that some of the benefits, or the alleged benefits, of building a freeway are illusory and will not bring the solutions for the commuters of north Canberra. The residents of Gungahlin, the residents of the inner north, need real solutions, the solutions they deserve, not the false promises that are being put out there.

I think the strength of Ms Bresnan's motion is that she actually seeks to answer some of the questions that we do not believe have been adequately answered to date. I think that she has raised the points in quite an evidence-based sort of way. She has not stood up and said, "I reckon this; I reckon that." She has actually brought forward with this debate some evidence rather than just ideology around the fact of what has happened in other cities and in other parts of the world.

Somehow there seems to be a view in this chamber—at least the old parties, the agreeing coalition, seem to have a view—that despite the fact that everywhere else in the world produces evidence, somehow Canberra is magically different. Well, it is not. What Ms Bresnan is seeking is to actually undertake some scrutiny of this proposed road project.

This is going to be \$300 million by the time it is completed. Let us face it: the costs will undoubtedly increase. They always seem to. So we are talking about \$300 million here. The Liberals, who sit on the other side of the chamber, scream blue murder in here about the scrutiny of \$10,000 and the like. This is \$300 million. We need to look at whether this is the best investment that we can make to solve the transport problems for the people of Gungahlin and the north side of Canberra. Our argument is that there is a more cost-effective way to solve those transport problems, and that is a two-pronged strategy—a strategy to upgrade Majura Road to the standard to make it safe and to provide the improvements that will improve traffic flows for the traffic that obviously is flowing down that road already.

The second part of that strategy is to invest in high volume public transport that will service the people of Gungahlin in particular with the sort of transport options and services that they deserve. That is what the Greens' position is. One of our primary concerns in this debate is the false promises. The two false promises are that this road will solve the problems, and the second is some vague promise from the government that they are going to do something about public transport—that they are going to build light rail.

I am going to discuss in some detail those two issues. Ms Bresnan has gone through in some details the issues around induced traffic, the issues around the fact that the more roads you build, the more people drive on them. That is a well-recognised, well-studied, well-documented, peer-reviewed issue that has been identified by researchers all over the world.

As I have said, the Greens do see that there is obviously a role for cars in our transport system. No-one in our team disputes that, despite all the verballing that this chamber might seek to put upon us. No-one disputes that. The question is: will simply building more roads solve the problem or are we going to lock ourselves into a car-dependent future?

When it comes to building light rail, we have had promise after promise after promise. But the reality—and there is the point Ms Bresnan was making about emphasising the distortion of budget funding toward road building—is that we always seem to find the money for roads. We never, ever seem to find the significant money that is required for investment in public transport.

I do not know how long people in this city have talked about the need for light rail from Gungahlin to the city. In the government's own documentation that they have put to Infrastructure Australia—funnily enough just before the 2008 elections so that everyone thought they were serious about it—they identified the cost of light rail from Gungahlin to Civic at \$86 million. The estimate was \$86 million.

Admittedly, that figure was part of a broader network. It was a whole picture. So you can make an assumption that if it was done as a stand-alone, you would lose some economies of scale from not building the whole system. But that is \$86 million. We have never, ever found that money. We found \$300 million for the GDE, we found \$300 million for Majura parkway, or at least we are trying to, and yet we cannot find

something in the region of \$100 million for light rail. Nobody in this chamber, bar the Greens, is serious about redefining the transport paradigm in this city.

You might recall, members, that a couple of months ago Ms Le Couteur brought into this chamber a matter of public importance about peak oil. Mr Coe gave a very special speech on that day in which he was rude, derisory and, frankly, mocking. He stood up and raved on about when he is out in an electorate nobody ever raises peak oil with him.

In fact, he went on to say, “Peak oil is a just a little bogus when it comes down to it.” Let us talk about some of the evidence. This is why the Greens are focused on shifting the transport paradigm. The International Energy Agency is an independent, multi-government agency formed out of the wake of the 1973 oil crisis. It forecasts oil production and it monitors the international oil market and other energy sectors. So I think it is a body with some credibility.

I do not always agree with it, but certainly it is a body that is recognised as an authority on these issues. It is certainly not some sort of left-wing think-tank in case anybody is fearing that this is some ideological statement. The association’s chief economist says that the world’s crude oil production peaked in 2006. They go on to predict that the age of cheap oil is over. That is what this is actually about. This is about acknowledging that. The world’s leading authorities on these issues know that the age of cheap oil is over. That is why the Greens are focused on providing some sort of alternative.

As I have said, there have been a few verbalings of the Greens today. Mr Coe sort of said that basically we do not think the people of Gungahlin deserve this. I want to be absolutely clear: the Greens do believe that the people of Gungahlin deserve a world-class transport solution. That is our position. We are simply wanting to argue that there is a better way to do it than the current proposal that is on the table. That is what Ms Bresnan’s motion seeks to achieve.

When it comes to safety, Mr Hanson quoted from the *Sunday Canberra Times*—not always my source of research, but there you go. He cited some accident figures for Majura Road. They are concerning. But what he did not note was that from 2003 to 2008 there were 210 accidents on Majura Road. In the same period, there were 312 crashes on the Monaro Highway. So Mr Hanson might remember to tell the whole story next time. (*Time expired.*)

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (11.56): I think it is important that we put in place the context for this road and that people understand what it is that we are actually talking about here. This is a road that completes the transport network for the ACT. It allows the people of the ACT and those who transit through the ACT to have three choices, three corridors, in the north-south. You end up with Horse Park Drive, Majura parkway and Monaro Highway on the east. On the western side you will have Gungahlin Drive and the Tuggeranong Parkway. In the centre, should you choose to go through the centre of town, you can go Northbourne Avenue, Commonwealth Avenue, Adelaide Avenue and all stations south.

There are a number of routes east-west that give us a nice grid system that allows rapid transport and accessibility and ease of movement for the people of the ACT and those that come and visit or those that transit through. It was always planned this way. Just because something was always planned this way does not mean you should go ahead with it.

But I think people understand the importance of this road. This is not just a road for the people of Gungahlin. It is not just a road that will take off the pressure in the inner north. It is not just a road for freight. It is not just a road for the snowfields. It is not just a road for those that want to visit the Monaro. It is actually a road, in my perspective, for the people of Brindabella as well, because it allows those on the southern side of Canberra to move north without having to go through Civic, without having to go up the western route. It allows the people of Brindabella the transport system that they deserve, and that is why I agree wholeheartedly with Mr Coe's motion today.

I think it is very important that people know that it is an upgrade that is required for road safety. And if you have not been involved in the trauma of a road accident, if you have not had it happen to you or you have not had it happen to a loved one, you cannot understand how it hurts families and communities when people die or are injured in road transport accidents. This road is well past its use-by date in terms of road safety. I can recall briefings when I was the minister about some of those dangerous curves and the way that the road is currently built that makes it unacceptable to upgrade it.

The point was made that not upgrading the road and building the new Majura parkway is somehow ecological vandalism. To upgrade the existing road pushes into some very interesting verge areas that are truly the last remnants of some of the original grasslands and wooded areas that were in that valley. So it may be that the greater environmental vandalism is in fact to upgrade the existing road. But it is also impossible to upgrade the existing road because if you want grade separation so that you have got flyovers to get in and out of the airport and other places, you actually come into conflict with some of our aviation legislation which says you cannot have things of a certain height within a distance of the airport.

For a whole lot of reasons, to upgrade the existing road is unacceptable. To leave the existing road as it is is even less unacceptable. I do not know how many accidents you have to have on a road before you get to change it but it is quite clear that this road is well past its use-by date and the work should have been done.

It is unfortunate that the Chief Minister, when she got up, talked in such sad tones about young Canberrans. I think she should apologise for the use of the words "young Alistair". What it says is that this Chief Minister believes that if you are young and you have an opinion, do not dare voice it, because the Labor Party will not listen to it. And I think it is really sad from a Chief Minister who earlier this week promised to be more open and more accountable. What she should be doing is listening to what young people in this city are saying, not using disparaging words, not just shooting the messenger and going back to her normal old practice of saying, "This is a good

motion, firstly, because the Labor Party put it forward and, secondly, because it congratulates us.”

That is the problem with this motion. You have got the same old self-congratulatory, pat-on-the back words “continuing commitment and determination to build Majura parkway”. There are a lot of people out there who do not see any commitment and there are a lot of people who do not see any determination from this government, particularly from this Chief Minister. On talkback radio recently there was one quote: “It is all very well that Ms Gallagher can say she has been lobbying pretty strongly on the Majura parkway but with no success thus far. Will she take the tack of her predecessor and just blame her public service?”

Ms Gallagher: I have not seen anyone else walking the corridors.

MR SMYTH: It is your job. It is your job and if you do not want to do your job, then move aside. You have got the job. When you are held to account—

Ms Gallagher: You have a job too. You just don’t do it.

MR SMYTH: But nobody is doing it for me.

Ms Gallagher: You have a job too, Brendan. Represent the community.

MR SMYTH: That is what you get the big bucks for, Madam Chief Minister. That is what you get paid for. Go and do your job. And what people are saying is that they do not see the fruits of any continued commitment or any determination. We do not have any belief that you do carry forward, and that is our concern with your motion.

There is the question of why you need such a complex motion anyway. Some days, yes, if there are complex issues, then you should have complex motions. What Mr Coe’s motion says—and it is worth reading it out—is:

That this Assembly supports the construction of the Majura Parkway.

There will be due process attached to that. There will be all sorts of things that need to be done. We are not arguing about that. We are not saying we are short-circuiting. We are not giving you a blank cheque. We are not advocating an ACT Assembly call-in of the project. What we are saying is that we support the construction of the Majura parkway. That is all it has to be in this case. And I look forward to seeing all members supporting it. If you do not support it, then I think there will be serious questions about your commitment to us as a city.

Mr Rattenbury talked about real transport solutions. I love the words “shifting the transport paradigm”. Fantastic! “Let us shift that transport paradigm.” What are we doing, shifting into low gear? Are we shifting into overdrive? It is really interesting. B-doubles cannot take the bus to get through Canberra. The ski crowd cannot stop at Watson and get a light rail to get to the snowfields. Local people from the Monaro cannot take a bus to get back home if they have been visiting the rellies in Young. You have to have some common sense in your approach. “Shifting the transport

paradigm”, I am sure, will look good on a green brochure in about 70 weeks time. But it does not answer the questions and it does not hold water.

This road should be upgraded first and foremost to make it safe. And if you cannot make the existing winding structure safe then of course you will need to shift it.

Whenever we build anything, it does impact on the environment. But you also have to look at the environment that it is in. It is an area that has been heavily farmed and heavily used for a long, time. As I was reminded, a lot of the remanent ecological values are actually those pockets of grassland or forest that line the existing road, as with so many areas across Australia. The bits that never got farmed, that is, the bits outside the fences of the farms that line the roads, are the pieces of territory that actually do retain a lot of the ecological values. I would have thought Mr Rattenbury, before he got up and wanted to shift the transport paradigm, would have read the EIS and understood that this is being discussed quite heavily in the document, as I was reminded.

There is a false promise here. He talked about the false promise about solving the problem and about the vague promises. At the end of the day, this is a city. This is a city that needs to function. I think we are all interested in transport options. But at the end of the day, the existing road is beyond its capacity, it is not safe and it needs to be upgraded.

Mr Rattenbury talked about smoothing the traffic flows. “Let us address the traffic flows.” I do not see how you can address the traffic flows on a road that is basically full at peak hour without making it a dual carriageway. If it is a dual carriageway and you want to do that on the existing alignment, then of course you are going to eat into the areas that have the most ecological values in that valley. Normally if somebody had proposed eating into an area with very high ecological values the Greens would be aghast. “Don’t. Save it. Save whatever it is.” But that is exactly what Mr Rattenbury, in his shifting the paradigm speech, has suggested.

He bagged other members for not doing their homework. Perhaps Mr Rattenbury, the Green, the self-confessed saviour of the environment, ought to do his homework before he comes in. Perhaps he would like to get some scientific values before he stands there in his sanctimonious way, as he always does, and tell us we are all wrong because we are not green. And that is the problem with the approach of the Greens. It is blinkered. It is blind. What they are proposing destroys what is left of the remanent environment in the Majura Valley. How is that for an irony?

He puts up people’s safety. He says, “We will address traffic flows.” That sounds to me like passing lanes. He could not bring himself to say, “We will make it four lanes for the entire length of the valley.” It either means passing lanes or overtaking areas. So we are going to have bottlenecks. What do bottlenecks do? You speed up, you slow down, you speed up, you slow down. People take chances, people take risks, people get injured and people die.

Why not just accept that occasionally you actually do have to build a new road? Why not just accept that the right thing here, in a city whose population has grown, not just

in the north but in the south and in the surrounding area, is that it deserves a road of the calibre proposed? (*Time expired.*)

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (12.07), in reply: Mr Speaker, I thank members for their contributions to the debate on my first private member's motion in this place. It is fitting that the matters raised have cast a wider net than simply a discussion about "a bit of road". It is that, of course, at one level, but as many of us have made clear this is a critical piece of infrastructure which has the potential to bring solid benefits to the whole of the ACT and the region.

I talked in my speech about the need to create efficient connections from the hubs, such as the airport, Fyshwick and Hume, which generate large volumes of heavy vehicle traffic on the national freight network. I spoke also of the broader benefits to other road users from an upgraded Majura parkway.

Like Mr Coe, I am concerned for the people of Gungahlin. However, he misses the point. The purpose of the Majura parkway is to improve national freight movement and to achieve an economic outcome for Canberra.

Ms Bresnan implies that road freight is not relevant to the Canberra economy. How does she think the solar panels that her colleague was talking about this morning are going to get here? The message from the Greens party today for north Canberra is: four wheels bad, 18 wheels good.

Regional Development Australia ACT is part of a national network of 55 committees that work with local communities on economic, social and environmental matters. RDA, Regional Development Australia ACT, say that, although the road is solely within the boundary of the ACT, there are major freight implications for the surrounding regions. And they strongly support it being built. Nearby RDAs, those surrounding us, also support the development of the Majura parkway because of the positive impact it will have on regional freight traffic through Cooma-Monaro to Sydney.

We should not forget that more than 50 per cent of Canberrans do not work in the public service—there are more than 25,000 businesses servicing the region, from multinationals to micro businesses. Over half of Canberra's workforce is employed in our private sector.

I know that the Greens have expressed the view, as they have done before, that there ought to be no new roadworks of this type. I recognise their commitment to public transport and I too support the modal shifts which we will need as we move to a low carbon future, but I cautioned in my speech that they ought not to simplify the arguments to an either/or dichotomy.

The move to greater use of mass transport is an inherent assumption of the ACT government's transport policies over many years and will remain so in the update to the 2009 strategic public transport network plan, due as part of transport for Canberra later this year. But this is about balancing priorities and timing—the core of so many deliberations and differences between members of this Assembly.

That there will be a transition to higher use of passenger rapid-transport networks is inevitable, but there will remain a need to meet the social and economic demand for efficient freight transport, and that is the main game for the Majura parkway—efficient, national freight.

Although there will be improved commutes between some locations for some Canberrans as they travel from their suburb to recreational activities and work, the biggest effects and benefits will be from the movement of freight. As it happens, and I mentioned this too earlier in my speech, the majority of workplaces are in the city, parliamentary zone and town centres and that is also where we undertake many of our recreational activities.

The Majura parkway will move significant numbers of heavy vehicles away from the main northern entrance to the ACT, along the Federal Highway and Northbourne Avenue, getting the trucks out of north Canberra, with consequent improvements to other road users as well as the residents of north Canberra.

The government, of which I am proud to be the newest member, has put a cogent argument to the commonwealth that the Majura parkway is a strategic connection link in the national freight network. Roads such as the Majura parkway are long-term investments, not short-term costs. Contrary to the claims by some, the returns to the ACT and the nation have been clearly identified in all the supporting documentation.

I add my strong support to the ACT government in its continuing negotiations with the federal government and plan for the development of the Majura parkway. This is an ACT, a regional and a national project of significance and deserves widespread support.

I wish to reiterate what I think are the three key reasons why we must continue to seek support from the commonwealth to construct the Majura parkway project. The first is the national aspect, which will see the Majura parkway become the primary link between two great national roads, the Federal Highway and the Monaro Highway, which are our freight routes and which will continue to see considerable traffic growth—an expected doubling in the next 10 to 15 years.

The second is the impact on our region as the new Majura parkway will open up freight more easily and directly to the rapidly developing Canberra airport precinct. As I mentioned earlier, this will be a catalyst for the airport to grow to its potential and be complementary to broader economic development in the ACT region.

The third will be the improvements to the local traffic flows as the Majura parkway brings greater capacity and higher safety levels to the roads in north Canberra, taking the trucks off the roads in north Canberra. Much heavy vehicle traffic will be removed and diverted from major transport corridors like Northbourne Avenue. This will be an important factor in the planning work underway on that corridor this financial year.

In closing, I confirm my support for the continued promotion by the government of the need for the Majura parkway to be included as a national priority project. The ACT government has committed \$144 million towards a fifty-fifty shared funding

arrangement for the \$288 million construction of the parkway. I will be doing whatever I can to assist the government's lobbying efforts aimed at getting the federal government to fund the balance of \$144 million. As I said, this major infrastructure project must be argued on its benefits to Canberra and the region. I want to see the Majura parkway built, and built soon, for the benefit of my constituents and for all of Canberra.

MR SPEAKER: As members may recall, we are debating this cognately. We are going to vote on Dr Bourke's motion and then we will come to the other two motions.

Question put:

That **Dr Bourke's** motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7

Noes 10

Mr Barr	Mr Hargreaves	Ms Bresnan	Ms Hunter
Dr Bourke	Ms Porter	Mr Coe	Ms Le Couteur
Ms Burch		Mr Doszpot	Mr Rattenbury
Mr Corbell		Mrs Dunne	Mr Seselja
Ms Gallagher		Mr Hanson	Mr Smyth

Question so resolved in the negative.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (12.18): I move:

That this Assembly supports the construction of the Majura Parkway.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Mr Coe's motion be agreed to. In the cognate debate, Mr Coe has the right to close the debate, and I believe that is it unless anyone moves an amendment.

MR COE: I do not intend to speak for long as I believe the opposition have already clearly articulated our view. Nothing could be clearer than saying that this Assembly supports the construction of Majura parkway. We are not going to try and pad it with self-congratulatory statements like the Labor Party tried to. We want to make it crystal clear what this Assembly's intention is when it comes to the construction of Majura parkway.

One thing that has not been crystal clear is exactly what the Greens' stance is on this. Mr Rattenbury probably got as far as saying that they are opposed to Majura parkway but they want to upgrade some intersections and they want to do some other work. I would like to know what intersections you want to upgrade. A couple have already been upgraded. You have got a couple of roundabouts there already; you have got the traffic lights. I am not sure exactly what intersections—plural—you are looking at giving this capital works money to. The fact is that the road as it currently stands, a single-lane road, is insufficient and is bringing about accidents. It is bringing about inefficiencies, and it is bringing about poor productivity for the region.

Ms Gallagher has said that the Liberals have not been speaking out. The Liberals' position on this is crystal clear. When she has been advocating, or supposedly advocating, for this road, I hope that she has not been saying the Liberals are opposed to it. She is probably not going to get very far if that is the case. In actual fact it is highly likely that, in whatever marginal negotiations or advocacy she has done, she would have said that the opposition would be supportive of it. Yet somehow that is not enough for her. In 2010 the Leader of the Opposition said that he endorsed the ACT government's proposal for Majura parkway. I have put out a number of statements and I have been on the radio saying this. Yet that is not enough for this government.

Going back to the Greens, let us look at the excuses that they have made as to why they cannot actually support this motion. We have heard about it mixing up the urban form. We have heard about the economic costs. We have heard about congestion. We have heard about induced traffic. We have heard about greenhouse gas emissions. We have heard about modal shift. We have heard about taking away from light rail. And we have heard about it taking away from alternative options. At some point, are the crossbench going to have the guts to actually say they oppose Majura parkway?

Another two reasons which they have not mentioned today are *Synemon plana*, otherwise known as the golden sun moth, and the striped legless lizard. To core constituencies of the Greens, they always go into that forum. I find it very hard to believe that old *Synemon plana* will be adversely affected by putting a couple more lanes down Majura Road. I find it pretty implausible. If only *Synemon plana* were on the electoral roll, Mrs Dunne! If only they were, they would have great advocates in Mr Rattenbury. They would have great advocates in Mr Rattenbury to be able to push their case.

The motion that we have on the table is crystal clear. We urge the Assembly to support it.

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (12.22): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) public transport services in the ACT need significant improvement and that:
 - (i) ACTION is only achieving an 83 percent timeliness rate for its buses, but NSW and Victorian bus services achieve 95 percent and 96 percent respectively;
 - (ii) Canberra has the highest car passenger kilometres per capita and the lowest per capita use of public transport of all Australian capital cities; and

- (iii) while other Australian capitals have sharply increased the share of trips made on public transport in recent years, Canberra's has decreased;
- (b) capital works funding in the ACT's transport budget overwhelmingly favours the building and upgrading of roads over public transport;
- (c) according to the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, the level of car dependence in the ACT is not ecologically sustainable; and
- (d) the Government has committed \$144 million to build a new Majura freeway despite:
 - (i) having done no comparative modelling of the benefits for Canberrans of building the proposed freeway compared to building new high quality, high capacity public transport options;
 - (ii) having not collected data about the amount of freight vehicles that pass through urban Canberra or the amount of freight vehicles that the freeway might divert;
 - (iii) having not thoroughly investigated or consulted on alternative options to a freeway, such as targeted upgrades at Majura Road intersections and choke points;
 - (iv) failing to give proper consideration to the concept of "induced traffic" and the likelihood that the freeway will generate more traffic and congestion;
 - (v) failing to accurately assess the greenhouse gas emissions that will be created by building the proposed freeway and falsely reporting that it "will reduce greenhouse gas emissions"; and
 - (vi) failing to analyse the impact that the proposed freeway will have on transport modal shift targets, ACT greenhouse reduction targets and the urban form of Canberra; and
- (2) calls upon the Government to:
 - (a) commit to prioritising public transport in its transport planning decisions and its transport funding commitments;
 - (b) delay committing any funding to building a new Majura freeway until it has done the following:
 - (i) engaged an independent expert in sustainable transport planning to analyse:
 - (A) the costs and benefits of building the proposed freeway compared to building new high quality public transport options, such as light rail;

- (B) the impacts of the road in terms of induced traffic, congestion, greenhouse gas emissions, transport modal shift, economic costs and the urban form of Canberra; and
 - (C) alternative options to a new freeway such as targeted upgrades to existing Majura Road intersections and choke points;
 - (ii) collected data about the amount of freight passing through urban Canberra, its origins and destinations and the expected amount that a Majura freeway would divert; and
 - (iii) tabled the above report in the Legislative Assembly; and
- (c) report to the Assembly on the progress of the above items by 6 December 2011.

My motion relates to the role of the Majura parkway in the territory's transport plan.

I will just speak briefly to some of the comments that have been made by other speakers in contributions to this debate. I will go first to Dr Bourke. Again we hear that the government have essentially changed their tune on the Majura freeway. It is not about addressing congestion for the north of Canberra; it is for freight. Yet as I pointed out earlier, the government have no data, no idea about the amount of freight travelling on the roads through Canberra and how much freight would actually use the Majura freeway.

We also hear that this is about the airport. You do have to ask what federal intervention the ACT government are receiving from federal Labor members whose electorates will benefit from this road and going out to the airport.

Again we hear from Dr Bourke and Mr Corbell that we will get both: we are going to get the freeway and we are going to get rapid public transport. We all wait with bated breath as to how the government intends to fund this. We have all heard statements before. In fact, I think that we have had about three previous reports.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: One moment, please, Ms Bresnan. Stop the clocks, thank you. Can we just try and keep the casual conversations down in volume a bit. I am having trouble hearing Ms Bresnan.

MS BRESNAN: We have had about three previous reports, and now again we have got the Northbourne study project, but we still do not have a commitment of any kind to proper rapid transit in the ACT. There is just a statement that we are not going to rule out light rail. That is what we have got. The government need to provide a time frame for this and say how we will fund it and when the Canberra community can expect to see proper rapid transit in the ACT.

Mr Corbell does not seem to be listening to what we are saying. We have repeatedly said—this is in relation to public transport—that it is not just technological. It is about

staffing issues; it is about having to find transport corridors; it is about having to find transport routes. But it is also about the infrastructure. I wait to hear from Mr Corbell how he intends, as he has stated, to improve the reliability and frequency of public transport without investment in public transport infrastructure—just going along with what we have now, a single-mode public transport system with decreasing patronage. It is about the overall proportion of funding and attention that you give to roads and car transport compared to sustainable transport. It is no surprise that we are not achieving any sustainable modal shift even if the government is entrenching this unsustainable path for public transport.

In terms of our motion, what is wrong with having an independent expert scrutinise this project in relation to sustainable modal shift and all those other issues which we have raised. I presume it is because they know that it will damage modal shift targets, our greenhouse gas targets, and that the government are not going to achieve them. We have to keep pointing out, it seems, that we have a 40 per cent reduction target here in the ACT. Given that transport contributes significantly, what are the government going to do to address this?

Also we have got our modal shift targets. What are they? What are we going to do about that? What about public transport patronage? Again, we are getting nowhere on this and we do not have any answers.

I want to go to one of those reports. I mentioned we have had a number of reports. We had the Infrastructure Australia bid from the ACT government on light rail, which Mr Rattenbury mentioned. What has happened to that bid? Is the government going to promote that as a key bid, as something that it sees as a priority? Again, we will not hold our breath on that.

Mr Corbell mentioned the Gold Coast light rail proposal. What a shame that the ACT government did not see fit to lobby for the ACT light rail bid for us to have that sort of system here in the ACT.

Let me go to Mr Coe. Again we see repeatedly from Mr Coe that he does not listen to what we say or does not appear to have read the motion. What the Greens have said—and I will repeat it again; it has been repeated a number of times today—is that we do not believe that spending \$144 million of taxpayer funding with no scrutiny on a highway is appropriate. We have agreed that upgrades are required around safety and addressing bottlenecks and peaks.

Mr Coe and Mr Hanson dragged out the usual rhetoric of the anti-car Greens. What a surprise! Forcing families—and this is a point we make—to have to have more than one car and giving them no other option than to drive to work or school increases significantly the costs for families, particularly those living in outer suburbs. Mr Coe just uses the usual lines rather than saying how he and the Canberra Liberals propose to address congestion in the future and population growth. As always, it is a policy-free zone. Let us hear the Canberra Liberals' policies on public transport and sustainable transport.

