



# Debates

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## **Wednesday, 18 February 2015**

**MADAM SPEAKER** (Mrs Dunne) 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.

### **Schools—safety**

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.02): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) a community organisation has been fined for exposing ACT school children to a convicted criminal without the required Working with Vulnerable People clearance;
- (b) the breach involved ACT schools under the responsibility of the Minister for Education and Training;
- (c) the Minister has failed to adequately address her full involvement or any influence she had in these events; and
- (d) the Minister has a significant conflict of interest with regard to these events; and

(2) calls on the Chief Minister to:

- (a) establish an independent and transparent inquiry into the circumstances surrounding these events and to report in full to the Assembly by 30 June 2015;
- (b) stand Minister Burch down as ACT Education and Training Minister immediately pending the outcomes of that inquiry; and
- (c) consult with the Leader of the Opposition and Mr Rattenbury on the terms of reference for the inquiry and the selection of the individual to conduct the inquiry.

I would like to start this morning by reading from the *Ministerial Code of Conduct*:

Ministers must not use their position or information gained in the performance of their duties to gain a direct or indirect advantage for themselves or their families or acquaintances that would not be available to the general public.

I would also like to quote from the members code of conduct that was agreed to and voted on by members of this Assembly:

Members should always act in the public interest, make decisions and choices on merit, and not seek to gain financial or other benefit for themselves, their family or friends.

Members should be transparent in, and accountable for, their decisions and actions, should avoid or appropriately resolve any actual or reasonably perceived conflicts of interest and should submit themselves to appropriate scrutiny.

Consistent with the above principles—

still quoting from the code of conduct—

Members further undertake that they should:

Actively seek—

actively seek—

to prevent any conflict of interest, or the perception of such a conflict, arising between their duties as a Member and their personal affairs and interests, take all reasonable steps to resolve any such conflict or perception of a conflict that does arise.

Madam Speaker, in that context, I ask this question: what other convicted offender of a very serious crime in the ACT gets to unlawfully and inappropriately interact on numerous occasions with ACT schoolchildren and then has a reference written for him, at the request of the education minister, based on that interaction with schoolchildren that is then used as evidence to support that sentencing hearing? I quote from the *Canberra Times*:

A mother approaching an organisation or an acquaintance to help out a son in trouble is nothing surprising or necessarily inappropriate. But when you are a minister of the government and the organisation is funded by the government, the premise is utterly different. And when you are an education minister with a son improperly in schools without the required documentation, the issue is more serious still.

The community needs to be assured that a member of this place has not used their position as a member or as a minister to secure a benefit for a family member in a very serious breach of ethics, integrity and both the ministerial and members code of conduct.

I make no judgement on the individual concerned and acknowledge that the error was not his intent. Ultimately, this is a matter not of his actions but of those of the minister and her direct conflict of interest.

The minister has stated that this was simply a matter between the individual and Menslink, and that she had no role. But that is not compatible with the fact that it was the minister who asked Menslink for the reference for the individual. I quote from her own statement:

... I approached the CEO ...

You cannot run the line, Madam Speaker, that you had nothing to do with this whole affair when you are the education minister who asked for a reference from an organisation that has been funded by that same minister, that has been presented awards by that same minister and that has launched programs—specifically, the very program concerned—by that same minister.

This should never have happened. Our school headmasters have made it clear that they would not have exposed schoolchildren to the individual concerned had they known the facts of his conviction. The individual should not have made a single visit to any school, nor interacted with any children. The number of visits should have been zero, not 10.

A travesty of these events is the enormous damage that has been done to Menslink. Menslink is a good local organisation. I am sure we would applaud their good work. Many of us have spoken at their mid-weekers or rattled the tin to raise funds. Menslink has been fined for unlawfully taking the individual into ACT schools to interact with schoolchildren without the necessary working with vulnerable people certificate, as part of the silence is deadly program. It is apparent that a working with vulnerable people clearance would not have been given to an individual awaiting sentencing for a serious crime.

Although the CEO of Menslink was aware that the individual being taken into schools was a convicted criminal awaiting sentencing, members of the board and staff who took the individual into the school were not made aware. Menslink staff and board members have made it clear that the individual concerned should not have been a participant in the silence is deadly program and would not have been had they known the truth. Let me quote from the *Canberra Times*:

... the discovery of [his] conviction came as a shock to many in Menslink, including the board, whose then-chairman Peter Clarke said he and the board had been “absolutely aghast” at the discovery. The issue had only been brought to the board’s attention after the sentencing, he said.

[He] should not have been in schools without a Working with Vulnerable People Card, and given his conviction he would not have got one, Rear-Admiral Clarke ... said. The board had self-referred the breach to the Office of Regulatory Services, and Menslink was then fined.

Not only had Menslink broken the law [he] was not a suitable person to take into schools in any case, given he had not been sentenced or rehabilitated, Rear-Admiral Clarke said.

The individual concerned should not have been put in front of children. Let me again quote from the *Canberra Times*:

The issue has caused major angst inside the organisation. At least one of the people who went into schools with [the individual] resigned in protest in the past fortnight, and at least one other person is said to be deeply unhappy.

The men are upset they were expected to take [him] into schools without being told of his conviction. They say they would not have accompanied him or allowed him to have contact with teenage school boys if they had known. They knew he was the education minister's son, but the information wasn't routinely divulged to schools. They said [he] should have been referred to Menslink's counselling program, not been used as a role model for teenage boys.

Based on these unlawful visits to schools, the CEO of Menslink, who was fully aware of the individual's circumstances, then wrote a reference for the courts that was used as evidence in his sentencing hearings, at the request of the minister. Let me again quote:

Chief executive ... did know about [his] court case—he had written a reference for him at his court appearance in April, and wrote another in October for sentencing. [His] work with Menslink and the ... reference helped him escape jail, the judge explicitly pointing to it.

Menslink has been in part funded by the education directorate. The minister launched the silence is deadly program and the minister gave Menslink an award for the silence is deadly program. The conflict of interest and the benefit to a family member—a serious breach of the ministerial and members code of conduct—are glaring.

It is a tragedy that Menslink has been torn apart by these events. I have spoken with staff and board members and they are aghast at how this all came to pass. People dedicated to looking after young men feel that they were misled and have broken the law because they were not told the truth.

The parents of schoolchildren and staff at schools also deserve answers. The protection of our schoolchildren is paramount, and that is why we have the working with vulnerable people clearances. As a result of these events schoolchildren have been exposed to an offender, which both Menslink and school headmasters have said was not appropriate and was not lawful. I have spoken with parents who do not want an individual who robbed a person at knifepoint presented to impressionable teenagers as a role model.

What was said to our children? According to the reference, the discussion was about a spiral into drugs and a crime that was committed. Given the events outlined and the significant conflict of interest, the government's dismissal of this as simply an administrative oversight is manifestly inadequate.

I ask: is it the norm for offenders to unlawfully interact with schoolchildren and be provided with a reference for the courts based on that interaction at the minister's behest, or was this a special case? If it is the norm, that is unacceptable. If this was a special case, this was unacceptable. Either scenario, either explanation, is unacceptable.

As Chief Minister, Andrew Barr must always put schoolchildren first. He must act to restore the damage to Menslink's reputation, and he must act to assure parents that the education minister has not acted improperly.

*Members interjecting—*

Only a full and independent inquiry will satisfy these requirements. Based on the evidence before us, we would be negligent in our responsibility as a parliament not to scrutinise this issue fully. The extraordinary threats that we have seen from Labor members in this place attacking members of the opposition and targeting specific members of the *Canberra Times* for simply doing their job have been outrageous.

**Mr Corbell:** You're a grub.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Withdraw.

**Mr Corbell:** I withdraw.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Could you sit down, Mr Hanson, and could we stop the clock, please. This is a very sensitive debate. There has been a level of interjection which is less than is often the case, but I think that there should not be any interjection. Quite frankly, if members start calling people names across the chamber as you did now, Mr Corbell—and as soon as you did you got to your feet to withdraw—that is not acceptable behaviour. You do not call people names and then get to your feet to withdraw just so that you can get to call people names. I will not tolerate it. Yesterday you were required to withdraw the same word. So I will be much stricter in this debate than I normally am. I will expect a high level of propriety because of the sensitivity of this issue, the same as I was expecting a high level of propriety when this sensitive issue was dealt with in question time yesterday.

**MR HANSON:** I will say again that the extraordinary threats that we have seen from the Labor members attacking members of the opposition—

**Mr Corbell:** A point of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** On a point of order. Could you stop the clock, please?

**Mr Corbell:** Madam Speaker, it is an imputation on Labor members to suggest that members are threatening Mr Hanson or members of the media. It is quite a serious allegation and, generally speaking, it is an allegation that would only be able to be made through some form of substantive motion. It is an improper assertion against members in this place and I do not believe it is parliamentary. I suggest to you, Madam Speaker, it is disorderly language, and I seek your ruling on it.

**MR HANSON:** On the point of order, this is a substantive motion. This is a debating point. I stand by it, and a referral to yesterday's *Hansard* and the interjections during question time from those opposite regarding Liberal Party family members would indicate that the Labor Party made threats against and attacks on members of the opposition.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Do you have a transcript of what you said, Mr Hanson? Did you read what—

**MR HANSON:** I do not have the specific words from yesterday's debate, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Corbell has part of a point. I will review the transcript. I will ask members to be careful. This a substantive motion calling for an inquiry into a particular issue, and Mr Hanson has been addressing that fairly tightly. I will review *Hansard* and come back with a consideration on the matter raised by Mr Corbell.

**MR HANSON:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Many questions are left unanswered, and if an example of that is needed I refer members to the Chief Minister's extraordinarily evasive answers yesterday to the very simple question of when he was first informed of this breach of law. His answer was:

... the same time as other members of the community.

He was then asked for a specific date and again he repeated:

At the same time as other members of the community.

He was then asked when the community found out, and his response was:

That is something I cannot answer.

Madam Speaker, we were all here; we all heard those answers. It was bizarre. It was deliberately evasive, and I ask the question: why did the Chief Minister not answer that very simple and straightforward question? What is there to hide? This goes to the point—if the Chief Minister will not answer such a simple question in the Assembly, it is no wonder that the community, sections of the media and the opposition are calling for an inquiry. If there is nothing to hide, if this minister has done nothing wrong, as stated by those opposite, this is the opportunity to establish that. Denial, avoiding questions, attacking the opposition and attacking the media are not adequate responses. The failure to conduct a full and independent inquiry would be a failure in leadership by the Chief Minister, Andrew Barr. It would certainly fail Menslink.

**Mr Corbell:** Point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Stop the clock, please.

**Mr Corbell:** Madam Speaker, you have repeatedly ruled that members should refer to members by their proper titles. Once again Mr Hanson is using language like "Andrew Barr", "Simon Corbell" et cetera. You have ruled that it is "Mr Barr" or "Chief Minister", and I ask you to draw Mr Hanson's attention to that.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I uphold the point of order and—

**MR HANSON:** On the point of order, Madam Speaker, I said, "the Chief Minister, Andrew Barr". I used his proper title and his full name. I seek your ruling on that.



**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Corbell raised this with me the other day. Perhaps I was not being attentive, but I will uphold the point of order. I ask members to refer to people by their title and their surname or by their portfolio title.

**MR HANSON:** Madam Speaker, the failure to conduct a full and independent inquiry would be a failure in leadership by this Chief Minister. It would ultimately fail Menslink. It would fail our schoolchildren. It would fail this Assembly. It would fail our community. I seek members' support for this very important motion calling for a full and independent inquiry.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Urban Renewal and Minister for Tourism and Events) (10.19): The government will not be supporting Mr Hanson's vicious motion today because the facts do not support his assertions. It is a matter of great sorrow, Madam Speaker, that I have to speak today on this motion. It is not sorrow for myself; it is sorrow for this place and sorrow for how low this Leader of the Opposition has brought this place.

It was not that long ago that the Liberal Party was led in this place by people of real character. I do not often agree with Gary Humphries, but as this side and that side argued about how Canberra could be a better place, at least we all knew that was why we came into this place—that is, because we loved it and we wanted to make it better. What we have seen in the last week from this Leader of the Opposition is a failure of character, and that is distressing for this place. It is incredibly distressing for the Burch family, but it is even more distressing for what it means for politics in this city.

I will put some facts on the table. Having seen the statement issued by Menslink and emailed to every member of this place this morning that addressed this issue and all the unresolved questions, all the wild accusations and all the outrageous assertions made in the last 24 hours—led by Mr Hanson and his colleagues—I would have thought Mr Hanson would have had the good grace to drop this grubby motion today, but no. This man failed the character test this morning.

**Ms Lawder:** A point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Stop the clock, please.

**Ms Lawder:** I ask Mr Barr to withdraw the term "grubby". It has been ruled unparliamentary in the past.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I do not uphold the point of order. It is an adjective describing emotion; it does not describe the person. I contemplated that when Mr Barr said it, and I do not uphold the point of order.

**MR BARR:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is worth putting on the record what Menslink have said today. Their chair has written the following in response to the *Canberra Times* article and to the outrageous accusations from those opposite yesterday:

I am writing in response to the Canberra Times article (17/2/15) regarding ACT Minister Joy Burch's son Lloyd Burch and how he came to be involved in the Menslink school program, Silence is Deadly.

The Menslink CEO Martin Fisk provided the following information to the Board to explain how Lloyd Burch became a volunteer involved in Menslink:

- Mr Lloyd Burch first volunteered to assist Menslink with charity collections at the Multicultural Festival in February and subsequently at a Brumbies match in March 2014.
- Subsequently, Martin Fisk, the Menslink CEO approached Lloyd Burch directly. Martin Fisk, the CEO, approached Lloyd Burch directly to talk in schools, after learning of his sentencing deferral. Martin confirmed that the sole intent of this approach was to assist a young man repay his debt to society through community service and provide a real-life warning to other young men about the dangers of drug use and crime.
- At no point in time did Minister Burch or her staff approach Martin Fisk or any other Menslink staff or Board member to request her son be involved in the school-based programs conducted by Menslink.

Let me repeat that for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition, who was not listening:

- At no point in time did Minister Burch or her staff approach Martin Fisk or any other Menslink staff or Board member to request her son be involved in the school-based programs conducted by Menslink.

That has been the basis of your grubby campaign throughout—that there was some improper influence. This has put that to bed finally, Mr Hanson, and you should drop those allegations.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Address the chair, Chief Minister.

**MR BARR:** Menslink have made a clear statement, Madam Speaker, on that matter. I go on with the statement:

- As a Menslink volunteer Lloyd Burch and Menslink staff attended ten Silence is Deadly presentations in schools in the Canberra region. This level of attendance consequently breached the Working With Vulnerable People (WWVP) legislation which allows up to 3 visits in 28 days or 7 in a year.
- Students were not placed at risk due to this breach in the WWVP policy by Menslink.

I repeat:

- Students were not placed at risk due to this breach in the WWVP policy by Menslink.

The letter continues:

- The Menslink CEO wrote two letters of support to the Court for Lloyd Burch that are on the public record. This is common practice for our CEO and other Menslink staff—

I repeat, “This is common practice for our CEO and other Menslink staff”—

who write to the courts (and other bodies), in cases where young men have demonstrated their commitment to making positive changes in their lives.

When the matter was reported to the Menslink Board in October 2014, they took immediate action to address the issue and consequently reported the breach to the Office of Regulatory Services and affected stakeholders.

The Office of Regulatory Services received the final incident report in December 2014 and recently issued Menslink with an infringement notice fine of \$2500.

As an experienced community organisation successfully working with young people for more than a decade we are extremely disappointed this incident occurred. A critical review of our policies and procedures has been conducted and improvements have been made to ensure our activities are best practice and understood, implemented and maintained at all levels of the organisation.

And here is a quote that Mr Hanson ought to pay a lot of attention to:

The fact remains that the board demonstrated good governance in reporting the breach to ORS and hopes that the recent negative media does not suppress the responsibility of other organisations—

read “the Canberra Liberals”—

to demonstrate responsibility and integrity.

That is at the heart of what we are debating today. I would have thought the Leader of the Opposition’s time in service would have left him with some understanding of what leadership is, Madam Speaker. I would have thought he would have some understanding of what character is. I would have thought he would have some understanding of what dignity is, of what moral fibre is and of what service to the community and the greater good look like. After what we have seen in the last week, I am seriously questioning those values. He is showing he is a man with no scruples, someone who is prepared to seek even the smallest scintilla of political advantage at the expense of a young man—and that is ultimately what this is about.

If Lloyd Burch’s mother was not sitting two chairs down from me, this would not be debated in this place. It is all about politics. It is all about seeking a grubby little bit of political advantage. I can understand that; when you are 20 points behind in the polls, I can understand why you would want to get every little bit of advantage. When you have seen the chaos your political party is currently in, of course you would want to

grab any issue, but the fact that they are prepared to stoop to this, Madam Speaker, demonstrates just how bankrupt they are. They are picking on a man for doing charity work.

Everyone on this side of the chamber is here to give a voice to the voiceless, and I know most of those opposite are here to do that as well. But what we have not seen demonstrated in this sad and sorry episode for the territory's parliament is any evidence of humanity and of respect for an individual trying to turn his life around. No, let us make the cheap political point because that is so much easier. Well, I hope you can all sleep at night with what you have done, because bullying people who do not have a voice in this place is not what we are about. It is not what we should be doing in this chamber. We have seen the damage it can cause, but it does not seem to matter.

There is nothing this man will not do to try and score a cheap political point, and that is where we are at in this debate now. Menslink have made a very clear statement; Minister Burch has made a very clear statement. All that is left for the Leader of the Opposition is petty political point scoring. It is Godwin Grech all over again. It is this pattern of behaviour we see where partisan political advantage is all that the Liberals can seek. Then we get the crocodile tears about Menslink's reputation. As Mr Battenally said in his statement:

... hopes that the recent negative media does not suppress the responsibility of other organisations to demonstrate responsibility and integrity.

We will stand up for responsibility and integrity today, Madam Speaker. We, as a political party here to provide a voice for the voiceless, will not let this go without response. This is a disgraceful motion. The facts do not support it. The government will not support it. This Assembly should not support it.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (10.30): Colleagues, the issue like the one we are discussing today is perhaps the hardest sort of matter that we are called on to deal with in politics. There is much at stake. There are strong emotions. There are personal reputations at stake. There is a level of political strategy and drama. There are agendas and perspectives shaped by levels of information and where you sit. And there is intense media scrutiny.

Amongst all of that, we must do our best to sift through the clamour and try and decide what is the best outcome, what is the most objectively appropriate way to deal with the matter before us. That matter, of course, is the conduct of Menslink, Lloyd Burch's volunteering role with them, and whether that is connected to Ms Burch's role as a member of this place.

I think the facts have been reasonably well set out in that we know that Lloyd Burch was connected with Menslink. He then went into schools, ultimately more times than was allowed under the working with vulnerable people legislation. There is more to it, but I do not think I need to rehash the facts here today. I think they have been given quite an airing.

I have thought long and hard about this issue in recent days. I have read the articles in the *Canberra Times*. I listened to the minister's statement very carefully yesterday as well as the many questions that were put in question time. I have also now seen the statement issued by Menslink this morning, which was provided to all members of the Assembly. Through all of that, I think there are three important areas to examine: the role of Menslink, the role of the schools involved and the role of Ms Burch.

When it comes to Menslink, clearly there has been an error made. Those matters are rightly addressed through Menslink's internal governance procedures, as well as the external scrutiny provided by the Office of Regulatory Services. There is no doubt that this has caused considerable angst within Menslink. We have seen those comments reported in the *Canberra Times*. We have seen them reflected in Mr Battenally's statement today. One can only imagine in an organisation, an NGO, the sort of turmoil and angst that this level of exposure has created.

We know that most people that work in NGOs go there because they are absolutely committed to why they are there. They usually work for less money than they can make in the private sector. They are there because they are passionate about it. You can imagine what it is like at Menslink at the moment, with people feeling all sorts of emotions: guilt, a sense of "We should have made a better decision"—all those kinds of things.

But those issues are for Menslink to deal with. Menslink have a governance structure, as an organisation, that they need to work through: whether their CEO made appropriate decisions, whether the board adequately oversaw those decisions. Those are questions for Menslink to sort out, and they have indicated in their statement that they are undertaking a critical review of policies and procedures, as they should.

People will have different views on that, but I think the general view—and I think this has been acknowledged—is that better decisions could have been taken, that Menslink need to reflect on how they interact with the working with vulnerable people program, because, clearly, in breaching the law their systems are not right. They have got work to do to ensure that they line up with the law as it is rolled out. That is for them to work to in their internal governance procedures.

Similarly, there is a level of external scrutiny for Menslink. I think this is one of the moments of absolute integrity in this entire discussion. Menslink went forward to the Office of Regulatory Services and self-reported the breach and were subsequently fined after an investigation by the Office of Regulatory Services. So there is a level of external scrutiny there that has been appropriately applied to Menslink.

I think I can honestly say that there are probably a lot of community organisations out there that are watching this process at the moment thinking, "There but for the grace goes my organisation." I reckon a lot of community organisations in the last two weeks will have been pulling up their socks very quickly and reviewing their own application of the working with vulnerable people program, because it is new, it is complex, it is detailed and it requires new procedures that, frankly, probably most community organisations do not have and that they are having to put in place.

I think that if there is any good to come out of this whole exercise, the primary one will be that a range of other community organisations will undoubtedly be reviewing their own procedures and practices and making sure that they have them in the right place. I will not say anything further about Menslink, other than to note—and I will come back to it—the statement that has been issued by Menslink today, who I think have laid out very clearly their perspective on it. I will return to that matter.

The second area that I think is of importance here is looking at the role of the schools that have been caught up in this discussion. I think there are interesting questions here. I had not looked closely at the working with vulnerable people program, although I have now; I have looked much more closely at it. But certainly when this issue first came to the fore, it raised questions for me about whether the schools are asking for working with vulnerable people cards. Do they have the right systems in place to make sure that they are checking these things?