Mr Coe said that Gungahlin is getting a raw deal. It is certainly getting a raw deal from the Canberra Liberals, who do not think that the people in the north of Canberra, particularly Gungahlin, deserve reliable, frequent public transport which will make it faster and cheaper for them to get to and from work and school.

Mr Coe also made an interesting statement that the only way you can build public transport infrastructure is to build roads—it is the only thing you can do. Perhaps Mr Coe needs to look to the example of Brisbane, where they have put in significant bus infrastructure capital works, with busways, park and rides—

Mrs Dunne: That is a road.

MS BRESNAN: It is actually not a road. Why don't you want to look at what it actually is. It is a busway, and it is a busway that can incorporate a change in technology. If light rail is brought into Brisbane, it will be able to incorporate that. This was championed by a Liberal lord mayor. Perhaps Mr Coe could use some of his study travel budget to visit Brisbane and see what has been done there.

Finally, let me go to a fact that has not been mentioned.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, members. Order!

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Let me go to a fact that we have not have had any great discussion about. We still have no commitment from the federal government to fund the freeway. Yet both the government and the Canberra Liberals are prepared to blindly go on and commit \$144 million of ACT taxpayers' money to do something that will not solve congestion problems and when we have no guarantee that it will actually happen. If the federal government think this is such an important project, why don't they fund the cost of it and allow the government here in the ACT to invest in a rapid public transport system that would address congestion in the north of Canberra.

I have to say—I do not know if it is a first; it is probably a first—that it was wonderful to hear Mr Hanson positively quoting a government document with the EIS. It was good to also hear the 1970s fact—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, members. Let's hear Ms Bresnan.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It was also good to hear the 1970s fact quoted not just by Dr Bourke but by Mr Hanson. Both the Labor and Liberal parties seem to be looking for inspiration to a policy from 40 years ago for their transport policy. It is laughable that Mr Hanson accused the Greens of being in the past when their idea of transport planning was from the 1970s. Now at least we know where they get their policy inspiration from.

I want to quickly point out something about Nightrider, which Mr Corbell raised. I think I have the right to raise that. With Nightrider, the government did not start direct on-street marketing until week 7 of the service. And a point worth mentioning is that Deane's offered to fund direct marketing and advertising from the start of the service. They offered to do that out of their own pocket. And the government said no to that.

I want to mention just one other fact in relation to a point Mr Smyth raised. He was talking about the upgrades which we have mentioned and the upgrade flagged in the EIS, which—I want to point this out—is about building a parkway over the existing route. It is not about selective upgrades to a road which we have been saying should be investigated. So for him to be talking about environmental damage and issues of that sort is not accurate, and that needs to be pointed out.

I commend my motion to the Assembly.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 4

Noes 13

Ms Bresnan
Ms Hunter
Ms Le Couteur

Mr Rattenbury

Mr Barr
Dr Bourke
Ms Burch
Mr Coe
Mr Corbell
Mr Doszpot
Mrs Dunne

Ms Gallagher
Mr Hanson
Mr Hargreaves
Ms Porter
Mr Seselja
Mr Smyth

Question so resolved in the negative.

Sitting suspended from 12.32 to 2 pm.

Questions without notice

Alexander Maconochie Centre—staff

MR SESELJA: My question is to the Chief Minister. Why is Mr Doug Buchanan no longer the superintendent at the Alexander Maconochie Centre?

MS GALLAGHER: I will ask the Attorney-General to take that question.

Mr Hargreaves: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I understand there is an item on the notice paper relating to this issue.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, that standing order has actually been removed from the standing orders.

Mr Hargreaves: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, but—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

Mr Hargreaves interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Hargreaves, Mr Hanson! Mr Corbell, I believe you are taking the question.

MR CORBELL: Thank you Mr Speaker. I previously answered this question in estimates and in other fora. The previous superintendent has returned to his substantive duties in New South Wales Corrective Services.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Seselja, a supplementary?

MR SESELJA: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, was due process followed in relation to the end of Mr Buchanan's tenure?

MR CORBELL: This is a staffing matter for the Directorate of Justice and Community Safety. I am not directly involved in the administration of those matters. I would simply highlight to members that at all times I believe my directorate has acted appropriately in relation to this matter.

MR HANSON: A supplementary, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, was Mr Buchanan pushed because of his opposition to a needle and syringe program?

MR CORBELL: No. Such a claim is false.

MR HANSON: A supplementary?

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, why has there been such a high turnover of superintendents at the Alexander Maconochie Centre?

MR CORBELL: Regrettably, the person occupying the substantive position of superintendent of the Alexander Maconochie Centre has experienced a range of personal circumstances that have meant that they have been unable to occupy that position. That led to a number of acting arrangements being put in place, because the substantive office-holder was unable to act in that position due to personal circumstances.

Schools—counsellors

MS HUNTER: My question is to the minister for education. The question is in regard to the adequacy of school counsellors across the public schools in the territory. Can

you advise of the current ratio in ACT primary schools, high schools and colleges of students to school counsellors?

MR BARR: Not off the top of my head, Mr Speaker, I can't. That information I can provide. What I can say is that I am most certainly aware, Ms Hunter, that this matter has been raised, I think, at each and every annual reports and estimates hearings in the last few years, that the directorate worked with the Australian Education Union in relation to sourcing qualified psychologists to fill funded vacancies for a range of positions that were not filled in years past but now have been.

The ACT, when compared with other states and territories, has I believe the best or the second best ratio of students to school counsellors. I do not off the top of my head have the breakdown for primary, high school or college. I would note, of course, that in addition to school counsellors, school welfare teams within the various education settings are supported by, amongst other positions, youth workers, pastoral care support workers and a number of other discipline-based professions across a network of provision.

As the member would be aware, we have a number of trials underway bringing in a range of outside organisations to assist with student welfare and pastoral care support within our primary schools, high schools and colleges. But I am happy to take the detail of Ms Hunter's question on notice and provide current information for the 2011 school year on the ratios across primary, high school and college. I am very confident that, when compared with others states and territories, the ACT will fare very favourably in that comparison.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary, Ms Hunter?

MS HUNTER: If you find that the ratios are unsatisfactory, what steps will you take to improve those ratios?

MR BARR: That would be a resourcing issue. There would be a number of possible responses were that to be the case. I do not believe it is, but, were it to be the case, then one could consider redirecting resources from other areas of student welfare and pastoral support into dedicated counsellor positions. However, I do not believe that the evidence is there to suggest that that would be the most appropriate policy response, and, in fact, it is having a multi-disciplinary approach, bringing in the skills of a variety of different support workers across the youth sector with pastoral care support dedicated teachers. We funded an initiative in the budget a few years past to provide a dedicated pastoral care teacher within each of our government high schools. That was an important initiative that has been funded in recent years to strengthen student welfare support within the public education system.

MS LE COUTEUR: A supplementary, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Le Couteur.

MS LE COUTEUR: What is your response to the coronial inquest into the suicide of a 15-year-old boy who was the victim of school bullying, which was handed down in

New South Wales last week and recommended a ratio of one counsellor to 500 students?

MR BARR: I am aware of this and other coronial inquiries in other jurisdictions that have made a number of recommendations relevant to those particular jurisdictions and the education systems within those jurisdictions. As I indicated in my previous two answers to Ms Hunter's questions, the ACT brings a broader approach to student welfare and matters of bullying than simply school counsellors.

There are a variety of other support workers that can assist in creating an environment within our education system that is supportive of all students. Two particular examples this year that we have sought to pursue have been dedicated forums across the city, engaging schools from all three sectors—public, Catholic and independent—and focusing, in the first instance, on tackling cyber bullying and, in the second instance, focusing on homophobia within our education system.

MS BRESNAN: A supplementary, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Bresnan.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, in order to recruit and retain school counsellors, what measures have you taken or are you looking into, such as increasing their salaries, recognising that the majority hold dual qualifications and can earn considerably more in the private sector?

MR BARR: Again, enterprise bargaining arrangements are underway for future agreements in relation to these particular professionals within our education system. As I indicated in my opening response to Ms Hunter, we did work with the Australian Education Union in relation to freeing up some of the fairly restrictive industrial relations practices that were in place. I think it is a general observation one can make of the education sector, particularly the public education sector, that its industrial arrangements are stuck somewhat in a 1970s mindset. We do need to reform, and the government is seeking to achieve this through its current enterprise bargaining offer.

Schools—non-government

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, on 29 July 2006, at the ACT ALP conference, the left wing put forward a resolution which proposed the end of funding to non-government schools.

Mr Hargreaves: On a point of order, Mr Speaker—

MR SPEAKER: Let us hear the question—

Mr Hargreaves: No, Mr Speaker; there is sufficient information before the Assembly for me to make a point of order, and that is that the Chief Minister is not responsible, in her portfolio responsibilities, for anything that comes out of any conference at all.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Hargreaves. I am going to hear the whole question and then make a decision. Mr Smyth, let us hear the whole question and then I will decide what we are going to do.

MR SMYTH: Perhaps I will start again. Chief Minister, on 29 July 2006, at the ACT ALP conference, the left wing put forward a resolution which proposed the end of funding to non-government schools. It stated, amongst other things:

The growth of private education is facilitating the fragmentation of Australia's children along ethnic, cultural and particularly religious lines.

Chief Minister, both you and Mr Corbell voted for this resolution. Chief Minister, do you still hold the view that private education is facilitating the fragmentation of Australia's children along ethnic, cultural and particularly religious lines?

MS GALLAGHER: I am not sure how it relates to my responsibilities as Chief Minister about—

MR SPEAKER: Before you start, Ms Gallagher, I want to have a moment to think about this.

Mr Corbell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, question time relates to questioning of ministers in relation to their portfolio responsibilities. Previous Speakers, and you, Mr Speaker, have ruled previously that questions about party political matters do not fall within portfolio responsibilities and are out of order.

Mr Smyth: I specifically said "as Chief Minister".

Mr Seselja: On the point of order, Mr Speaker, it is quite in order for the opposition to ask the Chief Minister of this territory whether she believes that private schooling is divisive. It is quite in order.

Ms Gallagher: That wasn't the question.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Seselja has the floor.

Mr Seselja: Well, it is the question. The question is very straightforward. It asked her whether she endorses those views. She has voted on it in the past, and we are quite entitled, on a matter of public policy, to know the Chief Minister's views on non-government education. Does she hold to those views or not?

MS GALLAGHER: I am happy to answer that question.

MR SPEAKER: Yes.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order, members! I am going to rule the question out of order because it was framed in the context of matters undertaken at the ALP's party

conference. Quite clearly, from practice in this place and also looking at *House of Representatives Practice*, there is a precedent for being out of order.

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, Mr Berry has ruled questions along these lines in order, specifically on this issue. I specifically said: as Chief Minister, do you still hold these views?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, the challenge you have created for me is the way you framed the question.

Mr Smyth: She is the minister responsible for all portfolios in this place, and it is quite within order that I ask her these questions.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you. I have made my ruling, Mr Smyth. I am happy to invite you to reframe the question.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Let us move on then. The next question; Mr Hargreaves.

Energy efficiency—low income households

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks very much, Mr Speaker.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Hargreaves now has the floor. Let us move on.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Members, let us move on. Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks very much, Mr Speaker. I am interested in how the government is helping low income families, so my question is to the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development. Can the minister please advise the Assembly on how the government is helping low income families to use energy efficiency to manage pressures on their household energy costs?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Hargreaves for the question. This is a very important issue for low income households in Canberra to work out ways that we can reduce their energy and other utility costs by improving energy efficiency in their own homes. That is why the government has focused very strongly on programs to deliver this, particularly through the outreach program which was trialled in mid-2010 to explore new ways of working with the community to reduce their energy costs.

The trial program involved a partnership with five community welfare organisations and contributed in funding a total of \$435,000 to provide highly energy-efficient essential appliances to low income households. In addition, Housing ACT was funded to the tune of \$950,000 to accelerate existing activities to insulate and draught-seal its

properties and install solar hot water systems as well as energy-efficient appliances in properties rented by community housing organisations. This program showed some stunning results. Indeed, per household, savings of over \$150 a year in the average household's electricity bill were achieved as a result of this outreach program. For this reason, the government is moving to significantly expand the program.

The services that were brokered in the trial program include the Belconnen Community Service, Communities@Work, the Northside Community Service and the Society of St Vincent de Paul. These organisations were critical in identifying those low income households that were struggling with their electricity bills. What did they receive as a result of this program? What they received was assistance not just with the things that we would normally expect, such as insulation and draught-sealing and so on, but also direct financial assistance to purchase new, energy-efficient appliances that are able to significantly reduce these households' energy bills.

For example, through a group such as, say, the Northside Community Service, we were able to identify households that were running very old fridges in their homes, fridges that did not work properly, fridges that did not keep food cold in summer, and because of the circumstances of these families, they simply could not afford to replace these appliances. With the help of the outreach program, we were able to purchase new energy-efficient appliances for these households—a new fridge, for example, for one family was highlighted to me. They have got a fridge now that works; it keeps their food safe and clean and cold in summer, but it also significantly reduces their energy costs.

These are the types of programs that the government have put in place as we reach out to those low income households, as we reach out to disadvantaged households in our community and say to them, "You are our priority as a government. As a government, we are going to provide you with assistance to help you with the rising costs of utility bills"—energy, water, gas. That is a very, very significant contribution that we will continue to make. Indeed, the government are expanding this program in the forthcoming financial year.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary, Mr Hargreaves?

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Would the minister please provide the Assembly with some information around the impact of that outreach program on the lives of those low income earners?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Hargreaves for the question again. The impact will be significant because we will now reach out in the expanded program that has been announced in the most recent budget—a \$4.4 million program now over the next four years. We will reach 4,000 low income households as a result of that program. That program will provide free home energy efficiency assessment, education sessions, retrofitting of the types of improvements I was mentioning earlier and the continued ability to purchase new energy-efficient appliances to reduce electricity costs for those households.

We are going to reach out and work with those households, and work through a range of community organisations that work day to day with people who are suffering disadvantage. Again, St Vincent de Paul, Northside Community Service, Belconnen Community Service, Communities@Work and the Salvation Army will be engaged so that we are able to properly identify those households who are struggling and provide them with the assistance they need.

The type of things that we will be doing will, we estimate, achieve a saving of approximately \$147 each year in energy costs for those households. When you think about that in the context of the recently announced increase in the average electricity bill—which was approximately \$80, which was announced on Monday—this program will deliver a saving that entirely offsets that electricity increase for those low income households. And that is without taking into account the significant increase in the concession payments regime the government are putting in place, again to assist low income households.

This is the direction and this is the focus of the Labor government—helping those disadvantaged households, helping them make ends meet.

MS BRESNAN: A supplementary?

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Bresnan.

MS BRESNAN: Do programs like ToiletSmart, which are energy-efficient programs, have a dedicated phone line? Are they able to respond to all calls that they receive? Have any complaints been received about calls not responded to?

MR CORBELL: The ToiletSmart program is being added to the outreach program that I was referring to in my previous answer. ToiletSmart and the water efficiency measures that come with that, such as retrofitting of toilets to low-flush, dual-flush toilets, are part of the program.

In relation to the telephone inquiry service, yes, I understand there is a telephone inquiry service. No, I am not aware of any complaints in relation to that service. But if Ms Bresnan has any concerns, I would welcome further information from her.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Porter, a supplementary?

MS PORTER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the minister tell the Assembly why these sorts of programs will become more important as we deal with climate change?

MR CORBELL: Energy efficiency will be a key element of the government's response to greenhouse gas reduction targets and a key element of achieving the emission reductions we need to help achieve those targets. The use of energy efficiency is highly cost effective. Because of the particular distribution of energy use in the ACT, where the major use is energy used in stationary buildings for heating, for cooling, for lighting, for the powering of appliances—over 60 per cent of all energy consumption in the territory is in the built sector—it is vitally important that we focus on energy efficiency.

Of course, the government are not just using the outreach program to achieve these outcomes. We have also launched the ACTSmart suite of programs, which gives all households, not just low income households, access to energy efficiency advice, audits and rebates to assist with energy efficiency measures in the home. This is a very important outcome.

Of course, the government also continues to promote to consumers the opportunity to purchase green power as part of their normal electricity purchase. In the ACT we now estimate that we have a significant number of households contributing to green power purchase. It is estimated that the number of households benefiting from that program is quite extensive.

In relation to the outreach program, we estimate that that outreach program will achieve a reduction of 1,000 megawatt hours of electricity consumption in the first year and reduce greenhouse gas emissions just amongst those low income households by over 915 tonnes per annum.

Visitors

MR SPEAKER: Before we come to Ms Le Couteur with the next question, I would like to point out to members that we have a group from the University of the Third Age joining us at the Assembly today and witnessing question time. I welcome you again to the Assembly.

Members: Hear, hear!

Questions without notice Planning—Glebe Park

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the minister for planning and is in regard to Glebe Park. Given that the lease for the southern part of Glebe Park, block 24 section 65, city, contains an overdue commitment from the owner of the site to spend a million dollars on constructing parkland, what will the government do to enforce this lease and what other compliance issues are there in relation to the site?

MR CORBELL: The government has been very clear in relation to the development approval that has been granted for that part of the area adjacent to the Glebe Park apartments. It is not part of Glebe Park. It is privately leased land adjacent to the designated Glebe Park area. The obligation is on the developer, the owner, to construct a car park for public access to Glebe Park as well as to service the adjacent Glebe Park apartments and to provide a million dollars worth of landscaping works as part of that activity as well.

The government will be making it very clear and have already made it very clear to the leaseholder that we expect that approval to be acted upon, that we expect those works to be undertaken. We will follow that through with the usual compliance activity and options that are available under the relevant planning legislation.

MS LE COUTEUR: A supplementary, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Le Couteur.

MS LE COUTEUR: What is the government's commitment to maintaining the site as open space, which is becoming increasingly important in the city as the population increases?

MR CORBELL: The site is not designated as open space under the territory plan; the site is designated for a range of limited uses but with a strong landscape element. There is approval, I understand, embedded in the lease—or there is a right embedded in the lease—for a small commercial development such as for a restaurant or other recreational or social uses. It is not permitted to be used for residential development. The government does not support its use for residential development. The government will not consider any change to the territory plan that permits residential development or indeed any other development beyond that which has already been granted under the lease.

In relation to the question Ms Le Couteur asked me, it is the case that this area is contiguous with the formal gazetted Glebe Park area. That is why the development approval requires the owner to invest significantly in the landscape and maintenance of the area. That will continue to be the obligation on the leaseholder, as it is privately leased land.

MS BRESNAN: A supplementary.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Bresnan.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, has the government considered suggesting to the developer that if the parkland is constructed it could be turned over to the government to reduce the owner's ongoing maintenance costs?

MR CORBELL: The government remain open to that suggestion, should it be made, but it is not a matter that we have pursued at this time. The fact is that the use of the land is limited. There are obligations on the leaseholder to maintain the land and to maintain the landscape quality of the land that they own. We believe that it is entirely appropriate and reasonable that a leaseholder who has purchased the land understands the development rights they have under that lease, understands the obligations they have under that lease to maintain a landscape element, the leaseholder does just that and maintains the landscape quality to the degree expected under the lease.

MS HUNTER: A supplementary?

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Hunter.

MS HUNTER: Minister, has there been consideration of a land swap or a transfer of development rights to allow the owner of the site to leave the parkland for public use?

MR CORBELL: The land is available for public use. Even though it is a private leasehold, the fact of its location and the conditions under the lease mean that the land is used extensively by members of the public, and it is envisaged that it will be into the future. The government was approached by those opposed to the private ownership of this land to consider the issue of a land swap. The government gave that consideration but ruled that out. I have communicated that to those who have made those representations.

Quite simply, the land was leased over 30 years ago by the commonwealth government prior to self-government. The land is in private ownership and has been for an extended period of time. The lease sets out very clearly what can and cannot occur on that land. The fact is that, in relation to this particular site, there are very limited uses available for the leaseholder. They were aware of that when they purchase the lease, and they now have obligations under that lease to maintain the land in such a way, including in relation to its landscape, so it can continue to be enjoyed by those who also enjoy the formal designated Glebe Park area.

That is the government's position. We do not think that the taxpayer should have to subsidise the leaseholder when the leaseholder knew what they were purchasing and knew they had obligations under the lease to maintain that lease and to maintain the landscape to a particular level and quality so it can be enjoyed by everyone. They knew that when they purchased the lease.

Hospitals—elective surgery

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, on 2CC this morning a caller identified as Max stated that he was currently awaiting elective surgery and had been advised in writing that the standard waiting time for his surgery was 60 days. Max is still waiting for his surgery after 270 days. Yesterday you stated in the Assembly:

... the target to focus on for how good your elective surgery system is performing needs to be how many people are having their surgery on time ...

If this is your measure of success, have you failed patients such as Max, who is still waiting after 270 days for surgery that was due over seven months ago?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Hanson for the question—question No 3 to me and the first one in order. But congratulations, Mr Hanson. I did not hear the call to 2CC. I am surprised that the Liberals are listening to 2CC. I thought they had banned themselves from 2CC.

Members interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: Well, your leader banned you. So you can listen to the station but you cannot participate. That must be painful.

In relation to the question—is it “Mack” who is the caller?—I am certainly happy if I have more details to find out what the situation is and who the surgeon is because

there are often opportunities to reallocate patients to other surgeons to improve timeliness if that is possible. It depends on the nature of the surgery that needs to be performed and the preparedness of people to consider other surgeons.

I do not think it is any secret that we have a proportion of our waiting list who are waiting too long for care. Indeed, the focus of the elective surgery access plan is to concentrate on those people and to make sure that they do have their surgery. I am not sure whether he is a category 3 patient or a category 2 patient—

Mr Hanson: It sounds like 2A if it is 60 days, doesn't it?

MS GALLAGHER: If he is a category 2 patient, what type of surgery he needs. I am very happy to look into it.

The effort that is going in at the moment is to clear the long waits from the list and we are seeing significant improvements. That is not to say that there is not more to be done. There is. That is exactly why in the government's priorities I have outlined that as a key measure of achievement and a key target for us to focus on. That message is not only from me to the community. It is from me to the strategic board and it is from me to the Health Directorate about the expectations I have of improving that result.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary, Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Max stated that his wife had already contacted your office 170 days ago and—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, preamble.

MR HANSON: Although authorities were contacted, no results ensued. Chief Minister, what did you do to assist Max, and why did that fail?

MS GALLAGHER: One thing I can, do and will make clear is that I do not determine when people get their operation. I am not a clinician. I do not ask—

Mr Seselja interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: I follow up every single person that contacts my office and I ask that the elective surgery access coordinator speak with them—which they always do, and I think in this case it is correct—whether that is about explaining options, whether that is explaining the wait, whether that is explaining what they are doing to try and improve people's access or whether it is about how they will keep in contact to provide more information. There are a range of options.

If Mr Hanson is asking me whether, on receipt of a call, I am able to deliver that person their operation, no, I do not get involved in those decisions and I am not going to get involved in those decisions. Those decisions can only be made by a clinician. I can assist people with information. I can ensure that we are doing more operations than we have ever done, and that is the case. I can ensure that the waiting list is coming down. I can ensure that we are improving access to elective surgery. But can I determine whether someone gets their operation and on what date? No, I cannot.

MR SMYTH: A supplementary, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, how can we trust your new commitment to accountability when you are not accountable to constituents who contact your office?

MS GALLAGHER: I am accountable to those constituents.

MR SMYTH: A supplementary, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, why do constituents have to contact talkback radio to put their case forward to receive any attention from you?

MS GALLAGHER: They do not have to. That is a choice that individuals make. There are a range of avenues through which constituents engage with their members and with the broader community. I think that is a fantastic part of the place in which we live and call home.

In relation to whether I can solve everybody's problem or get their surgery on a particular day, if you are asking me, a politician, to fiddle with the waiting list, then no, I cannot do that. But I can do a range of other things, and all of those areas where I can influence an outcome for someone are being done. We are seeing improvement, we will see continued improvement and we will see people get access to their surgery on time in greater numbers than have been delivered in the past.

Housing—affordability

MS BRESNAN: My question is to the Minister for Economic Development and is about the affordable housing action plan. The Auditor-General's report of February this year found that a number of affordable properties to be provided under the OwnPlace scheme were not being released to the market in a timely manner because they were being held up by developers and builders. Minister, what steps has the government taken to ensure that these properties under the OwnPlace scheme are provided in a timely manner and that developers do not take too long to release them?

MR BARR: I understand that the government response to the Auditor-General's report is forthcoming and will be able to be provided very shortly. So I will not, obviously, pre-empt all of that in my answer now.

Suffice to say that, yes, we are aware of some of those concerns. I have looked at the detail of this program in recent times and it would appear that there was some misunderstanding certainly in interpretation of the OwnPlace program in relation to the Auditor-General's report and that there have been some concerns raised that it would appear are not entirely justified. However, I am aware that there are, I believe, about 50 properties that have been delayed and we are seeking to ensure that those are made available more quickly.

One of the issues that I think we do need to address in relation to the affordable housing strategy overall is how we respond to the different points within the market, particularly different products and the number of bedrooms within, in terms of the definitions around affordable housing. I know that this is an issue that Ms Bresnan has had some interest in, and many in this place have had some interest in. In reviewing this policy upon taking responsibility for this area of public policy, I will be looking at definitions of affordable housing and looking at this particular program to see whether it is achieving all that we hope.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary, Ms Bresnan?

MS BRESNAN: Minister, are you concerned that, under the OwnPlace scheme, purchasers can on-sell their property after only six months, potentially making quite a profit very quickly?

MR BARR: Yes, I am concerned and will attempt to address that particular issue in a review of this policy area.

MS LE COUTEUR: A supplementary, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Le Couteur.

MS LE COUTEUR: Minister, why does the 20 per cent affordable target only apply to greenfield sites and not large multi-unit developments which are being done on an infill basis?

MR BARR: I think there are some issues in relation to the capacity within certain size infill developments to achieve that particular target. There are also questions around how this particular target is being delivered within the marketplace at the moment. I have some concerns that only a particularly narrow form of housing product is now being provided, and I believe that there is a need to have a look at this particular area in order to provide some more signals to the marketplace and some more guidance to those in the construction industry, particularly those who are seeking to offer product at the affordable end, to provide a diversity of housing options at this point. I think that will require a change to the current policy settings. I am examining the issue at the moment and will obviously release more detail in the near future.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary, Ms Hunter?

MS HUNTER: Minister, is the ACT government's affordable housing action plan currently under review? If so, what consultation is the government conducting on it, and when will a new version be released?