In looking at that this week, I and my office read the policies. As best we can understand them, they do not spell out the need for an up-front declaration or request for a working with vulnerable people card. Is that appropriate? Should the schools actually, before anybody enters the place, demand to see a card? Are they doing it and is that the standard we expect?

I do not know the answers, but these are questions that need to be reflected on. I also wonder how the schools are supposed to sift their way through this, because the legislation allows for up to seven visits a year without a working with vulnerable people card. If you are a school that somebody turns up to without one, how do you know whether that is that person's third, sixth, seventh or eighth visit in a year? What role does the school play in that? What are they supposed to do?

Again, I do not know the answers to these questions. But what this whole discussion has highlighted is that there are difficult questions to be resolved here. There clearly are issues that need to be resolved in the rollout of the working with vulnerable people program, because we look at this and say, "Why didn't the headmaster check?" The "principal", I should say; I am showing my age there by referring to the headmaster. Why did the principal not check whether this young man had the suitable qualifications? Even if they had asked and he had said, "Actually, I do not have one," they then would have had to count up how many times he had been in a school in a year. How can they possibly verify that?

The third area I touch on is the role of Ms Burch. She has two roles in this: as the mother of a young man who, like quite a few others no doubt, has made some poor choices in his life and has committed a very serious criminal act. Her other is as an MLA. I make no comments on Ms Burch's role as a parent other than to say that I hope I never find myself in the situation she did. No-one wants to see their child in those circumstances and no-one would want to be in the shoes of a parent in that case.

As an MLA, the question that most needs to be answered is whether she sought to use her position to unduly influence the opportunities given to her son. Did she breach the relevant codes of conduct by seeking special favour or by not addressing a conflict of

interest? The evidence that we have before us to try and draw a conclusion on this comes from two sources. It comes from the statement that Ms Burch made to the Assembly yesterday as well as the many questions she answered during question time. Then we have the comments made by Menslink, including in the statement that they issued this morning.

Both of those sources have indicated that Ms Burch did not make a special request. Ms Burch was adamant about this in her statement to the Assembly yesterday. She was very clear. She was very precise in her words, in her statement. The Menslink statement is equally clear. I will quote from it, as Mr Barr has. I will also quote from it, because I think it is important. It is very clear. It states:

Martin Fisk ... approached Lloyd Burch directly to talk in schools, after learning of his sentencing deferral.

It goes on to say:

At no point in time did Minister Burch or her staff approach Martin Fisk or any other Menslink staff or Board member to request her son be involved in the school-based programs conducted by Menslink.

It also talks about the letters of support that were provided to the court for Lloyd Burch that are on the public record. Minister Burch was clear yesterday in her comments—she was transparent about it—that she did ask for a reference for her son on the advice of her legal counsel, as other parents would. I think there is transparency in that. People can form a judgement on whether they think that was appropriate or not but I do not think there is any lack of clarity about the role Ms Burch played. That is the information we are privy to today and with which we are able to assess the merits of the case and this motion.

I will turn to Mr Hanson's motion at this point in the debate. Mr Hanson has sought to establish an independent and transparent inquiry into the circumstances surrounding these events and to report in full to the Assembly by 30 June. He has done that for a number of reasons, which are stated in part 1.

I think the key issue that Mr Hanson has been getting at in both his motion and his remarks is a sense that information has not been provided. I think we now find ourselves at a place where that information has been provided. I think it is certainly regrettable that this took as long as it did to get to this point. I might say that it is at moments like these that, as much as I work with them, I struggle to understand my ALP colleagues at times.

I do not understand why the approach is to bunker down and not answer questions when they are asked. I do not understand why they fail to understand the community's right to have an explanation and to have questions answered. I understand the reluctance in the sense that Ms Burch at least considered this a private matter. But unfortunately we do operate in a sphere where sometimes things move beyond the personal domain and there does reach a point where questions need to be publicly answered.

But I think we can also reflect on the approach the Liberal Party take to these things. No matter what the question is, they always want the biggest, most controversial inquiry that can possibly be mounted, no matter the scale of the question to be asked, and that is the politics of this. It is all about the trench warfare. The Liberal Party are always about inflicting maximum political damage. We see that, and we see the way they talk about my role in this as well.

It is always about the political score. It is not about finding the most appropriate mechanism. In this case we do have an appropriate mechanism. We set it up in this Assembly within the last 18 months, but members have a short memory. Those who were here last term will recall that we had a very substantial debate about matters surrounding Mr Seselja, and an inquiry was set up.

My view was that that was an unsatisfactory process. We needed an ability to scrutinise these sorts of matters. To do that, we set up the Commissioner for Standards. We set that up so that we can have a mechanism when these sorts of matters arise. Somebody independent, impartial, with integrity and with experience can look at these matters.

For reasons unclear to me, that mechanism has been ignored here. I think that is probably because the Liberal Party wanted to maximise the political exposure of this issue, not use the sensible mechanism that we put in place to resolve matters like this. I cannot answer why they did not go down that path, but yesterday I wrote to the Clerk seeking advice on whether the Commissioner for Standards was a suitable mechanism. I have a letter back from the Clerk that I will now table for the benefit of members who may wish also to read his advice that this is a suitable mechanism. I table the following paper:

Commissioner for Standards—Possible referral—Advice from the Clerk of the  
Legislative Assembly to Mr Rattenbury MLA, dated 18 February 2015.

It begs the question why the Liberal Party did not go down that path. They can answer that question, but at the end of the day I cannot support the motion put forward by Mr Hanson today. This motion is an overreach. This motion fails to reflect the evidence that has been put forward by both Ms Burch and Menslink indicating that neither party feels that undue or inappropriate influence was used to seek special favour for Ms Burch's son.

That is the best evidence we have before us. Mr Hanson is seeking to generate an inquiry as some sort of political exercise, in my view, in order to answer questions that have been resolved. He has chosen to ignore the mechanism that is available to him because he wants a more spectacular outcome. I am not prepared to be a part of that. If there are questions that need to be resolved, seek those questions out in an appropriate forum. We probably do need to discuss the rollout of the working with vulnerable people program, but let us do that in a place that is appropriate. Let us not drag a particular case into the public limelight in order to resolve those important policy questions.



That is my view. I am sure there is more I could say. I am sure more will be said about me in relation to this matter, but I cannot support this motion today because I think the motivations behind it are not appropriate. I think the two parties involved here who have primary evidence to present have made their case very clear. They have made it public and we can now decide what we think on that. *(Time expired.)*

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (10.45): I rise today to support Mr Hanson's motion calling for an independent and transparent inquiry into the circumstances surrounding a community organisation which exposed ACT schoolchildren to a convicted criminal without the required working with vulnerable people clearance and to report in full to the Assembly by 30 June 2015.

Firstly, may I say this: I applaud Ms Burch for standing by her son and for standing up for her son. It is something any mother would do. I have enormous sympathy for the situation they find themselves in. Secondly, may I say I am sure it is a very difficult time for those involved and I hope everyone is getting the support and assistance they need during this time.

*Ms Burch interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, Minister Burch!

**MS LAWDER:** Nor is it about any particular organisation. It is widely acknowledged that this particular community organisation does great work in supporting young men in our community, in particular with its mentoring program.

Until Minister Burch and her colleagues started talking about the issue yesterday the opposition had been quite careful not to name the organisation or the individual concerned out of concern for them and their reputation. It is Minister Burch and her colleagues who have chosen to name names in this case so that they can then try to turn the argument around and accuse us of smearing their good names.

*Mr Barr interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, Mr Barr!

**MS LAWDER:** This is not the case. I do understand that they feel attack is the best defence.

*Ms Burch interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order! I do not want to have to warn anyone, but I will.

**MS LAWDER:** But they are not doing any favours to the organisation that they are so vehemently defending. To use the vernacular of Minister Burch, it is not about you. Let me be quite clear. This call for an independent and transparent inquiry is not about Ms Burch's family either. It is about protecting the thousands of schoolchildren and other vulnerable people in our community. It is about the failure of the Minister for Education and Training to ensure that schoolchildren in the ACT are protected.

The Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act 2011 came into effect in November 2012. At that time Minister Burch was the Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services. The revised explanatory statement for the Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Bill 2010 states that once enacted the bill would become “the primary law in the ACT which provides for background checking as part of a risk assessment of people working with, or wanting to work with, children or vulnerable adults in the ACT”. The revised explanatory statement goes on to say, firstly:

The exclusion of people with a known history of certain behaviour is a fundamental part of creating safe environments for vulnerable people.

Secondly:

The aim of the Bill is to reduce the incidence of sexual, physical, emotional or financial harm or neglect of vulnerable people in the ACT.

Thirdly:

The Bill introduces a requirement for people who have contact with vulnerable people in the course of engaging in certain regulated activities or services to be registered with a statutory screening unit to be established in the Office of Regulatory Services, Department of Justice and Community Safety.

Fourthly:

The Commissioner for Fair Trading (the commissioner) will be the commissioner responsible for administering the Act. The commissioner will conduct a background check and risk assessment before registering suitable applicants for a maximum period of three years.

Fifthly:

People who are not registered or who are deemed to present an unacceptable risk of harm will be prohibited from working with vulnerable people in the ACT.

The revised explanatory statement underlines the rationale for introducing the Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act 2011:

In line with obligations under the National Framework for Creating Child Safe Environments — Organisations, Employees and Volunteers, checking systems for people working with children have been established or are being developed in all Australian jurisdictions.

The protection of the rights of children and vulnerable adults in the ACT is a legitimate objective and pressing social need. The ACT Government considers that the creation of a checking system for people who work with, or want to work with, vulnerable people, with appropriate safeguards, is a proportionate response under Section 28 of the Human Rights Act 2004 (ACT).

The revised explanatory statement further states:

A rigorous and transparent background check and risk assessment process will enable appropriate and defensible decision making. Background checking and risk assessment will complement an organisation's recruitment practices and other policies to create safe working places for clients, employers, employees and volunteers.

I will not continue reading from the explanatory statement, which talks about past and future behaviour, as I concur with Minister Burch: it would appear that the person in question in this matter has worked hard to turn their life around. This is indeed to be celebrated.

However, the question at hand is: how was someone with a criminal record allowed into ACT schools? It is not how many times they went but that they went at all, because patently they would not have been eligible for a working with vulnerable people card under the guidelines. Whether they went seven times or 10 times is immaterial, because I presume that this person would have been rejected if they had applied for a working with vulnerable people card.

So I repeat: this is about protecting vulnerable people in our community, the schoolchildren in our ACT schools. Children in our community have the right to be safe and their parents have the right to be informed. Our community has the right to know that the government ensures that the laws it enacts are fully complied with. Alarming, it appears that this was not the case in this instance. How was a person without the appropriate documentation allowed into schools in our community?

The previous chair of the community organisation reported this breach of law when he found out. A number of school principals have made it clear that they would not have exposed schoolchildren to the individual concerned if they had known. It could have been any individual with a criminal record who was allowed into our schools.

We over here, and the ACT community at large, would want an independent inquiry regardless of the person concerned. If it were Joe Bloggs from Calwell, that would be enough to warrant investigation. The parents of schoolchildren and staff at schools deserve answers. The safety of our children is paramount and that is the rationale for having a working with vulnerable people card in the first place. As a result of these events, schoolchildren have been exposed to a convicted criminal, in direct contravention of the working with vulnerable people legislation. Both the community organisation concerned and school principals have said it was not only inappropriate but unlawful.

The Chief Minister must always put the safety of schoolchildren as a priority on his agenda. Minister Barr should conduct an independent inquiry into the circumstances surrounding this affair to rectify damage to the community organisation's reputation and to reassure parents that the Minister for Education and Training has not acted improperly; to reassure parents that the education department has the correct procedures in place to monitor those people who come to schools to speak with children, who are defined as vulnerable people in our legislation; and to check if this

was a one-off incident and, if that was the case, the circumstances of that incident. That this could happen at all is a serious matter and warrants an independent investigation.

The potential mixing of personal interests with ministerial responsibility could make this matter all the more serious. The lack of transparency is deeply concerning and only a full and independent inquiry will reassure our community that our working with vulnerable people checks system is robust and properly complied with at all times and that our schoolchildren are protected, which is what parents quite rightly and reasonably expect when they send their children off to school each day. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MS BURCH** (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Racing and Gaming and Minister for the Arts) (10.55): It goes without saying that I think that this motion is absolutely the lowest of the low. Mr Hanson and the Canberra Liberals have shown themselves as wanting to politicise, at any cost, something on which there are questions. They have been responded to. Menslink have made that very clear in their statement.

Mr Hanson stood and spoke about ethics and integrity. Today he has shown that he does not understand what ethics and integrity are. I could have put a call out. We have seen in this place that Mr Hanson has no boundaries on a personal attack and the lengths to which he will go for a cheap political point. We know that. We see it here. But I think this week, over these last few days, it has hit a new low, to the point that I would say that if you took my name and my son's name out, they would not have the same heightened piousness that they have over there.

He has made mention that I launched the silence is deadly program. I think it was in 2012, 2013. Yes, I did. It is a fabulous program. Let us reflect on what the silence is deadly program is. It is about going into schools, getting young men that are troubled, in difficulty, to seek help. It is fairly well accepted in the community that men do not talk about their problems. That is the idea of men's sheds. Silence is deadly is going into schools and talking to young men about seeking help. My son volunteered for that and he shared his journey of despair and self-help and recognised that when you are at that level of despair the best thing you can do is to put your hand out, seek help and help yourself at the time.

Did I give silence is deadly and Menslink an award? Absolutely. I have done it and I will do it tomorrow, next week, next year, because they are a worthy organisation and a worthy program. And I am a little anxious because at the Multicultural Festival, on behalf of CONTACT Canberra I handed an award out to ACT Policing. They won the best stall award. Is that a problem? Can I not now participate in and recognise good community organisations because I may have a conflict of interest?

Mr Hanson has also said that members here should be responsible for their actions. Absolutely. Every member of the Canberra Liberals ought to be responsible for their actions today. However they dress it, they have sought the most vile, nastiest political attack on me and my family.

Ms Lawder can stand and say whichever way she likes that it was us that brought my son's name into it. I ask anybody to go back and to listen to Mr Hanson on radio yesterday. It was appalling. And I challenge any one of the Canberra Liberals to take my son's name out and put your son or daughter's name in and how would you feel about that? Be aware, Mr Hanson has shown that he will throw anyone under the bus for his own political gain. So heaven help you if you cross him, because he will throw you and your family under the bus with the same free abandon because he knows no bounds of personal integrity.

Mr Hanson has quoted quite at length from the *Canberra Times* because it suits his purpose. But let me quote from Menslink, as has been done today—the organisation that, through this persistent, biased and uninformed, ill-informed or indeed malicious debate, is being brought into disrepute. I will stand by Menslink. I will say they are a champion organisation. And, as I said yesterday, I cannot thank that organisation enough for the work and the support they provided my son. I cannot and will not be able to thank them enough.

What the Canberra Liberals are doing, what Mr Hanson is doing, is calling that into question. He would rather quote misinformation and innuendo from the *Canberra Times* than make any reference to a statement that I provided from Menslink yesterday and that Mr Barr has provided today. But let me, in closing, just say this—and this is a quote from the release that I know that every one of the Canberra Liberals has received:

Subsequently ... the Menslink CEO approached Lloyd Burch directly to talk in schools, after learning of his sentencing deferral. Martin confirmed that the sole intent of this approach was to assist a young man repay his debt to society through community service and provide a real-life warning to other young men about the dangers of drug use and crime.

The purpose of silence is deadly is to do that. The release continues:

At no point in time did Minister Burch and her staff approach Martin Fisk or any other Menslink staff or Board member to request her son be involved in the school-based programs conducted by Menslink.

He then goes on to say:

Students were not placed at risk due to this breach ...

It is very clear. This statement is on the public record. It is on Menslink's website. Anyone in the community that has an interest in this, that wants the honesty in this, that wants to maintain support to Menslink, can see it there in black and white. Menslink are a great organisation. They supported my son.

I have nothing to answer to, other than being a mother whose son needed help and gratefully, thankfully, Menslink were able to provide that to my son. For any one of the Canberra Liberals to continue this after today, when this motion will be put down, is nothing but a personal vendetta and a malicious attack on me, my son and Menslink. The final paragraph of the letter from Michael Battenally states:

The fact remains that the board demonstrated good governance in reporting the breach to the ORS and hopes that recent negative media does not suppress the responsibility of other organisations to demonstrate responsibility and integrity.

It is now time for Mr Hanson to show his responsibility and integrity. In closing, it is also a chance for the Canberra Liberals to really understand and to demonstrate some basic fundamentals—charity, humility and forgiveness—because I believe my son has them in spades and Mr Hanson has none of them.

**MR CORBELL** (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for the Environment and Minister for Capital Metro) (11.03): I think the Chief Minister and Minister Burch have outlined amply why there is absolutely no evidence to substantiate the spurious claims, imputed or otherwise, in the motion we see from the Leader of the Opposition this morning—no evidence whatsoever.

The facts are very simple. Minister Burch, on the public record in this place, has said she sought no advantage or consideration in any improper way. The Menslink board have confirmed that is the case. Minister Burch said she did not do it; Menslink said she did not do it. It did not happen. Everything else is innuendo and speculation, without evidence.

It is remarkable, I have to say, that throughout this debate, in the serious allegations and the professed concern that we hear from the Liberal Party about the impact on Menslink, they have not once referred to what the Menslink board said in their statement issued this morning—not once. You would have thought that would be a key piece of evidence in Mr Hanson's political attack today. He would have had the community organisations saying: "Yes, we agree. Yes, this is a real problem and a concern for us. And, yes, there are questions to be answered." Unfortunately for Mr Hanson, Menslink say none of those things. They have been consistent and accurate throughout.

I have been a member of this place since 1997. I have never, in all of my time here, seen a member of a member's family dragged into the political debate in the tawdry, vile and reprehensible manner that we have seen from the Leader of the Opposition today and over the last week. I have never seen a member, a member's family, their son or their daughter dragged into tawdry political debate in an environment where they cannot answer, where they cannot say what happened. I have never seen it. I did not think I would ever see it, but we have seen it today.

Look at how strongly the Liberals feel about this! Mr Hanson cannot even muster his full team to be here for what is a fundamental issue, according to him. His deputy has been absent throughout this debate. Where is their commitment if they feel so strongly about it? If they feel so strongly about it, why aren't they there backing their leader? Why aren't they there? I have never seen such a serious motion moved with the opposition benches half empty. I have never seen it. In the same way, I have never seen the family of an MLA dragged into debate in this place for tawdry, grubby political ends. It is a disgusting step.

I proudly stand by my colleague Minister Burch today. I note the comments of my colleague Minister Rattenbury, but I do not agree with him. As he knows, he does not agree with us on some things. We have common aims and we work together. But in the Labor Party we stick by each other. We stick by each other because we know who our colleagues are and we know that when they say they did not do something, they did not do it. So I proudly stand by my colleague today, as I know all of my colleagues do.

This motion has no substance. It has no evidence to substantiate the claims. As the Chief Minister has said, it is simply a base political tactic. And it is clearly one that does not even have the support of all the members over on that side of the chamber.

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.08), in reply: I thank members for their contributions. I do not deny that this is a difficult issue that we are dealing with today—without question, it is—but I do not resile from it. We have an important duty in this parliament to make sure that all of us are behaving with the utmost probative, ethical conduct and integrity. That, undoubtedly, has been called into question. There are, without any question, some significant issues that have been brought before the public, not least relating to a breach of the law but also with regard to the minister's conduct in this place.

The fact of the matter is that this issue has been aired in public over a reasonably protracted period. The Labor Party's response, the minister's response and the Chief Minister's response were to do everything to shut the issue down. Rather than, as would be expected as a member of this place and as a minister, making a clear statement to explain actions, to adhere to the code of conduct, we have seen, in essence, every attempt to intimidate the media, to intimidate the opposition and to shut this matter down. Indeed, Mr Barr and Ms Burch have been refusing to discuss the matter. Mr Barr said last week that the matter was closed, that there was going to be no more discussion about this matter. He attacked the quite reasonable questions that were being asked in the media as media hysteria.

Mr Rattenbury, in his comments, has gone to this point and acknowledged it. I thank him for that explanation because he has made it clear—I paraphrase him—that it is regrettable it has taken so long to get to this point. He has made the point that the community have a right to an explanation. The community have a right to an explanation. Rather, we saw from the members of the government dismissal and attacks on the media for asking what were, in my view, quite legitimate questions that needed to be answered and, I believe, paraphrasing Mr Rattenbury, reasonable questions that needed to be answered. As Mr Rattenbury said, he simply does not understand the Labor Party sometimes.

It is quite evident that we now have more information about what has occurred. There is no question that we now have some more information about what has occurred. But let us also be very clear: we would have known nothing if the Labor Party and the minister had not been dragged kicking and screaming to this place because of my call, the opposition's call, for an inquiry. The statement that we have seen from the minister, the response that we have now seen, has only come as a result of the opposition's call for an inquiry. The instinct and the actions of Mr Barr and Ms Burch were to deny, to attack the media and to attack the opposition.

I made this point earlier in the debate, Madam Speaker. You asked me to clarify what had been said in the debate yesterday when I said that we were being threatened, when we were being threatened by those opposite. Let me quote from what Ms Burch said yesterday, to make it very clear what she said:

I just look to each and every one of you over there that have family and friends to understand that now you have opened the door for us to bring them into this place in any way, shape or form we like. That is what you have done today. That is exactly what you have done today.

Madam Speaker, the clear intimidation and threat made there against the opposition are apparent.

**Mr Corbell:** Point of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Point of order, Mr Corbell. Stop the clock.

**Mr Corbell:** Madam Speaker, you have already indicated that assertions by Mr Hanson that the Labor Party is threatening him or members of the media are matters that you will review, but again I draw your attention to standing order 55, “Personal reflections”. It is a clear imputation of an improper motive. You have already indicated that you will review the matter, but he is continuing with this line of argument. I ask you to call him to order, having regard to your earlier ruling.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** On the point of order, I said that I would review the matter. Mr Hanson has sought to reinforce his claim by quoting—I presume quoting accurately—from *Hansard* yesterday. The matter will receive my active consideration. I ask Mr Hanson not to go down that path, because it is under my active consideration, but to refer to the motion, which is to set up an inquiry. Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is fundamentally apparent to me, to members of the opposition, to many people in the community, and indeed to Mr Rattenbury, from his words, that the Labor Party, Ms Burch and the Chief Minister, Mr Barr, have been dragged kicking and screaming to this point.

We have seen evasive answers to questions by Mr Barr. We have seen him label this media hysteria. We have seen Mr Barr say that the matter is closed. I ask whether that is in any way consistent with the members code of conduct, which calls on members in this place to:

Actively seek to prevent any conflict of interest, or the perception of such a conflict, arising between their duties as a Member and their personal affairs and interests, take all reasonable steps to resolve any such conflict or perception of a conflict that does arise ...

Madam Speaker, it is evident that, rather than comply with the members code of conduct—as you will see if you go through the members code of conduct, and the ministerial code of conduct, it says here, “actively seek”—rather than deal with the matter, the reverse is true: those opposite actively sought to prevent any information getting out, actively sought to stop the media from making



any further comment, actively sought to try and stop the opposition from litigating this issue.

It is clear that a conflict of interest, or the perception of it, exists. That is abundantly clear. An individual who is a minister, and who has funded an organisation, presented awards to an organisation and launched a program, has then—that very same person—asked for a reference from that very same organisation. The ministerial and the members codes of conduct refer to actively seeking “to prevent any conflict of interest, or the perception of such a conflict, arising between their duties as a member and their personal affairs and interests”. That has not occurred.

My view of this is that it needs an open and independent inquiry, perhaps with powers where people could be subpoenaed and people could have protections. I have spoken with some people close to Menslink who are very distressed by some of the events that have taken place. I know that there are members and people out there who would want protections, who would want the surety that there would be no consequences from them making statements. That is why it is important, in my view, that we go down that path.

Although I believe that, the other option open is through the Commissioner for Standards. I want to make it very clear that, as Mr Rattenbury has outlined in his case, there is the availability of the option for the Commissioner for Standards to look into matters where there have been serious breaches of the members code of conduct, where there are questions of integrity, where there are questions of conflict of interest. I indicate to you, Madam Speaker, that I shall now be writing to the Commissioner for Standards to have this matter investigated. This matter will not be left to rest.

**Mr Barr:** You have got to write to the Speaker.

**MR HANSON:** I did say I will be writing to the Speaker. If I did not, I correct that. I will be writing to you, Madam Speaker, so that this matter can be resolved. I am disappointed that this matter will not be put forward in an independent inquiry, but I am satisfied, Madam Speaker—I stand by my actions here and the actions of the opposition—that it has now reached a point where at least we have some understanding of what has occurred so that this can be now dealt with further by another mechanism.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Mr Coe  
Mr Doszpot  
Mrs Dunne  
Mr Hanson  
Mrs Jones

Ms Lawder  
Mr Smyth  
Mr Wall

Noes 9

Mr Barr  
Ms Berry  
Dr Bourke  
Ms Burch  
Mr Corbell

Ms Fitzharris  
Mr Gentleman  
Ms Porter  
Mr Rattenbury

Question so resolved in the negative.

## Canberra—urban renewal

MS FITZHARRIS (Molonglo) (11.22): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the Government has committed to urban renewal as a policy priority;
- (b) that urban renewal is vital to growing Canberra's economy and strengthening its community by improving productivity, connectivity and sustainability;
- (c) that much of the ACT's public housing stock was built to the standards of an earlier time, is reaching the end of its useful life, and is in need of renewal; and
- (d) the importance of public transport, including light rail, to delivering good urban renewal outcomes; and

(2) resolves to support the Government's work to:

- (a) deliver urban renewal in Canberra's suburbs and town centres;
- (b) renew Canberra's public housing stock; and
- (c) assist urban renewal by delivering the first stage of a new light rail line.

I am pleased today to move this motion on urban renewal. And I am pleased to be part of a government for whom urban renewal is such a high priority. As I said in my first speech last week, I am proud to be part of a government that understands our challenges, understands our history and is embracing our future.

These characteristics will all inform the government's policy priority of urban renewal. As government members have noted previously and consistently, we have a rich history in a young city but that history must continue to be written. We must build on our past but not be constrained by it.

We must plan for our future, and urban renewal is vital to this future. We must—and I think this is important—understand our challenges: population growth, climate change and energy and food security. But in most challenges there is opportunity—for example, the opportunities that come from people wanting to move to our city, from the opportunities that renewable energy brings not just for our environment but also for local businesses to foster innovation and help to create new and thriving industries.

There are challenges also in the way our community wants to live; how and where they work, live and play; how and how often they move from one part of the city to another; how they communicate. On all these counts this government understands what the future holds and how Canberra will find its place in this future—the brilliant possibilities it holds.

Madam Deputy Speaker, urban renewal is vital to the vibrancy and livability of our city and is critical in improving competitiveness, productivity, livability and the economic future of our community. It is about capitalising on our local community's assets, inspiration and potential to create high quality public spaces that promote people's health, happiness and wellbeing. Urban renewal is about deliberately shaping the environment to facilitate social interaction and improve our community's quality of life and it is about shaping our built environment to reflect who we are: a confident, bold and ready city—one that has earned its position amongst the greatest places to live in the world.

And we have the mandate. The Canberra time to talk 2030 consultation results noted shifts in societal preferences: from suburbia to proximity to employment and services; from single purpose zones to mixed use developments; from the old way of doing things to the revitalisation of existing urban areas to both make better use of unproductive land and create a city that truly reflects the needs and demands of city residents and businesses.

Not only are the government meeting our community's expectation through a renewed focus on urban renewal but also we understand the importance of urban renewal in achieving a range of policy outcomes. Urban renewal will deliver a range of social, environmental and economic benefits. It will continue to drive urban productivity through mixed use development and regional hubs. It will create employment opportunities during both the capital work phase and the operational phase. It will drive tourism activity and boost the tourism economy—and draw people from across Australia and around the world to Canberra. It will drive connections across the city, the country and the world.

Urban renewal will capitalise on existing infrastructure and attract increased investment by creating new markets for new businesses to service new facilities and their occupants and residents. Urban renewal will assist the government in achieving its goals in relation to sustainability and environmental outcomes. People will rely less on their cars to get around, resulting in fewer greenhouse gas emissions. It will assist with modal shift as Canberra moves to a more compact city and comes to rely less and less on cars which, of course, will tie in strongly with capital metro and the transformative nature of this project. Urban renewal can also promote more active forms of transport, which is linked to better health outcomes for the community.

The government is also delivering one the of the largest and most significant urban renewal projects in Australia—city to the lake. City to the lake will allow for an additional 15,000 residents in the city centre, resulting in an uplift in the economy and an increase in Canberra's vibrancy. Other urban renewal projects such as Melbourne 3000 have focused on delivering residential infrastructure with excellent results.

In addition to increasing the number of residents in the city, city to the lake will deliver world-class facilities and infrastructure, including a major new public waterfront for the city; an aquatic facility; a new convention and exhibition centre; a city stadium; residential, commercial and mixed use development opportunities; and recreation, cultural and community facilities.

A recent study by the Grattan Institute found that CBDs and inner suburbs are the engine rooms of our economy. Economic activity is concentrating in CBDs and inner suburbs because high knowledge intensive firms need highly skilled workers, and locating in the city gives firms access to more of them. Investing in the livability and accessibility of our city centre as proposed by city to the lake and capital metro will have a profound impact on economic growth and the prosperity of our city.

Productivity is important to grow our economy across the board, to generate shared wealth across our community, to drive innovation and to expand and strengthen our labour market. The ACT government's business development strategy, which the Chief Minister will update tomorrow, will provide further detail. As the Chief Minister has noted, the ACT government's vision for business development is built on fostering the right business environment, supporting business investment and accelerating business innovation.

Connectivity is also important. The previous federal Labor government's visionary project, the national broadband network, has the potential to transform people's lives and to open up new and exciting opportunities for learning and working. While we do not suffer from the tyranny of distance within Canberra, the NBN offers the possibilities of working from home, as well as the possibilities of communicating and collaborating nationally and internationally on a wide range of different projects.

I know that in my local area in Gungahlin, it has transformed local businesses and its use in the digital hub located at the Gungahlin Library and CIT Learning Centre has helped not just with study but also people seeking advice and support from a range of government services, notably Centrelink. This has meant that people no longer need to wait in queues at offices and can get directly and quickly to services they need.

The renewal of the ACT's public housing stock is also important. It is important because everyone deserves to live in good quality housing in the private and public sectors. The ACT government's housing stock is ageing. Some properties were built in a time when energy efficiency was not on the agenda and they are therefore expensive to heat and cool and now they are becoming more expensive to maintain.

The ACT government's policy objective to renew our public housing stock is grounded in the belief that public and social housing is vital to the lives of many Canberra families as an enabling service to help them improve their chances of participating in and contributing to our economy and community. Canberra has always had a unique approach to public housing, what has become known as the salt and peppering of housing to distribute social housing throughout our suburbs and regions. This is a good thing and it will continue.

The renewal of the public housing stock will bring a boost also to our construction sector, with new construction jobs. As well, I know that the Chief Minister and the Minister for Housing are keen to explore innovative ways of funding this renewal, seeking partnerships with community housing organisations and the private sector to contribute to this important project.

My motion also talks about the importance of a modern, fast and reliable public transport system. As many members acknowledge, many Canberrans will continue to need to rely on the family car. I will be one of them. But I will rely on the family car and public transport in different mixes at different stages of my and my family's life. Capital metro will add to our current public transport mix. Canberrans want their government to be thinking, planning and funding high quality services and programs for our future.

Capital metro will help to reduce the travel time from our fastest growing suburban region, Gungahlin. As I have said, I travel on this route each day to the city. I know how much it has grown over the years and how much it still has to grow. Capital metro will deliver Gungahlin residents and other residents along the first route a real alternative to car travel to and from work and for social purposes. It will also provide a real solution to the congestion building along our busiest arterial route for residents in Gungahlin and north Canberra. But it will also shape our city's growth in the future. The range of urban renewal projects along the length of the light rail line, in stage 1 and in the future in various additional stages, will stimulate the territory economy through public and private investment.

As Minister Corbell has said many times, capital metro's value is not just in providing transport options but also in the way it will transform our city in the future. It will drive urban renewal along the corridor, with new and innovative housing and commercial spaces. It will transform the way Canberrans move around our city and the way our community interact with one another.

This motion also asks the Assembly to support renewal across our suburbs and town centres. The government continues to invest in municipal services across our city and in upgrading our playgrounds and shopping centres—\$1.2 million alone for shopping centres in this year's budget. The government has also invested \$1.2 billion in roads projects over the last 10 years. The government's land release program contributes considerably to urban renewal. There is significant land release in greenfield sites, as well as sites in and around our town centres. Of the 13½ thousand dwelling sites in the four-year program for 2014-15, 55 per cent are classified as infill.

My motion calls on the Assembly to resolve to continue supporting the ACT government to deliver renewal across all our suburbs and town centres, to renew our public housing stock and to deliver light rail. Our track record and planned urban renewal agenda highlights that urban renewal is much more than just new buildings and construction dollars. It is about the free and seamless movement of people, ideas and investment throughout and across the city.

This government has a clear idea of the city we want to become and is mindful that this will, at times, require a paradigm shift in how our city works, grows and changes to meet today's challenges and take hold of future opportunities. Canberra will be the place where people across the generations are compelled to stay because there is vibrancy, life and opportunity. As my motion notes, urban renewal is vital to growing Canberra's economy and strengthening its community by improving productivity, connectivity and sustainability. I commend the motion.

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (11.34): I thank Ms Fitzharris for giving me an opportunity to once again lodge my concern about the misplaced priorities of the ACT Labor-Greens government. In fact, I never cease to be amazed by the fact that all the Labor members opposite are so desperate to do the bidding of Mr Rattenbury. I never cease to be amazed by the fact that the Labor Party have been willing to commit to an \$800 million project, and to do so willingly on the back of a demand by a Green. Those opposite have sold out their principles and convictions, and believe their own spin about the indulgent and unjustified project.

As I have said before in the Assembly, I have the utmost respect for the public servants who are working on instructions from cabinet. Page 13 of the full business case for light rail tells the story. It says:

Given the background to this project, including analysis ... performed and decisions already made by Government, this *Full Business Case* considers the business case for a 12km light rail route from the City to Gungahlin. It does not extend to an analysis of alternative transportation means or routes.

In other words, the experts in Capital Metro and their consultants have been sidelined. They did not get a say on whether a tram is required and they did not get a say on the route.

I believe that is an insult to the board of Capital Metro, an insult to the executive director and an insult to all the staff at the Capital Metro Agency. I have no doubt that there are people in the agency and elsewhere in government, including ACTION buses, who are more than capable of planning for our public transport needs in the future. However, the government has not done that. The government has not empowered these people. Minister Corbell, Minister Rattenbury and Chief Minister Barr backed themselves to the tune of \$783 million to know what is the best mode and what is the best route. This is no way to do transport policy and it is no way to do public policy.

Regarding paragraph (d) of the motion, we do not need light rail as a catalyst for urban renewal. The land could be developed independent of light rail. All it requires is for the government to make the land available. We have seen this with developments right down the corridor, such as Space and Space 2, Axis apartments, IQ apartments, the Haig apartments, and many other buildings. In fact, thousands of dwellings have come online up and down Northbourne Avenue without light rail.

The centre of Canberra is, like in any other city, a desirable place to live. It is convenient, primarily because it is so close to essential services. City living also provides for a good quality of life, as restaurants, bars, cafes, gyms, supermarkets and shopping centres are all within walking distance. Fortunately, here in Canberra we also have Lake Burley Griffin, which is just across the road from the city. So, to put it bluntly, living on Northbourne Avenue and in the city does provide a good quality of life as it stands at present.

Because of this, people are encouraged to build in the city. They know there will always be a high demand for these properties. We see this every day when property and rental prices in the city are some of the highest in the ACT. So I will say it again: light rail does nothing to actually renew Northbourne Avenue. The government can renew Northbourne Avenue by making land available. It could all be done with prudent planning decisions. Of course, the government would still be a financial beneficiary of those decisions, but they would not need to spend \$800 million along the way.

The removal of 400 trees, the majority of which are healthy, from the Northbourne Avenue median strip seems illogical, particularly when the government is proposing that they be replaced by a tram and overhead wires. In this context “urban renewal” and “light rail” seem to be mutually exclusive.

A lot has been said in the light rail debate about the heritage listing of public housing on the route. It is the government’s intention to knock down all of this housing if they can. The rapid business case highlights this. Today it has been reported that the Heritage Council will protect one of the Dickson towers, pair houses, three-storey flats, maisonettes and garden flats.

This shows that the government have put the cart before the horse. They have promised, in part, that they will be able to remove all of the public housing houses on Northbourne Avenue in order to make way for light rail. However, this was always unlikely to be able to happen. The ACT Heritage Council was always going to have very firm views on the housing precincts along Northbourne Avenue. The cost-benefit analysis released last year of 1.2 seems to have shrunk just a little more as a result of the Heritage Council’s decision. Again, the question is: why are we spending \$800 million when we can have the same benefits by simply having better government?

The government have chosen to build light rail because they need the support of Mr Rattenbury. Mr Rattenbury in turn supports light rail because he is ideologically opposed to cars. Because of this, the government have walked blindly towards their light rail policy. If they want urban renewal, they do not need light rail. They simply need a better planning system and better governance.

The \$783 million figure which the government has published is of course the capital cost of construction, but it does not include many other essential works. Of course, changes to intersections near the route, changes to bus infrastructure, the construction of park and ride and many other works have not yet been factored into the cost. Further to this, dozens of staff in the Capital Metro Agency have not been factored into the headline costs of delivering light rail either.

However, one of the biggest expenses related to light rail which the government has been reluctant to put a price on is the cost of reconstructing public housing. There are many hundreds of public housing dwellings in multi-unit complexes up and down Northbourne Avenue. The government have flagged their desire to redevelop most of these complexes as part of the light rail project. Therefore, these costs are directly as a consequence of the government’s decision to go ahead with light rail. To reconstruct hundreds of dwellings will surely be in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

The government may say that this cost is not linked to light rail, but the fact is: would the government be doing this work if it was not for light rail? If the answer is no, then the cost should be added to the \$783 million figure. If the answer is yes, then the government cannot attribute the land sales of these public housing complexes as part of the benefits of light rail. I will say that again. If the government was not going to do the public housing redevelopment if it was not for light rail, then you have to put the cost of reconstruction onto light rail. However, if the government does admit that the reconstruction of public housing is attributed to light rail, then so must the land sales also be attributed to the public housing project. The cost of land sales on Northbourne Avenue will simply offset some of the costs of reconstructing the very dwellings which are being knocked down as part of the government's so-called renewal of Northbourne Avenue.

The ACT government says that light rail is all about urban renewal. That does not mean much for the 94 per cent of Canberrans that are not within walking distance of light rail. How is light rail going to bring renewal to them? The fact is that this project is going to suck the life out of the rest of Canberra. In fact, that is exactly what the Ernst & Young job report said. Page 16 said:

... the majority of the jobs accommodated along the corridor will not be new to the ACT. Rather, they will locate in the corridor instead of somewhere else within the territory.

I will say that again:

... the majority of the jobs accommodated along the corridor will not be new to the ACT. Rather, they will locate in the corridor instead of somewhere else within the territory.

So the jobs on the light rail corridor are not new jobs, just ones that the ACT government has sucked from elsewhere in the ACT. So not only will Canberrans be paying for it through their rates, taxes, fees and charges, but they will also be paying for it through their communities.

I will deviate for a minute and discuss the jobs aspect of the light rail project again. Rather than the ridiculous 50,000 figure which Minister Corbell keeps foolishly saying, let us see what the EY report said. I quote from page 2:

For light rail construction: the total number of jobs that will be supported is estimated to be 3,560, spread over the construction period (2016-2018). 1,450 of those are direct and around 2,100 indirect jobs.

It goes on to say:

Recognising that labour market constraints mean not all of the gross 'footprint' jobs are achievable, the labour market modelling finds that around 960 net additional direct and indirect jobs will be supported during the assumed peak of construction in 2017. The equivalent figures for 2016 and 2018 are 720 and 240, respectively.



For \$783 million we do not seem to be getting many jobs at all. And we all know that the traditional construction sector delivers far more jobs and far wider economic benefits per dollar spent than light rail.

Nowhere is the government's neglect at the expense of light rail more evident than in the maintenance of local shopping centres. All across Canberra there are examples of local shopping centres that are run down and messy. They are becoming eyesores. Instead of investing in the maintenance of local centres, the government has been more concerned about its grand projects, like the light rail project. The government likes to announce money for shopping centre upgrades and produce slick artists' impressions, but that is as far as it goes.

**Mrs Jones:** And then you wait four years.

**MR COE:** As Mrs Jones knows all too well, there have been very few actual improvements to local shopping centres but there has been a lot of talk. There is great potential at local shopping centres, but potential is not good enough. Potential does not fix the cracked footpaths or the broken lights. Potential does not make local shopping centres the vibrant centre of the community. If the government really cares about urban renewal then it should start by maintaining and upgrading local community infrastructure such as shopping centres.

The government's talk about urban renewal is just that—talk. There is little substance beyond a glib ministerial title and throwaway lines. The fact is that urban renewal in Canberra is hampered by harsh planning rules. The government continues to impose the lease variation charge on people who want to develop projects that would help with urban renewal. The lease variation charge is a serious disincentive for urban renewal. Urban renewal requires redevelopment and change. The lease variation charge means that good projects are stopped because the cost is prohibitive. Instead of encouraging renewal, the lease variation charge discourages renewal. It encourages stagnation. Derelict buildings are left in place because it is too expensive to redevelop the area. If the government wants to encourage urban renewal it should review the lease variation charge and other charges on development to provide an environment where renewal is encouraged.

Of course, the number one restriction on urban renewal is variation 306. The fact is that our planning system stifles development and urban renewal. The solar access rules get in the way of sensible developments. The government was repeatedly warned that the onerous requirements would lead to bad planning outcomes and to stagnation in industry. Instead it has been forced to roll back some of these regulations which have been proven to be unworkable. However, there is still much more to be done. The requirements of variation 306 mean that innovative projects, the sorts of projects that are vital for urban renewal, cannot go ahead.

There is much that could be said in response to this motion. However, unfortunately, once again we have a government that has tried to use a B-grade wedge and sought to tie light rail to urban renewal—tried to tie light rail to planning objectives, and planning and housing. In stark contrast to what the government has tried to spin, the ACT government's light rail project has not enabled better planning or better housing outcomes but the very opposite. It is for that reason that we do not support the motion.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Urban Renewal and Minister for Tourism and Events) (11.49): I am very pleased to rise to speak to Ms Fitzharris's motion today, and I thank her very much for bringing it forward, because urban renewal is a core part of making the city of Canberra that we all know and love an even better place. I spoke earlier this month about how important urban renewal is for our suburbs and what we are doing as a government to ensure that Canberra is a place where people want to live, work, visit and invest in.

I spoke of the challenges that we face through population growth, climate change, energy and food security and acknowledged our community's very clear desire to preserve the history of our city as we grow in our second century. I also spoke about the progress we have made across the territory, with a number of successful urban renewal projects either completed or underway, including in Kingston, Campbell and the Tuggeranong town centre, and how they present exciting opportunities for new investment and new jobs, new homes and new lifestyles for Canberrans. Urban renewal is critical to our city's competitiveness, our productivity, our livability and ultimately our city's economic viability.

But today I would like to take the opportunity to talk about how important urban renewal is for social housing. Our city has a proud public housing tradition. As a city growing from scratch, public housing played a crucial role in giving the influx of new residents to our capital, mostly public sector workers, somewhere to live as they went about building this city in its earliest days. Since the establishment of self-government, successive ACT governments have prioritised public housing, and my government is no different in this regard.