MR BARR: Obviously I am actively considering the future of the particular programs. I have had portfolio responsibility in this area for a matter of weeks, but already I have been engaging with a number of the key stakeholders in this area. I have met with the Land Development Agency and with Community Housing Canberra already in relation to policy, and also with the Village Building Company, who have delivered,

I believe, around 90 per cent of the affordable product within the private development sphere. They take their obligations and responsibilities to deliver affordable housing very seriously; so does the government.

In my view, there is a need to adjust some of the policy settings to get a more diverse range of housing product available at the affordable end. There are, of course, a range of other issues, including our capacity to increase the supply of housing, and I do note that we are towards the end of the financial year and will achieve our 5,000-dwelling target for new release this year. We will be able to go beyond that in 2011-12 with a target of 5½ thousand new dwelling sites to be released. A supply-side solution is critical to achieving housing affordability in this city.

Energy—electricity prices

DR BOURKE: My question is to the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development. Would the minister please advise the Assembly what would be the impact of the recently announced electricity price increase on ACT low income earners compared to their New South Wales neighbours?

MR CORBELL: I thank Dr Bourke for his question. It is the case that the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission recently announced an increase in average electricity prices under the transitional franchise tariff arrangements.

Mrs Dunne: Point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes. Mr Corbell, one moment, thank you.

Mrs Dunne: Could I seek your ruling as to whether Mr Corbell is responsible for electricity prices in New South Wales and whether the question is therefore out of order?

MR CORBELL: In comparison with the ACT.

MR SPEAKER: It is a fair question, Mrs Dunne. Dr Bourke, can you just give us the question again?

Dr Bourke: My question was: would the minister advise the Assembly what would be the impact of the recently announced electricity price increase on ACT low income earners compared to their New South Wales neighbours?

MR SPEAKER: The question is about the impact of price increases—ACT electricity increases.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order, members! I have made my ruling.

Mr Hanson: On your ruling, Mr Speaker, you have previously ruled that Mr Seselja's question, I think it was—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth's.

Mr Hanson: or Mr Smyth's—was out of order. That directly related to education in the ACT. I do not see how it could be that you could say that one is in order because it relates to electricity and the other one is out of order because it relates to education. They both have aspects to them that are not part of the—

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Hanson. I understand your point. I have indicated that the question is in order, and Mr Corbell is free to keep answering it.

MR CORBELL: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Sorry, Mr Hanson?

Mr Hanson: I said it is bias.

MR SPEAKER: I invite you to withdraw that, Mr Hanson; it is dissent.

Mr Hanson: No, I will not withdraw, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: You decline to withdraw?

Mr Hanson: I did decline to withdraw.

MR SPEAKER: I gave you more credit than that, Mr Hanson. On that basis, Mr Hanson, I name you for declining to follow the Speaker's direction, under standing order 203.

Question put:

That Mr Hanson be suspended from the service of the Assembly.

The Assembly voted—

Noes 6

Ayes 11

Mr Coe
Mr Doszpot
Mrs Dunne
Mr Hanson
Mr Seselja

Mr Smyth

Mr Barr
Dr Bourke
Ms Bresnan
Ms Burch
Mr Corbell
Ms Gallagher

Mr Hargreaves
Ms Hunter
Ms Le Couteur
Ms Porter
Mr Rattenbury

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Hanson was therefore suspended at 2.45 pm for three sitting hours in accordance with standing order 204, and he accordingly withdrew from the chamber.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Corbell, we have lost the plot. I think you have about three minutes to go to answer the question, if you wish to use it.

MR CORBELL: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is disappointing that those opposite are not interested in the fact that in the ACT we are managing to keep electricity prices at a much lower level—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Just focus on the question, Mr Corbell, thank you.

MR CORBELL: than electricity prices in New South Wales. As members would be aware, the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission announced this week that there would be an increase of \$84 in the average household electricity bill per annum. This was a 6.4 per cent rise and compares very well with the rise that we have been seeing occur over the border, which has been a 17 per cent rise in New South Wales electricity prices for the same period.

What this means is that the average Canberra resident is now paying around \$1,500 a year on their electricity bill while a Queanbeyan resident can expect to pay more than \$2½ thousand a year. What this means is that ACT residents continue to enjoy some of the lowest electricity prices in the country.

Obviously any price increase has an impact on household budgets, particularly those on fixed incomes. For that reason, the government is working to provide a range of concessions and other benefits to assist low income households and other households who are facing financial disadvantage, to assist them with the cost of rising utility prices.

But the fact cannot be ignored that, under the Australian Energy Market Commission's most recent assessment of projected price increases between now and the 2012-13 financial year, the ACT ranks as the only jurisdiction that expects the lowest level of increase in electricity prices. We are below every other jurisdiction in the country when it comes to electricity prices for average households and we also expect the lowest level of increase of any jurisdiction in the country over that period. That is the assessment that has been done by the Australian Energy Market Commission.

The government continues to focus on providing assistance to those low income households who do face pressures as a result of changes in utility prices. Whilst none of us like or enjoy the prospect of seeing these bills increase, it is nevertheless important that we minimise those increases. We are seeing that here in the ACT—the lowest electricity price increases of any jurisdiction in the country. Those are projected to continue to be the case to the year 2012-13 by the Australian Energy Market Commission. The government will continue to focus its efforts on assisting

those low income financially disadvantaged households who are struggling with these issues and who do need our assistance as a community.

MR SPEAKER: Dr Bourke, a supplementary question?

DR BOURKE: Can the minister tell the Assembly how the ACT government supports low income earners dealing with rising electricity costs?

MR CORBELL: Yes. I can tell the Assembly that in the most recent budget the government provided \$12.35 million over the next four years to substantially increase the ACT energy concession. This is all about ensuring that those on low incomes get an effective rebate on their energy and other utility bills. The \$12.35 million investment over four years comprises just over \$4 million over that period to increase the maximum level of rebate for the energy concession to 16 per cent of the average household electricity bill. The government is also providing \$8 million of that total \$12 million over a four-year period to mitigate the impact of the recently announced increase in the average water price, which takes effect from 1 July this year.

This energy concession is provided for eligible cardholder residents of the ACT and currently is paid to 25,000 Canberra households. The concession means that those low income households, whether they are owner occupiers or whether they are renters, receive an additional \$131 a year in their energy concession. As I previously indicated, this entirely offsets the most recent electricity price increase—in fact, it more than offsets it—for those low income households.

This is a good example of a Labor government working to protect low income households. We will not accept the assertion from those opposite that this sort of assistance should be provided to everyone who, the claim is made, is struggling. We must provide the assistance to those on low incomes—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Thank you, Mr Corbell; your time has expired.

MR CORBELL: those who are vulnerable—

MR SPEAKER: Sit down, Mr Corbell.

MR CORBELL: those who are financially disadvantaged—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Corbell, sit down, thank you.

MR CORBELL: and that is what we will do.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Porter, a supplementary?

MS PORTER: Minister, did the ICRC report make any reference to the contribution of clean, renewable energy programs on the electricity prices paid by Canberrans?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Porter for the question. Yes, the ICRC did comment on this matter, and they indicated that, of the six-and-a-bit percentage increase that they

announced in terms of electricity bills, five of that six per cent increase was a result of changes to the federal government's renewable energy target scheme. Those costs are being passed through to consumers as a result of changes in the way the federal government has structured that scheme and the requirement that that scheme puts on electricity companies to purchase an increased amount of renewable energy generation as part of their total energy purchase.

What is pleasing about this decision, though, is that the ICRC has confirmed that the most recent price increase was in no way impacted on by the ACT's feed-in tariff scheme. There was not a single cent—not a single cent—of this price increase that was a result of the ACT's feed-in tariff scheme, contrary to some of the assertions we have heard over the past few months from those opposite.

What this again highlights is that the ACT government is appropriately and responsibly managing its energy policies to keep electricity prices the lowest of any state or territory in the country, providing assistance to those low income households who are struggling, providing generous rebates and programs to assist with energy efficiency for those households, and putting in place responsible policies and programs that encourage the uptake of renewable energy to help make this city undertake its transition to be a sustainable city into the future. That is the sort of policy setting the people expect of the government. I am pleased that to date we have been able to deliver that. We will continue to focus to achieve that.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary, Ms Hunter?

MS HUNTER: Minister, in relation to the utilities concessions program, how will you be ensuring that the value of those concessions will continue over the next few years and will not lose their value as they have in past years?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Hunter for the question. In the last budget, the government announced that it would be ensuring that the payment for concessions was indexed to CPI. So it is now an indexed amount which is ongoing through the budget. The government will continue to review the operations of its concessions regime. My colleague Minister Burch, through her directorate, is undertaking a detailed review of how we can continue to ensure that we maintain the relative benefit and the relative amount that is made available through the energy concession and other concession schemes to make sure they are not eroded over time. That remains a very important objective of the government.

Government—executive

MR COE: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, I refer to these comments made by the Deputy Chief Minister on Friday in relation to an executive comprising only four ministers: "I don't believe it's sustainable in the long term." Given that your deputy considers a ministry of four is not "sustainable in the long term", why did you only appoint four ministers and will you appoint a fifth before the 2012 election?

MS GALLAGHER: The answer is because he is right. It is not sustainable in the long term and I have made it clear from when I announced that the executive would be made up of four ministers that I would be looking to go to five ministers in a reasonable time and I expect that to be before the 2012 election.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary, Mr Coe?

MR COE: Chief Minister, given the current state, does that mean that Mr Hargreaves, Ms Porter and Dr Bourke are not currently up to being ministers?

MS GALLAGHER: Not at all. I know that it worries those opposite that those on this side are such a talented, energetic bunch, and we can sense the concern over there that you have about that. It must be hard having to come in here year after year and look at this government delivering for the people of Canberra.

I can tell you, Mr Coe, I will not be discussing the fifth minister's appointment with you. You will find out about it in due course. I have a range of talented members to consider. In the short term, as we got through the surprise announcement of the former Chief Minister's decision to retire, in the interests of stability going through the budget period and all that was before us, it was the right decision to take at that time. It is my expectation that we will move to five ministers in a relatively short period of time, but at this point in time, the Labor government—all seven of us—are working together to continue to deliver this government's agenda to the people of Canberra.

MRS DUNNE: Supplementary question, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: Chief Minister, haven't you demonstrated by your decision that no-one on your backbench has the competence to be a minister?

MS GALLAGHER: I think I have just answered that. In the interests of stability in the short term, with the surprise announcement of the Chief Minister leaving, the week after the budget I thought it in the interests of all of us, including the new member who has joined our team, to be able to settle down, that four ministers provided that stability in the short term. It is not optimal. There is a vacancy there and it will be filled at the appropriate time.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks very much, Mr Speaker. Chief Minister, have you considering offering Mr Coe a ministry?

MS GALLAGHER: It might shock people greatly to hear my answer but, no, I have not.

Corrective services—governance

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, a question without notice.

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Chief Minister. I refer, Chief Minister, to the list of ACT government priorities for 2011-12 which you outlined yesterday, and tabled. You stated that one of the priorities was to improve the governance of corrective services, including Bimberi. Chief Minister, what are the failures of governance at Bimberi that you need to improve, and who has been responsible for those failures?

MS GALLAGHER: The politics of negativity continue from those opposite. The priorities I outlined for the community yesterday included some work that we would like to see done, and that is indeed being done, in the Alexander Maconochie Centre and Bimberi. These are about improving systems and building on systems that we already have in place. I do not think, having been in opposition for the length of time that those opposite have, that they have any understanding about delivering a correctional service for a vulnerable population such as the youngest members of our community, at Bimberi, and the disadvantaged populations that we see at the Alexander Maconochie Centre. Nor do they understand the decision of this government to implement a human rights agenda and make that integral to the services delivered at Alexander Maconochie Centre and Bimberi.

I think the fact that we have been very open and clear with the reviews that have been done into Alexander Maconochie Centre and Bimberi shows the importance that this government place on not accepting that we cannot always improve on the services that we deliver to communities, even if they are living inside the AMC or at Bimberi. That is the commitment that this government have—to be transparent, to be open, to have reviews, to respond to those reviews, to make those reviews public, to make the government's response to those reviews public, and then to work very hard to improve the services, with the very clear focus of improving the lives of the people who have to live at Bimberi and the AMC. So that is a priority.

We have the Hamburger review that has been released. The Attorney-General has established a task force for implementation of that review. There are numbers of pieces of work going on at Bimberi around how to improve, and on some of the challenges that we have got at Bimberi, including trying to keep kids out of Bimberi in the first place. All of that work is underway, Mrs Dunne, and we look forward to continuing working with members of the Assembly—

Mr Seselja: So was it just an empty statement?

MS GALLAGHER: No, it is not an empty statement.

Mr Seselja: It sounds like an empty statement if you can't give it—

MR SPEAKER: Thank you. This is not a discussion, Mr Seselja.

MS GALLAGHER: It is not an empty statement. I know that outlining these priorities has made it difficult for you over there, because this is about being clear about what our priorities are, to accept that we could always improve what we are doing, to work hard and to be open and transparent about what we are doing. That is what the government will do, and it is clear and it is there for all to see, and indeed it will be there to be measured upon.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mrs Dunne?

MRS DUNNE: Chief Minister, what responsibility do you take as a former minister in this area for failures of governments at Bimberi?

MS GALLAGHER: As the former minister responsible for building Bimberi and also for managing young people at Quamby at the time, I understand the complexity behind this job. It is not an easy job and these are perhaps the most disadvantaged members of our community—the young people that live at Bimberi.

As Chief Minister, I do take responsibility. I look forward to the review from the Human Rights Commission. I look forward to working with Minister Burch in continuing to strive for excellence at Bimberi. I look forward to supporting the staff who work at Bimberi and looking at how we can improve supports to them. There is a whole lot of work to do. Just because you open a centre and it runs for a year, 18 months or two years does not mean that you cannot improve on what you offer.

I have to say that, after being the minister responsible for Quamby and visiting young people out at Quamby with not only the environment but the services that were provided there, Bimberi is a much better experience. That is not to say that it is perfect and that is not to say that we cannot improve. But we have come a long way from the day that I walked in Quamby's doors and had a look around. We have come a long way but there is more work to be done.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary, Mr Seselja?

MR SESELJA: Minister, what responsibility does former Minister Barr have for the failure of governance at Bimberi?

MS GALLAGHER: Again, we go back to the politics of negativity. This is not necessarily about failures; this is about new systems—

Mr Seselja: Bimberi's been a success?

MS GALLAGHER: Well, Bimberi has been a success on a number of fronts, but, as I said, that does not mean you cannot improve what you do. Do not underestimate the challenge of providing a service to these young people. Do not underestimate it. It is perhaps the hardest job in government, being the minister responsible for juvenile justice and child protection. Having had a few portfolios, I would have to say it is probably one of the hardest. It is probably one of the most heart wrenching as well when you read about the lives of some of these children.

I know that ministers strive to do their best, and I think we have come, as I said, a long way from the days when we took over and I walked in the doors at Quamby. What a disgrace. It was a disgrace that was made on your watch, Mr Smyth. Look at where we are now. I think a young person actually passed away in Quamby. The place was appalling. The supports and systems were not there, and we have been building it up ever since. Bimberi has a bit of a way to go—we accept that—but we have come a long way.

MR SPEAKER: Another supplementary, Mr Seselja?

MR SESELJA: Minister, what instructions have you given Minister Burch to fix the serious problems at Bimberi?

MS GALLAGHER: I have not given any instructions, so to speak. Minister Burch and I have a respectful relationship where we discuss matters of importance in portfolios. So Minister Burch has talked with me about challenges in her portfolio, not just in care and detention but in a whole range of areas.

What we do on this side, unlike on that side where Mr Doyle obviously calls the shots, is work collaboratively, we work to support each other and we work together to solve problems. That does not mean that I have to sit down and issue instructions to anybody. It means that we work together as a team to deliver services to the people of Canberra.

Mr Seselja: Maybe you need to. Have you seen how your ministers are performing?

MS GALLAGHER: Mr Seselja, thanks very much but I do not really think I need to take any advice from you on how to lead a team.

MR SPEAKER: Just before we continue, Chief Minister, I remind you that it is not the practice of this place to name members of staff in the chamber.

Hospitals—elective surgery

MR DOSZPOT: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Health. In the Assembly yesterday, in response to a question without notice regarding elective surgery, you stated:

... the target to focus on for how good your elective surgery system is performing needs to be how many people are having their surgery on time ...

Minister, the latest health quarterly report shows that the waiting time for category 3 patients increased by 43 days in comparison to the same period last year. If patients receiving surgery within clinically approved times is the most important measure, have you failed category 3 patients?

MS GALLAGHER: I was very clear yesterday around the challenges and the targets that we have set as a government on improving access to elective surgery, and I think

I have been clear in this place that there are improvements to be made, particularly in our long-wait patients, and they tend to be our less urgent category 2 and our category 3 patients. As we remove those long-waits from the list, there will be an impact on the median waiting time for the ACT elective surgery system, but we go into that with our eyes open.

I am setting ourselves a target of a 33 per cent reduction in people waiting too long for care. We are already seeing some positive results of that in the sense that we have got the lowest numbers of long-wait patients since we started recording this performance measure in 2003. So they are the best results that we have seen for seven years.

There is more work to be done, Mr Doszpot. But I would say that I have set some targets in terms of improving the elective surgery system. Those targets are going to be challenging to meet, but I am very focused, and I know the Health Directorate are very focused on meeting them.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, a supplementary?

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, for category 2 patients, the waiting time has increased by two days since last year and by 11 days since 2007-08. By your measures of success, have you failed category 2 patients?

MS GALLAGHER: Again, I think the management of the waiting list overall is complex. I am not saying that it is not.

Mr Seselja: That is what they say when they can't answer a question. They give it as complex.

MS GALLAGHER: It is not that I cannot answer the question. The issues are that, as we continue to deal with increases in demand for surgery and as we continue to see removals of long-wait patients from the list, there are going to be impacts on the waiting list overall. The waiting list is the lowest it has been for some time. The number of long-wait patients is the lowest it has been since 2003. The number of people being seen on time is not acceptable at this point in time, overall, and that is why I have set ourselves a target of improving that by 33 per cent.

Mr Smyth interjecting—

Mr Smyth: For 10 years it has been unacceptable.

MS GALLAGHER: If we look back—and I know that Mr Smyth likes to measure it by how great they were doing when they were in—the simple fact is that they were not. You did not report your long-waits. Your waiting list was more than half of your throughput. If we had the same results that you were delivering, our waiting list would be about 5,700 people. It is not. It is 4,400.

Mr Smyth interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: You reported your long-waits off your list? The long-wait patients are reported now and were first reported in 2003.

There is more work to be done. The signs are promising. The targets are set. They are ambitious. But I am very keen on actually improving access to elective surgery and delivering those targets. Again, as part of the transparency and openness of government, we will be updating the community and, indeed, the Assembly in six months time.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth?

MR SMYTH: Minister, for category 1 patients, the most urgent patients, they are waiting one day longer than the same period last year. Based on your stated measures of success, why have you failed category 1 patients?

MS GALLAGHER: I am not sure what figure Mr Smyth is using. My understanding is that for the first 11 months of this year our target for category 1 patients being seen on time is 91 per cent, which is just below the target of 95 per cent under the national access program. Under the national access program we have a commitment to see 95 per cent of category 1 patients on time. This is a target that we have signed up to and it is one that we will meet.

But, yes, there are challenges in managing this, Mr Speaker. Sometimes category 1 patients, for a number of reasons, are not able to be seen in 30 days, and that sometimes is down to surgeon availability. It is sometimes down to patient availability. It is sometimes about the availability of other surgeons and beds within the hospital. But it is at 91 per cent now. I believe we can reach the target of 95 per cent.

MR HARGREAVES: A supplementary.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks very much, Mr Speaker. Minister for Health, do you believe that the occasions of elective surgery services are as valid an indicator as perhaps a waiting list may be?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Hargreaves for the question. Absolutely; throughput is the critical indicator here. Back in 2001, a year that Mr Smyth likes to reminisce about, they did about 6,800 procedures. This year we will do 10,700 procedures—more than 4,000 more operations per year that our hospitals are dealing with. Next year we will exceed 11,000 operations, with the extra money that we have put in the budget. So, yes, throughput is part of the challenge. Obviously we cannot get to a zero waiting list position because we do not necessarily want to drive demand or drive out the private health system from this market. But we do need to manage our waiting list in line with the targets that I have set, and indeed that we have agreed to with the commonwealth.

I think that enormous effort has gone into this by our staff at the hospitals, at both Canberra and at Calvary Public Hospital, to deliver what needs to be delivered to this community. It does involve millions of dollars. Just 300 operations is more than three million extra dollars a year, and it is an expensive business. So we do always have to

look at how we finance these, but our throughput is increasing and our demand for elective surgery is increasing as fast as we are increasing our throughput. So it is part of the solution—not all of it. But I am very confident that Health will be able to deliver the targets that I have set for them, and I stand ready to be measured by them.

Housing—energy efficiency

MS PORTER: My question, through you, Mr Speaker, is to the Minister for Community Services. Could the minister please update the Assembly on progress to date regarding the implementation of the government's energy efficiency programs in public housing?

MS BURCH: I thank Ms Porter for her interest in energy efficiency in public housing. The ACT government remains committed to improving energy efficiency in public housing, thereby reducing the cost of living pressures on those who can least afford it and reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the ACT.

There are almost 12,000 properties across Housing ACT, and at least a quarter of these are in excess of 40 years old. A significant number of public housing dwellings have already undergone a form of energy improvement. The aim over time is to bring the remaining stock to a minimum three-star energy rating. To achieve this, various measures have been implemented, and some of these include improving energy efficiency for public housing through the sale of low energy rated properties, purchasing properties with an energy rating of at least three star or higher, constructing dwellings with a minimum of six-star energy ratings built to either adaptable or universal design principles, and improving energy efficiency of the remaining properties through implementation of a range of measure to improve their efficiency.

To date approximately \$8.5 million has been expended on undertaking energy efficiency measures across 3,100 properties. That equates to almost 26 per cent of the portfolio. These measures have been funded through the government's commitment in the 2007-08 budget, which funded \$20 million over 10 years to improve energy efficiency in public housing. Energy measures include but are not limited to ceiling and wall insulation, draught sealing, and installation of pelmets and gas and electric-boosted solar hot water systems.

In addition, in the 2001-12 budget, a further \$8 million over four years was included to expand the energy efficiency program. Housing ACT is investigating options to expand the current energy measures being installed, with a view to decreasing emissions, increasing the comfort of tenants and reducing the energy costs to tenants. Housing ACT also continues to install energy-efficient appliances, such as five-star gas hot water systems, water saving devices, dual-flush toilets and water saving eco shower heads at its properties funded through its \$35 million maintenance budget.

In addition, from 2009 a total of \$2 million has been provided by the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate to assist low income households in public housing properties and community organisations to reduce their energy consumption. These funds will be fully expended by December of this year. Funding from the

Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate is being utilised to provide building shell improvements and solar hot water systems, and to replace inefficient white goods in properties managed by community organisations. Approximately 500 properties so far have benefitted from this expenditure, and a further 200 will benefit before the end of this year.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Porter, a supplementary question?

MS PORTER: Could the minister please detail the environmental and cost saving benefits to public housing tenants?

MS BURCH: To respond to the rising energy costs and the impacts of climate change, the ACT government continues to focus on environmental, social and economic objectives to improve household energy outcomes for low income and disadvantaged households.

Housing ACT continues to install physical building shell improvements designed to improve energy efficiencies. These are implemented in a way that is conducive to good energy efficiency behaviour—for example, ceiling and wall insulation, as ceiling and wall insulation potentially has the greatest impact on energy use—by allowing tenants to turn down their heaters and hence reduce the cost.

Water-efficient shower heads are also being installed. A standard shower head uses 15 to 25 litres of water per minute—

Mr Barr interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, members. Mr Barr, thanks. Let's hear from the minister.

MS BURCH: Can I continue?

MR SPEAKER: Yes. Please do continue.

MS BURCH: However, water-efficient shower heads reduce usage to about seven litres per minute. It is estimated that this will save the average household 14½ thousand litres per year and help reduce gas water heating costs by 47 per cent.

To assist households to transition to a low carbon future, reduce impediments to the uptake of energy efficiency and make buildings more energy efficient, Housing ACT has commenced a trial to measure the effectiveness of various energy efficiency initiatives involving energy efficiency inspections. After completion of these inspections, some properties will have improvements to the building as recommended by the assessors, and some will have energy-efficient appliances installed.

MR SPEAKER: Dr Bourke, a supplementary?

DR BOURKE: Minister, could you provide some detail regarding what additional benefits the recent \$2 million increase to this program will deliver?

MS BURCH: I again thank Dr Bourke for the question. It is good to you here, Dr Bourke. There are a range of options currently under consideration to ensure the best outcomes to improve energy efficiency and to reduce the cost of living for our tenants. It is important to note that in order to best utilise the funds, some assumptions have been made. These are that we have close to 12,000 properties in our stock and around 640 properties were constructed post 2001. So energy efficiency measures to a minimum three-star energy rating are in most cases included.

With approximately 3,100 properties already benefiting from some form of energy efficiency work, that leaves approximately 7,900 properties remaining that could benefit from an additional energy efficiency program.

With the additional \$2 million, there is potential to increase the numbers. For example, for solar hot-water systems, whether gas or electric, we installed 131 last year. This could rise to the potential of 300. Wall insulation could increase from 68 properties to 150 properties in 2011-12. However, to ensure the best possible outcomes and the best use of funds, Housing and Community Services is working with total facilities managers Spotless to consider the viability of additional innovative energy efficiency strategies.

Some of these measures include energy efficient lighting to complexes, window film, eglass, double glazing, underfloor insulation, photovoltaic cells, gas connection and conversion to gas appliances, heat transfer systems, compulsory replacement of slow combustion heaters and thermally efficient carpet, while additional cost-effective measures are being considered to ensure improved energy outcomes the property portfolio and reducing costs to tenants.

MS BRESNAN: A supplementary.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms Bresnan.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, are you committed to maintaining current levels of funding for energy efficiency measures, including the \$2 million you mentioned, which was an agreement item with the Greens, as is the 10 per cent of public housing stock?

MS BURCH: We have committed to providing all the support we can to our tenants, including energy efficiency measures.

Ms Gallagher: I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice Housing—affordability

MR BARR: I have been doing some research following on from a couple of questions asked of me by Ms Hunter and Ms Bresnan. I will go to Ms Bresnan's question first in relation to the OwnPlace program. I can advise that 454 blocks were taken up by the OwnPlace panel. As of 15 June, 211 had been completed; 36 are

under construction; and a further 157 are due to commence construction in the 2011-12 financial year.

Schools—counsellors

MR BARR: I can also partially answer the question I took on notice from Ms Hunter in that I can advise at the moment 40.5 full-time equivalent school counsellor positions, 17 pastoral care coordinators and a student support network team that comprises four behaviour support teachers, four senior counsellors and two social workers.

There are two disability support officers and four school youth health nurse officers within our student welfare and pastoral support team across the public system. I will get the comparisons with other states and territories, obviously, as I do not have that information on hand—

Mr Coe: Chaplins as well?

MR BARR: And there are, of course, chaplains, yes.

Answer to question on notice Question No 1395

MRS DUNNE: Mr Speaker, in accordance with standing order 118A, I ask again the Minister for the Arts for an explanation for her failure to answer question No 1395. The 30 days expired on 17 March.

MS BURCH: I signed that late last evening, so it should be headed your way, Mrs Dunne.

Mrs Dunne: Sorry, Mr Speaker, I actually asked for an explanation as to its lateness, not where it was in the system.

MR SPEAKER: Minister Burch?

MS BURCH: I understand that it took some time to gather the information, Mr Speaker.

Economy—cost of living

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (3.22): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that in the ACT since 2001:

(a) total taxation has grown by 68 percent;

(b) total taxation per capita has grown by 93 percent;

- (c) property rates and charges have grown by 75 percent and up to 157 percent in some areas;
 - (d) rents have increased by approximately 68 percent;
 - (e) water prices have increased by 200 percent;
 - (f) electricity prices have increased by 75 percent; and
 - (g) parking fees for all day places in Civic have increased by 57 percent;
- (2) notes that the cost of living in the ACT is reaching a breaking point, even for many households with two incomes; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) ensure all policies consider the impact on the family budget and cost of living;
 - (b) include a cost of living statement as part of its annual budget; and
 - (c) ensure that the cost of living pressure on Canberra households are considered as part of the Regulatory Impact Statement process.

It is a pleasure to be raising this issue here again in the Assembly because it is a critically important issue to Canberra families. There is no doubt, Mr Speaker, that Canberra families are feeling the pinch of cost of living pressures in a whole range of areas, many of which are directly controlled by the government, many of which are affected by government policy and, indeed, others which are not directly or in some cases are indirectly affected by the government. But the range of those issues is hurting Canberra families. There are many which the government has either direct or indirect control over.

Today I want to focus on some of those cost of living pressures that Canberra families are feeling, and particularly about how this Labor-Greens coalition is doing all it can to add to that burden instead of take that burden away. I think there is no doubt that the Labor-Greens coalition has a very inner suburbs view of the world. It appears to ignore the concerns of ordinary families in the outer suburbs. There are in many cases a sneering disregard for those of our community who live in our outer suburbs.

The Labor Party and the Greens have long abandoned these people. They have long abandoned these people and I think that the closeness of this Labor-Greens coalition is adding to the financial pressures on those Canberra families. In fact, it is that view of the world from the Labor Party and the Greens that assumes in respect of all those people who are living in the outer suburbs who are struggling, that it is really because they went and bought themselves a so-called McMansion.

It is that view of the world that says that it is the families' fault. It is nothing to do with the government's policies. It is nothing to do with the challenges that ordinary families face. According to the Labor Party and the Greens, it is their fault and they

have no regard for the tens of thousands of families in the middle class who consistently get forgotten. We have in this Assembly had debates where we have simply sought to encourage the government to consider middle income earners on any number of policy issues and we have been rebuffed.

When we look at my motion, it goes to a range of areas. Let us go through them. It notes that total taxation has grown by 68 per cent since 2001. That is an increase per year of around \$1.6 billion in revenue. Total taxation per capita has grown by 93 per cent. It has grown by 93 per cent. That is an increase of \$1,696 per person. That is how much extra tax Canberrans are paying just to the ACT government—just to the ACT government per person. So a family of five are paying an extra \$8,000 a year more to this government in taxation.

We have seen rents going up by approximately 68 per cent since 2001. Of course, they will go up much more. I will talk a bit more about the change of use charge which will make that burden even greater. But let us put that into context. That is \$190 extra for weekly rental. That is more than I would have been paying to rent an apartment in 1999-2000. That has been the increase—\$190. Around that time you could rent an apartment for between \$150 and \$200. Now we have seen that go up on average for Canberrans \$190 a week.

We have seen water prices increasing 200 per cent. That is an increase of \$550 to the annual amount paid for water. Electricity prices have also increased. Of course, Simon Corbell says that they are modest increases. This is now the view of the government. The view of the government is that electricity price increases are modest. Those so-called modest increases see Canberrans paying an extra \$600 a year for their electricity. We have seen parking fees for all-day places in Civic increase by 57 per cent. That is an increase of \$988 a year for parking.

None of that is modest. None of that is to be dismissed as we see so often by the Labor government in this town. They dismiss these issues as not relevant or not their fault. But they are relevant and many of them are, indeed, this government's fault—many of them either directly, such as rates which I will get to in a minute, or indirectly, such as things like rent which are heavily influenced by government policy, water which is almost exclusively influenced by government policy and, of course other areas such as parking which are heavily reliant on government policy.

Let us look at rates for a moment. The government often like to tell us their defence. Firstly, it is either not their fault that these costs have gone up or it is not that bad—and by the way, we are not as bad as some other states; so what are you whingeing about? That is the message from the government and we get that consistently.

But let us have a look at how much extra some of the suburbs are paying: 75 per cent across the board extra is what Canberra families are paying for their rates since this government came to office. Let us have a look at some of the specific suburbs that have been particularly hard hit and particularly targeted by this government. Residents of Conder are paying an extra 84 per cent. That is an extra \$594 a year that they are paying out to the ACT government directly for their rates. The people of Banks must have done something to upset the ACT government. They are paying an extra

152 per cent or \$778 extra per year for their rates since 2001. The people of Gordon are not spared: they have a 99 per cent or \$641 increase.

What is it about the Lanyon Valley, Madam Assistant Speaker? What is it about the people of the Lanyon Valley—Conder, 84 per cent; Banks, 152 per cent; and Gordon, 99 per cent? Fadden is paying another 85 per cent, an extra \$673. What is it about the residents of Tuggeranong, who have copped another six per cent just this year on top of these massive increases over the last few years? What does this government have against the people of Tuggeranong?

The people of Calwell are paying an extra \$692 a year or an extra 111 per cent. But do not worry. The people of Belconnen have not been spared. Charnwood residents are paying an extra 157 per cent or an extra \$724 a year for this government. We can go through the suburbs: Amaroo, 96 per cent; Ngunnawal, 108 per cent; Mawson, 101 per cent, and the list goes on. These are real dollars. This is money out of people's pockets that they cannot otherwise spend on their families and their needs.

Of course, we always hear from the Chief Minister on just how good it is that they spend a lot of our money on any given issue. It is never about results. In health, it is always about how much money we have spent. Anyone can spend other people's money. How effectively is it spent and why are people being forced to pay so much?

We know that this government have become legendary for wasting money. That is one of the reasons why these rates and these other costs are so expensive. We know that the feed-in tariff will add another \$200 a year. So they cannot claim that they do not have an influence over electricity prices. We know that water prices, which have gone up 200 per cent, are influenced by things like the massive cost blowout in the Cotter Dam.

This government have to take responsibility. People resent paying all of that extra money so that this government can go and waste it. If they could show that they could deliver projects on time and on budget, maybe they would not resent paying a little bit extra and maybe they could get some of that money back occasionally instead of constantly having to fork out more.

I want to use the example of an ordinary middle income family living in the suburbs of Canberra to debunk this myth that the Labor Party and the Greens seem to perpetuate that it is only very low income earners who are doing it tough, because we know that low income earners are doing it tough. It is right that they get assistance. But there is a whole spectrum of people in our community who many would regard as being comfortable middle class who are doing it tough.

You only have to look at the assumptions when you put them together for a middle income family here in Canberra—mum, dad, two kids. Dad works full-time on \$80,000 a year; mum part-time on \$40,000 a year. That is not an uncommon family situation here in the ACT. They have a mortgage—a high mortgage. A mortgage of \$380,000 is certainly not uncommon for anyone who has bought in the last few years in the ACT in order to get into the market. They have one child in care part time, one in a low fee non-government school. Dad is repaying his HELP loan for his uni degree. They have private health insurance. They have one car with a loan on the car.

Look at the numbers for that family: at \$120,000 combined income, the tax goes to \$23,000, the HELP being paid back, the Medicare, the mortgage, childcare, car, groceries, utilities, parking, school fees, private health insurance and then some basic family spending—a small amount of family spending, around \$7,000 or \$8,000. There is nothing left. There is actually nothing left.

It is not like this family with a combined income of \$120,000 has lots of money to splash around. Things are tight. This adds up to \$119,000. This does not include things like rates. If this family lives in Banks, they are paying an extra \$780 above what they paid in 2001. They are paying out every year \$1,300 to this government, which is not even included in this account.

Madam Assistant Speaker, the point of this is to do the numbers. Have a look at the numbers? These are modest. These are people who will never be in line for government assistance. They will never be in line for government assistance. So we have a responsibility to make sure that our policies are respecting these people. We are respecting the fact that they work hard, that they are not wealthy, that they pay their taxes and that they expect their governments to back them up.

They expect their governments to be in their corner, either through restraining their spending and not blowing it out so that you do not constantly have to be raising rates through the roof or through good policies so that things like electricity do not spiral out of control. You do not have policies like a massive tax on units so that rents increase. You do not manage the planning system and land release in such a way so that the cost of buying a home or renting a home gets out of reach.

One thing that does surprise me, and I guess I should not be surprised because we have seen it before, is the fact that the government will not support a motion such as this. It is curious, to say the least, that we would have this situation because of all these factors. This motion says: put it front and centre. At the moment this government does not put it front and centre. So put it front and centre in your budget. Put it front and centre in all of your policy development and in the development of legislation.

What is unreasonable about that? The counter-argument from the government is that it should not be front and centre. If the other argument is that it is front and centre, that is laughable because if it is, it is completely failing. We know that it is not. We know that it is not front and centre for this government.

I come back to where I started. This is a government that has an inner suburbs view of the world. They do not seem to have any regard—any regard—to the fact that families are doing it tough across the board. Many families in the suburbs of Canberra—whether it is Tuggeranong, whether it is Gungahlin, whether it is Belconnen, whether it is Weston Creek or whether it is Woden—are feeling the pinch. It is not just low income earners who are feeling the pinch. It is across the board.

The government should take responsibility and say that all of their policies will take account of their impact on the family budget. They should say that they will take

account of the fact that families are doing it tough, in some cases because of issues outside the government's control and in many cases due to issues that are directly or indirectly influenced by government policy.

Madam Assistant Speaker, we are going to continue to fight for those families in the suburbs. The Labor-Greens coalition may not care about them but we will, and that is why we will continue to bring motions such as this to the Assembly. I commend it.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Health, Minister for Industrial Relations and Treasurer) (3.37): I thank Mr Seselja for bringing this motion to the Assembly again. The allegations that the Leader of the Opposition makes are incorrect that the Labor Party does not care about families that might be finding life difficult or managing their household budgets with difficulty. It is simply not the case. We will not be supporting the motion, though, and we will not be supporting it for a number of reasons. I have circulated an amendment to Mr Seselja's motion.

The first reason is that the only figure we can verify in paragraph (1) is in subparagraph (a), and I have had Treasury trying to identify where the Liberal Party got these other figures from.

Mr Seselja: The ABS.

MS GALLAGHER: Well, we are using the ABS figures too and they do not match up. I am seeking to amend it to put what the ABS data actually says in reference to the figures in subparagraph (1)(b) and (c), which I think are incorrect. But I am also adding in the context in which this discussion needs to be had. I note Mr Seselja did not go at all to the issue of growth in the economy or growth in wages in terms of putting some context around increases in other areas. Yes, over a period of time, costs will increase. Alongside that, you need to look at what is happening to wages and the overall makeup of the economy. I will formally move the amendment I have circulated in my name. I move:

Omit all words after subparagraph (1)(a), substitute:

- “(b) total taxation per capita has grown by 75 percent;
 - (c) gross household disposable income has grown by 81 percent;
 - (d) GFS revenue, as a proportion of the economy, has decreased from 14.4 to 13.7 percent; and
 - (e) significant investments and expansion of services to community have been made, including increases in targeted assistance to those in need of extra support, including an increase of \$151 per annum in the last two budgets to the energy concessions regime;
- (2) notes per capita taxation as a proportion of gross household disposable income in the ACT is 5.1 percent, the lowest in the country compared to the national ratio of 7.9 percent;

- (3) notes that the ACT Government will apply triple bottom line analysis on all major policy proposals, including all budget initiatives from August 2011; and
- (4) notes that the ACT Government will continue to work with the Assembly and the community to ensure that we continue to examine ways to ensure those experiencing financial hardship are provided with appropriate assistance.”.

If you look at the amendment that we have circulated to Mr Seselja’s motion, you will see that, yes, we accept that taxation has grown by 75 per cent. We accept that gross household disposable income has grown by 81 per cent. We accept that GFS revenue as a proportion of the economy has actually decreased from 14.4 to 13.7 per cent. And we also acknowledge that per capita taxation as a proportion of gross household disposable income in the ACT is 5.1 per cent, which is the lowest in the country compared to the national ratio of 7.9 per cent.

So I think it is important to have some context around this discussion. It is a convenient context for the Leader of the Opposition to omit every time he speaks to this issue. I do not doubt his concern around cost of living pressures for Canberra families, but if he is going to look at all the cost drivers and what is impacting on cost of living, he also needs to look at other rational measures, including issues such as gross household disposable income, growth in wages and per capita taxation as a proportion of people’s household disposable income to provide that context in which to view these pressures.

It is also important to note that it is part of all of the decisions of government and it is very much at the forefront of our minds when we are making major policy decisions about how this will impact on Canberrans. I can certainly say that, in my time as Treasurer—indeed, in the past three years—the rate increases have gone up with the annual adjustment. There has been no hike in rates by this government. There has been no—

Mr Seselja: No hike in rates!

MS GALLAGHER: Well, there has not, Mr Seselja, and the challenge—

Mr Smyth: They have gone up every year.

MS GALLAGHER: Well, they go up with supported indexation arrangements of this place. The challenge for the Leader of the Opposition is not only to come in here and say how terrible things are and how concerned he is, but, three years into this term, we now need to take the next step and ask, “What would you do?” If you do not agree with the ratings measures and the formula for increasing rates, then what are you going to do? Are you going to bring legislation to this chamber and make adjustments to that? If you are going to control rents, how are you going to control them? Are you going to regulate for rental decreases? If you are, how are you going to do it? Where is your legislation? If you are going to set the price of water as opposed to the ICRC, what are you going to do?

These are the things. This is about the third time this motion has come to this place put forward by the Leader of the Opposition. I accept that he can use his full 15 minutes to put all the blame at my feet, but often there are absolutely no ideas about what he would do to control the things he is so concerned about. In a minority government, there is nothing to stop any member in this place—if they are concerned with the way rates and charges are being levied—in coming up with ideas and proposals to put downward pressure on them. We have not seen that. We hear a lot of moaning, banging on about how you would like to see decreases and placing control on cost of living pressures, but there have been no reform measures and no ideas at all.

The government have been very cognisant, particularly since the global financial crisis, about how we manage our own revenue lines. Indeed, this budget is another example of that. We accept that we have to make savings, and those savings are almost entirely found within government. We are not asking the community to foot the bill, despite being able to provide to the community extra services and new initiatives in this budget.

Every time we consider our revenue lines in the budget, every time we consider a new budget initiative, we weigh that up and consider that in the context of what people can afford, where our own revenue effort is sitting at and whether there are any opportunities to increase or decrease our own revenue lines within the context of the budget. All of that is done as part of standard budget deliberations.

Yes, prices are going to go up, and I think the challenge for government is, where you can have influence, how you cushion the impact of those increases for the people that need it the most. I accept it is not just the most vulnerable who should be eligible for government assistance. We constantly need to upgrade and improve on our own data collection to make sure that our own concession regime are targeting all of those in need of extra support and assistance from the government. Indeed, one of the priorities outlined yesterday for the government is to streamline and update the concessions regime to make sure it is constantly updating and renewing the data so that we are providing the most modern support that we can to families and families in need.

They will not just be the families captured in the public housing criteria and they will not just be families covered by emergency housing or emergency government assistance or who have links with community services. We understand that. There are people who are holding down jobs and who are paying rents who are finding life hard with all of the cost increases. That is where the government has a range of programs that are targeted to meet the needs of individual families, and Minister Corbell's program around energy efficiency for private renters is a classic example of that. We are extending government support and assistance into an area where we have not traditionally provided it in the past.

The amendment I have circulated, again, as I said earlier, puts the context around the issue a little bit more than the Liberal Party are prepared to do. We also note that the ACT government will apply the triple bottom line analysis on all major policy proposals, including all budget initiatives from August this year. We will continue to

work with the Assembly and the community to ensure that we examine ways to ensure that those people experiencing financial hardship are provided with the appropriate assistance they need. That is the responsible response from government about how to manage cost of living pressures for the group within our community that are experiencing genuine cost of living pressures.

I think it is a bit rich for the Leader of the Opposition to argue that government fees and charges should not rise or should not rise as much as they have. Again, you have got to look at the extent to which service delivery has increased in line with capacity. There have been enormous increases in service delivery. If you look at our care and protection system, if you look at disability services, if you look at health, if you look at mental health even, you will see huge increases compared to what you were doing when you were last in government. And it is not just about the money; it is about the quality of the services you provide. The quality of the services provided are very good. The health budget has increased by 125 per cent. The largest part of the budget has increased by 125 per cent.

Mr Smyth: Yes, but that is the point. You measure the dollars; you don't measure the outcomes.

MS GALLAGHER: The outputs are measured, Mr Smyth, as well. Hundreds of outputs in health are measured. You can focus on the two where we do not perform as well as we would like, but hundreds of areas are measured. We are offering services here that people have never, ever received in Canberra before. We have more children in our care and protection system getting better access to financial support than we have ever had before. We have people starting new services like the intentional community, which is quite an expensive service, I will be up-front. But that is a new service because that is what the community expects from us. We are going to have to fund those services from somewhere, and a large part of our budget comes from our own source revenue.

Yes, government fees and charges have gone up. Yes, service delivery has gone up—it has gone up more than those increases in our own revenue base. But wages within the community, disposable incomes, have gone up, and they have gone up faster than our own revenue has. I think we need to have this mature discussion within that context. You just cannot have it on one side. I would welcome any Liberal Party member who feels able to break off the shackles of negativity and break off the set scripts that you have—which is all about the government just increasing rates and charges—and come up with some ideas about what you would do to place downward pressure on rents. I would be very interested to hear how you will have that discussion in the community. Just what will you do to reduce private rental charges? I am sure the private rental industry will have a lot of interest in you leading that debate, Mr Seselja. What will you do? Will you change the rating system?

Mr Smyth: Well, you're certainly not leading it.

MS GALLAGHER: Will you change the rating system, Mr Smyth? You have been here long enough. What is your view on the rating system? You obviously think it increases rents too high. What are you going to do about it? Are you going to change

the formula? Would you like to change rating formula? It is a minority government. Let us have a look at your ideas, put them on the table. Put some evidence behind your emotive claims as outlined in the motion from Mr Seselja that there are all these families at breaking point. Honestly come forward with your ideas, come forward with your evidence. It is a minority government. Come here and let us have the honest discussion. Do not come in here conveniently and have 15 or 10 minutes of negativity with no ideas and no solutions.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (3.52): I am speaking to the amendment.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Le Couteur): I assumed so.

MR SESELJA: We just heard it there. I think the Chief Minister really started to articulate her views on this issue. She started off a little bit conciliatory but towards the end she went back to the Labor Party form—that is, that there is no evidence that there are lots of families at breaking point. Apparently, Canberra families are not doing it tough. I do not know what parts of Canberra Katy Gallagher hangs out in but when I speak to families right across the city—

Ms Gallagher: No, bring the evidence.

MR SESELJA: and the reason—

Ms Gallagher: Oh, that is your evidence.

MR SMYTH: The evidence is in the fact that all of the essentials of life, the things we need, are going up much, much faster than the CPI. Any reasonable person can deduce from the fact that most people's salaries go up is somewhere around CPI, a bit above sometimes. We have seen wages growth but the growth of these key fundamentals of life, the things that people generally cannot do without, have gone up much faster than that. That is the evidence in the motion.

Rents have gone up faster, rates have gone up faster, water has gone up faster, electricity has gone up faster. These are all key things that people cannot choose. They cannot choose whether or not to have electricity. They cannot choose if they do not own their own home whether or not they pay rent. They cannot choose whether or not they pay the government rates. They have to pay these things and these things are going up much faster than their incomes. That is why they are feeling the squeeze. So Katy Gallagher comes in here and says that there is no evidence that people are feeling are feeling the squeeze. Where is the evidence?

I will speak to the amendment because I think it reflects this attitude which is being pushed. It is very much this inner city centric view of the world that is completely ignorant of the real pressures on Canberra families. We saw it there. This amendment put forward by the Chief Minister is a sort of “let them eat cake” amendment—you have never had it so good, guys. The government says that you have never had it so good. That is the view of the Chief Minister.

Ms Gallagher: You did not listen to a word I said, then.

MR SESELJA: I did listen. I go back to just a couple of minutes ago. I will get you to think back to that part of my speech where I said that you started off conciliatory and then by the end of it you got to this point where you said that there is no evidence that families are struggling. You said that there was no evidence that families are struggling. You have not presented any evidence, apart from the fact that all of their essentials of life are going up much faster than their income.

If your income is going up at three per cent or four per cent a year and the essentials of life are going up at six per cent, seven per cent, eight per cent and 10 per cent a year, then that does not leave a lot left. Again, I think it goes back to this view of the world of the Labor Party, shared by the Greens, that it is really because these people go out and they buy their plasma TVs, they have these big houses and that is why they cannot afford it. That is rubbish!

Talk, in particular, to people who have purchased a home in the last few years in Canberra. Ask how many of them have bought a really, really large home. Most of them are just very happy to squeeze into the housing market. That will often be a very, very simple home. They may well have an expanding family and they will have a small home because the cost of land has gone through the roof under this government.

Madam Assistant Speaker, this amendment is an attempt to whitewash all of those things. It is an attempt to whitewash the concerns of Canberra families. All of the statistics show how much pressure there is now on the family budget and this minister wants to ignore that, pretend it is not a reality. We got to the nub of it at the end where she basically did not even acknowledge the problem. She denied that there is a problem.

Ms Gallagher: That is not true; not true.

MR SESELJA: You did. You said that I had not presented evidence. We presented all of the evidence that shows how much things are getting more expensive—how much more expensive they are.

Ms Gallagher: No, at section 2 you say that families are at breaking point. I said, “What is the evidence?”

MR SESELJA: There it is. So there is no evidence according to Katy Gallagher that families in the ACT are at breaking point.

Ms Gallagher: Oh, Zed!

MR SESELJA: You are judged by your own words. You are judged by your own words.

Ms Gallagher: Or how you twist them.

MR SESELJA: No.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

MR SESELJA: No, you just said it again and I will use it—that there is no evidence that families are at breaking point. Go and speak to them. The stats across the board show that things are getting tougher.

Ms Hunter: The low income ones are at breaking point. The low income families are.

MR SESELJA: We see the cheerleader interjecting there. We see Ms Hunter interjecting there. I could not hear over all the noise, so I apologise.

Ms Gallagher: She was on your side.

MR SESELJA: I would be shocked if that was the case, so I would welcome the positive interjection. I cannot remember the last time it happened from Ms Hunter. If I have misconstrued what she said, I do apologise.

But in terms of what can be done differently, there are a number of things. Let us look at rents. There is a lot that you can do. This government have done all they can to make it harder to buy a home and to rent a home in the ACT. They started through the minister who is now the planning minister again—the former planning minister, Simon Corbell—who decided he would not put out any land. I think in one year, in about 2003-04, they released about 700 or 800 blocks. That started the rot.

These policies do matter. We were there at that time saying that we need more land release. Simon Corbell did not listen. So we saw this squeeze on families, which is very hard to undo. That is why we put forward policies like the policy for Infrastructure Canberra. It is actually about getting that infrastructure out there ahead of time so that we can actually get the land out to have housing options, so that we can have more housing choice for families, so that we can have competition. That is why we promote competition in the market instead of the way this government conducts it with their LDA monopoly. That is why we do not support their policy of putting a large new tax on rent.

These policies make a difference. We outline what we would do differently on a daily basis and this government reject it. That is why they pursue expensive policies like the feed-in tariff. The feed-in tariff does virtually nothing for the environment but does add significant amounts to our electricity bills. You are responsible for your policies. They are your policies. You cannot control your spending and you impose higher rates on the community.

The other part of the Chief Minister's contribution is where she said that the government had not put rates up. "We have not put rates up," she said. That would be news I think to the people of Banks. If you are in Banks and you were to look at your bill in 2001-02—\$512—and you look at your rates bill now—\$1,290—you would probably suspect that the government may have put them up. You may suspect that

the government have put them up. But we are told today by the Chief Minister that actually they have not put them up.

I do not know what accounts for the anomaly. I do not know why the people of Banks are paying an extra \$778 compared to what they were paying in 2001-02. The people of Conder are paying an extra \$594 and the people of Gordon are paying an extra \$641. Clearly, that is a ridiculous statement by the Chief Minister. This government has a reason it has had to get so much raising revenue and look for new ways of revenue with things like change of use increases or massive increases in rates. It is because it cannot control its spending. There is no doubt about it.

Finally, in the one minute that I have left, the minister again points to success being when you spend money on something. Let us just look at some of the measures. Let us look at some of the measures of this government's success. Are the basics of life more or less expensive under this government? Have they been successful in housing affordability? No, they have not.

Where have we gone in health? We used to have average waiting times. Now we have the longest waiting times in the country. We have seen the management of the prison falling apart. We have seen some of the most basic services such as local roads and ovals not delivered. We have seen the GDE take a decade and still not be complete. There is a performance appraisal. People are not getting 75 per cent better services and better infrastructure.

Let me finish on this point: this is a government that is out of touch. This is a minister, Katy Gallagher, who is completely out of touch, and she has demonstrated that with her contribution today.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (4.01): We did, of course, debate a very similar motion last year that even included the same statistics or permutations of them that Mr Seselja is asking the Assembly to note today. So it appears to be honest and accountable government and the cost of living that are obviously some recyclable products here. On that day the motion was amended and passed—

Mrs Dunne: And they're not important to you? You don't care?