But Canberra's long commitment to public housing has left a legacy. We have the oldest portfolio in Australia. The average age of a house in our portfolio is around 30 years. The stock on Northbourne Avenue is now more than 50 years old and, to put it bluntly, these buildings are old and they are tired. They have reached the end of their useful life. They were built quickly and to the standards of a different time, and bringing them up to contemporary building or energy efficiency standards is simply not a viable option.

Most importantly—and I think this is something we should all dwell on—these buildings do not serve the needs of our tenants, some of whom are the most vulnerable Canberrans. In fact, these buildings do a significant disservice to our tenants. They serve as a reminder of outmoded thinking on public housing. They reflect a time when the concept of place-based disadvantage was not appreciated let alone considered. These properties were constructed hastily in the era when large numbers of public servants were being transferred to Canberra as part of the establishment of commonwealth departments.

Fifty years ago these buildings were adequate, temporary accommodation for newly arrived, single people. They are not adequate for this purpose today. They do not suit families. They do not suit ageing in place. They do not suit disability access. They are expensive to maintain and to live in. This is the bottom line: much of our current public housing stock, particularly the stock along Northbourne Avenue, does not meet the needs of public housing tenants and no amount of wistful wishing can change that.

Our public housing tenants deserve better than Bega and Strathgordon Court. They deserve better than the Currong and Allawah apartments. They deserve better than the Dickson flats, the Northbourne flats, the Owen flats, the Stuart flats and the Red Hill flats. And that is why my government will replace them all, to give all our public housing tenants homes they can be proud of and homes that our whole community can be proud to provide. Like the Labor governments before us, my government is committed to public housing as an important strategy in tackling poverty and social disadvantage. That is what good governments do. They support their most vulnerable.

Through the public housing asset management strategy the government has committed to the renewal of its public housing portfolio to ensure the provision of sustainable and suitable public housing in the ACT by reducing maintenance costs and building accommodation that aligns with tenants' needs. As we break down concentrations of disadvantage, we will create better amenity in our suburbs and a better way of life for our most vulnerable. So in renewing our public housing stock we have to think about all Canberrans, no matter where they fall on the housing spectrum. Redeveloping outdated public housing stock across the territory creates the opportunity to increase the range of housing options for the whole community.

My government will not just invest in public housing. We will do so in a way that drives the urban renewal of our city and improves the range of housing choices for ACT residents, and this, critically, includes more affordable housing, more options for ageing in place and adaptable and accessible dwellings. It provides increased choice for Canberrans. It enables increased densities around transport corridors and group and town centres to support their ongoing viability.

We should continue to be proud of the city that Canberra has been and what it can become but, of course, we always must have an eye to the future. We should not be proud of co-locating large numbers of disadvantaged people in one location. The gateway to our city shows contempt for the needs of the most vulnerable and we need to move on from the world view of the 1960s. Canberra deserves a gateway of which we can all be proud, one that signals we are an inclusive community, a community that provides a range of housing options for all of its residents, a gateway that says that we are a confident, bold and ready city. And that is exactly what the ACT government are committed to through our urban renewal agenda.

While we must always be mindful of the legacy of planning and development that has shaped our city, we simply cannot remain static and let Canberra become an epitaph of an outmoded, mid-20th century mindset. The government understands the importance of Canberra's unique characteristics and natural assets, our traditional built forms and our iconic landmarks. As a young city we do not have large tracts of grand Georgian, Victorian or Edwardian buildings to give us a sense of continuing architectural heritage. But that does not mean we have to hold onto buildings that are past their use-by date, particularly when there is overwhelming community support for their demolition and redevelopment.

There are a plethora of ways in which we can document the significance of buildings to the ACT's cultural heritage without leaving them all standing. We have a clear idea

of the city we want to become, and all of us in this place must be mindful that this will, at times, require a paradigm shift on how our city works, how our city grows and how our city changes to meet contemporary challenges.

But the challenges we will face as we grow bring wonderful opportunities, principally the opportunity to do better now than we have done in the past, the opportunity to use urban renewal to showcase the best of environmental, social and financial sustainability and the opportunity to cement Canberra as a city building its future, not one jealously hoarding a stale past. I commend Ms Fitzharris for her motion.

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Minister for Planning, Minister for Roads and Parking, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations, Minister for Children and Young People and Minister for Ageing) (11.58): I rise today to support Ms Fitzharris's motion and I am pleased to be able to speak on this important issue of urban renewal. As we discussed in the Assembly last week, Canberra is facing the challenges of the 21st century posed by population growth, climate change and energy use and we need to position Canberra so that we can achieve a sustainable future.

The Chief Minister spoke last week about the need for urban renewal and how this will help Canberra become a modern and dynamic city with a strong urban core. I am pleased to say that the ACT planning strategy, adopted by the government in 2012, recognises the drivers for change and the need for us as a community to respond accordingly. The approach being taken in the planning strategy builds on the strengths of Canberra's planning legacy, such as its metropolitan structure and transport network. Integrating land use and transport planning will contribute to the development of Canberra as a compact and efficient city and will deliver on the ACT government's vision for a connected, livable and prosperous city built around urban renewal. As our city grows towards a population of 500,000 over the next 20 years it is becoming increasingly important for us to address the challenges of creating a livable, resilient and connected place for all Canberrans and those in the surrounding region.

Transport for Canberra, also adopted by the government in 2012, provides the foundation for transport planning in the ACT over the next 20 years, with the objective of improving everyone's mobility alongside a choice of conventional travel and convenient travel. This will be done by putting in place actions to increase public transport and active travel mode share. One way to do this is by investing in significant public transport projects such as capital metro.

The ACT planning strategy and transport for Canberra were developed after considerable research and analysis and reinforce our intention for a more compact, resilient and efficient city. These important policies are delivered in part through statutory documents such as the territory plan. However, they are not only documents that stand still. They, and the territory plan, must respond to the changes that are occurring in our community.

One example of how the government is working on this program of urban renewal is through the omnibus territory plan variation process. The Environment and Planning Directorate has produced an omnibus territory plan variation to support the land release program and the revitalisation of the public housing portfolio. Numerous

individual sites are being combined into an omnibus variation so that the community gains an appreciation of the overall issues. This approach assists in telling a connected story of urban renewal.

The redevelopment of some public housing sites is necessary to revitalise and renew the public housing portfolio. Many of the public housing sites are old, expensive to maintain and have limited ability to meet tenant needs. Planning uplift will deliver better design outcomes, including improved amenity, and provide opportunities for better revenue returns. This could mean an increase in density and building heights on some of the sites, sites that are close to shops, public transport and other community facilities. These are sites where urban renewal is most appropriately located.

The variation also introduced a range of different housing types into the older suburbs. This will give people the opportunity to remain in the suburbs while they move into housing that better suits their needs. And we know maintaining community linkages is important when people get older. It also means that these people leave their houses, other people and families move in, further regenerating and renewing the suburb. We will also see a mix of generations, ensuring vibrancy in these areas of renewal. When land is sold it is important that it provides the best outcome for the community and it meets the government's objectives set out in policies such as the planning strategy and transport for Canberra by ensuring appropriate revenue returns for the citizens of Canberra.

In response to community comments about pre-consultation events, the omnibus package has been split into two packages. The first package was released in November 2014, with the consultation closing just after Christmas last year. This included public housing sites in Kaleen and Lyons as well as land releases in Charnwood, Greenway, Mitchell and Symonston. The first omnibus package also included the site of the former Downer Primary School. The draft territory plan variation proposes to turn that site into a vibrant, mixed use development with a focus on residential development that will help renew the suburb of Downer.

The public submissions received are being considered by the Environment and Planning Directorate, who will in turn provide reports to me with recommendations on the way forward for each site.

The ACT planning strategy also calls for master plans to be undertaken. These master plans respond to place-specific needs that enable Canberra to be a city where everybody can take advantage of its network of centres, open spaces and modes of travel and enjoy a sense of wellbeing while participating in vibrant civic and cultural life. And I note Mr Coe's comments earlier about planning with colourful diagrams, but it is important that we engage with the public during these processes and we get their ideas.

The master planning program for commercial, group and town centres aims to encourage the revitalisation of selected commercial centres within the ACT. These centres are ready for renewal through the encouragement of new development and the provision of opportunities for adjustment in the built form, improved connectivity in public places, to better accommodate future residents of, workers in and visitors to the centres.

So far, work has been completed on master plans for the Dickson, Kingston, Kambah, Erindale and Weston group centres, as well as a master plan for the Tuggeranong town centre to revitalise and attract investment to the area. Master plans for the Pialligo rural village and for Oaks Estate have also been completed to protect the unique character of these settings in those areas while permitting moderate levels of commercial activity to assist in retaining the viability of each centre.

Work is currently underway on the remaining master plans, including Mawson, Curtin, Tharwa, Kippax and Calwell, as well as the Woden and Belconnen town centres. These master plans will guide the development and renewal of these centres into the future. Of course, community and industry engagement in the development of these plans is critical, as I have said, to their success.

As master plans are integrated with the light rail and are multidisciplinary, they also address a range of elements, including increased density, allowing for higher density development in centres close to services and public transport and therefore reducing our urban footprint. For example, the light rail master plan considers where development can occur to maximise the benefits of light rail and support urban infill targets, and I am expecting to release the light rail master plan soon for consultation.

Public transport, incorporating development with the frequent network and along transport corridors, encourages more users onto those services through safe and easy access, better pedestrian connections and allowing for park and ride facilities. For example, in the Erindale group centre master plan a key component of the work was to resolve a public transport hub for the centre and commuters between town centres as well. Likewise, a light rail master plan will support the development of enhanced public transport services along identified transport corridors.

Master plans for centres also address more detailed, precinct-based issues such as traffic and car parking, managing traffic and parking issues by encouraging better pedestrian and cyclist access to desired destinations. For example, the issue of connectivity in managing pedestrian movement through the centres is a key outcome for all master plans.

In the public domain, allowing for green urban spaces such as tree-lined streets and pocket parks will help ameliorate urban temperatures and absorb air pollutants. For example, in the draft Woden town centre master plan currently released for public engagement, the provision and integration of public open spaces within and through the centre is a key feature to improve the amenity for workers in, visitors to and residents of the centre as well.

Throughout the consultation on the ACT planning strategy, the government heard strong support for investigation into higher density developments alongside our existing transport corridors, town centres and group centres. The government responded to these issues and accordingly prioritised the master plan studies to areas where redevelopment pressures are growing.

The future growth of Canberra as a prosperous and sustainable city cannot be secured through extending the city further and further at its edges. We must balance the growth. So I acknowledge Ms Fitzharris's support in delivering urban renewal in Canberra in the suburbs and town centres and of course look forward to the priority of the first stage of the light rail network.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Justice, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Transport Reform) (12.08): I am pleased to speak in support of this motion. Members will know that the Greens and I are supportive of quality urban renewal. Done well, it has an excellent capacity to help achieve the social, economic and environmental outcomes that will ensure we have a healthy and green city in the long term. Urban renewal provides opportunities to create long-lasting, environmentally efficient infrastructure to implement forward-thinking planning for the city that will ensure we are a sustainable 21st century city.

I have talked before in the Assembly about some of the quality examples I have seen in other cities. I cite in particular a trip I took to Portland, Oregon. It is considered to be a highly successful example of a city that has transformed itself through the construction of light rail and quality urban renewal. It has an interesting history. The city first grew to a point where its roads and freeways were starting to interfere quite seriously with the amenity of the city, loss of neighbourhoods, growing congestion and pollution.

They consciously decided to turn away from car-based infrastructure and more strongly pursue public transport, walking and cycling. They have made some very positive progress. They have seen significant light rail-related development that has provided benefits to the community. They have seen whole areas of the city that might have been run down or in some cases quite derelict transformed into vibrant neighbourhoods that are full of families and city life. An area such as the Pearl district in Portland is a perfect example of this. Putting in the light rail line led to an area that was formerly warehouses and really quite run down being transformed into a neighbourhood that is full of people, vibrant venues and families playing in the parks.

Interestingly, what we have seen is that the developers are now actually moving away from one-bedroom apartments and moving to two and three-bedroom apartments, acknowledging the arrival of families into these sorts of areas. Not only has this brought life back to the city; it has also given a great boost to the economy. They have seen a new wave of innovative jobs and businesses flowing in. They have been able to adopt ambitious greenhouse gas reduction targets in Portland, which they appear to be on track to meet, and they of course have some great transport alternatives for the population.

I will not say that Portland has done everything right. They still have a variety of traffic and other problems to deal with. But it is quite clear to me that the concerted efforts that they have made with quality and environmentally friendly urban renewal, primarily focused around light rail, have made a positive difference and mitigated problems in the city that would otherwise have been much worse.

The challenges are similar for Canberra. Fortunately for us, at Canberra's young age they are less acute. We have the chance to act now, early in our development. By doing so, we can avoid and mitigate to an even greater extent the problems that face growing cities. Similarly, we can maximise the benefits that come with concerted efforts on urban renewal and modern, environmentally friendly public transport.

As an example of what I consider urban renewal, consider the extensive benefits that will accrue to the community associated with the construction of light rail in the Gungahlin to city corridor. They are billions of dollars of benefits and a long-lasting positive legacy for the community. They are environmental, social and economic benefits. In contrast, consider some of the alternative plans—if you can call them plans—that we have heard.

These suggestions emphasise inaction. They instead talk vaguely about building more car parks and expanding roads. They seem to pretend that the corridor will not grow, that congestion will not get worse or that there is no such thing as pollution or oil price volatility. They are not interested in the future of the city in 10, 20 or 100 years from now. They are not interested in the fact that car-dependent development places economic pressures on households or that it entrenches social disadvantages.

Members may be interested in a series of papers recently released by the London School of Economics cities research program as part of a global cooperative flagship program called “The new climate economy”. In one of the papers “The transformative role of global urban growth” the researchers emphasise that well-managed cities in high income countries like Australia could continue to concentrate national economic growth through re-densification and the rollout of innovative infrastructure and technologies.

In contrast, poorly managed urban growth is likely to have substantial economic costs. Urban sprawl and poor public transport infrastructure, amongst other things, can hinder accessibility and mobility, increase air pollution and exacerbate urban poverty, which reduces the economic benefits of urban concentrations and increases costs. This growth pathway also tends to lead to unnecessary greenhouse gas emissions, social exclusion, and a range of other environmental and social costs.

The report states that the choices that countries and cities make today about managing urban growth will lock in the economic and climate benefits or costs for decades to come. The report particularly emphasises the cost of business-as-usual growth. It says that while the abundance of cheap energy, land, capital, labour and resources has supported the economic growth of cities in past centuries, today the business-as-usual trend of poorly managed urban growth in cities is leading to substantial costs.

The economic and social costs include growing financial and welfare costs related to traffic congestion, escalating economic and social costs due to air pollution, the lock-in of inefficiently high levels of energy consumption and a wide range of other economic and social costs, including those related to road safety, community severance, low activity levels with health implications, reduced ecosystem services and food security. These are all challenges facing the ACT in the decades to come, perhaps not to the same extent as faced by some other rapidly developing cities but certainly the same questions and challenges are relevant here in the territory.



I would like to turn to the comments on Ms Fitzharris's motion about housing, because what I can say unequivocally is that we need to grow our social housing stock and we need to be more responsive to the environmental and social needs of a modern housing portfolio. That means we must renew and redevelop our housing stock so that we can better support vulnerable members of our community.

It means improving the quality of our housing—for instance, fulfilling our parliamentary agreement item to continue expanding public housing efficiency upgrades to reduce the environmental impact and to make heating and cooling more affordable for tenants. That is one of those very practical things that government can do to ease cost of living pressures: make sure that houses do have the right insulation so that tenants are not racking up massive electricity bills but instead are able to use money for other matters as well as having a comfortable quality of life in the house that they are in.

We need to build new housing that is designed to meet the needs of tenants. Often this will mean smaller complexes of 10 to 15 units to reduce the risk of pockets of disadvantage forming and to promote more inclusive neighbourhoods. I think this is a very important lesson as we reconsider the development of some of the large multi-unit housing sites across the territory. I think the lessons of years bygone are that those large-scale developments do have their own negative social issues that can arise. Certainly, the wisdom these days is that having a smaller group of houses builds a better sense of community and avoids some of those problems that have arisen in some of the larger scale developments.

For me, that is one of the advantages of moving to redevelop some of these sites. We also need to have a new approach to the often wicked problems associated with an ageing stock that was built to respond to the needs of a different time and when Canberra was a very different place. Certainly, I think that goes back again to issues of design around energy efficiency but also accessibility—building houses that are of a universal design so that a range of tenants can access them. This includes those with a disability and those without a disability, but also so that people can age in place. As their mobility declines, they do not need to move house. In fact, the house can be quite cost effectively adapted for them.

These things perhaps do not seem like urban renewal, but at the very personal scale these are the things that urban renewal is actually all about. There are opportunities for true urban renewal inherent in addressing these issues. They require a whole-of-government approach to achieve better outcomes. I was certainly proud to have worked with my cabinet colleagues last year to secure a roof-for-roof replacement of public housing properties identified as needing renewal. In particular, along Northbourne Avenue, I was proud to see consideration given to rebuilding housing within walking distance of the transport corridor.

We need to explore the urban renewal process as being more than bricks and mortar. It is also about the human story, the human scale and, as they say in the classics, the vibe of the thing. It needs careful planning and genuine consultation with not just the tenants but also the broader community about the future sustainability of the urban

fabric. The diversity of people living in our streets, the positive social inclusiveness and the built form all have an impact on the quality and experience of our lives in a city.

I think that many members met Jan Gehl, the Danish city planner, when he was here recently, and will have seen the stories in the paper. I had the opportunity to speak to him. It is always very interesting, of course, to have that chance to talk to someone that comes from outside, that offers fresh perspectives and that is perhaps not caught up in the day to day of the Canberra policy discussions.

I think the thing that I took out of the conversation I had with Jan Gehl is that you need to plan cities for people. That must be the number one policy question that we ask ourselves as we work through these issues: how will people interact in this place? How will it suit the human scale? These are questions that do not always have an easy answer, but I think they are the sorts of things that should motivate us as we think about these issues.

So I thank Ms Fitzharris for bringing this motion forward today. I think that the question of urban renewal is one that we are facing as a city. We may only be a relatively young city still, but clearly the world has changed a lot in the last 102 years. There are parts of our city that can be renewed in a way that makes us an even better city to live in than it already is. It is a discussion that will be an ongoing one but it is one we need to be having. The debate today allows us to reflect on some of the important principles and the rationale behind some of that urban renewal effort. I will be supporting the motion today.

**DR BOURKE** (Ginninderra) (12.19): Belconnen is less than 50 years old as a town, almost born yesterday compared to the ancient cities in Iraq or to Rome and Beijing. However, Belconnen is undergoing rapid urban renewal under this government, bringing the promise of those early plans for a dynamic city centre to fruition. We are maintaining vast green corridors in Belconnen—open spaces, nature parks and more intensely manicured parks, such as the impressive John Knight Memorial Park, which are being constantly renewed, updated and improved.

There are also substantial areas being put aside in the early town planning of Belconnen for future development, notably in the town centre and around the suburban shopping centres. Other opportunities for urban renewal have arisen though changes in the community's need and market conditions. Over 50 years the demographics of the Belconnen community have changed. Families are smaller, more households do not have children and more young adults are living independently of their families.

We are living longer and seniors are living in retirement in Canberra, whereas in the earlier days of Belconnen they returned, for example, to Melbourne or Sydney, where they had grown up. We have a wonderful legacy of suburbs full of houses on large blocks with room for front gardens, backyards and a garage or carport.

These are treasured. They meet the needs of many families and are being renovated, as needed, to meet more modern tastes and needs. Meanwhile, due to the demographic

changes noted above, the demand for a variety of accommodation choices has increased and has been met by urban infill with low rise apartments in suburban areas around shops in areas such as Bruce and higher rise apartment buildings in the Belconnen CBD.

Meanwhile aged-care accommodation has spread dramatically through the suburbs, for independently living seniors. Other opportunities to add to the accommodation mix have arisen through market changes. I am thinking, for example, of the townhouses being built on the old Jamison Inn site or the rehabilitation and reuse of old suburban service station sites.

These service station sites next to shopping centres are springing back to life in Belconnen as prime development opportunities. A Page service station is being developed into residential apartments and a retail space. Another site at Jamison has already been redeveloped. Redevelopment of disused service station sites revitalises suburbs and local shopping centres while providing Canberrans with a wider range of housing choices.

The Freestyle Apartments on the Holt service station site were developed a few years ago by CHC housing. CHC redeveloped the O'Connor service station site as part of a City Edge development. They have also undertaken the redevelopment of a range of old public housing in Belconnen, providing low cost accommodation especially for groups of tenants on low incomes.

CHC has built extensive affordable housing in Bruce as well. The decommissioned Higgins school site is another example of changes in demand leading to opportunities for urban renewal and new accommodations, particularly for aged care, becoming available. In the last decade we have expanded housing in west Belconnen, including West Macgregor, and the Riverview development further west is under design.

Closer to the Belconnen CBD, the suburb of Lawson, long delayed by the federal government, is surging ahead, with the basic infrastructure completed and the blocks sold to eager buyers. Canberrans' high average income drives up our costs of living even for those living on welfare, marginal incomes and the minimum wage.

As a result, affordable housing initiatives and public housing in Belconnen play an essential role in a city that is expensive to live in by any standards. A major upgrade and renewal of our public housing is welcome news to my constituents. It will fit well with the range of initiatives of this government to help those most in need. It is a sign of this Labor government's commitment to Labor values of a fair go for all.

**MS FITZHARRIS** (Molonglo) (12.24), in reply: I thank my colleagues for discussing this motion today and I thank those who have already indicated their support. I was pleased to bring this motion about urban renewal to the Assembly today. In the motion I talked about productivity, connectivity, sustainability and investment across all our suburbs as a key part of urban renewal. I thank the Chief Minister for his support of the motion, for articulating his understanding of the challenges that our future presents, for articulating also a vision of what our city can be and for the energy this government is bringing to this important task.