MS HUNTER: Of course they are important to me, very important to me, and I will speak to that today and give you some information on what we are doing as far as these issues are concerned.

But on that day the motion was amended and passed. It called on the ACT government to consider carefully the cost of living in the ACT and include, where possible, initiatives to put downward pressure on the cost of living to ensure the affordable housing action plan provides for those households that are not eligible for public housing and cannot afford the median rental or even 74.9 per cent of the market rate, to acknowledge that the running costs such as energy and water must be included in assessing the affordability of a house, and to conduct a poverty impact analysis of significant new policies and programs. They were the amendments that were made to the last one.

Before I respond to the specific claims in today's motion, I would like to make the general observation that many in the community are starting to unpick that term "cost of living" and the arguments being put about as to whom this issue really applies and what it means to whom. In fact the OECD just last month released the "your better life" index, which found that "Australia had the third highest household disposable income in the OECD"—the ABS stats tell us that Canberra has the highest average income in Australia—and "the ACT has the highest average equivalised disposable household incomes" and our incomes have risen in real terms significantly faster than CPI. And that makes us, on average, the wealthiest of the wealthy.

That is, of course, not to say that there are not a significant number in our community who are doing it tough. As everyone knows, the Greens are committed to helping those who are in those difficult situations, those who are most in need. And I must say that to say that you care about cost of living but not want to provide more public housing for those most in need really does make your claims seem a little hollow.

The single-best response to the price of housing is public housing. And it seems clear that the Liberals have adopted a more Keynesian approach and seem to now be saying that the government should have more of a role in the housing market. So if they do not think that public housing has the single biggest impact, please tell us what does. And what would you do to help those who really need assistance with their housing needs? It is time. You do need to get out there now and you do need to put your solutions on the table.

In the last debate I thought we had managed to move beyond the very superficial approach of plucking out a few statistics with no context. So it is, I think, quite lamentable that we find ourselves covering almost exactly the same ground. One has to ask whether the Liberals have forgotten what was passed last year in that debate about poverty impact statements. Do they reject the basis of that work, as appears to be the case from statements they have made indicating that they believe cost of living pressures have more impact on middle income than low income groups?

If we look back at the data we know that here in the ACT the average household is doing quite well and there is quite a homogenous group with good, long-term public service employment. The problem, however, comes from that group of people that do not fit into the mould and rely on government benefits or unskilled work.

To live on a low income in Canberra is probably harder than it is elsewhere because our position, relative to the norm, is much further apart from that in other places, and things like high rents are definitely a struggle. If this is a matter that concerns the Liberal Party and is something they wish to pursue, then I really do welcome their engagement. But I think there is a great level of evidence that people on a low income struggle the most when rises in essential goods and services occur.

I am very concerned about statements that Mr Seselja has made. There were quotes by Mr Seselja in the *Sunday Canberra Times* on 12 June. In that Mr Seselja was quoted as saying:

Middle-income families always feel it the most they are people who feel the cost of living pressures because they are without much disposable income and they don't get the benefits of government payments that go to the low-income households.

So I am really keen to know: was Mr Seselja actually quoted correctly in saying that middle class people are doing it tougher, are doing it tougher in this town, than low income families? And if so, what evidence has he to back that up, as some professionals in the financial area would argue that governments actually spend more money on the middle class, on what some would call middle class welfare, than they do on low income earners and those low income households which quite often are female-headed households? We know how many children are living in poverty or in very difficult circumstances even here in the ACT.

Ross Gittins recently wrote an interesting article titled "Earning \$150,000 and whingeing? Here's a reality check". In this article he came to the point that poverty is not just about income deprivation but also about social exclusion and a lack of ability to gain employment. Those groups with the highest risk of facing deep exclusion are, in declining order: unemployed people, public renters, lone parents, Indigenous Australians and private renters.

If Mr Seselja is concerned about the impact energy price rises have on Canberrans, I would encourage him to focus on those groups that are on a low income, as evidence shows, for example, that around 75 per cent of people who go to ACAT because they cannot pay their energy come from public housing. In actual fact, it is not middle income groups that struggle with energy bills, it is low income groups.

But what we have heard Mr Seselja say today in this chamber is: "That is okay. Let those low income families, those people who are really struggling, eat cake." And that is what Mr Seselja has told those people in the ACT who really are desperate and in a desperate situation as far as how to juggle the school excursion with the energy bill, with the new shoes, with the food. Mr Seselja today has said, "Really it is about the middle class families. We are telling the low income earners you can eat cake." And that is what he has said.

This of course is why the Greens have worked hard to secure through the last budget a doubling of funding for public housing energy improvements—an additional \$12 million towards the energy concession rebate to help offset rising utility prices. So the Greens have been out there, the Greens have engaged. The Greens have put on the table solutions. The Greens have pushed hard for them, and outcomes are being shown.

This is really why I do encourage everybody in this place to be part of the solution, not just a part of continuing to highlight the problem. We all have a responsibility at some point in time to also come along and put our plans, our ideas, our solutions on the table. And the community expects us to do that.

The Greens have been pursuing poverty impact analysis for some time now, and it seems that while the government initiated it back in 2004 there is little evidence of the

work they have done since. That was why I did move an amendment to the last motion around this issue, and I will be moving similar amendments today.

The government did investigate this issue through the review of the previous homeless strategy, breaking the cycle, and came to the conclusion that probably the impact analyses are most effective, of course, if you put them in up front of the project. It is like an evaluation. I was actually part of the homelessness group that set up that strategy and followed its progress and was part of that poverty impact analysis that was undertaken by a consultant. We really want to have this poverty impact analysis embedded into the decisions, policies and programs to ensure that they are the best way of spending money and to ensure that any new policies or programs are not going to disproportionately impact on those who are really doing it tough.

In March last year, the Greens put in a submission to the government's consultation on the triple bottom line analysis, arguing again that a poverty impact analysis had to be built into policy processes and annual budgets. Income distribution is essential for community prosperity and it is well recognised that the more equal the distribution, the better off the community is. And the real issue at hand is income distribution and how to ensure people in our community do not miss out on the wealth that the majority enjoy.

There are of course a range of measures that need to be considered. These include the Gini coefficient. There is also the Theil index. There is the Atkinson index and the Lorenz curve. And these are all ways that we can measure where we are up to. They are very useful, these measures, in looking at the spread of economic prosperity across our community and ensuring that we meet our social obligation to assist those in need and ensure the fair distribution of resources across our community. If you go to the ACT government website, measuring our progress, it shows that the Gini coefficient in Canberra in 2007 to 2008 was 0.311, and while this reflects a more equitable distribution of income than occurs in other Australian jurisdictions, it has been increasing slowly, reflecting a growing disparity in income distribution in the ACT.

On the particulars of the motion, I would like firstly to turn to, and have a little say about, the regulatory impact statements. These are, we know, governed under the Legislation Act, chapter 5, and there does appear to be some inconsistency, at least in our expectations if not the reality of product in this area. The Greens do think the government should do some more work to ensure that RISs cover everything that we can agree is appropriate they should. Section 34 of the Legislation Act requires that the minister must prepare an RIS if there is an appreciable cost on the community or part of the community. But of course, this is open to interpretation. So we really do need to have some more work done on when this will apply.

As far as the proposed budget statement process is concerned, which at this time would offer very little to us—and we are just looking at Mr Seselja's amendment in which he talks about including in the budget statements the cost of living as part of that—our feeling is that it would not offer a lot to members of the community in actually evaluating budget proposals. We really think that does come from a poverty income analysis.

More useful data would incorporate changes in pricing of essential goods and services in comparison to income growth and what the distribution between income groups looks like. As I said, there are a range of measures to do this, and it is disappointing there has been no attempt to utilise these.

Looking at the government's amendment to all of these, we, as I said, will accept the government's amendment in that we can actually see where they got their statistics from, whereas we could not find the sources of some of the statistics in Mr Seselja's motion. We also do note No 3 in the government's amendment, which is about the triple bottom line analysis. Of course, that has come from the parliamentary agreement and we did secure government's commitment to introducing that interannual reporting, and it is in the Chief Minister's annual report directions, although it does need great improvement. We have done quite a bit of lobbying on this issue and we do think there needs to be greater progress. It has been slow to date.

On the poverty impact analysis, as I said, we do need to ensure that we really do move along with that work. I think I said in November last year that we do need to see greater progress.

I will move to my amendments in a moment but the Greens will be supporting the government amendment. We do think that there has been some progress made. I note that in my amendments I will also be highlighting, I guess clarifying, some of the progress government has made. That is actually around the energy concessions rebate, which of course we also have been pushing to ensure that those families that really are doing it tough, that really cannot afford their energy bills, are going to be assisted and will be assisted with this improvement that has happened and that has really dragged us back. That amount of concession was falling way behind. We are now getting back to a situation where it is improving.

I seek leave to move the amendments to Ms Gallagher's proposed amendment circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

MS HUNTER: I move:

(1) Omit (e), substitute:

“(e) the 2010-2011 budget has increased funding to the energy concessions rebate scheme in line with rising electricity prices over the past six years;”.

(2) Add:

“(5) calls on the Government to:

(a) provide the detail, including relevant methodology, tools or assessment framework for the triple bottom line analysis referred to in paragraph (3); and

- (b) fulfil the commitment it made to the Assembly on 17 November 2010 to conduct poverty impact analysis of significant new policies and programs and report to the Assembly by the last sitting day in September on the details of analyses undertaken.”.

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Community Services, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Women and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs) (4.16): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for providing an opportunity to address such an important issue. As the Chief Minister has indicated, the government will be amending this motion, as it misleads both the Assembly and the ACT public. While there have been price increases—

Mrs Dunne: A point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Hargreaves): Excuse me, minister. Stop the clock. Mrs Dunne.

Mrs Dunne: Ms Burch, by saying that the motion misleads the Assembly, by implication says that Mr Seselja is misleading the Assembly, and she must withdraw that.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: There is no point of order. Ms Burch, continue.

MS BURCH: Thank you. While there have been price increases since 2001—

Mrs Dunne: Mr Assistant Speaker, on a point of order, could I seek your guidance? In what sense is saying that Mr Seselja’s motion misleads the Assembly not unparliamentary words?

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I am sorry, Mrs Dunne; I was just getting the clock stopped.

Mrs Dunne: I understand. I am seeking your guidance.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Yes, I am happy to address that. My interpretation of the rules is that where a member is actually named in the accusation of misleading the chamber, that is unparliamentary. When there is an oblique reference to a motion which may very well do so, I do not consider that to be misleading.

Mrs Dunne: So that is the standard ruling in this place?

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: That is my interpretation.

Mrs Dunne: To say Mr Seselja’s motion misleads the Assembly is not unparliamentary?

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I do not believe that is a direct implication, a direct accusation that Mr Seselja has misled the Assembly, no.

Mrs Dunne: I will keep that ruling in mind, Mr Assistant Speaker.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Fine with me. Ms Burch.

MS BURCH: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. While there have been increases since 2001, these should be put into some context. It is not quite correct to consider price increases for basic goods such as utilities without taking into account a range of government concessions for people in need and increases in services.

While some families in the ACT struggle to meet cost of living pressures, there is not a crisis, as suggested by those opposite. While the ACT has a community that is well educated and above-average wage earning per household, we also know that there are households in Canberra that are experiencing pressures and difficulties. The government is committed to a targeted approach of assisting those most in need, recognising that others may need support at certain times in their lives. A range of concessions and other measures are in place to assist those in need.

On utilities, this government has shown its commitment in this budget with measures which will significantly increase utility concessions for eligible concession holders. The opposition's motion fails to recognise that the energy concession will be raised to 16 per cent of the average annual household electricity bill, an increase of approximately 24 per cent, or \$51, from July 2011. This represents 20.8 per cent of the average electricity bill for 2011-12, which is expected to be an average of \$1,664. The combined benefit of the energy and utility concessions for households will reach \$346 per year. It compares favourably with other jurisdictions, with Victoria providing \$270 per annum and South Australia \$235 a year.

The ACT Labor government's concession increases show our commitment to supporting those on low incomes and vulnerable Canberrans with the cost of living. It is anticipated that 25,000 members of our community will be accessing the broad range of ACT government concessions. Yesterday the Chief Minister committed to a review of the concessions regime to ensure that it continues to support those most in need in our community.

As of 1 July 2011 a family with two parents and two school-age children with an average household income of \$45,000 will be entitled to the following concessions totalling \$13,096 or 29 per cent of gross household income. There will be an energy concession, a utilities concession, a motor vehicle registration concession of \$400 for two registrations, a rental rebate of \$8,750, public transport concessions of \$400—estimates of four trips per week—and a student transport concession of \$3,200.

A range of other concessions and supports through this government include the ACT seniors spectacle scheme, the ambulance transport levy exemption, dental services scheme, dog registration, drivers licence, energy support, homebuyer assistance schemes, the home haemodialysis rebate, low vision aids, sewerage support, special needs transport support, student transport scheme, as I have mentioned, and the taxi subsidy scheme. They are just a few of the supports that this government has in place.

Further practical help is also being provided to low income households to reduce the cost of energy with energy and water efficiencies. Tenants in public housing households are being assisted to reduce their household energy and utility costs.

Looking at travel, we know that travel costs can also be part of a family's budget. Compared with other jurisdictions, the ACT has recorded the lowest increase in public transport costs since 2001, with an increase of 19.5 per cent compared to a national increase of 33 per cent. Low income ACT residents and students have been provided with concession travel on ACTION buses. We have also issued 1,179 gold cards in 2009-10, which allows for free travel on buses for Canberrans aged 75 years and older.

The ACT taxi subsidy scheme assists people with disabilities and older people with taxi fares. There are around 3,000 individuals who use the taxi subsidy scheme in the ACT. In 2009-10 over \$1 million was provided in subsidies and the number of taxi vouchers and subsidies per trip for people with a disability and in wheelchairs has been increased in this budget. We have provided over \$2 million over four years. Concessions are also provided to low income earners and age pensioners for the cost of vehicle and trailer registration and drivers licences.

When we look at housing, the ACT government recognises that housing costs are a significant part of a family budget. The government provides housing assistance to low to moderate income families through public and community housing and affordable housing initiatives. For those on low incomes, a rental rebate is provided to meet the cost of public housing. In 2009-10 more than 90 per cent of tenants in public housing were in receipt of a rental rebate. Over 11½ thousand households were assisted through social housing.

The government is continuing to implement its affordable housing action plan, which addresses the issues of housing affordability across the spectrum for homebuyers and for renters, those in community housing and those in public housing. Just this week, we launched a new program for older Canberrans which will see them buy into, effectively, a public housing property at 75 per cent of value.

People on low incomes and age pensioners are provided with concessions on their property rates. The pensioner duty concession scheme assists pensioners to move to accommodation more suited to their needs by charging duty at a concessional rate. Since the commencement of the pensioner duty concession scheme, to the end of February 2011 190 households received the benefit of concessional duty, totalling approximately \$2.2 million.

The first homeowner grant provides a \$7,000 grant to first homebuyers to purchase their home. In 2009-10 2,823 people received such a grant. The government is also assisting those on low incomes with affordable housing options by providing Community Housing Canberra with loans of \$70 million. Over 10 years these loans will finance over 500 properties for affordable sale and 500 for affordable rental. We also have 20 per cent affordable housing in greenfields. We have a land rent scheme and a shared equity scheme.

Childcare costs are also part of family budgets. In the ACT we do not set the fees for childcare services. It is worth noting that the ABS has recently noted that the out-of-pocket cost for families was seven per cent in 2010 compared to 13 per cent in 2004. We have certainly brought online the potential for increased childcare places and are building new childcare centres.

Basic services to support Canberrans have increased through increased front-line services experiencing demand pressures. We have expanded health services, improved school programs and facilities, including new schools, and strengthened our community services system.

In summary, it is quite inaccurate to refer to price increases, particularly over a 10-year period, without taking into account the services and concessions that this government has provided to the Canberra community. When all factors are considered, this government is showing that it is responsive to the Canberra community, whether we live in the outer suburbs or the inner suburbs. The government has a significant proportion of its members actually living in the outer suburbs. I know that I do not live too far from Mr Smyth; I occasionally see him down at the local shops. So I see myself absolutely as part of the Canberra community.

I fully support the amendment put forward by the Chief Minister.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (4.27): I welcome the opportunity to again range over broad territory in relation to the cost of living pressures that face Canberra families—not just Canberra families who are recipients of welfare and people who live in government housing but other families as well, who seem to come entirely under the radar of the Labor Party and the Greens in this place. It is for this reason that the Canberra Liberals will not be supporting the attempted changes to Mr Seselja's motion by both the government and the Greens. I am pleased and proud to stand up for Canberra families today—all Canberra families who are doing it tough. And that is most Canberra families.

As is often the case, Ms Burch comes in here and runs off a litany of programs that are doing this here and that there. But they are not joined up in any way. There is a series of concessions. We had a review of the concessions system in the last term of the government and we are now having another one, which shows that the minister at the time, now the Chief Minister, failed to get the concessions system right and now we are leaving it to Minister Burch to try and fix up the mess.

The concessions system does not work as well as it can for the benefit of the people of the ACT. But there have been some improvements, which have been universally welcomed, in the budget to address the incapacity of people to deal with rising, escalating utility costs.

I need to put on the record the narrative that was being run in question time today by Minister Corbell and in this debate earlier by Ms Hunter that in some way the Canberra Liberals are not interested in people who are in receipt of the concessions scheme. That could not be further from the truth.

What this motion today does is to build on the work that has been done in relation to the concessions scheme but say to this Assembly that these are not the only people who are in need in this community. For the most part, most people in the community would rather be able to fend for themselves—for the government to keep their hands out of their pocketbooks sufficiently so that they could look after their families themselves, so that they could buy a house or pay the rent to house their family, so that they could educate their children in a way that they saw fit, so that they could care for the health of their children and put food on the table in a way that they saw fit.

This is what families are for. Families are autonomous groups that are designed for the nurturing of the next generation. That is what they are for and they need a reasonable share of their income to do that. Mr Seselja used an example of a family on a combined income of essentially 1½ salaries, of \$120,000 a year. That, in ACT terms, is not a high salary. By the time you pay for the essentials of life, you pay your taxes and you pay for everything, there is not very much left to pay for the ACT government. What goes by the board is a trip to the pictures or a meal out or an extra pair of shoes. You hope that the shoes do not wear out, or from time to time it is an excursion that you do not go on, and it is definitely a holiday that you do not take.

These are real, live issues not just for the 25,000 people, by Mr Corbell's calculation in question time today, who are in receipt of concessions in the ACT, but for hundreds or thousands of other families who live in Giralang, who live in Macgregor, who live in Holt and who live in a whole lot of other, mainly outer suburbs and who are doing it tough. And they are doing it tough because the cost of their housing is going up and up.

They look at their children and think to themselves, "I could afford to get into housing but my children can't." I look at my children. I consider that my husband and I were blessed to have reasonably affordable access to housing when we married. But I look at my children 30 years on who, with good jobs and trades and degrees behind them, cannot aspire to homeownership. And that is a message which is being repeated time and time again.

What will happen with those people is that they will go somewhere else. They will end up choosing to live somewhere else, to move somewhere else, to work somewhere else, where housing is more affordable, where they have a chance of entering into the housing market. The ACT already has a skills shortage. Do we want to exacerbate it even further by having unaffordable housing? Mr Seselja dwelt at length on housing.

There are a few issues that I would like to address. It will come as no surprise, Mr Assistant Speaker, that I would like to deal with the question of water. I spoke last time that we dealt with this matter in relation to water and I tabled a graph and a table, and I seek leave to table an update of that here today.

Leave granted.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. I table the following paper:

Water charges—ACTEW total bill per household and water bill per household—
Table and graphs.

This table is an analysis by the ICRC of the cost of water over the years. It was updated at my request after the last increase in water bills. For a typical household in the ACT, where they use 250,000 litres of water a year, we see that the cost of water since 2001 has risen from \$245 a year, in 2010-11 to \$692 a year and in 2011-12 it will rise to \$794 a year. So we have now had well over a 200 per cent increase in the cost of water since the arrival of the Stanhope, now Gallagher-Hunter, government.

This is a matter that these people do not care about. They say that that is not important. Ms Gallagher is saying with her amendment that, with the taxes and charges, total taxation has gone up by 75 per cent. But there are a whole lot of other things that contribute to the cost of living that this government is responsible for.

In this period of time we have seen huge charges introduced by this government which have driven up the cost of water—the water abstraction charge, which is now, of course, subject to a High Court appeal, and in addition to this, the supervision of this Chief Minister and her predecessor over the largest blow-out in a capital works project that this territory has ever seen, which, by the admission of the head of Actew, will add another \$120 a year, every year, to the cost of water over the life of the dam.

In addition to that, I would like to talk about childcare. Again, childcare is one of the big drivers of family costs. Mr Seselja spoke about the impact of education and I would like to talk about the impact of childcare in this area. We have seen over many years the cost of childcare increasing, year on year, so that we see in the ACT that we now pay \$60 per child per week more than the national average. This is an unsustainable burden.

The government's solution to this, of course, is to drive up the cost further through their signing up to the national quality framework which, on the surface, as we all know, sounds wonderful. We all believe in improved quality and we all believe in improved frameworks. But this government and the federal government have not taken into consideration what this means for families—that childcare will become unaffordable and that many children will either be taken out of childcare or at least taken out of formal childcare. We have to remember that for every child in formal childcare there is another child in informal childcare who is not receiving the benefits of a professional childcare and early learning process through a formal day care centre, and they will be the losers. All the people who depart the childcare system will be the losers and the cost pressures in the ACT are driving people out of childcare. (*Time expired.*)

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (4.37): I want to start with some of the comments of Ms Hunter. Ms Hunter is very good at setting up straw men. She declares that there is a class war, that only the Greens care for the poor, and that the Liberals are only interested in the rich and the middle class. It is a good tactic. When you cannot answer

the question, just declare, “I am on their side and you are not.” In many ways it does hark back to Robert Menzies’s speech on the forgotten people. It is worth reading just the first two paragraphs. This is 1942, remember. He says:

Quite recently, a bishop wrote a letter to a great daily newspaper. His theme was the importance of doing justice to the workers. His belief, apparently, was that the workers are those who work with their hands. He sought to divide the people of Australia into classes. He was obviously suffering from what has for years seemed to me to be our greatest political disease—the disease of thinking that the community is divided into the relatively rich and the relatively idle, and the laborious poor, and that every social and political controversy can be resolved into the question: What side are you on?

When you put it in terms like that, it is easy to cast aspersions and throw the blame back on others. But it is a false war, it is a false assertion and it is a straw man from a straw leader who has nothing else to say. It is ridiculous for the Greens to simply assert that they seem to be the only ones who care.

I point back to three initiatives from when I was in government: the Earth Charter, which looked at addressing all of these issues; the Kyoto protocol, signed in Kyoto, which looked at addressing issues of climate change; and, in particular, our great initiative of putting in place the poverty task force. The poverty task force and its resultant report, much of which has not been actioned by the Labor Party since they came to office, is the clearest example of any party in the history of self-government being genuinely interested in resolving the issues of where poverty strikes. And it is not just the poverty of the poor or the most poor.

Ms Gallagher said, “Where is the evidence of all these claims of families at breaking point?”—in her sort of “let them eat cake” amendment. The evidence is out at Kippax Uniting. Go and ask them. Go and read their submissions to estimates. The evidence is just in—

Ms Gallagher: God, it is only Wednesday. I don’t think they are the same families we were talking about.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Hargreaves): Order, members! Other members have time.

MR SMYTH: things like ACTCOSS, who, in their budget submission this year, said this. Let me just read one paragraph:

What is seen in this Budget is some short term solutions to what are long term problems. The opportunity for bold action, as families and communities continue to grapple with the impacts of the global financial crisis, has been missed.

And people like Kippax Uniting said last year, “What we are seeing are people we have never seen before from a sector of the community that we do not normally expect them to appear from, because they are all hurting.” That is what Mr Sesleja seeks to address in his motion today. We need to have a different measure of the impact of government activity upon all Canberrans.

And let us not declare a false war. Let us not say, “Only we can look after the poor, and the Liberals do not care.” It is not true; it is a lie. Anybody who says it is a liar. Let us work together to come up with a solution. This is a good solution. Let us work out what the impact of the government’s annual budget is on Canberrans. That is not unreasonable.

Ms Burch got up in her usual way, offering very little to the debate, asserting that we were misleading. She then said “fails to recognise”, but just went on to read a list of concessions. Yes, we note the concessions. Many of them are there because they were started by Liberal governments. Yet there are those who are above the thresholds who miss out on the concessions, who are caught in traps of their own. Many of them on paper are quite wealthy, and therefore you might expect them not to deserve any support, but, because of the fallout of the GFC, they have seen their super eroded or locked up and are unable to access their funds. Many have had to return to work just to survive. We have to question whether that is fair.

A litany is not an understanding of what is going on, Ms Burch. Inputs are not outcomes. It is a common mistake: “We have spent more; therefore we are much better.” The problem is that it is the outcomes that count. If you cannot address the issue—it is commonly a refuge of ministers who cannot address the issues or think about what is going on.

We have got some interesting amendments from Ms Gallagher. They are disingenuous at best. I am particularly intrigued by part (d), where she says:

GFS revenue, as a proportion of the economy, has decreased from 14.4 to 13.7 percent ...

I would like the minister to tell us what her definition of economy is. What happens if we look at some of the measures that are printed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, for instance gross state product? In 2002-03, GFS revenue was \$2.14 billion over \$21 billion, a percentage of 9.8. In 2009-10, GFS revenue is \$3.4 billion over \$25 billion of gross state product, or 13.2 per cent. That is the closest number I can find to the Treasurer’s 13.7. If you go to state final demand impact, it was 10.1 per cent in 2002-03, but it is 7.8 per cent in 2009-10. The question is: what numbers are we using here? It would be interesting to have the Treasurer and Chief Minister reveal what her definition of an economy is and where she gets the calculations for these numbers.

This is an important motion. It deals with everyday issues and concerns for all Canberrans. Cost of living matters are top of mind for virtually everyone, particularly in the aftermath of the global economic and financial crisis. But this crisis has not been the sole cause of any concerns within our community; other major factors are also in play as influences on our cost of living. I say to the new Chief Minister: I note that one of the consequences of your statement to the Assembly on Tuesday is that you said you would be able to tell the ACT community what the effects would be of your policies on them. As the situation stands at present, you are unable to do that. And, as with the stance with your amendments to this motion, you are unwilling to do that. So almost at the first hurdle, two days after your statement, you fall down.

We need to emphasise that we are dealing with the cost of living for households here. Many people assume that the consumer price index equates to the cost of living for households. That is not correct. As the Australian Bureau of Statistics quite rightly notes, CPI is not a measure of the cost of living. In its bulletin 6640, on pages 3 and 4, what it actually goes on to say is:

Although the CPI is also commonly referred to as a measure of changes in purchasing power or a cost-of-living index, in an economic context these terms are not strictly interchangeable ...

It says that if you really want to measure the cost of living, “Such a measure would include items like income tax and interest payments”. It continues:

A true cost-of-living index, among other things, would need to be concerned with changes in standards of living and with the substitutions ...

That is what we are suggesting. There are datasets out there that would help us inform this debate and not rely just on CPI. That is why it is so important that this motion go through unamended today.

Again, in her document, the Chief Minister tries to say—I think her amendment is a confusion of both mischief and poor analysis—that somehow the government’s revenue has eroded and that is why you use a percentage instead of real terms. But let us go to another ABS document, *State statistical bulletin 2011*, which came out on 1 June, luckily enough for all of us, this year. This is the most up-to-date information we can gather.

In 2005-06, for general government sector taxation per revenue at the state level, the ACT came second, at \$2,376 per head. It came second by \$147, but it was still 11 per cent higher than the national average. Let us go to 2006-07. We topped the billing then. Average taxation revenue per capita was \$2,724. We have pipped WA by \$18, but it was 17 per cent higher than the national average. This is territory government taxation. In 2007-08, we were still number one. The gap blew out to 20 per cent above the national average, and we were simply \$65 above the next competitor, WA. In 2008-09, we were 24 per cent above the national average and \$339 ahead of the next, number two, which was WA. And in 2009-10, we were out 28 per cent above the national average and higher than WA by \$353.

So there is some disingenuousness in this—that somehow the government is poor, that its revenue base is declining, when the taxation per capita, the pressure this government exerts every day on the people of the ACT, has gone up. And it has gone up from \$2,376 per head in 2005-06 to \$3,107 in 2009-10. That is the legacy and record of this government on taxation. (*Time expired.*)

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services and Minister for Police and Emergency Services): (4.47): The hypocrisy of those opposite when it comes to their purported care for those on low incomes is just mind-boggling—particularly Mr Smyth. This is the man who, as minister, sold the Narrabundah long-

stay caravan park for a dollar. He gave those people no security of tenure, and as a result this government had to bail them out.

Members interjecting—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Order! Mr Corbell, resume your seat. Stop the clock. Mr Corbell, please. Members of the opposition will desist. Members of the government will stop baiting. So far, the debate has been engaged—

Mr Doszpot interjecting—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, if you want to join Mr Hanson for three hours, you are going the right way about it. So far, this debate has been conducted quietly and arguments have been placed on the record in the proper manner. I will not have exchanges across the chamber. We have already got one person on a holiday; let us leave it at that. Mr Corbell, you have the floor.

MR CORBELL: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. Of course, it is a soft spot, but I will not respond further to the interjections. But it is worth placing on the record that the previous Liberal government and the previous minister for housing, Mr Smyth, were responsible for two terrible decisions that had a direct and immediate impact on low income households in this city. The first was to blow off the Narrabundah long-stay caravan park for a dollar. He wanted to wash his hands of that problem—

Mr Smyth interjecting—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Order, Mr Smyth! Mr Smyth, don't ask me to warn you, please.

MR CORBELL: Sell it for a dollar and give those people no security of tenure, resulting in a situation where they were then cast out and had to be bailed out by this government.

Mr Smyth: He can't lie.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Corbell, resume your seat. You said what, Mr Smyth?

Mr Smyth: I said he cannot lie.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I invite you to withdraw that comment, Mr Smyth.

Mr Smyth: I withdraw.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you. I also invite you to sit there in silence. Next time I have to mention it, I will warn you.

MR CORBELL: He keeps interjecting, Mr Assistant Speaker. I will just have to keep—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I know how to do my job. Thank you very much, minister.

MR CORBELL: Thank you. I will just have to keep making my point, Mr Assistant Speaker, which is that there were hundreds of people in low-cost accommodation and Mr Smyth had to get it off the government's books.

What was the other great travesty that Mr Smyth was responsible for when it came to his purported care for those in low income households? It was the then Liberal government's decision to sell 1,000 Housing ACT properties during their term of government. They sold off 1,000 ACT public housing properties.

This party that all of a sudden is the new convert about the interests of low income households has an appalling record on this matter. And Mr Smyth, as the former minister, has real credibility issues when it comes to his purported concerns for poverty, for people on low incomes, for people who are stuck in some of the most difficult social circumstances. That is his record. That is the previous government's record. He cannot wash his hands of those terrible decisions.

In contrast, this government is investing in real and direct assistance for people on lower incomes. Today in question time, I was asked about some of the very important measures that this government is undertaking when it comes to assistance to low income earners.

The outreach program that the government has funded in the most recent budget is investing further in these households. Four thousand Canberra households that are low income households—whether they are renting, whether they have a mortgage, whether they are in social housing or whether they are in community or public housing—will be assisted as a result of this program. That program, we know, will deliver savings to those households of between \$300 and \$500 a year on their utility costs—\$300 to \$500 a year, on average, on their utility costs because of a direct measure by this government to invest in energy efficiency, to invest in appliance improvement, to invest in retrofitting properties and to make a real difference.

That is this Labor government's response to cost of living pressures. That is this Labor government's response to helping those who are most vulnerable. And that is the first and the most important duty of government, particularly a Labor government—to reach out to low income families, people on pensions, people with a disability, and people caring for the sick or the elderly, and say to them: "We will help you. We will provide assistance. We will make sure that you are not left to the raw pressures of utility costs, of other price increases in the economy."

That is what a Labor government should be doing, and that is what this Labor government is doing. We are proud of our record when it comes to supporting those low income households. Unlike other parts of the economy, unlike other parts of the community, the ability to respond to pricing is much more limited for low income households. They are on fixed incomes or they are on the payment of benefits from government. They simply do not have the protections that those in other parts of the

socioeconomic strata have access to. First and foremost, our obligation must be to assist those vulnerable families.

I was very proud to learn of some of the assistance that the outreach program has been able to deliver. I was speaking to the chief executive of the Northside Community Service when we launched the upgraded outreach program earlier this year. He told me the story of a family where the husband, a wife and a couple of kids had their own home—they are not renting; they have their own home—but the husband is sick. He has cancer. The mother is sick, but she is recovering. She cares for her husband and their children. They could not afford a new fridge. They had this old, clapped-out fridge. It was not working properly. It would not keep the food cold in summer. And it was costing them a bomb, because it was inefficient. It was costing them an absolute bomb in electricity costs. They had had contact with the Northside Community Service because of their circumstances. But Northside were able to say to them: “Look, we have got some funding through the outreach program. We can help you. We can help you to get a new fridge. We will pay for it. Let’s get the old one taken away. We will get it recycled. We will get you a new fridge. That way you can keep your food cold in summer.” Their electricity bill plummeted. That is a really great example of how this government is helping those battling low income households.

And that is what we will continue to do. We will reach out to 4,000 of those households over the next four years—and that is on top of the very significant increase in concession payments this government has put in place.

That is the approach we are going to continue to adopt, because it is the only credible and reasonable thing for a government to do—not to try to promise the world to everyone; not to try and say, “We will make things better for you no matter what your particular financial or personal circumstances are.” That is the vague and easy promise that those opposite have made. Instead, we will make a commitment to households who are in dire circumstances, who have low incomes, who battle in circumstances like the family I have just talked about. That is the Labor government’s commitment. We will continue to make that investment to help them with the cost of living here in the ACT.

Question put:

That **Ms Hunter’s** amendments to **Ms Gallagher’s** proposed amendments be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 11

Noes 5

Mr Barr	Mr Hargreaves	Mr Coe	Mr Smyth
Dr Bourke	Ms Hunter	Mr Doszpot	
Ms Bresnan	Ms Le Couteur	Mrs Dunne	
Ms Burch	Ms Porter	Mr Seselja	
Mr Corbell	Mr Rattenbury		
Ms Gallagher			

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Question put:

That **Ms Gallagher's** amendment, as amended, be agreed to

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 11

Noes 5

Mr Barr	Mr Hargreaves	Mr Coe	Mr Smyth
Dr Bourke	Ms Hunter	Mr Doszpot	
Ms Bresnan	Ms Le Couteur	Mrs Dunne	
Ms Burch	Ms Porter	Mr Seselja	
Mr Corbell	Mr Rattenbury		
Ms Gallagher			

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Housing—energy efficiency

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (5.01): First off, I have to seek leave to move an amendment to the motion circulated in my name. It is due purely to poor writing.

Leave granted.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. I move:

Omit paragraph (2)(h), substitute:

“(2)(h) advocate at COAG for funds to:

- (i) improve methodologies for data collection on built houses; and
- (ii) use more appropriate climate data.”

Amendment agreed to.

MS LE COUTEUR: I move my amended motion:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of building homes to minimise greenhouse gas emissions given that household energy use comprises 31 percent of the ACT's greenhouse gas emissions;
- (b) the importance of addressing energy efficiency of existing houses as well as new houses and notes the ACT Planning and Land Authority's intention to review the use of the *Building Act 2004* to address this issue;

- (c) the community concern about the accuracy and value of compulsory household building inspections, including energy efficiency ratings (EERs), at the time of sale;
 - (d) that energy efficiency star ratings are based on a calculation of expected energy required to heat and cool the house per square metre, that is, a bigger house will use more energy, all other things being equal;
 - (e) household equipment such as hot water services and heating and cooling systems significantly influence energy consumption as does the behaviours of the occupants and are not currently included in energy efficiency rating calculations;
 - (f) a 2008 Australian Bureau of Statistics study found three percent additional value for each star rating on the resale of a house;
 - (g) changes to regulate EERs assessors in the *Construction Occupations (Licensing) Act 2004*, which commenced on 1 March 2011, have not yet been fully implemented because key regulations have not been finalised;
 - (h) that EERs for existing houses under the *Civil Law (Sale of Premises) Act 1997* still require the use of first generation software; and
 - (i) progress on implementation of my EERs motion passed by the Assembly on 1 April 2009; and
- (2) calls on the government to:
- (a) require household EERs to be provided not only as the current star rating but also with a separate expected energy use for the whole house for a year, in megajoules per annum, as is done with appliances;
 - (b) expand the existing ACT Home Energy Rating Scheme to include a rating for fixed heating and cooling appliances, water heating and fixed lighting using a similar methodology to the NSW Building Sustainability Index system;
 - (c) expedite the finalisation of key regulations to allow the full implementation of the EERs assessment part of the *Construction Occupations (Licensing) Act 2004* which commenced on 1 March 2011;
 - (d) amend the *Sale of Premises Act 1997* to:
 - (i) require, or at least permit, the use of second generation software; and
 - (ii) cover additional residential premises such as those on educational institutions and retirement villages;
 - (e) both implement, and call upon the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to implement, the “mandatory disclosure of residential building energy, greenhouse and water performance at the time of sale or lease, commencing with energy efficiency by May 2011”, as committed to by COAG in July 2009;

- (f) explore the use of alternative methods for physical audits of EERs including the use of thermal imaging and air leakage testing;
- (g) expand the energy efficiency rating assessment to include the provision of recommendations for improvements to a premises that would increase energy efficiency; and
- (h) advocate at COAG for funds to:
 - (i) improve methodologies for data collection on built houses; and
 - (ii) use more appropriate climate data.

I rise today to talk about a subject very dear to my heart—energy efficiency ratings—and how we can bring them forward from where they are at present. I think we have reached the situation where the people realise they are important but we still have a lot of confusion and discussion about them. The purpose of my motion today is to bring them, in effect, to the next step.

I would like to start by stating that energy efficiency ratings are important in terms of meeting our greenhouse gas commitments. As we all know, we have as an Assembly agreed to reduce Canberra's greenhouse gas emissions by 40 per cent by 2020. Our homes in the ACT produce 31 per cent of our greenhouse gas emissions; 26 per cent of that is from electricity and five per cent of that is from gas. So it is very important that we have energy efficient homes to live in. In addition, of course, energy efficient homes are more comfortable to live in and cheaper to live in because you are spending less money on energy.

My second point was the importance of addressing energy efficiency in existing houses as well as in new houses. This is very relevant to this motion because I will be talking about not only new houses. I will also be talking about things that come under the sale of premises act. The sale of premises act, as we are all aware, governs how houses are sold. It requires certain things to be revealed.

I am very pleased to hear ACTPLA talk about their intended review of the Building Act during the recent estimates hearings, particularly how ACTPLA are looking at using the Building Act 2004 to address energy efficiency of existing houses. This is really important because the bulk of the housing stock in the ACT, of course, already exists. The older ones of these are the ones we particularly need to improve the energy efficiency of.

In our parliamentary agreement with the Labor Party there is a clause which talks about an energy efficiency makeover for Canberra households with the aim that within 10 years all houses in the ACT should have improved their energy efficiency to at least three stars. The Greens are very aware that this is a big call. It is not an easy thing to do. But if we are to reach our targets on greenhouse gas reductions, it is an essential thing to do. From that point of view, I am particularly interested in what ACTPLA is planning to do with the Building Act 2004. I think that this motion today, if implemented, will be one of the levers towards achieving this aim, because I am talking about getting the ratings of existing houses better.

In my third paragraph, (1)(c), I note the community concern about the accuracy and the value of compulsory household building inspections, including energy efficiency ratings, at the time of sale. This is an issue that I have been raising in the Assembly for a number of years. I moved a motion about it in April 2009 to require ACTPLA and JACS at that time, through the sale of premises act, to vastly improve the auditing—both desk and physical auditing—of energy efficiency ratings.

People who are buying homes need to know that they can trust the ratings which have been given to a home that they want to purchase. They do not want to move in and then find out that the rating was wrong and that they have to spend significantly more on heating and cooling than they expected. I am very pleased that the government has committed extra resources to ACTPLA to deal with this issue in this year's budget. An amount of \$1.4 million over four years has been allocated. I must say that I am very hopeful of substantial improvement in this regard and I commend the government for doing this.

The next couple of points are really matters of fact: energy efficiency ratings are based on the star ratings per square metre. That means, all things being equal, bigger houses will require more energy to run them. It is a fact but it is unfortunately a fact that many people are not aware of. Also, household equipment such as hot-water services and heating and cooling systems significantly influence energy consumption. It is not just the fabric of the house.

The most important issue as far as energy consumption is concerned, which is not included in ratings and I do not think probably can be, is the behaviour of occupants. This is a variable. This is why, from a household point of view, I do not think anyone is suggesting going down the routes that have been gone down with commercial buildings where we publish the actual energy use of offices. That is now compulsorily being required by the commonwealth government. We do not do it in the household area because all households are so different.

However, the community does know that this is important. A 2008 ABS study found three per cent additional value for each star rating on the resale of a house. That was found in the ACT because, of course, the ACT is the only jurisdiction to have mandatory reporting of energy efficiency ratings on resale or sale of houses. This, of course, was a Greens initiative from last century.

It is really worth while for homeowners to look at improving their energy efficiency. For example, you could look at insulating the ceiling of your house. That is possibly only going to cost you a couple of thousand dollars but it would mean that a house that sells for, say, \$400,000 or \$500,000 could easily be sold for \$10,000 more with a fairly minimal amount of insulation done to it.

Paragraph (1)(g) relates to changes to regulate energy efficiency ratings assessors in the CO(L)A 2004, which commenced on 1 March 2011. They have not yet been fully implemented because key regulations have not been finalised. This is really unfortunate. What has happened with the changes in the CO(L)A Act is that the government has gone part of the way to addressing the issue. It has made energy

efficiency assessors part of one of the occupations that are regulated by ACTPLA. This, I would have to say, is a substantial step forward. They previously were not regulated at all.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, I am pleased at the improvements that have been made in this regard. But there is a bit missing here from a bureaucratic point of view. There is no code of practice yet for the energy rating assessors. We need to get this work done.

One thing which I have had a number of emails about recently is the fact that there is no way you can pay for a part-year licence at this stage. As the arrangements commenced on 1 March, which is in the middle of the year, everyone has been slugged for a full year's licence fee when they have not had a full year's licence.

My next point is that the energy efficiency ratings for existing houses under the Civil Law (Sale of Residential Property) Act 1997 still require the use of first generation software. I must make a brief mea culpa. We actually forgot that should have been the sale of premises act 2003, because the act was updated at that point. However, the point is still the same. We have been looking at the act. It still requires first generation software, because this was actually originally passed in 1997. It was passed as part of the legislation. They should have had something by way of regulation to enable you to change the software, but that was omitted, unfortunately.

Lastly, I note the progress on the implementation of my energy efficiency rating motion, which was passed in the Assembly 1 April 2009. As I have mentioned throughout my speech, I am very pleased at the progress which the government is about to make in terms of auditing energy efficiency ratings. We now have the CO(L)A framework and we have some money for energy assessors. So I am hopeful that soon a lot of the complaints will go away. It would have been a lot better had this happened a year ago. What has happened is that people have lost a degree of faith in the energy efficiency ratings because they have not been audited; so they have not always been reliable and accurate. That is a real pity.

Moving on to the second part of my motion, these are the things that I am calling upon the government to do. The first one is to require household energy efficiencies to be provided not only in the current star rating, but also as a separate expected energy use for the whole house for a year, probably in megajoules per annum, as is done with appliances.

What I am talking about here, as I mentioned earlier, is that most people think a five-star house means, "Okay, great; it will definitely use less energy." What they do not appreciate is that the five-star rating, the six-star, the zero stars, or whatever star it is, is on the basis of a rating per square metre. It is based on the building fabric—whether it has got insulation, where its windows are, its orientation. But it does not actually tell you precisely how much energy will be used, because size matters. This is something in which size actually does matter.

If you have got a five-star house which is 100 square metres compared with a five-star house which is 200 square metres, all other things being equal, you would expect the bigger house to use twice as much energy. But people do not realise that. They see

five-star, they see six-star. They think that that is the only thing that matters. You could often get the case where a big new six-star house in fact uses a lot more energy than a very old one-star house which is tiny.

I am proposing that we have a new number shown on our energy efficiency ratings for houses, just as we do when we buy our appliances. When you buy your appliance, it has got a label. It has got a star rating. Underneath it, it has “expected kilowatt hours for a year’s use”. We could have the same thing: “Expected megajoules used for a year”, which would be simply the product of the star rating—megajoules per square metre—and the square metres in the house. No additional work is required by ACTPLA to do it. It is merely a piece of mass which most people in the community would not have the resources to do or not know how to. This would be simple, cheap, easy and informative to people.

Paragraph (2)(b) proposes to expand the ACT home energy rating scheme to include a rating for fixed heating and cooling appliances, water heating and fixed lighting using a similar methodology to the New South Wales basic system. This is what they have in New South Wales. They include all these things because they make a difference to the energy use of a house. Most people do not really differentiate between the two. We need a rating for the energy for the long-lived appliances. We can do it. Washing machines have ratings for water and energy when you buy them. We can do that for houses. We can have a rating for the energy use of the house itself and we can have a rating for the heating system and the hot-water system. They come with ratings. We can provide them to the consumers.

Next, I want to amend the sale of premises act, which as I said should be 2003, to require, or at the very least permit, the use of second generation software. Software has improved since 1997. There is now what is called second generation software. But the legislation that governs this in the ACT says that you have to use old software. There is no training for that any more. You cannot get new copies of it. We can do better than this. This is one of the issues that we talked about in 2009. It should have been fixed by now. I call upon the government to actually fix this.

Another thing which I call upon the government to do is to improve the coverage of the sale of premises act so that it includes more residential dwellings. At present, basically it only includes normal household, multi-unit or single residences. I can see the point of exemptions on places like caravans or hotels. But there are two which I think should be added in: student apartments and retirement villages. There is no reason why they cannot have a rating attached. They are basically going to be built with the same sort of construction methods as single residences or multi-units, and their residents will want to know what is going on.

In paragraph (2)(e) I am calling on the government and COAG to actually implement the mandatory disclosure of residential building energy, greenhouse and water performance at the time of sale or lease. It has not happened and I note that Mr Rattenbury’s rental bill would be a good way of implementing the lease part of it.

I then ask the government to explore the use of alternative methods for physical audits of energy efficiency ratings, including the use of thermal imaging and air leakage

testing. Air leakage testing is very important. Australian buildings leak. They are not built as well as in Europe, and the plan-based EERs cannot, of course, deal with this. They assume the buildings are well-built. Thermal imaging would show up lack of insulation in the thermal bridging. I know that ACTPLA is now buying equipment, but it is only going to be used for auditing, not for ground truthing.

Paragraph (2)(f) is fairly straightforward. We need to improve so that we provide at least three cost-effective options for increased energy efficiency. In paragraph (2)(h) I advocate improved methodologies for data collection on built houses so that we have ground truthing between what the EER says and what is actually built. I will talk about more appropriate climatic data in my final speech. (*Time expired.*)

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (5.17): The government will not be supporting Ms Le Couteur's motion today. It is not because we believe energy efficiency in buildings is not important, because we do. It is not because we are not taking steps to improve energy efficiency in buildings, because we are. And it is not because we do not accept the need to see energy efficiency in buildings continue to improve to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, because we do. It is a key part of the government's response to greenhouse gas reduction targets.

But the reason we will not be supporting the motion today is that there is already extensive work being undertaken by a range of government agencies in relation to energy efficiency and building standards. Many of the issues raised by Ms Le Couteur in her very complex motion are already being done or have already been considered, and other parts of it are issues that are beyond the scope of the ACT government and relate to national measures and adoption of measures in other jurisdictions, which the government will argue is not relevant to the proceedings in this place.

In May 2010 the ACT was the first jurisdiction to fully implement the new energy efficiency standards in the building code of Australia. It should be noted that there are some states and territories where this is yet to be implemented. The ACT has also been the first jurisdiction to attempt to meaningfully and effectively apply energy efficiency standards to all building work, even those small alterations and additions that cannot reasonably meet the full performance level. Members should be aware that as well as being the first jurisdiction to introduce a mandatory disclosure scheme in March 2011, the ACT also became the first jurisdiction to commence a process of regulating energy assessors alongside other occupations in the construction industry.

The construction services branch of the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate has been allocated funding of over \$4 million in the 2011-12 financial year for the full implementation of an auditing program for energy efficiency ratings of new building work and sale of premises, the purchase of equipment to enable alternative auditing methods and an extensive education program for industry and consumers.

One of the issues that Ms Le Couteur raises is the issue of air testing of dwellings. However, at a cost of approximately \$800 to \$1,000 per dwelling, the cost of

conducting air leakage testing on a large number of dwellings is, in the government's view, currently prohibitive.

Work to continually improve and develop appropriate standards will be complemented by the work on building quality, started by my predecessor, Minister Barr, which will also address the initial construction and maintenance of the building. And it is vitally important that we make sure building quality is good at the beginning, when the building is being built, so that some of the issues that arise down the track around energy efficiency can be prevented.

In addition to this, the ACT government is a signatory to the national partnership agreement on energy efficiency. The national strategy on energy efficiency contains 37 measures, many of which relate to the performance of buildings and the practitioners involved in their design, construction and assessment. The government has committed to investigate these measures, which naturally includes appropriate analysis of their effectiveness and the impacts and potential benefits to consumers, industry, the environment and the community.

At present the strategy includes developing skills related to energy efficiency, strengthening capability in energy auditing and assessment, accelerating and expanding minimum energy performance standards and the labelling of appliances and equipment, the phasing out of a number of greenhouse intensive and inefficient products, the development of new energy standard settings, assessment and rating framework, significantly increasing the stringency of energy efficiency provisions for all classes of building under the building code of Australia and, finally, the introduction of mandatory disclosure programs in all jurisdictions.

I would like to particularly refer to measure 3.1.1, which includes many of the issues about energy assessments raised in this motion. When considering that this measure involves a fundamental review and restructure of the framework for energy standards and assessments, the time frames included in the strategy have proved to be ambitious. I would nevertheless draw to members' attention the fact that this piece of work is ongoing and every jurisdiction remains committed to resolving the residual concerns and issues relating to measuring and enforcing energy efficiency standards.

It is also worth pointing out that many of the measures in the strategy have already been implemented here in the ACT before the document was even developed. Through all of these processes, ACT representatives continue to advocate for the highest standards possible whilst also considering the economic and social impacts of any new policy. But they also advocate for standards to consider the whole building stock and building services rather than only new building work. However, regardless of what direction concerning the implementation of new programs, legislation or standards other jurisdictions take, the ACT will continue to develop and maintain measures appropriate to our goals and to meet community expectations for effective and fitting responses to environmental and regulatory issues.

Indeed, the ACT is already seen as a leader in this field. Earlier this year I had a meeting with the Hon Mark Dreyfus, who is the parliamentary secretary on energy efficiency. His first comment to me was: "You guys are doing really well. You have

got insulation standards and energy rating arrangements which are ahead of the pack.” And that is true. There is still much more to do but that is a recognition at the national level that the ACT’s performance is well ahead of other jurisdictions. But there is no reason to rest on our laurels, no reason not to do more. But it is also important to recognise where the ACT is placed. While the ACT will continue to encourage other COAG members to implement cost-effective mandatory disclosure schemes appropriate to their markets and climates, it is not the ACT’s role to call upon other governments to implement such programs, which Ms Le Couteur seems to be suggesting.

Although successive governments have committed resources to energy efficiency rating programs since 1995, given the extensive work currently being undertaken, the 2012 budget provides a step change in resources and commitment to continue to drive improvements in energy efficiency. The regulation of this sector, the assessors, the auditing of building work, the focus on building quality are all vital to drive improvements in energy efficiency and ultimately to achieve and contribute towards the government’s energy and greenhouse gas reduction targets.

So for all of those reasons, the government will not be supporting this motion today. I appreciate Ms Le Couteur’s personal passion for this subject, but I would also ask her to recognise that there are others, such as I, who have equal interest and passion in it but do not always agree on the approaches needed to get to the same place. The government will not be supporting the motion today.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.25): The opposition will not be supporting this motion either. I think it is fair to say that in the first part of Ms Le Couteur’s motion there are some reasonable points raised, some of which we agree with. There is no doubt that there is a need for improvement of the energy ratings scheme. Indeed, the opposition asked questions in relation to that during the estimates process. We asked questions of Mr Simmons in relation to that. There is no doubt that I think that the government needs to do more in looking at how it audits this scheme. We have put those concerns on the record.

We raised questions about government assessment auditors and members of the public having issues with inaccurate EERs. Of course, we took up the case of Gary Dixon during the estimates process. I think it was good that we could highlight those issues.