I thank Minister Gentleman for his support and for his vision in understanding how our planning system needs to meet the needs of a growing and diversifying community and economy, for outlining his commitment to building a resilient community—a community that has housing choice and open spaces—and for his work to increase density and support urban infill through the planning system, which builds diversity as our city grows and matures and plans for our future.

The Chief Minister, Minister Gentleman and Minister Rattenbury also talked about the importance of renewing our housing stock as a priority for our public housing tenants. It is what they want. It is a priority for our social policy outcomes, which seek to improve the participation of all Canberrans in our economy and in our community, and it is a priority for urban renewal—not just along Northbourne Avenue, as important as that is, especially for the tenants currently there, but in other parts of our city, notably the inner south.

Our generous community understands that these developments no longer meet urban or social policy outcomes. Minister Berry is a passionate advocate for social housing tenants. I know she does not just want to put a roof over people's heads but to provide better homes to those people who really need it. I know how invested she is in working with these tenants. She knows it is important for tenants to know that the housing renewal process is a long-term process.

No tenant will be made homeless as a result of our renewal. As Minister Rattenbury indicated, the government announced last year that there will be a roof-for-roof replacement of social housing. The government will work to provide each and every tenant affected by the process with the capacity to determine their needs and preferences and provide them with suitable accommodation options. The government will listen and be sensitive to the wishes of tenants while undertaking this much-needed renewal of our ageing housing stock.

The renewal of public housing involves delivering an accelerated renewal program of public housing along the Northbourne corridor and other housing multi-unit properties outside the corridor. It will break down concentrations of disadvantage by redeveloping larger public housing complexes and maintaining our salt and peppering approach. It will build homes that meet the needs of tenants, be they older people, mums and dads with kids or people with a disability.

It will improve the energy efficiency of public housing and use of accessible design, which is particularly important for people on low incomes and people with a disability. It will reduce the burden of old stock that requires costly maintenance by designing new stock that has a lower maintenance requirement into the future. The renewal of the aged and rundown public housing along Northbourne Avenue is a key focus for the future urban landscape for our city and enhancing the gateway to our city.

The new homes will be modern, well-designed, efficient and better suited to the people whose needs we need to meet. On this note it is worth remembering that more than a third of public housing homes are home to people with a disability. The public housing renewal program, as the Chief Minister outlined, is ambitious and represents a significant increase in public housing replacement. For this reason it will progress over at least the next decade.

As has been outlined, the government’s urban renewal captures other core policies and services, but housing is a key component of this. Public housing is both a beneficiary of and a contributor to the modern urban environment of our city now and into the future. Quality public housing is vital to the government’s agenda on urban renewal.

I thank Minister Rattenbury for his support outlining renewal and growth and how, done well, it will improve community, economic and environmental outcomes. I thank Dr Bourke for talking about urban renewal in his electorate and the rich history of Ginninderra and the people in Belconnen.

My Labor colleagues and I, and Minister Rattenbury, have spoken about why we need urban renewal and what it delivers in the built form, as well as policy outcomes for our community and our economy. They have spoken about the future and all its possibilities—what it looks like and what role government, community and the private sector can contribute to this in terms of the conversation and deliberations about our future but also investment. They have spoken about the opportunities and challenges facing our city and our community.

As this motion outlines, I also want this place to be thinking about our future—its opportunities and challenges and how we get there. It may, as noted, mean a paradigm shift in our own and our community’s thinking. This is hard work, but it is worth while, and it is what the community expect of us. It is not about saying just what we will not do. I know that is in part the opposition’s role. I look forward to their solutions to reducing, for example, congestion on the Gungahlin to Civic route. I look forward to debating the cost of their solutions, and I particularly look forward to talking to the residents of Gungahlin about these clear choices.

It will not always be easy; it will not always be straightforward. That is what good public policy and good public decision making are about. As colleagues have noted, we must keep, above all, people and our community at the forefront. We have a special privilege and responsibility to them, especially to think about and plan for our future. Urban renewal is vital to this future.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 7

Mr Barr  
Dr Bourke  
Ms Burch  
Mr Corbell

Ms Fitzharris  
Mr Gentleman  
Ms Porter  
Mr Rattenbury

Mr Coe  
Mr Doszpot  
Mrs Dunne  
Mr Hanson

Mrs Jones  
Ms Lawder  
Mr Wall

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

## **Schools—safety**

### **Statement by Speaker**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Before we go to lunch I would just like to reflect on the fact that Mr Corbell, during the debate this morning, asked me to rule on whether Mr Hanson's statement was an imputation. Mr Hanson referred to "extraordinary threats that we have seen from Labor members attacking members of the opposition," and he stated those words previously: "the extraordinary threats that we have seen from Labor members in this place attacking members of the opposition and targeting specific members of the *Canberra Times* for doing their job".

This has been a rather robust debate, and I have reviewed much of what was said during question time yesterday. I refer members to this statement made by Minister Burch:

I just look to each and every one of you over there that have family and friends to understand that now you have opened the door for us to bring them into this place in any way, shape or form we like.

I thought at the time, when I heard those words, that they were fairly threatening words; I personally felt that they were threatening words. I have looked at the debate. I think that, while the debate has been robust and no holds have been barred in this, I do not believe that there has been anything that has been unparliamentary. Mind you, I think that we are coming pretty close to what is unparliamentary. On reflecting on what Minister Burch said yesterday—and there were some interjections which are not recorded in this version of the transcript that were of a similar tone—I think that the comment made by Mr Hanson this morning was a reflection on that. I need to warn people that you need to be very careful about your language and the impact that your language has on other members in this place and on the public. I do not believe that what was said on either occasion was strictly unparliamentary.

**Sitting suspended from 12.35 to 2.30 pm.**

## **Questions without notice**

### **Canberra Hospital—patient care**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, in response to recent complaints about the poor levels of patient care at the Canberra Hospital, the Secretary of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation ACT, Ms Jenny Miragaya, said that "nurses often reported too great a workload for the number of staff available". She said she thought that staff at the Canberra Hospital were working "in a system that is quite stretched at times". The Executive Director of the Healthcare Consumers Association of the ACT, Darlene Cox, said the "quality of patient care needed to improve". Minister, at Canberra Hospital, do nurses often have too great a workload for the number of staff available?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Mr Hanson for his question. There is no doubt that our hospital can be very busy at times. Nursing staff, medical staff and allied health staff

are in a pressured environment at times—there is no doubt about that—but that is nothing unique in the public hospital system. It is a challenge driven by increasing demand, particularly for tertiary healthcare services right across Australia, and the ACT is no different from that.

We work very constructively with our nursing unions, with our allied health representative bodies, with our doctors' representative bodies and with all staff concerned to continually improve the patient experience and to continually improve the delivery of care. I am very pleased that we have a hospital system which has one of the lowest rates—indeed, the lowest rate—of readmission of any public hospital system in the country. It speaks to the quality of the health care that is being provided, but patient experience is equally important, and we continue to work very closely on that issue in conjunction with all staff within ACT Health.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, at the Canberra Hospital does the quality of patient care need to improve, as stated by the Health Care Consumers Association?

**MR CORBELL:** There is no doubt that the quality of the patient experience has to improve. There are areas for improvement there. I see many comments come through to my office from people who have received care at the Canberra Hospital. Many of them are compliments and they are grateful for the high quality of care that they have received from staff at the hospital. Equally, complaints are received as well. We respond proactively to each and every one of those. So the patient experience is a critical one. We are responding to that in a very systemic way. We are making sure that there is—

**Mr Hanson:** A point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A point of order, Mr Hanson.

**Mr Hanson:** The question was very specific as to whether the quality of patient care needed to improve, not the patient experience. Could the minister be directly relevant and answer the question that, as stated by the Health Care Consumers Association, the quality of patient care needs to improve.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The question was in relation to the quality of patient care. I remind you, Mr Corbell, that that was the question and ask you to be directly relevant.

**MR CORBELL:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would say that the patients' experience is part of whether or not there is quality care, and that is why I am turning my mind to that element. If you do not have a good experience in hospital, it does not really matter whether or not you actually get your illness addressed; you still leave with a negative perception. So this is part of the continuum of care that we need to provide. If you want to look at the quality of care in terms of whether or not people are happy to be readmitted after they have received treatment, we have the lowest level—

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, Mr Hanson! You have asked your question.

**MR CORBELL:** of readmission of any public hospital system in the country.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, what are you doing to ensure the levels of available nursing care are sufficient to address issues of poor patient care at Canberra Hospital?

**MR CORBELL:** We are continuing to invest in additional nursing and, indeed, medical staff. For example, later this year we will commence a significant extension of the emergency department at the Canberra Hospital. We will be putting in place more beds; we will be putting in place more nursing and medical staff to support those beds. So that is a direct response to the increase in demand and a great example of how we are focusing on continuing to improve the quality of care.

I would not say that the quality of care is poor. I would not say that. Those opposite can say that, but there is no doubt that the quality of care at the Canberra Hospital is some of the best in the country. But does that mean that there are not areas where we can improve? Of course it does not mean that. There will be and are areas where we need to improve and we will continue to focus on those, working collaboratively with nursing, medical and allied health staff.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, what is the status of, and how is the government tracking on, the suite of nine measures to improve patient care announced by the previous minister last November?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Mrs Jones for her supplementary. I am very pleased to say that that work is ongoing. In particular, we have seen the implementation of the patient and family escalation process and call and respond early standard operating procedure for patients and their families to make sure that we are responding in a timely and effective way to patient concerns about quality of care. That, I think, is exactly what we should be doing.

There are a broad range of steps being put in place. Growing capacity in our health system is a key priority for the government, to ensure that we maintain quality of care and that we continue to improve it. Whether it is more beds in the emergency department or whether it is growing our capacity in terms of elective surgery, we now have the lowest elective surgery rates since 2004. That is fantastic in terms of people who are waiting longer than the prescribed time. To get to that level is very pleasing.

We continue, for example, to also see improvements in timeliness to access in our emergency department. In our emergency departments, for the second year in a row, we have improved timeliness in terms of people waiting less than four hours for



care—for the second year in a row. That all goes to quality of care in our hospital system, and I am very pleased to see those improvements being made, a direct result of both the investments the government has made through the budget and the very hard work of our medical staff, of our nursing staff and of our allied health staff.

### **Transport—light rail**

**MR COE:** My question is to the Minister for Capital Metro. Minister, your government has to date spent over \$300,000 promoting light rail. This has included, amongst other things, purchasing a large cardboard tram, making over 40 YouTube videos and producing novelty items such as a toy bullet train and water bottles. A contractor will also be paid to develop a 12-month calendar of strategic communication. Minister, why was this whole campaign not reviewed by the campaign advertising reviewer?

**MR CORBELL:** The individual elements of the program that have gone over the threshold set out in legislation have been reviewed by the campaign reviewer.

**Mr Coe:** The whole campaign?

**MR CORBELL:** It is not one campaign. It is wrong to characterise it as that. All expenditure that triggers the requirements of the campaign reviewer legislation has been referred to the campaign reviewer and the campaign reviewer has signed off on any elements that trigger his oversight in relation to these matters.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

**MR COE:** Minister, why is the spending on this campaign necessary if the decision has already been taken and the trams will not be operational for five more years?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Mr Coe for his supplementary. I do not know whether Mr Coe has noticed, but what the government is doing is consulting with the community about key design elements for this project. We are talking to them about landscape issues, station design issues, frequency, access for cycling, access for pedestrians, access for people who are disabled. We are talking with them about route alignment; we are talking with them about station design. These are all legitimate issues for a very large and significant capital works infrastructure project. Indeed, I would have to say that if the government was not doing that, I am sure Mr Coe and his colleagues would be criticising the government for not consulting with the community.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

**MR WALL:** Minister, has capital metro commissioned any polling or market research this financial year or are there any plans to do so?

**MR CORBELL:** Capital metro certainly undertakes surveys of the community in relation to people's views about the project and about some of the key issues that the government is having to address in terms of design and delivery of this important capital works project. In terms of the details, I will take the question on notice and provide an answer to the member.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

**MR WALL:** Minister, what is capital metro's budget when it comes to promotional costs?

**MR CORBELL:** I do not have that figure to hand, but I am very happy to provide it to the member. Indeed, I have answered quite a comprehensive series of questions on this already from those opposite. I am sure it will be a reiteration of those, but I will take it on notice and provide an accurate figure to the member.

### **Canberra—urban renewal**

**MS FITZHARRIS:** My question is to the Chief Minister and Minister for Urban Renewal. Chief Minister, why is urban renewal important to diversify housing choices and the economy in the ACT?

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order!

**MR BARR:** I thank Ms Fitzharris for raising this matter. Yes, it has been the subject of some discussion in the Assembly today, and so it should be. It is a priority for the government and a priority for the city. I am very pleased to have been able—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Dr Bourke:** Point of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Point of order, Dr Bourke.

**Dr Bourke:** The Chief Minister has been continuously interrupted by this whining from the opposition. I ask you to do something about this disorderly conduct.

**Mrs Jones:** On the point of order, I would not characterise interjecting as whining.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** That is not helpful, Mrs Jones. I had already called members of the opposition to order. I think that I can manage it without your intervention, thanks, Dr Bourke. The Chief Minister has the floor. I am sorry; I should have stopped the clock.

**MR BARR:** It certainly is worth acknowledging the importance of this issue and of the announcements that I have just made in relation to the next stage of the government's urban renewal agenda, and this particularly goes to not only the Northbourne Avenue corridor but, indeed, a number of other multi-unit high density ACT public housing properties.

The government's intentions are very clear. We want a better quality of public housing in our city. We want to renew our city's ageing public housing asset base so

that we can provide better homes for Canberrans. We recognise the important opportunity that this presents for the city, both in terms of an economic stimulus for the housing and construction sector but also, and most importantly, the opportunity to provide more suitable, environmentally sustainable, affordable and higher quality housing properties for Canberrans.

This is an important step forward today, the announcement in relation to the Owen flats being the next stage of development. We have identified three sites for around 50 new public housing dwellings in different locations in the city. As members would be aware, Minister Gentleman, through the omnibus territory plan variation, is ensuring that there are a wide variety of new sites to add to our city's housing stock.

The government's agenda here is very clear: we want to grow public housing, community housing and, indeed, affordable housing in this city, and the answer to that is more supply in appropriate locations right across the city. The government is getting on with that job. The urban renewal task force and the public housing renewal task force are working to provide for nearly 1,300 new public housing dwellings in the coming years. The government will make a major commitment to the urban renewal of our city, and particularly to our public housing stock, in coming budgets.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Ms Fitzharris.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Chief Minister, why is urban renewal important for our suburbs and local shops?

**MR BARR:** It is very important to ensure that a partnership between the government, the private sector and the community is achieved in renewal outcomes across the city. This means opportunities for the community and the private sector to come forward to government with proposals where government assistance to upgrade the public realm could be matched by the private sector upgrading those areas of local shopping centres that are in private hands. Clearly, there is also a significant opportunity, building off the success of a range of programs in our centenary year, to have a greater level of community engagement and activity at a local suburban level.

We are seeing this renewal occurring in a number of different areas of the city. Some examples in recent times have included the Aranda shops and the Cook shops. Most significant examples that have got the bulk of public attention in recent times have been the outcomes in Braddon and the Kingston foreshore. We certainly look forward to spreading those opportunities to a variety of locations right across the city.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

**DR BOURKE:** Chief Minister, what major urban renewal projects are already complete or underway?

**MR BARR:** There are indeed a number of projects that have been completed or are in the final stages of completion. I have mentioned some, including the work at Kingston foreshore, but we are also underway with urban renewal projects in every part of the city, including the Tuggeranong town centre, and the master planning exercises that

have led to changes in investment in a variety of different locations in the city; the Kambah group centre at Erindale; and, of course, the master planning work in the Weston Creek group centre. Some of the recent land sales in the Molonglo valley provide the opportunity for significant renewal and investment.

We are seeing, in both Manuka and Kingston, old and new urban renewal. Of course, there is the CBD and adjacent areas. As we move north, there is Dickson. We look at Gungahlin and the significant investment, both public and private, that has occurred in the town centre. And then, in Belconnen, the Belconnen town centre itself has undergone the most significant transformation perhaps of any of the town centres in recent times.

The government continues to work in partnership with organisations like Westfield for associated private sector investment. We have seen it in Belconnen. It is underway in the Woden town centre as well, with the bus interchange upgrade. So right across the city, in a variety of locations—town centres, group centres and local shops—the government is working in partnership with the private sector to see urban renewal in this city.

It is more than just infrastructure. It is also about social capital and opportunities for community level events that are supported by the ACT government. We are continuing that work.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

**MR COE:** Chief Minister, what will light rail do for the 94 per cent of Canberrans who are not within walking distance of a tram stop?

**MR BARR:** It will provide a significant catalyst for the territory economy, employment opportunities, reduce congestion for their particular transit to work, provide opportunities for a better transport system for the city, reduce our overall reliance on the private motor vehicle and ensure that new investment, new jobs and new activity are brought to our city. It will also ensure that this city responds to the contemporary challenges that we face.

The alternative is for Gungahlin residents to be taking one hour, maybe two hours, to commute into the city. If nothing is done, over time it will be an hour for Gungahlin residents to commute and then, as the traffic continues to build up, if there is no new transport infrastructure—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR BARR:** That is the Liberal Party's position: no investment to support the growth of the fastest growing region in our city. That is it—no vision for the future—and that is exactly why this city needs better transport and that is why this government will deliver it.

## **Planning—delays**

**MRS JONES:** My question is to the Minister for Planning. The *Canberra Times* reported on 12 February that ACAT has overruled the termination of the lease on a property in Waramanga where renovations have been in progress for 40 years. The *Canberra Times* also reported that the government is considering “the opportunity to introduce a municipal-style regulatory framework that would enable issues such as the state of undeveloped blocks to be dealt with expeditiously”. Minister, what is the nature of the changes the government is considering and when will the new framework be introduced?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mrs Jones for her question. Yes, the government is considering some changes to the planning system in regard to operations in planning. It is looking at opportunities to ensure that developments can go ahead in a timely manner and that there is recourse for those in the community that feel that perhaps builders or developers have not gone ahead in a timely manner. Those matters are being discussed at the moment.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, what steps has the government taken to deal with the ongoing problems in Delegate Street, Kaleen, where a property has over 100 whitegoods stored in the front and back yards?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I am not sure that the Kaleen matter has anything to do with the original question, but I am happy to talk to the directorate and see what developments have taken place in regard to the Kaleen matter and come back to the member.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

**MR COE:** Minister, what steps has the government taken to deal with ongoing problems across Canberra, and in particular in Kambalda Crescent, Fisher, where the front yard is full of rotting food?

**MR CORBELL:** Madam Speaker, I will take the question in relation to Kambalda Crescent, Fisher, as it is being dealt with by the Health Protection Service. The matter that Mr Coe refers to at Kambalda Crescent in Fisher is a matter driven by hoarding behaviour by the resident at that address. The Health Protection Service has issued a number of abatement notices to provide for the clean-up of both the front and rear yards of that residence and also to pursue the clean-up of the interior of the property. Some of those abatement orders have been implemented; others are pending, depending on the notice period to the resident.

As the health minister, I have met with residents at Kambalda Crescent and I am aware of their concerns. I have undertaken to them to continue to pursue the matter through the provisions available under the Public Health Act. In addition, I have asked my directorate to develop proposals for the government that would allow for a more effective case management approach to hoarding behaviour. Clearly, whilst short term

it is viable and possible for the government to move in and clean up rubbish that is hoarded in the front or rear yard, or even inside the dwelling, it does not strike at the root cause of the behaviour. There need to be services provided and work done with residents in these situations to provide for changes to the hoarding behaviour that stop the detrimental impact that it has on neighbours and other people in the street.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

**MR COE:** Minister, given the ACAT ruling, what options are open to the government in situations such as the ones we have highlighted in Weston Creek and Belconnen?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Coe for the question. I think the options are that we need to look at other ways that we can address these matters. That is what I have instigated in conversations with the government on how we can change the planning act, for example, to enable those operations to take place in a timely manner and for clean-up operations to take place. In future we may be able to look at whether they can be authorised through Access Canberra and whether extra powers may be available through that development.

### **Roads—Tharwa Drive**

**MR SMYTH:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Planning and Minister for Roads and Parking. Minister, were you briefed about the roadworks at Tharwa Drive which took place early in the new year?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** It is not a planning matter.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** As the Minister for Planning and Minister for Roads and Parking, you can answer it wearing whichever hat you like. Knock yourself out, Mr Gentleman.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I received the notification post the works that were done in the roads planning portfolio. During the planning and construction, I understand that the previous minister for planning, Mr Corbell, had the brief for that.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, were you specifically told that the road would be closed and have you put in place any improvements to the process to ensure that the debacle that occurred does not occur again?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** No.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, at the time of the briefing did you question the need for the road closure, and what advice were you provided with and from whom?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** No, I was not given the briefs.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, did you approve the road closure?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** No.

### **Gaming—poker machines**

**MS LAWDER:** My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. A number of sporting clubs throughout the territory rely on income from gaming machines to fund their activities, meaning that government decisions on gaming machines are important to the sector. It has been reported that you held a meeting with the Chief Minister on 13 January to discuss the decision to increase the note limit for acceptors to \$50 notes. Minister, was it your understanding in December 2014 that the government was planning to increase the note limit for note acceptors to \$50?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I am just trying to analyse what Ms Lawder's question actually was, because it roamed over a number of different topics. I think that if, at the end of the day, her question was—

*Mr Coe interjecting—*

**MR RATTENBURY:** The question was actually all over the place, but I think that at the end of the day what Ms Lawder wants to know was: in December did I know the \$50 note limit was coming? If that was the actual question she was trying to ask me, the answer is: no, I was not aware the decision was being taken to introduce that regulation.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, what consultation occurred between Minister Burch and you or your directorate before the regulation was issued increasing the note limit for acceptors on 22 December?

**MR RATTENBURY:** There was none.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Minister, what was the outcome of your meeting with the Chief Minister on 13 January and did the government position on this issue change as a result?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I cannot recall if I met with the Chief Minister on 13 January. I will have to check my notes.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

*Mr Coe interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, Mr Coe! You are not helping.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Minister, did you pass on your concerns to Minister Burch and the Chief Minister about the failure of government process on this issue, and what was the outcome?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I have indicated in this place before that I communicated to both the Chief Minister and Minister Burch my disagreement with the policy. I think the outcomes are a matter of public record.

### **Courts—procurement**

**DR BOURKE:** My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, can you please update the Assembly on how the public-private partnership procurement process for the ACT law courts project is progressing?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Dr Bourke for his question. I am pleased to say that work is proceeding well on the new ACT law courts facilities project, to be delivered by a public-private partnership—the first project to be procured under a PPP framework. The territory invited interested parties to submit an expression of interest in mid-2014.

**Mr Coe:** On a point of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Stop the clock, please.

**Mr Coe:** I ask for your advice as to whether the Attorney-General is the appropriate minister to be answering about a procurement process or whether it is indeed the responsibility of the Treasurer or Chief Minister.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I am not in a position to answer that question. I would assume that the Attorney-General knows something about the procurement for building the law courts in the ACT.

**Mr Hanson:** But he might not be the responsible minister.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** He may not be the responsible minister for procurement, but I think he might be the responsible minister for the law courts.

**MR CORBELL:** I am certainly the responsible minister for the project, Madam Speaker, and that is why I am answering the question. You are quite right: as the attorney I do pay some attention to what happens in the courts.

Six submissions were received from the EOI process. Following an evaluation, the two shortlisted bidders were announced in early October. These two shortlisted bid teams were the team known as Juris, which consists of Laing O'Rourke Australia Construction, along with Programmed Facility Management and Macquarie Capital Group. The other shortlisted proponent is Capital Courts, made up of a consortium involving Amber Infrastructure, Richard Crookes Constructions and Brookfield Johnson Controls.



The territory is currently in the request for proposal phase of procurement. RFP documentation was released to the two bid teams prior to Christmas last year. To ensure that the bid teams have the opportunity to clarify and understand the requirements of the RFP the territory has commenced the interactive tender workshop phase. Both bid teams have taken up regular opportunities to meet with the territory to discuss the development of their concepts and designs and to seek clarification and feedback to better understand the requirements of the project. It is expected that the RFP process will conclude in May, when the two bid teams will submit fully costed binding proposals based on the requirements of the RFP.

Following evaluation of those proposals, a preferred bidder will be identified. Following cabinet approval, negotiations will commence to complete contractual and financial agreements with that preferred bidder. We anticipate at this stage that construction will commence in early 2016.

This is a very important project for the law courts. The existing Supreme Court building is certainly well at the end of its operational life. We need to retain some of the distinctive and important heritage elements of that building, but we also need contemporary court facilities that provide for the more efficient administration of justice and at the same time deliver appropriate working conditions for those who use our courts, whether that is judicial officers themselves, members of the public who need to appear before or perform duty in the courts, prosecutors, the defence, those who are accused, and a broad range of other parties.

The new courts project is designed to provide a state-of-the-art, modern court complex to meet the needs of those users and of the broader community for many years to come.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

**DR BOURKE:** Attorney, why is it considered necessary to redevelop the courts precinct?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Dr Bourke for the supplementary. It is worth highlighting that the original law courts building was built to service a population of about 100,000 people. Today, obviously, Canberra's population is much greater than that. There have been a series of modifications and additions to the building over time, but these have only temporarily alleviated issues with space, circulation, layout, facilities and security, all of which remain legitimate concerns today.

Let me highlight some of the key problems facing the existing court building. First of all, there are problems in terms of internal separation of court attendees—for example, between the accused and witnesses and their associated families, and between the accused and victims. There is unsuitable courtroom accommodation for judicial officers and other personnel. The holding areas of the court are not appropriate for the current day and there is no capacity for growth in the existing court buildings.

It is worth highlighting some of the system integrity and security risks. The existing layout of the Supreme Court provides only one secure circulation space, and this is used by the judiciary, but at a minimum we really need four separate secure circulation systems—for the judicial officers, for custodial staff and custodial functions, for the juries and for members of the public. This will ensure that we do not see inappropriate mixing and some of the risks that come with inappropriate mixing between detainees, the public, juries and witnesses, which is currently the case in the existing Supreme Court building.

Of course, this type of situation poses risks associated with jury contamination, compromising legal processes. So it is important that we address that. At the moment only two— (*Time expired.*)

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

**MS PORTER:** Attorney, how will the redevelopment improve the environmental performance of the court?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Ms Porter for her supplementary. The Magistrates Court is currently the second highest user of energy in the JACS portfolio. Whilst we are redeveloping and significantly refurbishing the existing Supreme Court building, we are also connecting it to the Magistrates Court. This will see us with an opportunity to significantly improve the energy performance of both buildings as they become one.

There are significant opportunities for energy efficiency upgrades to be applied to the Magistrates Court, reducing the overall energy usage across the new facility as a whole. The project is aiming for a very high level of environmental sustainability through a comprehensive range of initiatives.

Some of the key objectives we are putting in place through the tender process include ensuring that we achieve energy efficiency to reduce ongoing recurrent costs, the creation of an indoor environment that provides a high quality, healthy and productive space and an overall reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

The building will be assessed against the Green Building Council of Australia rating tool for public buildings, with a target of exceeding or achieving a five-star green star rating. This is an important benchmark to put in place early. This significant investment delivers not only a contemporary and efficient court building but also a building with a high level of environmental performance, reducing running costs to the territory and at the same time reducing the overall greenhouse gas emissions associated with the building's operations. (*Time expired.*)

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** Attorney-General, will this redevelopment help in any way with the chronic delays that we have experienced in our courts over recent years?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Mr Hanson for the supplementary. It certainly will, because we are increasing, for example, the number of jury courts. At the moment we only

have two jury courts available for trials. Obviously, there are only so many trials you can fit into the availability of two jury courts. We will be increasing the number of jury courts significantly, and that will ensure more capacity to conduct criminal trials where a jury is needed to be empanelled in a much more efficient and timely way. So that is just one example of where the provision of up-to-date and improved court facilities is delivering efficiencies across the justice system.

### **Taxation—clubs**

**MR WALL:** My question is to the Minister for Racing and Gaming. There has been industry interest regarding the government's gaming machine reform package. How will the proposed changes to taxation rates for gaming machine revenue be implemented?

**Ms Burch:** Sorry, Mr Wall; could you repeat the question.

**MR WALL:** The question was: there has been industry interest regarding the government's gaming machine reform package. How will the proposed changes to the taxation rates for gaming machine revenue be implemented?

**MR BARR:** Madam Speaker, I have responsibility for taxation matters, so I am happy to take the question. The government has—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order! It is not unusual for ministers to say that they actually have carriage of it. It is not a big thing.

**MR BARR:** If I need to remind members, I have responsibility for taxation matters, as Treasurer, and I am working with Minister Burch in relation to this particular gaming reform package. Taxation changes associated with gaming machines can be adjusted as part of the budget process or associated with pieces of legislation that are introduced to this place. They would be the two primary mechanisms for any changes to taxation in relation to gaming machines to be introduced.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

**MR WALL:** Minister, how are taxation rates for the clubs adjusted?

**MR BARR:** Either by legislation or by instrument.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** I will keep it simple. Minister, how will the taxes be collected?

**MR BARR:** Through the established mechanisms within the commission and the Revenue Office.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, will these be implemented through legislation or notification, and who will have charge of this?

**MR BARR:** Those matters are, of course, subject to consideration in the budget process, but as Treasurer I have responsibility for those issues.

### **Sport—sponsorship**

**MR DOSZPOT:** My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, I refer to a tweet you sent recently about the Brumbies' new sponsors, Aquis. You tweeted:

... shame our successful and well loved Brumbies couldn't find a more socially responsible sponsor.

Michael Jones, the CEO of the Brumbies, pointed out that the ACT government had introduced Aquis to the Brumbies. Minister, what involvement did the ACT government have in facilitating Aquis sponsoring the Brumbies?

**MR BARR:** Madam Speaker—

**Mr Doszpot:** Wrong minister again, is it?

**MR BARR:** Yes, I have—

**Mr Doszpot:** Did you tweet, it, Andrew?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, Mr Doszpot. I am trying to hear Mr Barr.

**MR BARR:** For the benefit of Mr Doszpot, as Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Events, I have responsibility for the performance agreements of the Raiders, Brumbies, Giants and Canberra Capitals. They are four national league teams who have cross-portfolio performance agreements with the ACT government. So in the context of our work in Economic Development and through Invest Canberra and, indeed, a number of other areas within the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate we have regular engagement with new investors in the city.

We are also, of course, the major financial contributor to the Brumbies. As members would be aware, the Brumbies were in search of a major sponsor and we took the opportunity, through the various networks that exist in Invest Canberra and other areas, to facilitate an introduction. Of course, as the Brumbies have indicated, Aquis were not the only potential sponsor for the team, but it is ultimately a decision for the Brumbies to make as to whom their major sponsor will be.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I will direct my question to the minister I directed it to before, the minister for sport. Minister, was the sports directorate involved or aware of the involvement of the ACT government in facilitating the new sponsorship deal?

**MR BARR:** Again, Madam Speaker, I need to advise that responsibility for the Brumbies and their performance agreement sits with me, and Sport and Rec serve me in that instance. So, yes, Sport and Recreation were aware. But in relation to—and let me repeat this—the Raiders, the Brumbies, the Giants and the Capitals, who have performance agreements with the ACT government that include their performance, their use of territory venues and events, payroll tax concessions and a variety of different arrangements with the ACT government that cross over portfolios, I have responsibility. Sport and Recreation were advised and informed in part of the process, but in this instance they report to me in the Economic Development portfolio.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

**MR COE:** Mr Rattenbury, when were you made aware of the ACT government's matchmaking role at the Brumbies?

**Mr Corbell:** Point of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A point of order.

**Mr Corbell:** Madam Speaker, ministers are asked questions as they relate to their portfolio responsibility. The Chief Minister has made clear that he has portfolio responsibility for the sponsorship deals in relation to those sporting teams. Whilst I am sure that it is a matter of great interest, question time does not operate on that basis. Questions are asked of a minister in relation to their portfolio responsibility. The question is clearly out of order.

**Mr Coe:** On the point of order, there have been a couple of other instances this question time which are relevant. One is the fact that the Chief Minister is responsible for procurement. When a procurement question was asked, the minister of the line agency took the question. Secondly—

*Members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order! I can sort this out—

**Mr Coe:** And secondly, we asked several questions earlier about Tharwa Drive to Mr Gentleman. Government members interjected that he is not the minister responsible, yet Mr Gentleman kept standing up and kept giving an answer, despite the fact that apparently he was not responsible. With that in mind, I do not see how it is not relevant to ask Minister Rattenbury a question, especially as I presume he is responsible for his own Twitter account.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I was hoping that you would not actually say that, Mr Coe. Mr Rattenbury may be responsible for his own Twitter account, but he does not have

ministerial responsibility for anything to do with telecommunications or whatever. I uphold Mr Corbell's point of order. The question is clearly out of order. If you want to ask a question about when anyone knew about the relationship between the Brumbies and Aquis, I think you have to ask the Chief Minister.

**MR COE:** Madam Speaker, if I may, I will ask a supplementary then.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I will listen to the supplementary.

**MR COE:** Minister Rattenbury, as minister for sport, when were you made aware of the Brumbies' arrangement to obtain sponsorship from Aquis?

**Mr Corbell:** On a point of order, again, you cannot construct the question in that way to avoid the rules of question time. Questions can only be answered by ministers in relation to their portfolio responsibilities. As the Chief Minister has made clear, the minister for sport does not have ministerial responsibility for the administration of sponsorship arrangements and performance agreements with the major league sporting teams. The question is out of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Coe, could I ask you to repeat your first supplementary question, please.

**MR COE:** The one that was disallowed?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The one that was disallowed, in the way that you asked it.

**MR COE:** I will do the best I can, from recollection. It was along the lines of—

**Mr Corbell:** Just give up, Alistair.

**MR COE:** No. It was, in effect: Mr Rattenbury, when were you made aware of the government's sponsorship of the Brumbies—the Brumbies' sponsorship—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** No, I rule the question out of order. I uphold the point of order.

**Mr Hanson:** Madam Speaker, there was a point of order put forward and I stood on my feet to address the point of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I had enough information already.

**Mr Hanson:** In regard to the first supp or the second supp, Madam Speaker?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** In regard to both supplementaries, I thought that they were troublesome and I uphold Mr Corbell's point of order.

**Mr Hanson:** On your ruling, could I ask perhaps that you provide further information as to how it is that when a deal is negotiated with a major sporting team, accepting that the minister for sport did not have a role—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** No, this is not a point of order. This is a question of me, and I have no ministerial responsibility for sport in the ACT.

### **Industrial relations—long service leave**

**MS PORTER:** My question is to the Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations. Minister, can you inform the Assembly about the portable long service leave scheme in the territory?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I am sorry, I was distracted. Can you ask the question again, please, Ms Porter?

**MS PORTER:** Minister, can you inform the Assembly about the portable long service scheme in the territory?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Porter for her question and her interest in workplace rights in the territory. As this Assembly may be aware, the long service leave scheme originated in the 1860s as an entitlement for public servants to allow them to go home to Britain after spending 10 years working in the colony. It has moved on, well in advance of that time, as Australia's workforce has grown and matured. Long service leave has matured into a basic employment entitlement for all Australian workers, and the ACT government supports this entitlement.

Notwithstanding the outstanding success the long service leave program has been for workers in Australia, there has been a need to make adjustments to reflect the changing nature of the Australian workforce and employment arrangements. Many Australian workers are now in casual and contract employment rather than long-term, permanent employment.

Traditionally, workers are required to work for the one employer for about 10 years before being eligible for long service leave. While this may have been appropriate in the past, what it does not recognise is the changing work environment in contemporary Australia. Many workers these days remain in the same industry for long periods of time but, because of the nature of their industry, move from employer to employer as new employment and career development opportunities arise. It is these workers which the portable long service leave scheme seeks to capture and ensure that they are entitled to the same provisions as everybody else in the workforce.

There has been a portable long service leave scheme in existence since 1981. It commenced with the building and construction industry. In 2000, the contract cleaning industry was added, followed by the community sector industry in 2010 and, most recently, the contract security industry in 2013. Presently there are 2,033 employers and 26,400 workers registered with the ACT authority on the quarterly returns.

The scheme is administered by the ACT Long Service Leave Authority, which is an independent ACT statutory authority. The authority is self-funding and therefore does not rely on the ACT government for an appropriation of funds from its budget for support.

The scheme is now fully automated. Through the Long Service Leave Authority website, employers in the industries covered by the scheme are able to register with the authority and then provide the authority with quarterly returns listing the employees who have worked for the employer during that quarter, together with the payment of a levy.

The levy is held by the authority in trust accounts for each industry. The levies received by the authority are separately managed and are invested and held to meet the future long service liability of those workers in separate industries. The authority's investment strategies are overseen by Treasury and approved by the Treasurer. The money in these accounts cannot be used for other industries.

When a worker reaches their entitlement to long service leave, they then apply to the authority, not to their employer, to have their benefits calculated and paid out. All of the schemes are subject to actuarial reviews every three years. It is these reviews that form the basis for consideration of changes to the levies payable by employers. As Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations, I am responsible for setting the levy, which differs for each of the member industries.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

**MS PORTER:** Minister, what benefits does the scheme provide to workers in the territory?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** The scheme not only offers benefits for workers; it offers benefits to employers and industry as well. In many respects, as the ACT is the only jurisdiction to have a scheme for the community sector and the contract security sector, it also gives us an advantage over the rest of Australia. For workers, the scheme gives those in the covered industries the surety of knowing that their long service leave entitlements will continue if they stay in the same industry.

When it comes to choice of moving between employers to advance their career opportunities, they know that they can retain continuity of their entitlement. They can plan their future knowing that they will not be disadvantaged, as would have been the case if their long service leave was not portable.

The scheme also provides advantages to employers. As I said earlier, the Long Service Leave Authority manages the long service leave entitlements for workers in the scheme. Employers need only to complete returns, which are now fully automated, once a quarter. They do not have to separately make provisions for long service leave commitments. This is done by the authority, and the scheme actually reduces red tape for those employers. Both employers and covered industries have an advantage in attracting new workers, again because the workers know they will not lose their entitlements should they change jobs.

The scheme also helps industry and the territory retain workers. Workers are more likely to stay in the same industry, ensuring their skills and expertise are retained, when they know their entitlements are also retained.



**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Ms Fitzharris.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Minister, why is the government so committed to the long service leave scheme?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** The government is all about ensuring fairness for all workers. The portable long service leave scheme provides that fairness, and the government see the scheme as being fundamental and central to good social and community outcomes.

The scheme recognises the fluidity of the modern-day Australian workforce. It recognises that workers very often do not stay in the same job for their whole working life but nonetheless remain committed to their professions, their careers and their industry. It supports workers who are willing to commit to the same industry and the benefits that longer term commitment brings to that industry as well.

*Members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order! Members, there is too much conversation. I cannot hear Mr Gentleman.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** It also enables flexibility and mobility for workers to develop their careers within the same industry, benefiting both workers and their employers. The government is committed to supporting these workers.

Fairness, to me, is about ensuring that people are not disadvantaged and do not lose hard-earned entitlements simply because of the nature of the workforce. We should be encouraging workers to expand their work experiences and skills, and we do this by ensuring that some of those basic employment entitlements are not lost.

The government is proud of its commitment to portable long service leave. We are proud that it is actually leading the way in Australia.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

**DR BOURKE:** Minister, would the government consider expanding the scheme to other industries?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Can you just repeat the question, please.

**DR BOURKE:** Minister, would the government consider expanding the scheme to other industries?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Unless I can be persuaded otherwise, I am going to have to rule this out of order as a request for an announcement of executive policy.

**DR BOURKE:** Can I try alternative phrasing?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** You may, yes, in accordance with the standing orders.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**DR BOURKE:** Point of order, Madam Speaker. It is—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** No. I have given you the opportunity to attempt to rephrase the language in accordance with the standing orders.

**DR BOURKE:** I was responding to the baiting from the other side.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** You do not need to do that; that is my job.

**DR BOURKE:** Minister, are there other industries where the expansion of this scheme could be of benefit?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I will allow that.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Dr Bourke for his question. My understanding is that there are other industries that are interested in looking at the scheme. In terms of further expansion, I would be happy to hear from them, but we will not be announcing any decisions today.

At the end of the day, as I have repeated, the portable long service leave scheme is about fairness. It is about workers not being disadvantaged simply because of the changing nature of the Australian workforce. We are keen to work with them.

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

## **Schools—maintenance**

**MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (3.29):** I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that last year there were several incidents with faulty gas, wiring and electrical equipment in Canberra schools that required evacuation and the attendance of emergency services;
- (b) research published in *The Canberra Times* in September 2014 indicated that many ACT public schools are at capacity or will reach capacity within a few years making overcrowding and hot classrooms even more of an issue; and
- (c) that, during 2014, the ACT Branch of the Australian Education Union (AEU) expressed concern that too many ACT public schools were without sufficient cooling in classrooms, meaning that on days of extreme hot weather students and staff were forced to work in temperatures above published AEU guidelines; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) provide details of which ACT public schools are without efficient air cooling in classrooms to allow students and staff to work in acceptable temperatures in line with AEU guidelines;
- (b) commit to deliver improvements to those schools that do not have them this school year; and
- (c) honour their 2012 election commitment to invest \$70m new funding for school infrastructure maintenance.

My motion calls on the government to:

- (a) provide details of which ACT public schools are without efficient air cooling in classrooms to allow students and staff to work in acceptable temperatures in line with AEU guidelines;
- (b) commit to deliver improvements to those schools that do not have them this school year; and
- (c) honour their 2012 election commitment to invest \$70m new funding for school infrastructure maintenance.

It is important to reiterate these issues. We call on the government to give Mr Rattenbury some time to think—to think of excuses why he cannot support this motion to call the government to account on education and their education commitments. All along, we keep hearing from Mr Rattenbury that he is here for all of the community. But since he has taken on his new role, we have asked him questions and given him plenty of opportunities to have a look at calling this government to account. This motion is one of those. This is not political, Mr Rattenbury. It is something that you should, if you still have any commitment to your broad electorate, be very much interested in.

The ACT public school network of 86 public schools and 33 early childhood and childcare centres is, by any account, a large property portfolio to manage. The latest ETD annual report advised that as at June 2013, the directorate managed assets with a total net book value of \$1,965.8 million. The education portfolio budget is, depending on how you measure it, the largest or second largest of this government's annual expenditure. We know that, by comparison with other states and territories, the ACT is a very high investor in public education.

If you read through the directorate's annual report, you can see, not surprisingly, that it has myriad issues to cope with in managing such a large property base. We have ageing asset stock; we have an ever-growing need for upgraded information and community technology infrastructure; there are ongoing issues of car parking and traffic management; and there is an increased need and demand for security systems by way of fencing or closed circuit TV and other preventative and surveillance measures to reduce vandalism. And, of course, with Canberra's growing population and the development of new suburbs comes a need for new schools.

Overlay that with a consciousness about environmental efficiency and sustainable landscapes and you start to get a picture of the competing needs of ACT schools in the 21st century.

This government, understandably, is proud of its state-of-the-art schools and its innovative approach to building design. Our new schools and the growth into new areas lead to opportunities for greenfield site development. This provides great opportunities for innovative design, and we are seeing that some of our new schools indeed have that.

But what is less discussed, and perhaps less considered, is getting the basics right. Some of our older schools, as loved as they are, do not always meet the expectations and demands of what is routinely available in more modern buildings.