When we start to look to the Greens’ proposed actions, I think that is where we have a difference of opinion and a difference in approach. I think that if we are going to go down the path that Ms Le Couteur suggests, there are consequences. And we need more than just 24 hours notice of a motion to consider some of these consequences. I would have thought that a number of these things were worthy of a full debate by way of legislation. Some of this needs legislative change.

We can go to various aspects of the motion itself. It says that the government should amend the sale of premises act to require or at least permit the use of second generation software and cover additional residential premises such as those in educational institutions. If that is the view of the Greens, they are welcome to bring

back a piece of legislation to amend the sale of premises act and we would consider that. I would not rule out supporting that. We would look at the arguments.

But we are not going to agree to effectively ticking off on the amendment of legislation without having a debate about the amendment of that legislation. There is a reason why we have a process where legislation normally has at least a month for consideration after it has been introduced. I think that on a number of levels the Greens are asking the Assembly to call on the government to do something which has cost implications without actually allowing the full consideration to occur.

If we look at the issue around requiring household EERs to be provided not only as the current star rating but also with a separate expected energy use for the whole house for a year, in megajoules per annum, as is done with appliances, I think that there are serious costs associated with that. We are talking about improving the regulatory scheme. Again, if the Greens are serious about this, I think that a little more thought needs to go into it, rather than just a motion such as this which calls on the government to do a number of things. This would be binding on the government. If we were to support this, we would expect that the government would do it. We would expect that they would accept the will of the Assembly.

What consultation happened with industry on this? To my knowledge, having spoken to parts of industry in the short time that we had to consider this motion, there was not any. When you look at the housing industry, the housing industry was not asked its thoughts on this.

Then the Greens want the government to look at expanding the existing ACT home energy rating system to include a rating for fixed heating and cooling appliances, water heating and fixed lighting, using a similar methodology to the New South Wales basic system. All new appliances come with star ratings. So using basics to calculate the energy efficiency of the house may be achievable. Unfortunately, existing homes range in ages, as do the appliances within them, and achieving meaningful results at a cost-effective and cost-benefit return is questionable.

Like the government, we think there are a number of things in the body of the motion which are reasonable and we think are reasonable in terms of what Ms Le Couteur has raised. But I think that we need to get serious about these things. If you are going to call on the government to amend legislation, firstly, you should consider bringing that legislation forward yourself. It is well within the competence of Ms Le Couteur to come back to the Assembly with potential amendments to this legislation.

I think that the proposal put forward by the Greens needs much more work before it is something that we could agree to. It needs proper and thorough industry consultation so that we could turn the aspiration into a potential reality, considering all of the implications of these changes, all of the cost implications for households, all of the practical implications and whether or not these things are achievable. So for those reasons, the opposition will not be supporting the motion.

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (5.32), in reply: First I will address Mr Corbell's comments. Yes, Mr Corbell, I did say quite extensively in my speech that I do

acknowledge that the ACT, particularly with the most recent budget, has finally, I hope, adequately funded the auditing part and the compliance part of energy efficiency rating, and with the recent changes to CO(L)A. I did acknowledge, and I continue to acknowledge, that there is potential for considerable improvement in the energy efficiency rating regime over what has been the case in the ACT; I well agree with that.

What I found disappointing about Mr Corbell's speech was that he did not actually address my motion. He just spoke generally about the ACT doing good things with energy efficiency. It is doing some good things. It could do a lot more than that. I also point out that a lot of the good things it is doing are because of the influence of the Greens. He talked about the fact that we were the only jurisdiction that has the residential sale of premises act. That was Kerrie Tucker's legislation.

He talked about the fact that we were the first jurisdiction to sign up for six stars from the BCA last year. That was part of our agreement with the Labor Party. I think that the progress that we are making on energy efficiency rating is in no small part due to the Greens' presence in the ACT, and I wish to continue pushing for progress on this. I was disappointed that he did not go through the things that I was speaking about and point out why, in his opinion, or the government's opinion, they were not things worth looking at.

Mr Seselja made comments about the housing industry and the cost. I think Mr Seselja has slightly missed the point of what I was saying. I did not at any stage suggest that anyone would be required to build a higher standard of building, a different standard of building. That is not what this motion is about. This motion is about providing better information to potential consumers, to designers, to anyone who lives anywhere—so to all of us. In particular, I went through a rating for a whole house; there are no cost implications for that. We already know the size of households. They are on the building plans, and the building plans already give an energy use per square metre.

All I am suggesting is that these two numbers be multiplied together, because most people do not know that the energy rating is per square metre. They are simply in ignorance of this. It would cost us basically nothing to make it clear to people that there are two things that matter here—the size and the rating. People just do not realise it. It is the same as the washing machine example. We have an energy rating and we have the amount expected to be used per year. Or the fridge: we have different ratings for large fridges and small fridges. So the same deal happens with houses. Houses use a lot more energy than fridges, but for reasons unknown to me, we do not do our rating system as informatively for houses in many ways as we do for fridges.

I went very quickly through the last couple of points of my motion because I ran out of time, so I will say a bit more about point (h). The methodologies for data collection on built houses: this is something I have suggested that we advocate at COAG for funds for. Mr Corbell in his speech seemed to believe that the ACT does not have any role in COAG or with other states and that we should not advocate for any change; we should just look after our own borders. That is not how Australia's cooperative federalism is done. We have COAG, and it is an appropriate role for jurisdictions to

advocate at that forum and in the various ministerial councils. I think that if our ministers do not advocate there, they are bereft in their duties. This is something they should be doing.

My motion refers to advocating for funds to improve methodologies for data collection on built houses. This is something the HIA has been talking about for a long time. We need to do some more ground truthing. The energy efficiency ratings at present are done on physical simulations as to how a house will work, and hopefully they are correct, but we need to put a bit of work into comparing what you get out of an energy rating from the simulation, as we do at present, with building houses and actually seeing what they do in practice. We need some resources to do that. The HIA has been calling for that for years, and I think it would be great if the ACT was prepared to put its voice behind that.

The other thing I refer to is more appropriate climate data. We are probably all aware that the climate is changing and that there is certainly a widespread belief that climate change is happening. However, energy efficiency ratings are done on the basis of the climate in the past. Any new house we are building is going to be built for the climate in the future. Britain have undertaken an exercise of looking at the climate they expect in the future, so that they can rate their houses, design their houses—maybe that is a better way to put it—for the climate they expect the houses to be operating in, not last century's climate. That is what I am talking about here. I am not talking about higher standards; I am talking about getting it better.

What I am talking about really is that it is clear that energy efficiency ratings are now accepted. We have had a lot of stories about them in the press because people in Canberra have been very concerned that a lot of them are dodgy and wrong. And, yes, I accept that the government is doing work to improve that. But there is more to do. We can see the impact of energy efficiency ratings on pricing—three per cent extra for an additional star rating. People in Canberra know this stuff is important, and they expect us to provide the information to them in an accurate form, in a form which gives them all the information. We are not doing that for them right now.

We need to start going to the next level and look at what consumers want to know. What they want to know is: "How much energy is it going to take to run my house?" So we need what we have got at present, which is the rating per square metre. We need to do a little bit of maths to multiply the square metres with the size of the house, and we need to add on the things that make a lot of difference as well. Your heating and cooling systems and your hot-water system come with energy ratings. Okay, some of the very old ones do not, but more and more of them do. They may not still have their label on, but the commonwealth government do have a website with a huge list of all the appliances that they have been rating. What we are talking about is not hard; it is just something that would make the system a lot more workable for the people out there.

In terms of amending the sale of premises act, I should probably take up Mr Seselja's suggestion. It was something we talked about in 2009 and I thought that the government at that time said: "No, don't amend this because we're going to do it. As a part of the COAG process, we're going to do it." That was what the government

said. Unfortunately, the COAG process has stalled. The ACT should probably be advocating for more action on this, but it is not happening. Given that we now have a federal Labor and more and more state Liberal governments, I assume that COAG processes are going to be even slower than they have been.

I commend my motion to the Assembly. I fear it will not be passed but I think that we will look back and see that, yes, we did end up doing all these things and it would have been better if we had done them earlier. It would have been better from the point of view of having more comfortable houses for people in Canberra. We could have houses that are cheaper for people in Canberra to run, addressing the Liberals' big concern of cost of living pressures. We would also make a contribution to addressing the Assembly's, and in fact I believe the world's, concern about climate change. We have to improve our houses if we are going to succeed in this one in any sort of cost-effective way.

Question put:

That **Ms Le Couteur's** motion, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 4

Noes 12

Ms Bresnan
Ms Hunter
Ms Le Couteur

Mr Rattenbury

Mr Barr
Dr Bourke
Ms Burch
Mr Coe
Mr Corbell
Mr Doszpot

Mrs Dunne
Ms Gallagher
Mr Hargreaves
Ms Porter
Mr Seselja
Mr Smyth

Question so resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

Education and Training Directorate—record keeping

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (5.45): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that the Education and Training Directorate has introduced new arrangements for recording teacher attendance within the public school system;
- (b) that flawed record keeping has, by the Department's own admissions, been ongoing for some years with little or ineffective effort made by the Government to correct the anomalies;

- (c) that the Australian Education Union has lodged a petition in the Assembly critical of these new arrangements, suggesting they deflect effort by teachers away from their core responsibilities of preparing and delivering quality education in the ACT public school system by imposing more paperwork; and
 - (d) that this is poor business practice and reflects badly on the ACT public education system and places a burden on the majority for the failure of the few to fill in paperwork; and
- (2) calls on the:
- (a) Minister for Education and Training to show leadership and take control of this issue; and
 - (b) Government to meet with teachers and their representatives to discuss an acceptable compromise that meets the necessary requirements for sound record keeping, while not imposing unfair and burdensome tasks on teachers and principals within the ACT public school system.

Today we have a most interesting situation in the Assembly. In a week where we have seen the Chief Minister promise a public education system that continues to deliver outstanding results, we have one of her ministers so totally and dramatically out of touch with a major union in his portfolio that they feel their only course of action is to ask his opposition number in the Assembly to table a petition outlining their concerns.

That, I think, speaks volumes about this minister, and this government and its reputation for openness and transparency in dealing with the electorate. But for those who are familiar with Minister Barr, this is no anomaly. This is par for the course for this minister, who has been forced to do more backflips than any other minister in this Assembly—even more backflips than Minister Corbell, and that is saying something.

The most recent Barr flip occurred late last year, when Minister Barr was forced to withdraw his ridiculous and damaging education efficiency dividend decision that would have slashed services to the visually impaired, that would have slashed services to the hearing impaired, that would have cut the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literacy and numeracy program and taken out several school counsellors. He stubbornly stood by his decision to cut essential education-related services to the most vulnerable in our community. It was only after concentrated pressure over a few weeks from me and a group of distraught parents who were asking for my support that the ridiculous efficiency dividend decision was finally reversed.

This minister has form for not listening to the community. This minister has form for misleading and misrepresentation of members of this Assembly. And that form for not listening to the community is certainly magnified in this motion and the petition from the Education Union that the motion is based on. It is magnified around 1,500-fold with 1,568 signatures from ACT public school teachers, Mr Barr—it is based on 1,568 signatures from ACT public school teachers, Mr Barr, for your attention—who

are requesting that you reverse yet again one of your less than brilliant solutions to a problem and enable teachers to do their jobs, let teachers get on with teaching.

This time around, in the middle of what one might suggest is a less than cordial negotiation on pay structures, and in the context of his usual hyperbole and false hopes surrounding six-figure salaries, the minister decides that what teachers and principals need is more paperwork.

Let us be very clear on this issue. We are not suggesting or supporting poor record keeping. We are not suggesting that teachers should be any different in accountability for their attendance at their workplace. We merely ask that commonsense prevail in what should not have dragged on for years and years.

The situation is this. In the ACT Department of Education and Training teaching staff enterprise agreement 2009-11, and presumably in the previous agreement, it states: “all teachers are required to complete fortnightly attendance records for leave purposes”. For some years—in fact the department indicated it has been going on for the entire duration of the Stanhope government—this has not worked as well as it might, and some teachers in some schools have not completed their attendance sheets in the correct manner. Some forms go missing. They go missing either because they were lost somewhere in the system or because they were not submitted in the first place.

Understandably, if leave is not debited against an employee’s records when it has been taken, it creates an ongoing financial liability on the public purse. The department’s internal audit process has been critical of the mismatch of paperwork for years. However, there are processes in place to address the recurrent and recalcitrant offenders.

The enterprise agreement says that “absences not covered by approved leave will be treated as an unauthorised absence and may result in salary and/or disciplinary action in accordance with the department’s Mandatory Procedures for Managing Employee Absences”. It would appear that, for whatever reason, the minister has not chosen to implement this clause, despite, I am advised, urging by the Australian Education Union to chase the offenders if they are known and are recurrent. Instead, in an effort to correct this ongoing failure, the minister decided, strangely, to insist on more paperwork. All staff employed under the ACT teaching staff enterprise agreement must now submit fortnightly returns in a most cumbersome manner.

An example of the system adopted at one primary school is onerous to say the least. It requires downloading a form to your own computer, filling in the details, keeping an electronic copy of any absence record, completing a leave form, photocopying it, forwarding it to the school’s front office, and attaching it to the fortnightly absence record for the team leader. On even weeks you give your form, with a copy of the leave form attached if leave was taken, to your team leader during the team meetings. If there are no team meetings, you have to make arrangements to give the form to your team leader before the close of business. Then there is a raft of processes for the team leader, who has to pass the forms to the principal, who then is required to keep the files for two years.

The union and its members are understandably angry about this. They have argued that the whole profession is being punished because of the transgressions of a few. But of course—I forgot—it is not the minister's fault! Just as he claimed the efficiency dividend idea was the responsibility of his department, this new attendance record has been adopted because his department told him to do it. Let me quote from the letter that Ms Penny Gilmour from the Australian Education Union, ACT branch, wrote to the minister. She says:

Since the first mention of this process, AEU officers have strongly and repeatedly expressed concern over how this additional compliance procedure would operate in schools. We foresaw a situation where supervising teachers would be distracted from their core business of teaching and educational leadership.

Ms Gilmour goes on to list their concerns. Firstly, she said, it creates administrative work for teachers when we should be working to reduce it. She said that supervising teachers now spend considerable time chasing up missing absence records, particularly in schools with large numbers of staff and/or offices with flexible or part-time working arrangements. There is a table attached to her letter which looks even more complicated than the extract I described earlier. Secondly, she said, the extra workload is significant. Ms Gilmour argues that a teacher with a perfect record of leave form submission is now spending additional time each fortnight performing a task they were previously not required to perform, with no discernible benefit for the department of education.

Principals in larger schools have told the Australian Education Union that this process has increased their workload by an average of 40 minutes per fortnight, as they cross-check, sign off and follow up paperwork. At one school an administrative officer supplements this extra teacher work by spending up to five hours per fortnight following through on the process. Ms Gilmour also suggested that the new arrangements duplicated work and relied on computer access by all teachers, which is not always easy; and that clearly the environment was of little concern, with so much paperwork.

Ms Gilmour also said there was a lack of clarity. Teachers are now not sure whether they are required to submit fortnightly absence records during stand-down or annual leave periods.

Ms Gilmour also made the point that it undermined professional trust. This is probably one of the most jackboot consequences of this; and, sadly, I doubt whether the minister is even the slightest bit aware that he may have offended the professional integrity of his teaching community. And as unaware as he might be, he would care even less. As Ms Gilmour says, teachers understandably see this as the equivalent of an entire class of students being punished due to the poor behaviour of a few.

Her last point, that it is unclear how this will address recalcitrance, is the most telling. Again I quote Ms Gilmour: "There is something ironic about trying to fix a problem of missing forms by requesting more forms." And indeed, what does happen to the few that remain unwilling to fill in these forms? If they have previously refused to fill

in forms, what is so different now? Or is it simply a case of being seen to be enforcing accountability, not actually achieving accountability?

Ms Gilmour's letter had a number of genuine concerns, delivered on behalf of teachers within the ACT public education system. But in case anyone believes that this is just the unions developing an issue for whatever reason, let me quote from a letter I received, quite unsolicited, from a teacher earlier this week. Her complaints are wide ranging, but in respect of the teacher absence record keeping issue she says:

I am tired of reporting things twice. As a college teacher I am required to mark rolls twice, once on a paper record and then again electronically. Now I am required to complete an absence form each fortnight which records again, any absence I have recorded on a leave form. As these absence forms are to be kept in schools for 2 years how can this improve record keeping? This just increases our workload.

The minister's reply to Ms Gilmour is almost dismissive and certainly not conciliatory. In five brief paragraphs he makes a number of claims and—why am I not surprised?—I am advised that much of what he says is wrong. The minister says that the absence record was developed in consultation with the AEU. That is not how the AEU see it. They suggest they were told what was to happen, and it was trialled. They highlighted the anomalies and said it would not work. The pilot became a permanent process. Some consultation, Mr Barr! But then again we are used to that. Why would anyone expect any better? This minister has form for calling this consultation.

The minister suggests that there were 1,600 officers, approximately one-third of the directorate's workforce, with discrepancies between leave taken and leave processed. The AEU disputes these figures and I am in no position to verify that. However, while I will not dispute the number of teachers supposedly found to be in breach, one has to ask: why have the department and its minister known or believed that over a third of the teaching force is in breach of the enterprise agreement, and known for six years or more, and done nothing—not a thing? This was all on your watch, Mr Barr. The minister admits to similar findings in the 2005 and 2006 audit years, so yes, I guess you can point the finger slightly to those before you. What on earth have you been doing, minister? And if the problem has been known about for so long, why is the only solution now yet more paperwork that clearly is set up to fail? It makes no sense. There is an old saying that goes: do what you always do and you will get what you always got. Surely this is what is happening here and likely to continue unless something changes.

There are better alternatives. A cursory look at other jurisdictions suggests a range of electronic systems that appear to have little of the flaws and complexity being rammed through schools in the ACT. In the Catholic education sector here in the ACT, some schools have a fully integrated electronic system that to all intents and purposes has the support of the teaching staff and delivers the necessary due diligence required in any efficient personnel record system. Didn't anyone bother to look at other alternatives? It is not rocket science. It just takes sensible dialogue and sensible listening skills. The minister would do well to take heed of the words of the 19th century US Chief Justice John Marshall, who said:

To listen well is as powerful a means of communication and influence as to talk well.

Mr Barr, no doubt you do talk well, but it is about time you started listening. Minister, stop hiding behind the protection of your department. Stop blaming them for your poor judgement and even poorer ability to communicate.

What we have here, minister, is a case of administrative failure, and a ministerial solution that simply replicates and enhances the existing flaws. I urge you, Mr Barr, to listen to the teachers and let the teachers get on with teaching. I commend this motion to the Assembly and I urge all members to see this motion for what it is: a genuine attempt to get a sensible resolution to an absurd situation. I seek your support accordingly.

At 6 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 BARR (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Education and Training and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (6.00): I think the only thing that Mr Doszpot and I will agree on is how absurd this discussion is.

The Education and Training Directorate introduced fortnightly absence records for teachers and school assistants in our public schools this year. As Mr Doszpot has indicated, the absence record was introduced following successive internal audits that revealed a significant discrepancy between leave taken and leave processed.

Clause 198 of the ACT Department of Education and Training teaching staff enterprise agreement 2009-11 states the following at part 198.1:

Teachers other than managers or equivalent are required to record daily attendance using the appropriate approved format and a hard copy retained for a period of two years.

And at part 198.2:

The teacher is responsible for ensuring their attendance record is accurate, and that all appropriate leave applications are submitted in accordance with clause 199.

The introduction of the absence record is consistent with clause 199.2 of the enterprise agreement, which states:

... all teachers are required to complete fortnightly attendance records for leave purposes.

These statements are in a binding industrial agreement and are unequivocal.

As I mentioned, several successive internal audits have shown significant discrepancies between leave taken and leave processed for teachers. So far from the “flawed record keeping” referred to in Mr Doszpot’s motion, sound record keeping systems have allowed this discrepancy to be identified and corrected. As a result of the audit, the directorate’s independently chaired audit committee instructed the human resources branch to develop a system-wide individual accountability mechanism for teacher and school assistant absences. It is worth noting that such mechanisms exist in all other ACT public service directorates.

In a further error in Mr Doszpot’s motion, he refers to “new arrangements for recording teacher attendance within the public school system”. The new absence record does not record teacher attendance. Teacher attendance is recorded at the school level and always has been.

The absence record was developed following an audit of the 2007-08 calendar years—an audit of those years, Mr Speaker. The audit found that approximately one-third of the directorate’s school teaching workforce, or around 1,600 teachers, had a discrepancy between leave taken and leave processed. This resulted in an approximate leave liability cost to the department of \$2.4 million. The audit confirmed that there had been little change from the previous audit conducted on leave taken and leave processed in the 2005-06 financial year.

As a result of that 2005-06 audit, the *Mandatory procedures for managing employee absence* and the *Best practice guidelines for managing employee absence in schools* were published in 2006. Whilst these publications assisted schools to deal with the non-submission of leave forms, they did not provide a system-wide mechanism of individual accountability. The new absence record fills this accountability gap.

Let me make this very clear: the absence record has been developed in accordance with the enterprise agreement provisions and in consultation with the AEU. It has been piloted across 10 schools over two terms prior to its introduction. Significant changes were made to the form as a result of the initial pilot in term 4 of 2010 and very little comment was received from the second pilot in term 1 of 2011.

The impact on individual workload in completing the absence record is insignificant. In a fortnight where no leave has been taken, it should take less than 10 seconds for a staff member to tick and sign the record and a similar time for a supervisor to do the same. Even when significant and complex leave has been taken, the time for the teacher and supervisor to complete the absence record would be no more than a couple of minutes. The form that teachers fill in is simple. If you have not taken any leave, tick the box. If you have taken leave, fill in the time and the dates. This is a quick process that will ensure accuracy and, importantly, save ACT taxpayers millions of dollars, and ensure the smoother running of schools.

Mr Doszpot states that the absence record “is poor business practice and reflects badly on the public education system and places a burden on the majority for the failure of a few to fill in paperwork”. I submit that the introduction of an absence record is in fact sound business practice. I submit that it supports the ACT public education system

and that it protects all teachers and supervisors in situations where forms have been submitted but not processed.

Constructive feedback continues to be received on the absence record. I can advise that the directorate will continue to work with schools and the AEU to develop the most effective and efficient mechanism to ensure leave compliance. As Mr Doszpot alluded, in the next 12 months this will include the electronic submission of leave forms from staff in schools.

I need to be very clear about this. Regardless of political pressure from Mr Doszpot, the core question here is about individual accountability and about saving money for the ACT taxpayer. And if that means that the AEU are inconvenienced, tough luck.

I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit subparagraphs (1)(a) to (d), substitute:

- “(a) that the Internal Audit Committee of the Education and Training Directorate in 2009-2010 expressed serious concerns about the failure of supervisors to manage leave and strongly recommended that appropriate corrective action be taken;
- (b) during the 2007-2008 financial year, 1600 officers (one-third of the Directorate’s workforce) had discrepancies between leave taken and leave processed, at an approximate cost to the Government of \$2.4 million;
- (c) the ACT Government recognises the importance of having an effective and accountable leave record system for ACT teaching staff;
- (d) that the Education and Training Directorate has introduced new arrangements for recording teacher attendance, within the public school system; and
- (e) that the Australian Education Union has lodged a petition in the Assembly critical of these new arrangements, suggesting they deflect effort by teachers away from their core responsibilities of preparing and delivering quality education in the ACT public school system by imposing more paperwork; and”.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (6.07): We listen to Mr Barr in this place and he is often very convincing on just how much the government is doing to improve education across the territory, enhance the careers of teachers and being committed to high quality outcomes and principles of best practice. So I guess it is concerning when we do hear from front-line teachers who feel that they are currently being unnecessarily burdened with ineffective paperwork.

The Greens support a well-resourced, high quality public education system that empowers front-line teachers in their role as educators, and we do hope that Mr Barr will be able to assist in achieving a successful resolution to this human resource process in the Education and Training Directorate that teachers say they are finding burdensome.

The AEU has provided a reasonable account on behalf of their members. They report that their members respect accountability but are demanding efficiency in human resource practices. To that end, a motion in this place has been brought by Mr Doszpot. We have heard that it is taking valuable resources in staff time, and we do need to make sure that we are on top of this issue with respect to how much time it is taking in schools.

Initially, one might say that this is quite a minor matter to bring forward as a motion and, when you look at it, it does seem to be a minor administrative matter. But we do understand that there are a significant number of teachers who have signed a petition to say that it is impacting on them and therefore we do believe that this issue needs to be addressed.

I agree with the minister and the Australian Education Union that it is very important that leave forms be submitted by teachers who are absent and that they are done in a timely manner. After all, as the Education Union states, it is a requirement for teachers under the current enterprise agreement to furnish leave forms. One of the subclauses clearly states that “absences not covered by approved leave will be treated as an unauthorised absence and may result in salary and/or disciplinary action”. This is a basic industrial relations issue that the vast majority of us would understand.

It does, however, seem to be a little absurd to burden all teachers across the system with filling out a form when they have not taken leave. The Greens are concerned that front-line teachers have an increased impost placed upon them due to what could be seen as an inefficient system or definitely a system that needs streamlining and that this could be seen as a waste of their time and really taking away some of that time from their primary role of being the teachers of young people and children.

I acknowledge that there is a serious side to this. An audit was conducted to match leave taken and the forms required with a staff member’s recorded leave entries. This audit investigated a two-year period and it found that 1,600 Department of Education and Training officers apparently had discrepancies between leave taken and leave processed. I acknowledge that this accounts for one-third of the workforce and that it translated into a cost of approximately \$2.4 million for the Department of Education and Training. I understand that the Education Union does not agree with these figures, but waste of a magnitude anywhere near this should be of some concern.

I am sure the Assembly would be united in its support of the minister and the department for recognising that it is important to ensure that we do not waste taxpayer funds, particularly in the areas around staff entitlements. So in this case, when leave taken is not recorded, we need to ensure that we have accurate and proper records. Surely, there is a much better way to deal with the issue than making all teachers submit forms every fortnight even when they do not take leave. To me, it would seem that the view of at least half of the union’s membership, the 1,500 who have signed the petition, is that there is a better way and that the directorate should be looking at a better way.

Whilst I understand that the union were involved in discussions regarding leave form compliance, and even the trialling of a new scheme, I understand that with regard to the one currently in place they have raised concerns with the directorate on many

occasions and then in frustration they finally sought intervention from Minister Barr on 12 May this year. The minister did not intervene in this matter and I believe it is now time to get it sorted out.