In earlier debates I have pointed out that one of the big issues for Canberra is the recognition that we have an ageing school infrastructure. While it is important that population growth be matched by the development of new schools, it is equally important that we do not allow a two-speed or two-class standard of school to develop.

While a focus on quality teaching far outweighs any consideration of how many electronic whiteboards or computer terminals and laptops a school has, it is not unreasonable for a government to provide a basic level of comfort and services for both students and staff in all our schools.

This year, so far, Canberra has had a very fortunate summer. Unlike last summer, when temperatures were regularly above 38 degrees, we have had few days of such discomfort. And it is just as well, because we know there are schools in the ACT that are less than comfortable places to be in when the weather gets tough.

But equally we know that this is not an issue that has just been realised. In 2011—2011, Madam Assistant Speaker—at about this time of the year, the *Canberra Times* ran an article about the fact that there were at least 10 to 12 ACT schools about which teachers were concerned because of hot days. At the time, it was suggested by the teachers union that on days of extreme temperatures it would be better for parents to keep their children at home.

The *Canberra Times* reported on the issue. It reported that parents, too, were worried about temperatures in classrooms, with the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations calling for new rules on hot classrooms, including the possibility of half-days and starting earlier and finishing earlier. The P&C council president at the time, Jane Tullis, is quoted as saying that parents were concerned that environmentally friendly cooling systems included in many new schools would not cut the mustard. She said: “We don’t believe they are good enough on days of extreme heat and, in the case of a few hot days in a row, it doesn’t cool down overnight.” That is a quote from Ms Tullis at the time.

Let us move forward three years to 2014. The AEU, frustrated at lack of progress on the issue of cool classrooms, were again, and are still, highlighting the issue. It has not

been fixed. They tried to highlight their concerns by collecting data on just how hot some classrooms were. They issued thermometers to their members to track their working conditions, with at least one south side school classroom reaching 34 degrees. As the AEU report on the 2014 ACT budget pointed out:

In response to member concerns about extreme temperatures, the AEU requested that the Education & Training Directorate conduct an audit of all ACT classrooms. “The Directorate’s own audit shows 73 of our schools lack comprehensive cooling systems. 11 of our schools do not have cooling in their libraries.”

As the ACT AEU branch secretary, Glenn Fowler, pointed out:

It’s 2014, we’ve got people now as a matter of course working in cool temperatures in other office and learning environments and this is a relic of the past.

It appears that there are no prescriptive guidelines for schools. In the absence of any ETD guidelines, the AEU guidelines say that classrooms should be between 17 and 30 degrees, a realistic range when the ACT’s own work health and safety code of practice suggests that “optimum comfort for sedentary work is between 20 and 26 degrees”. While there is a standard work health and safety code of practice, there is nothing specific for schools. Clearly, if we had public servants, and even those in private enterprise, working in buildings without air conditioning, there would be uproar. The AEU guidelines are hardly unreasonable on any account.

At the time this article went to press, the ETD director-general was quoted as saying:

There’s been a lot of work done over the last few years in upgrading our schools, so most of our transportable buildings have air-conditioning units.

She also mentioned such things as ceiling fans in many of the classrooms. And she said:

... where necessary, we work with schools to provide site-specific information on how to purge the heat from buildings during the night.

Seriously, in a city that is supposedly the world’s most livable, with one of the highest per capita investments in education and in a region that is known for its extreme hot and cold days, is it really good enough to expect our children and their teachers to work in buildings that rely on a ceiling fan or an open window to moderate the temperature?

Last year we had an unprecedented amount of equipment failures in schools. We had an electrical fault that put a teacher in hospital; we had schools that had to be evacuated while emergency services dealt with the problem.

When I raised this matter of lack of investment in infrastructure last year, I received, as is usual practice for this minister, no real explanation or information as to what was happening—just the standard line that I was not supportive of ACT public schools.

That, of course, is self-evidently wrong. If I was not supportive of ACT public schools, Ms Burch, why would I continue to press the government to do more, and to do it better, for the public schools? But the reality—

**Mr Gentleman:** Have you visited a few?

**MR DOSZPOT:** I have visited every school in Canberra by now. The reality is that we do have some that are ageing and in need of attention.

On the question of heating and cooling of schools, the minister's only suggestions were these:

All of our schools have effective heating systems. In relation to the cooling of schools, the directorate investigates concerns raised by schools and assists with managing extreme heat conditions. These actions include rotating classes to cooler areas. But Mr Doszpot knows this. So he is not acknowledging that we are talking about extreme weather conditions that schools operate in. It is quite concerning that Mr Doszpot can stand in this place and run down our schools as he has.

That quote is from our esteemed minister for education, Ms Burch.

The minister believes that to ask questions—to ask questions, Minister Burch—and to highlight concerns expressed by the community, in her words, is running down our schools. Perhaps you should make those same accusations of parents and teachers whom I talk to. I do consult. I consulted with the parents. I consulted with the teachers.

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Lawder):** Mr Doszpot, you can direct your comments to the chair.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I thought I was. My apologies, Madam Assistant Speaker. I do consult. I talk to the parents, the teachers and the organisations that reflect the education community. It is those groups that tell me that they are worried about how their children are able to concentrate and learn when they are sitting in rooms that are hot, when temperatures are over 34 degrees. While the minister might call them extreme, we know that above 30 degree temperatures are fairly typical for this time of the year. As I said, we are just lucky that thus far this year we have avoided the normal high temperatures.

The minister suggests that there is assistance to manage extreme conditions, and that that includes rotating classes. Is that the only solution the minister can come up with—to move students? To where? And how? How do you fit 300 students into one library, a reception area or a staffroom? How do you rotate without disrupting lessons, with 20 or more classes over the period of a day? Leaving a window open overnight or having an overhead fan are hardly likely to be significantly effective.

The only reason this issue is not front-page news again this year is that, as I said, this year we have not yet had the usual run of hot days.

My motion also referred to the fact that there is evidence that some of our schools are at capacity. The reality is that some classes will likely be forced to be larger than is

probably the ideal. Again, that puts pressure on those classrooms that are not cooled with anything more than perhaps double glazing and/or an overhead fan.

The second part of my motion calls on the government to:

- (a) provide details of which ACT public schools are without efficient air cooling in classrooms ...
- (b) commit to deliver improvements to those schools that do not have them this school year; and
- (c) honour their 2012 election commitment to invest \$70m new funding for school infrastructure maintenance.

I call for that because I think it is important that those schools that do not have classrooms with cooling systems are identified and a plan developed to upgrade them.

The minister has previously told the Assembly that all schools are heated. That is good and sensible, given our minus temperatures in winter. When she says “all schools”, I hope she means all parts of the schools—that it is not just the library or administration areas but includes classrooms.

In the 2012 ACT election there was a commitment by ACT Labor to invest \$70 million in new money in upgrades and maintenance in schools. Since the minister has repeatedly claimed that the money is being spent, and the AEU claims, equally, that it has not been spent, it might be useful for the minister to outline exactly where and how this additional \$70 million has been directed and whether the balance of that money might be directed to schools that are not appropriately temperature controlled in all classroom areas.

If the \$70 million was not intended to cover heating and cooling issues, what was it intended to cover, over and above the usual allocation for asset maintenance? And why does the directorate not consider the cooling of the classrooms a priority? Why is it acceptable for students and teachers to operate in an environment that is above and outside the ACT’s own work health and safety code of practice?

As I have said, it is a matter of luck that Canberra has not had its usual run of hot days. When it does, how many parents will be forced to keep their children home from school or assume that their child’s lessons will be severely disrupted as they get rotated around the school? That is how the directorate and the minister have said it will be managed. The weather gods will not always be this kind to Canberra; I just hope our schools are ready. I commend the motion.

**MS BURCH** (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Racing and Gaming and Minister for the Arts) (3.44): The government will not be agreeing to this motion, and I move:

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

“(1) notes:

- (a) that the 2014-15 ACT Budget invests \$1.06 billion in the ACT education system to improve our schools and training, support our educators and increase access to technology for our students;
- (b) that the Education and Training Directorate has an annual allocation of \$20.6 million for both planned and unforeseen repairs and maintenance works at ACT public schools and \$14 million for capital upgrades;
- (c) that the Education and Training Directorate constantly monitors future population growth, individual school capacity, and school environments to guide planning for now and into the future, and is investing \$3.5 million over four years to make all our schools energy efficient; and
- (d) that the ACT branch of the Australian Education Union has a policy on extreme temperatures that is broadly in line with the Education and Training Directorate’s Guidelines on Managing High Temperatures in ACT Public Schools; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) provide an update to the Assembly on improvements in energy efficiency and heating and cooling needs in ACT public schools by the last sitting day in June;
- (b) continue its work in providing safe and healthy school environments;
- (c) continue to deliver improvements to all schools; and
- (d) continue to deliver new, state-of-the-art schools such as the \$47 million new Coombs primary school, which is scheduled to open in the 2016 school year to accommodate growth in the Molonglo Valley, and will have a green star rating.”.

This government has a proud history of investing in our schools across the territory. In the 2014-15 budget we continued this proud tradition, providing record expenditure of \$1.067 billion, up 3.9 per cent from the previous budget, to ensure we maintain our national leadership role in education and improve the outcomes for all young Canberrans.

Through this investment we have stepped in to fill the gap created by the commonwealth’s withdrawal of school funds, signalling our continued commitment to a standard of excellence across our education sector. This government will continue to deliver on our commitments, targeting investment to provide the best possible education for every child regardless of their abilities, their backgrounds or the challenges they face.

We know the quality of learning environments has a big impact on how and how well students learn and, accordingly, we have provided focused funding for infrastructure and information and communication technology improvements. Over



the 10 years between 2005-06 and 2014-15 the government spent or has budgeted to spend around \$798 million on capital works and information communication technology in the portfolio. When the commonwealth funding of the building of the education revolution and the two trade training centres are included, this amount increases to around \$960 million.

Mr Doszpot would have us believe our schools are run down and dangerous. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our schools are lively, vibrant places of learning and growing. Whenever I visit one of our schools I am always struck by the positive environment and the happy faces of the students. The government is committed to keeping our schools safe and well maintained.

Every school has a detailed condition assessment report prepared every three years. Every school has a hazardous material survey and management plan. Every school has its asbestos report updated every year. Every school has a three-year audit report updated every year. The government allocates a bit over \$20 million each financial year to undertake repairs and maintenance works in our public schools, and these funds are used for a range of works, including planned maintenance, painting and carpeting, asbestos removal, safety issues, and the replacement of sewer and stormwater pipes.

In addition to the repairs and maintenance funding, the government also invests in an annual capital upgrades program of \$14 million, and these funds are used for refurbishment and upgrading and expansion of learning areas, front entry upgrades, toilet refurbishments, staff room refurbishments, additional parking, new lifts, environmental sustainability, older school upgrades and landscaping, and hearing assistance systems to name a few.

A program of school infrastructure planning is in place to address the current and future enrolment needs in relation to education across the ACT. The directorate undertakes student enrolment projections modelling using information from land release data, sales data, birth data, occupation dwelling forecasts, school census and capacities data.

The directorate regularly monitors the current and projected enrolments of schools with the principals to assist them in managing their intake through, for example, managing enrolments of out-of-area students and the use of transportable buildings. Where necessary, schools are expanded to accommodate urban renewal, including the works undertaken at Macgregor, Majura, and Duffy primary schools in recent years.

The government is also investing to ensure all our schools are energy efficient. All ACT public schools now have solar voltaic systems and smart meters to measure in real time the capacity of water, gas and electricity. The ACT is the first jurisdiction to achieve this level of environmental management. These meters are used not only to allow school leadership to monitor and plan their energy use but have also been integrated into the school curriculum. The government is also installing high efficiency light fittings to all ACT public schools and solar hot-water systems for pools. Each public school has a rainwater tank so that the water can be used for either flushing toilets or irrigating the school landscapes.

I am also pleased to advise that in 2014 three ACT public schools—Dickson College, Lyneham High School and Lyneham Primary School—were connected to the inner north Canberra urban waterway system. This new system provides non-potable water for school irrigation.

With respect to Mr Doszpot's statement that there is an absence of heating and cooling in many of the public schools, I assure the Assembly that all schools—I think this has been acknowledged—have heating systems. In relation to the cooling of schools, the directorate seeks to achieve an acceptable comfort level through appropriate environmental design and the use of natural ventilation, minimising the need for mechanical ventilation and air conditioning

In addition, the directorate investigates all concerns raised by schools and assists with managing extreme heat conditions. These actions include rotating classes to cooler areas of the schools, access to water, installing ceiling fans and purging heat from buildings, planting trees to shade buildings and installing air conditioning to administration and library areas and learning support units. On days of extreme weather conditions, and in consultation with central office, principals may even consider a temporary closure.

This government is continuing its investment in education. As the Assembly is already aware, the construction of the new \$47 million Coombs primary school is underway. The school will open in 2016 and is the first of several new schools to be constructed in the Molonglo Valley development. It will cater for 720 preschool and primary school students.

The government is delivering schools where they are needed and is committed to continuing to invest in our schools, whether it is expansions to respond to enrolment growth, provision of new facilities for special programs such as the Canberra College Cares facility and the Tuggeranong introductory English centre at Wanniasa Primary School, or major upgrades to the learning and teaching environments at the Yarralumla and Hughes primary schools and now the Curtin Primary School.

This government will continue to invest in the safety of our students and staff, including improved traffic safety in our school car parks, upgrades to toilets, improvements to environmental efficiency, improvements to external environments and updates to school entry and administration areas.

As part of the amendment I have agreed to update the Assembly by the last sitting day of June on the improvements in energy efficiency and heating and cooling needs of our schools. This update will provide an opportunity to show the work being done across our schools and the significant investment we make.

I have said we will not be supporting Mr Doszpot's motion, and this is why I have moved the amendment, which asks the Assembly to note that the 2014-15 budget invests \$1.06 billion in our education system and that the Education and Training Directorate has an annual allocation of \$20.6 million for both planned and unforeseen repairs and maintenance and an additional \$14 million for capital upgrades. The

amendment also notes that the Education and Training Directorate constantly monitors the future population growth, individual school capacity and school environments to guide planning for now and into the future and is investing \$3.5 million to make our schools energy efficient.

The amendment also notes that the ACT branch of the AEU has a policy on extreme temperatures that is broadly in line with the Education and Training Directorate's guidelines on managing high temperatures in ACT public schools. The amendment calls on the government, through me, to provide an update to the Assembly—which I will do—between now and the last sitting day in June, before we break for winter, on the improvements in energy efficiency and heating and cooling needs in our schools. It also calls on the government—which I am very proud of and committed to do—to continue to work in providing a safe and healthy school environment, deliver improvements in all our schools and deliver new state-of-the-art schools such as the \$47 million new Coombs primary school scheduled to open in 2016. I commend the amendment to members.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (3.54): The issue before us today seems to be mostly in response to issues raised by the Australian Education Union last year and which now, I am advised, have become an ongoing matter of discussion between the union and the Education and Training Directorate. The heart of the matter is ensuring that the public education system is providing a safe and healthy school environment for our community's children. That is the core of Mr Doszpot's motion, and I certainly support the intent of him bringing that matter before the Assembly, even if we quibble on some of the words.

The ACT Greens believe it is the responsibility of government to ensure the provision of high quality, well-resourced and safe learning environments that are open to all students, and this issue certainly relates to that belief. The issue of increased days of extreme temperatures is unfortunately becoming more relevant every day in a range of practical ways. We know they are increasing and that the impacts are being felt more and more keenly every year. I am seeing these issues arise in my ministerial portfolios as well. Extreme weather events are impacting on roads, bus reliability, wilderness and nature management plans, maintenance of ovals and grassroots and elite sporting events alike. Only a few weeks ago the Climate Change Institute released a very concerning report into the effects of increased extreme temperatures on the sporting community, highlighting the very real and quantifiable risks posed to athletes, spectators and the financial viability of the sports industry. These are not political arguments; this is just the sad reality of climate change, and no sector is immune to the challenges we are facing.

Mr Doszpot's motion talks about the increasing number of extreme weather events, but there is no acknowledgement of human-induced climate change in either the motion or his remarks. Given that this impacts right across the board, it is obviously an issue for the education sector, with its 144 sites under the direct management of the directorate, and for teachers, parents and administrators alike.

As I have said before in relation to a previous motion of Mr Doszpot's on similar issues, I have some sympathy with the directorates that manage large asset bases. I

know that in my portfolios, as in the Education and Training Directorate, there is an extensive program of proactive regular maintenance across the assets and most likely a list of due maintenance as well as planning for contingency or unanticipated or emergency works.

As the issues of healthy and safe environments are obviously deeply important for schools and their communities and, in response to previous attention brought to these issues in the Assembly and elsewhere, I understand that the directorate has enhanced the information provided on its website and in reports. I am advised the directorate's website spells out clearly that it prepares annual repairs and maintenance plans for each school on the basis of information from building condition assessments, requests from schools and information gained from other sources such as consultant reports and site visits as part of an updated strategic asset management plan for 2013-14.

It is clear to me that the directorate are working hard to better manage a large and ageing asset base, and I am encouraged by recent innovations in the construction of new schools. Good infrastructure planning involves thinking creatively about the solutions to future challenges rather than doing things in the same old way. It is also about employing innovative technologies where they are warranted. This is pertinent to all governments around Australia, and the ACT is doing quite well in this regard.

The government has committed to carbon neutrality for all schools by 2017, and this is worth noting because it goes to issues such as the use of electricity and also matters like insulation, which clearly have an impact on the comfort of school buildings on both hot and cold days. The ACT has the potential to be Australia's most sustainable jurisdiction, with a number of green star rated schools. At least six government schools in the ACT are either certified or registered to achieve green star ratings, including Harrison Secondary College and Gold Creek Primary School's environment centre.

The rollout and installation of solar power generation systems at all public schools continues, in conjunction with the rollout of solar power systems. The Education and Training Directorate is also installing smart meters to record energy and water consumption and energy generation with educational interface software. Of course, the issue of heating and cooling our classrooms is a part of this shift, and we know the ACT has one of the broadest temperature ranges in the country, from well below zero in winter to the 30s and even 40s in summer. I can understand why the Australian Education Union in particular is seeking for this matter to be discussed. With those sorts of temperature ranges, obviously the comfort performance of our buildings is incredibly important, but I think Mr Doszpot's motion has missed the mark on some of these matters.

I do not dispute that last year saw some concerning incidents involving apparent equipment failures being reported, but I am not sure all these incidents can be related to a lack of maintenance. Sometimes things just break, and I think it is fair enough to acknowledge that. While I can appreciate some plausible link between increasing student numbers and issues of heating and cooling comfort, I am not sure how quantifiable that is—for example, how many students equal what level of air conditioning?

In relation to the published AEU guidelines Mr Doszpot's motion refers to, the ACT Greens' reading of the material is that the AEU's position is broadly in line with the existing Education and Training Directorate's policy and procedures on managing high temperatures in ACT public schools. My understanding is that the AEU guidelines are a policy position they are pursuing through ongoing negotiations with the directorate.

The main point of difference, as I understand it, relates to a threshold for both preparation for and response to extreme temperatures. The AEU believes members have a right to decline to teach in situations where classroom temperatures are lower than 17 degrees Celsius or more than 30 degrees Celsius, while the directorate is focused on where forecast temperatures are expected to exceed 32 degrees Celsius. I believe this specific issue is best left to the unions, the teachers and the directorate to sort out. I am not sure the Assembly is in a position to make a detailed policy decision on it at this point in time. The people who need to be talking about it are talking about it, and I implore them to work together to find a suitable outcome.

Having made those remarks on some of the details, I think the substantive concerns of Mr Doszpot regarding the comfort and health and safety of students and teachers in our schools are good points. I am happy to support Minister Burch's amendment that will see an update provided to the Assembly on improvements to energy efficiency in heating and cooling needs in ACT public schools. This seems to draw out the information Mr Doszpot is seeking. It puts a time frame on it, which is not in the motion, and I note there is a specific deadline of providing the information by the last sitting day in June. That is an improvement on Mr Doszpot's motion because it puts a time line on it and means this Assembly will receive the information in a specific and timely manner that can be marked in people's diaries. It will provide all members of this place with an opportunity to review that information within the next few months. That is a welcome addition to the original motion. On that basis I will support the amendment moved by Ms Burch.

Mr Doszpot has put a view about some of the background information and Ms Burch has put another view. To me, the important part is paragraph (2)(a), which is about providing information to this place and making sure Assembly members can review that information. The addition of the time frame in paragraph (2)(a) of Ms Burch's amendment is particularly beneficial. On that basis I will support the amendment today.

**MR DOSZPOT** (Molonglo) (4.03): I will speak to the amendment and close the debate at the same time. To say that I am not surprised about Mr Rattenbury's stance is an understatement. I have quite a sense of *deja vu* here. The 17 September *Hansard* has the information from the last debate we had on this issue, which covered very similar items, if not identical. We had the same situation and my motion was completely cannibalised by Ms Burch, from "notes" to "action items". It is worth recalling those action items.

Mr Rattenbury should keep in mind keeping the government accountable, having regard to what he did last time in supporting the government on a similar motion. The government's amendment to the previous motion on this subject said:

- (a) use the most up-to-date data available to guide school planning and construction;
- (b) invest in school infrastructure across the ACT to ensure the continued confidence of ACT families in public schools ...

All great words, but there is no definition as to what and when things were done—and nothing has been done on these, as I understand it. It continued:

- (c) consult with the community on the future needs for school and education ...
- (d) invest in upgrades to existing ACT schools ...

We have been consulting with the community. We have been consulting with the education union. We have been consulting with the P&C associations. We have been talking to teachers and parents of children who are putting up with these conditions. We have asked for very simple action items from the government. I notice Mr Rattenbury has disappeared, which is a pity. We call on the government to, as follows:

- (a) provide details of which ACT public schools are without efficient air cooling in classrooms to allow students and staff to work in acceptable temperatures in line with AEU guidelines ...