The Greens understand that it is unreasonable for a minister to micro-manage their department. That would be a ridiculous situation to be in. In saying that, there does need to be a commitment to an outcome and we would urge the minister to ensure that there is a resolution to this matter. That is why the Greens will be putting forward amendments in order to achieve that.

In 2011 there simply must be a more efficient method to record the absences of teachers, just like there are more effective techniques to determine particular officers that are failing to comply, without punishing an entire workforce by making them fill out unnecessary forms, which, as I said, can make them feel like they are drowning in paperwork.

While the figure of 1,600 discrepancies seems quite high, it is important to note that with a complex and inefficient system many of these discrepancies may be of a genuine nature and not from officers intentionally failing to submit a leave form. On the other hand it should be understood, if anyone has ever worked in a workplace and has been a manager and has needed their staff to fill in timesheets, that not every staff member is as diligent as some others and that it does take time for managers to be able to chase those up. Having run an organisation myself, I know of that battle sometimes where you do have people who are regular as clockwork and then you have people who are not as regular in that sense and who really do need a little bit of encouragement to get their timesheets in.

At the end of the day we do need to keep records. It is about accountability and it is about finding a system that the vast majority of the workforce can comply with, to ensure that accountability is met and that at the same time we do not burden those on the front line with a system that they find difficult to comply with. So the amendments that I am putting forward today will go to the heart of how we can move forward on this issue and get it sorted out.

We need to be supporting our teachers. We know that it is important to ensure that there is high morale throughout schools. We need to hold on to that workforce. There are some very dedicated teachers across our system. There are some new things in the budget that Mr Barr has spoken about in the last day or so that are also about reflecting the importance of and value that teachers bring to our system and how they need to be rewarded for that.

It is always important to be looking at it, from the very small things to the larger things—the teacher quality institute, ways to be able to give six-figure salaries to those who have shown their capability, their ability, their dedication to being great teachers. We do need to be looking, as I said, from the small, the administrative, through to the professional development areas and make sure that we have in place good supports, good systems, that are going to support our teachers to get a good outcome.

At the end of the day, on this issue we have a petition that has highlighted that there is an administrative issue. I am sure the minister can oversee a good resolution here. On the other side, though, we need to understand that all workers do have obligations in the workforce, whether it is on occupational health and safety and reporting those matters to ensure that everyone is safe in the workplace, through to filling out some forms.

As I said, in the workplaces that I have managed over the years and that I have been part of, putting in a fortnightly timesheet is a pretty standard thing in most, if not all, workplaces in every city, every town and every neighbourhood. Unfortunately, there is red tape and there are forms to fill out. But we need to ensure that accountability. It is also about protection of workers' rights, so that you can have a clear record of when you have taken leave and when you have not taken leave and so that there is no dispute at the end of the day about what your leave entitlement is. I move the amendment that has been circulated in my name:

Omit subparagraph (1)(b).

This is an amendment to Mr Barr's amendment. It takes out (1)(b), which is the part of Mr Barr's amendment that talks about the audit and the 1,600 staff that have been involved—the findings of that audit process. It removes that from that part of Mr Barr's amendment. I believe that has been agreed to. I mentioned it in my speech; I think Mr Barr mentioned it in his speech. I hope that I get support for it.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Education and Training and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (6.18): I thank Ms Hunter for perhaps a more balanced assessment of this situation.

I am prepared, and the government is prepared, to accept her two amendments. Obviously, I have raised the issue of the evidence before me as minister in relation to the internal audit committee and the work that that committee has undertaken in my directorate. That is the evidence I have before me.

I will make two very quick observations. The first is that, in the midst of an EBA process, these sorts of issues will seek to be ventilated at the highest levels, and I am not surprised by this. It is fairly standard practice in transacting enterprise bargaining agreements. There is a line from *The West Wing* that might apply here. There are some things where you do not want to see how they are made: laws, sausages and enterprise bargaining agreements. I suspect there would be three things that you would put on that list. But it comes as no surprise that these issues have been raised at this time and in this way.

Again, if Mr Doszpot ever had the benefit of experience in a ministerial role with some responsibility and some accountability in terms of taxpayers' money, he may be more forgiving of the position that I have adopted in this instance. But no; instead he decided to spend most of his time in this debate focusing on my character. That is all well and good; good luck to him. But the issue of substance ultimately is about

accountability for taxpayers' money, and I think Ms Hunter was right in making the observations that she did towards the end of her speech. The other point that needs to be raised is that it is a difficult process to manage for the directorate and for the—

Mrs Dunne: That is what they get paid the big bucks for.

MR BARR: Indeed; that is what they get paid for, Mrs Dunne. With respect to the suggestion that every time the Education Union does not like a decision of management they should come to me and I will overturn that decision, I am not prepared to stand in this place and cop emotion from Mr Doszpot, because he immediately backs the union every time, without any regard for the issue or the difficulties associated or the bigger picture. I think that is an important point to make in this context. Every time there is a political intervention in an essentially administrative matter, it goes to undermine the capacity of the people who we trust and pay more than what we all get paid to manage these issues. It undermines their capacity to run an education system.

I have a very dim view of a failure of an industrial advocate to be able to negotiate with the management—in this instance with the administrative unit responsible for human resources within the education directorate. To give the impression that every time there is a failure at a particular point to reach agreement on an outcome the minister will intervene and resolve the matter for the union, I do not think that is good practice, and I have indicated that to the AEU.

My preference is to see these issues discussed and that it not be the first point of call to think that the minister will fix everything. There is too much of this sort of behaviour and I think it is rewarded by this sort of debate in the chamber this afternoon. If this is the path Mr Doszpot chooses to go down, that is fine; that is his business. But I will not be deterred from my view that this matter should appropriately be resolved between the education directorate and the Australian Education Union in accordance with the enterprise bargaining arrangements and the EBA that is currently in place and, of course, the one that is currently being negotiated. If Mr Doszpot is not smart enough to cotton on to that then I think he should sharpen up.

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (6.23): I rise to speak very briefly on just a couple of points that need to be made. I thank Ms Hunter for her comments and I do agree with both amendments. A small comment I would like to make is that the second amendment to my motion, which I will agree with, basically would work if we simply omitted part one of the motion. But I am happy to go the way you have suggested we go and I do accept your amendment.

I would like to make very clear to Mr Barr that the only reason we have had to have this debate in this chamber was his lack of ability to communicate with his constituency. Fifteen hundred teachers have come to me to put the motion that they suggested, that they were not being listened to. And that is the reason, Mr Barr. It is not my choice to do this. This was your choice, to not communicate with the people to ensure that the department and the union were able to reach a fair compromise that would suit both parties.

I want to be very clear on this: we have never suggested or supported poor record keeping. We are not suggesting that teachers should be any different in accountability for their attendance at their workplace. We are simply asking that common sense prevail and that this should not have dragged on for years. Why was this not attended to when you first became aware of it in 2007, Mr Barr? That was a long time ago. To have this problem—

Mr Barr: No, it was an audit of that financial year conducted more recently than that, Mr Doszpot.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Barr.

MR DOSZPOT: The audit that is referred to by you and the union is a 2007 audit that—

Mr Barr: The 2007-08 financial year, conducted afterwards.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Barr, thank you.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you, Mr Barr.

Mr Barr: You cannot conduct an audit in the year before it is finished, Mr Doszpot.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Barr, I have asked you. Do not force me.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you, Mr Barr. I guess we could go back to 2005 as well and you will say the same thing there. But that was not your fault, of course. That was somebody else's. I understand that.

Mr Speaker, I am not quite sure what the protocol should be here. Do we accept both amendments?

MR SPEAKER: No. We will just take the one, Mr Doszpot. We will come to the other in a moment.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you.

Ms Hunter's amendment to **Mr Barr's** amendment agreed to.

Mr Barr's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (6.26), by leave: I move:

Omit paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) calls on the Government to meet with teachers and their representatives to discuss an acceptable compromise that meets the necessary requirements for sound record keeping, while not imposing unfair and burdensome tasks on teachers and principals within the ACT public school system.”.

This amendment is, I guess, asking the government to get on and find a resolution to this. I think we have gone over a number of the issues that have come up here this afternoon. I do say that I hope Minister Barr will ensure that key stakeholders find a solution to this particular issue. I think I have made it quite clear that there does need to be some record keeping. There does need to be some system in place. We just need to find a way through that is going to ensure that that happens but at the same time we are not taking away valuable time that could be spent on educating our children.

So it really is a matter of balancing it, sorting through and finding the best way forward. And that is what part of this amendment is about. It really is taking from Mr Doszpot's motion that part where I think Mr Doszpot wanted the minister to get involved. I have already made it clear, in my earlier speech, that it is just not appropriate for a minister to be micromanaging in that way. A department is there; it has a role. We also cannot undermine who is involved in these processes, but of course we need to ensure the best outcome at the end of the day.

So what I have put forward picks up on part of what Mr Doszpot had called for, and that was around government meeting with teachers and their representatives about discussing an acceptable compromise that, on the one hand, met the necessary requirements for sound record keeping and, on the other, was not imposing unfair and burdensome tasks on teachers and principals. Therefore I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Mr Barr**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Public education awards

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (6.29): This is the first opportunity I have had to publicly applaud some great teachers and support staff in the ACT education system who were recently recognised at the 2011 public education awards on Friday, 27 May 2011. The annual public education awards recognise teachers and support staff who have given outstanding service to the development and promotion of excellence in public education. This year's finalists could have all easily been the ultimate winners in their category, and I congratulate everyone who was nominated.

Eleven categories across all public sectors are covered. The winners were: the primary principal of the year was Ms Liz Wallace, Isabella Plains early childhood school, for her vision, passion and commitment to the early childhood model of education that has established Isabella Plains early childhood school as a thriving, vibrant and happy environment for students and their families.

The secondary principal of the year was Ms Beth Mitchell at Dickson college. I visited Dickson college just a couple of weeks ago and I fully agree with the citation behind her winning nomination for being a visionary and inspirational leader who provides outstanding instructional leadership and embodies the Dickson college values of excellence, opportunity and community.

Primary teacher of the year was Ms Glynis Steward from Florey primary for her expertise and passion in inspiring students, colleagues and parents to learn and achieve and for being more than you expect in one teacher.

Secondary teacher of the year was Ms Caitlin Hanby, Connect10 northern at UC senior secondary college, Lake Ginninderra, for changing the lives of students and inspiring her fellow teachers by being the driving force behind the outstanding success of the Connect 10 northern program.

School hero was Ms Natalie Roberts from Amaroo school for her achievements in making Amaroo school a place where students want to come to school and whereby they and their families enjoy themselves, feel successful and are proud to belong.

The outstanding education support award went to Ms Kaye Browning from Kaleen primary for inspiring students to believe in themselves, for expertise in supporting teachers and for her enthusiastic contributions to the Kaleen primary school community.

The outstanding leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education award went to Mr Lyle Swan, Telopea Park and other schools, for inspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to achieve academic success and embrace their cultural identity, inspiring parents to engage with their child's education and the school community and being a role model to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education staff.

Outstanding new educator was Ms Arilia King from Amaroo school for her achievements in early childhood education, her inclusive and collaborative approach to student learning and for being an outstanding role model.

The Australian Education Union public education award went to Mr Tom Greenwell from Dickson college for his commitment to public education through establishing CLIO, a highly successful online history journal for students, and for being active in forming Funding Real Equity in Education, a group of Australian teachers, parents and citizens who lobby for a fair deal for public education.

The public vocational education and training teacher award went to Ms Melissa Dinn for her inspirational work as a mentor and teacher at CIT Centre for Health, Community and Wellbeing. As a mentor and work colleague, Melissa inspires others through her day-to-day work. Her passionate and engaging approach to teaching and learning embodies the finest qualities of public education.

The public vocational education and training education support award went to Ms Amy Holland for her consistent professionalism and exceptional customer service.

Her mastery of technology and her patient, calm demeanour have seen her as instrumental in enabling staff and students to use learning to maximum effect.

I congratulate them all and urge them all to continue to make the great contributions they make to current and future students in the ACT.

St Thomas Aquinas primary school
St John the Apostle primary school
Burgmann Anglican school
St Matthew's primary school
St Michael's primary school

MR COE (Ginninderra) (6.33): I rise this evening to acknowledge a number of schools I have had the pleasure of visiting in the last month or two. On Friday, 13 May I was pleased to attend the official opening and blessing of the refurbished school facilities at St Thomas Aquinas primary school in west Belconnen. The vision of the school is as follows:

To encourage the growth of each person through friendship with Jesus.

At St Thomas Aquinas we live out our Vision in four main ways—through Faith, People, Education and Innovation.

I have had the privilege of visiting St Thomas Aquinas on a couple of occasions and in each instance I have been very impressed by the warm welcome and strong sense of community and their commitment to living out that vision. St Thomas Aquinas is very well known in the west Belconnen community for working with the Charnwood-Dunlop school, the Ginninderra Scouts, the Christian Life Centre and others to organise the Charny Carny each year.

Those gathered at the opening heard from the school's principal, John Bourke, and assistant principal, Michael Bradley. Moira Najdecki, the director of the Catholic Education Office, and June Edwards, the director of the Early Learning Centre, also addressed the school community and other guests.

On 27 May I was pleased to attend the blessing and official opening of the refurbished buildings at St John the Apostle primary school in Florey. The school is led by principal, Helen Currie, and assistant principal, Sharon Sams. They are assisted by the coordinators, Josh Downie and Samantha Mance. I would like to also make mention of Tricia Johnson who is a chaplain at St John the Apostle and St Thomas Aquinas primary schools and certainly has her work cut out for her in remembering the names of the staff, students and families at the two schools.

The construction work that has been undertaken at the school is quite remarkable. I have been informed that it has made a tremendous impact on the effectiveness of the classrooms as learning spaces. Having had a tour, it really is a special space. Almost every aspect of the site has been improved by the building works and has, in effect, brought the different parts of the school closer together. Such significant changes were not without considerable sacrifice during construction and I commend the entire school community for their patience during the building works.

I had the pleasure on 10 June to attend the opening of the Burgmann Anglican school year 2 and middle school buildings and multipurpose hall at the Forde campus. Burgmann is an independent school with two campuses. The school opened in 1999, with 24 students in two classes, and has grown significantly to approximately 1,480 students. The valley campus provides early childhood education as well as a junior and senior school. The Forde campus, opened in 2009, now provides early childhood education and the middle school.

As I noted in a speech last March, there is a misconception about private schooling that only children of wealthy families attend non-government schools. Regardless of the family's income, the decision to send a child to a non-government school requires sacrifice. Unlike government schools which benefit to a greater extent from the stability, resources and administrative support of a government department, non-government schools are self-reliant when it comes to administration and corporate knowledge. However, it is this self-determination alongside active family involvement which has helped bring about the ongoing success of the schools.

I would like to extend my thanks to the principal, Steven Bowers, deputy principals, Chris French and Kerrie Wilde, and Bev Galloway, head of the junior school, and Wendy Hegarty, head of the early learning school. And I note that Paul Browning, the founding principal, was also in attendance at the opening.

I would like to mention the dedication and hard work of many parents, volunteers, students and teachers who put so much effort into the St Matthew's primary school walkathon and cross-country carnival which was held at the Stromlo Forest Park on 6 May. I had the privilege of working on the barbecue that morning. I understand that more than \$15,000 was raised, which is an amazing achievement for the school community.

In fact, I understand that if a certain amount of money was reached, teachers would be wearing their pyjamas to school on Monday. I am not sure that actually eventuated but I do believe the target was met. On that, I doubt politicians wearing pyjamas would motivate citizens to pay more taxes. Besides, I am convinced that individuals and community groups such as schools can spend money more effectively and efficiently than a government ever could. So we should not be seeking to raise more money anyway.

I very much enjoyed the cross-country-athon and commend the principal, Brenda Foley, and primary coordinator, Paul Cerce. I also commend the parents who made the day possible.

I would like to put on the record my thanks to the St Michael's primary school community for the wonderful breakfast they hosted during Catholic Schools Week. I commend the principal, Judy Walsh, Father Peter and the teaching staff who do a superb job. The breakfast is a wonderful opportunity to showcase the school and demonstrate the philosophy. I would like to commend the members of the community council, including Nicole Dwight, Maree Tuohy, Father Peter, Judy Walsh, Susan Alison, Jacinta Foster, Dan O'Meara, Jodie Clarke, Val Ciuffetelli, Jenny Rixon, Andrew Welsh, Louise Amos, Susan Anderson, Di Nagel and Matthew Lyddiard.

**Sri Lanka—Tamils
Asylum seekers—Malaysian solution**

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (6.38): I will speak briefly on a couple of matters. Firstly, a matter I have spoken about on a number of occasions in the chamber during the adjournment debate is the situation in Sri Lanka, particularly in relation to the Tamil population. I want to provide an update. This is something which has been investigated by a United Nations panel of experts. During the 17th session of the Human Rights Council taking place in Geneva, footage of an execution video obtained by Channel 4 News in the UK was analysed by the UN Special Rapporteur on Extra-judicial Killings, Christof Heyns, who stated that this evidence amounted to a definitive war crime.

The UN panel's report published in April 2011 states that tens of thousands of innocent civilians lost their lives during the final months of Sri Lanka's civil war in 2009. The panel's recommendation to the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, was to immediately proceed to establish an independent international accountability mechanism in Sri Lanka. An accountability for crimes against humanity is a duty under international law and, as has been pointed out by a number of organisations, it is unlikely that a proper process of accountability will be forthcoming from within Sri Lanka, as the process undertaken by the Sri Lankan government had been dismissed as flawed by the UN report. Obviously this is an ongoing issue and it is something that I think all members of parliament should be keeping a watch on, particularly for the Tamil community here in the ACT.

I would also like to speak briefly in favour of a motion that was brought before the House of Representatives by Greens MP Adam Bandt regarding the Malaysian asylum seeker proposal that has been put forward by the Australian government. This motion was also passed in the Senate. So it is a motion that has been passed in both houses of parliament and supported, I will note, by the Liberal Party federally. The motion that was moved by Adam Bandt on 30 May 2011 was:

That this House:

- (1) condemns the Gillard Government's deal with Malaysia that would see 800 asylum seekers intercepted in Australian waters and sent to Malaysia, and
- (2) calls on the Government to immediately abandon this proposal.

This is something, I believe, that all parliamentarians should be supporting. We know that a significant issue with Malaysia is that it is not a signatory to the human rights convention, which obviously impacts on the treatment that asylum seekers would receive in that country. I would call on all Labor members also to be lobbying the government to abandon this solution, to adopt a solution which is based on human rights principles and is about protecting the human rights of asylum seekers.

On that matter, I would just note that there was a program on SBS last night and is on tonight and tomorrow night about the plight of refugees and asylum seekers. I would

encourage everybody to watch it, because one of the places they will be visiting in this documentary is Malaysia. And I think it will be quite informative for everyone to see the situation that asylum seekers and refugees face in these countries and would hopefully inform people's views on this particular issue.

International Men's Health Week

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (6.42): Last week I attended two functions being held during International Men's Health Week. I visited the Men's Shed in Tuggeranong with Australia's first bloke, Tim Mathieson, and Minister Joy Burch. I then opened a conference on this topic the next day. International Men's Health Week is an opportunity to strengthen our efforts to improve men's health in the ACT. This is important because, put simply, blokes are often not good at looking after their health.

Last year the commonwealth launched the national male health plan 2010. I am proud that Australia is one of the handful of countries in the world to have a male health plan. And I am impressed that the term "male" was chosen rather than "men" because I think we really need a cradle-up approach.

For example, 25 per cent of Australian boys are overweight or obese. And we know that excess bodyweight is associated with increased cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes. Over half of all males 14 years and over are consuming alcohol on either a daily or weekly basis. And we know that excessive alcohol use is a major risk factor for mental health disorders, violence and accidents.

Male health is not just about prostate and testicular cancer. There are clear differences in how males deal with health issues and how they use health services. Males make the least use of preventive and health promotion services. Many males only present in acute situations or after long periods of persuasive encouragement from their partners or family. In my 30 years in clinical dentistry, this difference was very clear. Men would often present later, with more advanced disease, and then choose less than ideal outcomes.

Males generally experience poorer health than women. Males have higher rates of exposure to risk factors such as smoking, substance abuse, physical inactivity and poor nutrition. Only five per cent of men consume sufficient fruit and vegetables. Two-thirds of men are overweight or obese. Poverty, unemployment and less education are significant factors—the social determinants of health.

In remote and rural Australia where I have been working this year, males have poorer health. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males and those from non-English speaking backgrounds are more vulnerable. The life expectancy of Aboriginal men is 17 years less than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

Chronic stress and serious life stresses like family breakdown and social isolation also have their impact. Nearly half the male population will have a mental health condition at some time during their life.

Changes need to occur both within the health system and other sectors to make it easier for blokes to recognise when they might need help, to think it is okay to get help and for that help to be delivered in a way that affirms their masculinity and encourages them to get help earlier rather than later. The workplace can be important here. Workforce health promotion programs have been shown to offer enormous potential benefits for men. Recent research into blue collar workers in Canberra found that 84 per cent of these men had two or more of the risk factors that significantly contribute to poor mental health and poor physical health.

OzHelp and Manteena are two organisations which are doing commendable work in the area of men's health promotion in the building industry and with apprentices. The tradies tune-up, an onsite physical and mental health check-up, is one example of that. ACT Health has also funded male health services through Menslink, Gugan Gulwan and the Northside Community Service Majura Men's Group.

Most of us want to be mentally and physically strong and be able to contribute to the wellbeing of our families and community in a substantial way. The costs of ignoring male health issues are just too great.

Royal Military College Duntroon

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (6.47): On 11 June I attended a very special occasion, the Trooping the Queen's Colour and the Freedom of Entry to the City of Canberra, on the 100th anniversary of the Royal Military College Duntroon. The event was also attended by Mr Brendan Smyth, a former staff cadet, and the Chief Minister, who had official duties to perform on that day.

It was a fantastic parade on a bitterly cold winter's day, but the corps looked absolutely resplendent, with the band there on the foreshore of the lake, against the backdrop of the lake and the special buildings such as the High Court and the library. It really was a magnificent view. The drill on the day was as good as I have ever seen.

I would like to note the attendance at the parade of Major General Gerard Fogarty, who has recently been promoted—I congratulate him; he was accompanied by his son Sam—and also Major General John Caligari and Mrs Caligari.

For those that may be unaware of the Trooping the Colour parade, the colours of a unit or regiment embody the history, the spirit and the traditions to which they belong. They are highly valued, carefully guarded and treated with great respect. The custom of carrying colours has its origin in ancient and medieval times when, during battle, warring factions carried flags bearing family badges or bearings to show the positions of commanders and to serve as rallying points.

The Queen's Colour was trooped for the first time on the Queen's birthday parade in 1956 and has occurred every year since then. I would note that Staff Cadet Hanson was on parade in 1986 and 1987. I am not sure that my drill was as good as those that I saw on the 11th, but that remains another story.

The tradition of freedom of entry to a city dates back to a custom observed by British regiments as they marched through the city of London. The granting of freedom of entry allows a unit to march through a city or a shire with its bayonets fixed, its colours flying and music playing, after a formal challenge has been offered by the relevant officials which has been responded to by a unit's commanding officer.

With regard to the unit's commanding officer and the commandant, I would like to thank the Commandant of the Royal Military College, Brigadier David Luhrs CSC, for hosting the event, and all of those on parade, including the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Jason Hedges CSC, the second-in-charge, Major Clare Kellaway, the adjutant, Captain Michael Kearns, and the other officers and officers commanding, Captain Bradley Heskett, Captain Scottie Morris, Captain Thomas Drew, Captain Emma-Jayne Grigson, Captain Garth Fallon, Captain Sam Waite, Warrant Officer Class 1 Ken Bullman OAM, Major Geoffrey Grey CSM, and Warrant Officer Class 1 Simon Renfrey OAM. The Regimental Colour Party comprised ensign Under Officer Ciaran McGinnis and escorts Colour Sergeant Matthew Scattergood and Colour Sergeant Jacob Choi.

The corps on parade were drilled to perfection by Warrant Officer Class 1 Kenneth Bullman and the parade commander was Senior Under Officer Tim Glover. The company under officers were Under Officers Alex Grant, Adam Grigg, Benjamin Moroney, Nicholas Chamberlin and Tamara Malkki. The Queen's Colour Party comprised Under Officer Ciaran McGinnis, Colour Sergeants Chris Cox and Peter Cherry, and the ensign was Under Officer Zavia Tiplady. The escorts were Colour Sergeant Matthew Scattergood and Colour Sergeant Jacob Choi. The Sovereign's Banner Party comprised Colour Sergeant Joshua Scott and escorts Corporal Deane Brieshcke and Corporal Matthew Van Blerk. The Drill Wing Sergeant Major was Warrant Officer Class 2 Andrew Donnelly. The drill sergeants were always feared creatures for me. I remember my drill sergeant, Warrant Officer Class 1 Mark Dunne, as he is now. Sergeant Mark Dunne was certainly a fearsome character and no doubt these fellows are as well. The drill sergeants were Sergeant Tim Grover, Sergeant Matt Rhodes, Sergeant Luke Anderson, Sergeant Murray Severin and Sergeant Pete Dymond. The announcer on the day was Major Robert Morrison RFD, who many of you would have heard at other parades and events in Canberra.

I would also like to thank the SO2 Protocol and Visits, Major Steve Hladio, who put much of the event together. No doubt there were others behind the scenes as well who deserve mention. But well done to the Royal Military College, congratulations on their 100th anniversary and I look forward to future events later this year.

Question on notice No 1395

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (6.52): I am glad that Minister Burch is here. I would like to draw Minister Burch's attention to a question that I have been pursuing for a couple of days, and that is question on notice 1395. After question time today Minister Burch said that she had signed off on it.

I am now completely flummoxed as to where the question is because after question time today I received a request from chamber support to ask whether I would agree to

a redirection of the question which I asked in February and which is yet unanswered. The request had come originally from the cabinet inter-government relations office through chamber support. I was informed that in fact, as late as half past four, while I agreed with the redirection and it would be acceptable, chamber support had not seen the answer to the question which the minister had agreed to.

It is perfectly reasonable that this question should be redirected. But this question has been outstanding since March. We have known of the redirection since mid-May and it seems that, only after I have asked twice on successive days where the answer to this question is, someone has got around to asking for redirection.

I do not know whether the question has been answered. If it had not been redirected until after question time today, I find it difficult to believe that it has been answered and I would like the minister to go away and check what has happened and come back with a proper explanation after question time tomorrow.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.54 pm.