I wonder what the minister sees as objectionable in that. We are asking for details which should be available, and should be made available to us and to the public. The next one is:

- (b) commit to deliver improvements to those schools that do not have them this school year ...

In other words, we are asking for the comfort and health of the teachers and students to be taken into account. And we call on the government to:

- (c) honour their 2012 election commitment to invest \$70m new funding for school infrastructure maintenance.

Quite conveniently, Ms Burch once again did not mention or clear up that issue. I come back to the point that Mr Rattenbury should be aware that we went through this last September when the minister made similar modifications or amendments to the motion, and none of that has happened. On none of those items can I see that there has been some additional work since we debated this motion last. The minister has now come up with another set of propaganda notes, if you like, which touch on what the government is claiming to have done. It changes what I call on the government to do, in the three points that I had, to:

- (a) provide an update to the Assembly on improvements in energy efficiency and heating and cooling needs in ACT public schools by the last sitting day in June ...

I will hold you accountable on that. But why can't you provide the details, minister, that we are asking for? We are not asking for anything that is impossible. The amendment goes on to say:

(b) continue its work in providing safe and healthy school environments ...

That is what the minister said in the previous amendment last September, when there was a commitment to deliver improvements to all schools. Again the minister is making the same commitment in this amendment. Obviously it is just a rehash of what we went through before. We are calling on the government to carry out some concrete actions for the benefit of the community. Our call to action for the government within our motion is based on communication with the community and with the education community specifically on these areas.

I am very disappointed, once again, in Mr Rattenbury, who could really make a difference to education in our city just by keeping this government accountable, as we are trying to do. I think he had another perfect opportunity this time to not totally go against the government, which is his partner, but to keep it accountable on some of the issues that are becoming very important in education in the ACT—important in the sense of understanding what the commitment of this government is. At this stage we have not heard what has happened to the 2012 election education commitment to invest \$70 million in new funding for school infrastructure maintenance. We have still not had an answer from the minister.

We will not be supporting the minister's amendment to the motion. It is basically window-dressing for looking at things and not actually delivering on the requirements we have detailed in the motion. Once again I stress my disappointment that, even though Mr Rattenbury alluded to the fact that we make some sense in trying to achieve these changes, he cannot bring himself to totally commit to the action items that we call on the government to do. We will not be supporting the amendment.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 7

Mr Barr	Ms Fitzharris	Mr Coe	Ms Lawder
Ms Berry	Mr Gentleman	Mr Doszpot	Mr Smyth
Dr Bourke	Ms Porter	Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall
Ms Burch	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## Housing—public

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (4.14): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the Productivity Commission Report on Government Services for 2013-14 highlights that 2300 people are on the ACT public housing waiting list;
- (b) the ACT has Australia's second highest rate of homelessness, at 50 people per 10 000 of the population;
- (c) there has been an increase of more than 900 people on the ACT public housing waiting list since 2010;
- (d) the number of public housing dwellings in the ACT has dropped by approximately 300 compared to 10 years ago;
- (e) Canberra's private rental housing market remains one of Australia's least affordable for low and moderate income earners; and
- (f) there are a significant number of ACT public housing properties with structural problems; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to provide detailed information, by the last sitting day in March, of what action it is taking in relation to:

- (a) providing exits from ACT homelessness services;
- (b) helping all those leaving domestic violence, young people, families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people with disabilities and the elderly to be housed in ACT public housing;
- (c) rehousing tenants from the Northbourne Flats, ABC Flats and Strathgordon public housing properties;
- (d) if required, helping South Canberra Motor Park residents, including where it will rehouse those residents; and
- (e) maintenance and repairs of ACT public housing properties.

I bring the motion to the Assembly today to talk about the dire state of the public housing system in the ACT.

One issue of great importance that the government needs to address is that of providing exits from ACT homelessness services. Between 2006 and 2011 the rate of homelessness in the ACT increased by 88 per cent. In 2011 the ACT had the second highest rate of homelessness in Australia, according to the census. It is alarming. In fact, it is more than alarming; it is disgraceful that in our community here in the ACT



we have such a high rate of homelessness. Canberra's private rental housing market is one of Australia's least affordable for low and moderate income earners. And this contributes to the high rate of homelessness in the ACT.

High house prices in Canberra are also a contributing factor, with many people struggling to afford their own home. According to figures released by the ABS on 11 February 2015, the ACT has the third highest mean price for houses, at \$570,600. Canberra house prices increased by 1.7 per cent during 2014.

The high rate of homelessness in the ACT puts substantial pressure on homelessness services. ACT Shelter have documented that over half the people seeking emergency accommodation on any given night cannot be provided for. And, unfortunately, the government does not appear to have a plan to manage this.

As at 2 February 2015 the average waiting time for people on the standard public housing waiting list was 788 days—788 days that someone on the standard housing list, unable to afford accommodation in Canberra's private rental market, must wait—just over two years on average for a public housing property. This means that for approximately two years they may rely heavily on ACT homelessness services for support. Two years is longer than an elephant's gestation period. It is a very long time. It gets worse. There are currently 1,443 applications on the high needs waiting list as at 2 February 2015. This is just not good enough.

According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's regional wellbeing report released last year, the average income in the ACT is the highest of any state or territory in Australia and ranks among the top four per cent of all OECD regions. It does not make sense that a city with an average income ranking in the top four per cent of all OECD regions will, on the flipside, have such an atrocious public housing waiting list.

The Productivity Commission report on government services released in January this year shows that in 2004 there were 11,139 ACT public housing dwellings or properties. This number dropped to 10,848 public housing dwellings in 2014. You would have thought perhaps that the number of public housing properties could have increased in order to meet rising demand. But under this current Labor government the ACT public housing system is disintegrating right before our eyes. I ask the government in the motion today to provide detailed information showing how it is managing the public housing decline and exactly how it is providing exits from ACT homelessness services. What is the government doing to help those leaving domestic violence, young people, families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people with disabilities and the elderly, specifically, to be housed in ACT public housing?

One of my constituents, whom I have had ongoing correspondence with, has a young son with a disability, and his son uses a wheelchair. This constituent has been unable for years to get an ACT public housing property that he can live in with his son. The property this constituent is currently living in is not suitable for his son because his son cannot get to the bathroom using his wheelchair. This constituent's young son must crawl or slide along the floor to use the bathroom and toilet.

Unfortunately, more recently this has resulted in his son having to move out and live with his mother at a different property. This constituent, this father, is devastated that his son can no longer live with him. I quote from his email to me:

If the ACT Government can borrow money for the Mr Fluffy houses and light rail, why can they not get enough to house my son?

It is a very sad story and just one of the many examples of our public housing system failing those people most in need.

It continues to concern me that the ACT government do not have a record of which public housing properties are modified for disability access. When I first raised this last year I was told that a five-year audit was being undertaken and that maybe after that they would be able to tell me. The idea that we hold homes in the government's public housing portfolio that were modified for disability access and we do not know which homes they are is of great concern. Surely any property manager would know which homes were modified for disability access. It concerns me that we have disability-modified homes that are not being adequately utilised because we do not know which ones they are. It should be a focus for our government. We should be trying to give the greatest possible support to our most vulnerable residents.

In 2012 the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing homelessness in the ACT was 501 per 10,000. This is above the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander average. I ask what the government is specifically doing to help these people to be housed in ACT public housing.

It is public knowledge that the government plans to demolish the flats on either side of Northbourne Avenue, and there has been some media coverage of that today, with the Chief Minister very proudly talking about the sale of those properties. What is happening with the tenants from Northbourne flats? What is the government's plan to rehouse these people? In May last year I moved a motion concerning the redevelopment of the ABC flats. I flagged in that speech that there did not appear to be a plan to rehouse the tenants of the ABC flats. I am not against having plans for the redevelopment of these flats—the Northbourne flats, the ABC flats, Strathgordon Court, many of the other properties that are listed in today's media—but without an open, honest and transparent management strategy for rehousing these tenants the government is not fulfilling its role. It is letting down all Canberrans.

I can imagine that those people who have been on the waiting list for more than two years may not be very impressed if they found out that tenants from those flats were being moved into other vacant properties when they have been on the waiting list for some years. It is a very difficult situation. I understand that many public housing properties are outdated and run down but we have to respect the tenants who live there. This is their home and we must have a plan for these people.

We have another looming risk to our burgeoning public housing waiting list. I know many of us are aware of the possibility of the sale of the Canberra South Motor Park and that approximately 600 residents could become homeless if the sale of the motor

park goes ahead. Some motor park residents have lived there for more than 20 years. The possibility of an additional 600 people being evicted, possibly becoming homeless or being added to the public housing waiting list, would place significant pressure on our public housing waiting list, not to mention our homelessness services. If the motor park is sold and its residents are evicted, does the government have a plan to rehouse these people if required?

We need to have a transparent plan for the management and repair of our public housing properties. Many ACT public housing properties were built in the 1950s and up to the 1980s and they need significant maintenance work. During 2012 and 2013 the complaints and information unit of Housing ACT received approximately 1,930 complaints from public housing tenants. Many of those complaints concerned maintenance issues.

The 2015 report on government services showed that a public housing dwelling is assessed as being of an acceptable standard if it has at least four working facilities—for washing people, for washing clothes or bedding, for storing or preparing food, and for sewerage—and not more than two major structural problems. According to that report, the proportion of ACT public housing dwellings with at least four working facilities and no more than two major structural problems was 75.7 per cent. That figure is too low.

Given the high demand for ACT public housing properties and the fact that there is not enough public housing stock to meet that demand, maintenance should be of paramount importance. Maintenance is essential, as well as early detection and repair of structural problems. The government needs to lay the foundation for an effective and efficient public housing system in the ACT. To do that it needs to implement a workable strategy for the management and repair of public housing properties.

Many Canberrans face limited accessibility to the ACT private rental market. This reinforces the need for an effective and efficient public housing system or community housing or social housing. Today I ask the government to provide visibility in relation to how it will manage issues facing our public housing system in light of the recent damning report on government services which showed the ACT in quite a poor light. I call on the government to take immediate action in response to the urgent public housing situation here in the ACT.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Women and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Social Inclusion and Equality) (4.26): I rise to speak to this motion today and move the amendment to the motion circulated in my name:

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

“(1) notes that:

- (a) the Productivity Commission Report on Government Services (ROGS) for 2013-14 provided a snapshot of public housing and homelessness services in the ACT;

- (b) the Government continues to work with the private and community sectors to improve access to high quality, affordable housing for all Canberrans, including those with low and medium incomes; and
  - (c) the housing and homelessness sector continues to be under pressure due to uncertainty over Commonwealth funding; and
- (2) calls on the Government to provide detailed information to the Legislative Assembly, by the last sitting day in March, about the Government's public housing and homelessness programs, including:
- (a) the Government's public housing renewal program;
  - (b) ACT homelessness services;
  - (c) assistance provided to people leaving domestic violence, young people, families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disabilities and older people; and
  - (d) the maintenance and upgrade program across the public housing portfolio."

Ms Lawder's motion notes that the ACT has the second highest rate of homelessness nationally. On 12 November 2012 the Australian Bureau of Statistics released data indicating that on census night there were 1,785 homeless people in the ACT. This places the ACT at the second highest rate of homelessness nationally, with 50 per 10,000 of population experiencing homelessness. By way of comparison, the Northern Territory has the highest nationally by far at 730.7 per 10,000 and Tasmania has the lowest at 31.9 per 10,000.

However, what Ms Lawder does not mention is that the census counts as homeless people who are accessing supported accommodation services, in addition to people who are sleeping rough and couch surfing—not accessing services. Homeless people in supported accommodation services are receiving intensive support to address and resolve the issues around homelessness.

The ACT has the highest rate—triple the national rate—of people who are accessing supported accommodation services, including those who are homeless; 30.9 per 10,000 compared to 9.9 per 10,000 across Australia. The number of those sleeping rough and couch surfing in the ACT was 29 in 2011, a decrease of 43 per cent between 2006 and 2011. In all other categories of homelessness, other than people accessing supported accommodation, the ACT has the lowest or among the lowest rate per 10,000 in Australia.

I would like to talk about the waiting list. The Housing ACT waiting list is a point-in-time measure that represents all people who are seeking public housing accommodation in the ACT, including people who are accessing homelessness services and receiving support. In the ACT we probably have the best picture of what the demand is for public housing and homelessness services. However, it does not mean that our patterns of demand are radically different from other parts of Australia.

In Canberra over the last 12 months we have seen a significant decrease in the average rental cost of units and houses. This has resulted in higher vacancy rates in the private market. The Housing ACT waiting list fluctuates over time. I would hope that the public housing waiting list will soon start to reflect this drop in private rental prices. Ms Lawder claimed that we have 300 fewer public housing dwellings in the ACT compared to 10 years ago. The Labor government has taken a holistic approach to affordable and social housing—investing in public housing, community and supported housing, and affordable housing.

Every year the ACT government is required to report on stock numbers for the *Report on Government Services*. Under ROGS, public housing dwellings are separately reported from community housing and other supported housing. At 30 June 2014, the number of public housing dwellings reported in ROGS was 10,848. ROGS reports a reduction of public housing properties in the ACT from 11,139 in 2004 to 10,848 in 2014, a decrease of 291. However, over the same period ROGS reports an increase in community housing from 409 to 610, an increase of 201. This has been complemented by significant additional investment by the government in community and affordable housing.

In 2013-14 the ACT ROGS figures showed a 49 per cent increase in the number of community housing tenancies. In addition, and not counted in these numbers, is the establishment of affordable housing options in the community housing sector, including Community Housing Canberra with over 400 homes.

The government has recognised and acknowledged that housing affordability remains a challenge for low and moderate income earners in households in Canberra and has taken considerable action to address these issues. Since 2007 the government has released three phases of its affordable housing action plan, the most recent of which had a particular focus on affordability in the private rental market.

Actions taken through the affordable housing action plan to support private renters have included supporting CHC Affordable Housing to build and deliver 500 new affordable rental homes for low and moderate households and supporting the development of approximately 2,000 new affordable rental dwellings through the national rental affordability scheme, many of which provide subsidised accommodation for students.

Reports such as ROGS show that the ACT is, in fact, better off than many other jurisdictions, having the second lowest proportion of low income households in rental stress of all the states and territories. This does not mean that private rents are automatically affordable for low and moderate income earners, nor that the government's work is done. However, it does indicate that the policies and the programs put in place by this government are effective and leading to better rental affordability for Canberrans.

The government continues to work with the private and community sectors to improve access to high-quality and affordable housing options for all Canberrans, including those with low to medium incomes. The government has invested heavily in

CHC through a \$70 million revolving loan to deliver 500 affordable housing dwellings for rent and sale by 2015. The government has also supported the development of affordable and community housing through stock transfer. This includes the transfer of 132 dwellings to CHC Affordable Housing to support the affordable housing action plan.

Under the former federal government's nation building and jobs plan, the stimulus package, the ACT government supported the development of 53 dwellings for Argyle Community Housing, 24 dwellings for the Salvation Army, six units for St Margaret's Uniting Church and an additional 38 dwellings for CHC Affordable Housing.

The government had also provided support for a range of agencies to acquire or develop innovative disability housing options, including Project Independence, CatholicCare and CHC Affordable Housing. These projects have contributed to the diversity of housing choices for people on low incomes and for people with complex housing needs such as specialist disability housing.

Throughout 2014 the ACT government, with the assistance of the commonwealth government, has moved significantly closer to achieving Common Ground in the ACT. This 40-unit building is being constructed and will house up to 20 people experiencing chronic homelessness and 20 people on a low income in appropriate and affordable accommodation. Common Ground is an assertive intervention model which addresses homelessness by providing longer term safe and secure supported accommodation for people who have experienced homelessness. It is a mix of chronically homeless people with people on low incomes paying affordable rent.

Ms Lawder's motion calls on the government to provide detailed information by the end of March on what assistance it will provide to the residents of Canberra South Motor Park. I have sought advice on this issue and I understand from Housing ACT that Housing ACT has not been approached by any of the residents of Canberra South Motor Park seeking assistance. However, Housing ACT remains ready to assess people for their eligibility for public housing in the event that they do approach Housing ACT seeking assistance.

I will turn to the government's amendment to Ms Lawder's motion. The *Report on Government Services* released last month provided a detailed snapshot of the public housing and homelessness sector in the ACT. Despite what Ms Lawder has led us to believe, the report is not all dire news, as she has described it. For example, the report showed that Canberra topped the nation in a range of areas, including new public housing tenancies going to those with the greatest need, and support for people in public housing or those experiencing homelessness.

The ROGS report showed that the ACT led the nation in the proportion of public housing that was providing homes to low income households at 98.9 per cent and the greatest needs allocations as a proportion of new tenancies at 96.9 per cent. The ACT had the highest proportion of young people in education or training after receiving support, at 82.4 per cent, who had been experiencing a form of homelessness, compared to the national average of 68.4 per cent. Of those clients being provided accommodation by homelessness services, 43.8 per cent went to a secure tenancy of their own after this support. Again, this is the highest in the nation.

Some 75.7 per cent of ACT public housing tenants said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received, against a national average of 72.7 per cent. The ACT's central intake service for all inquiries related to homelessness means that we know better than any other jurisdiction the extent of homelessness in our territory and what supports these people need.

Overall, the ROGS results support the need and value of the ACT government's long-term program to renew public housing to provide modern homes to meet the needs of tenants. While there is no doubt that pressures on social housing and homelessness services are increasing across the country, in the ACT we have a clear picture of the extent of demand on homelessness services. We are responding to that demand by ensuring that those most in need receive the support they need and renewing our public housing stock.

The ROGS data also allows us to see areas where action is needed. The government is investing in the renewal of public housing so that it better meets tenants' needs now and into the future and improves the overall quality of our housing stock. This program of work is guided by the public housing asset management strategy 2012-17, in particular the following ACT government objectives to: reduce concentrations of disadvantage through public housing redevelopment; align the portfolio with changing social structures and tenant needs; respond to environmental standards, particularly in the areas of energy and water efficiency; leverage the asset base through innovative development models; and use the value of the asset to assist in restructuring the portfolio.

It is important for tenants and the wider community to know that this is a long-term process. This is not about evicting people from their homes. No tenant will be made homeless as a result of this government's renewal program. We will continue to work with each and every tenant affected by the process to determine their needs and preferences and to provide them with suitable accommodation options.

The renewal of public housing involves delivering an accelerated renewal program of public housing along the Northbourne corridor and other multi-housing unit properties outside the corridor. Ms Lawder is right to say that these are people's homes. In the first week that I was appointed housing minister I said that we needed to stop talking about these people and start talking with them. So I did, and I will continue to do that.

We will continue to redevelop larger public housing complexes, maintaining our salt and peppering approach; build homes that meet the needs of tenants, be they older people, mums and dads with kids or people with disability; improve the energy efficiency of public housing and use of accessible design, which is particularly important for people on low incomes and for people with disabilities; and reduce the burden of old stock that requires costly maintenance, and design new stock that has a lower maintenance requirement in the future.

It is interesting to note how the investment being made by the ACT government into housing and services is in stark contrast to the position of the current federal Liberal government. One of my first tasks when I took on the role of ACT Minister for Housing was to make formal representations to the federal Minister for Social Services seeking funding certainty for the services in this sector.

The federal government is being evasive and not guaranteeing a continuation of funding under the national partnership agreement on homelessness, which is due to expire on 30 June this year. If this funding is not renewed soon, front-line services to people facing homelessness are at serious risk. The question will not be about people exiting these services; the question will be that these services will not be available for people in need at all. This is not acceptable. I encourage Ms Lawder and those opposite to join with the government in lobbying their federal Liberal colleagues for an immediate commitment to the continuation of this funding.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I look forward to returning to this place in March to provide a detailed statement on the government's public housing and homelessness programs, including the work that we are doing in housing renewal, homelessness services, assistance for vulnerable groups and maintenance and upgrades of the existing public housing stock. I commend my amendment to the motion to the Assembly.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Urban Renewal and Minister for Tourism and Events) (4.41): I am pleased to rise again this afternoon to talk about this Labor government's work in doing the right thing by Canberra's public housing tenants and those who are seeking a home by refreshing and renewing our city's public housing stock.

I spoke this morning about the importance of renewing public housing stock, and also in question time. I spoke about our city's long and proud history of public housing—how it was critical in our city's early days as we sprang into being, and how it continues to be something that Canberra values today. I spoke about our long history of public housing and the legacy that comes with that. Much of our public housing stock is now ageing and has reached the end of its useful life.

The housing stock on Northbourne Avenue, in particular, which was appropriate as temporary accommodation for newly arrived public servants half a century ago, is simply inadequate for modern public housing. These properties have done an important job. But let's face it: they were built quickly, to the standards of a different era, and the world has moved on.

My government is determined that our public housing tenants should live in homes that meet modern standards. We aim to deliver a public housing system that the wider Canberra community can be proud of. I also want our city to have an entry gateway that shouts to the world what a city we are becoming.

Our approach to public housing considers the needs of Canberrans across the housing spectrum. Our urban and public housing renewal agenda will provide more affordable housing options for Canberrans, more flexible housing options for Canberrans and more age and disability friendly options for Canberrans.

My government is proud to deliver decent public housing to our tenants. It is also a government that is proud to support Canberrans who are going through tough times to get back on their feet. Sadly, this is not an approach taken by every political party.



Helping the homeless and helping people to avoid falling into homelessness should be a priority for every government. But this is not the case. The Liberal Party has cut the national rental affordability scheme. This was a scheme that was successfully boosting the construction of affordable housing here in Canberra and indeed around the nation.

I would like to take a moment at this point to recognise Ms Lawder for stepping across the party divide to vote with the Labor Party in calling for the Liberal Party to reconsider funding of the scheme—and to congratulate this Labor government on our commitment to reducing and preventing homelessness.

I acknowledge that Minister Berry has written to the federal Minister for Social Services, the Hon Scott Morrison MP—a minister renowned for his compassion to vulnerable people—to seek a commitment from the federal government for ongoing funding of the national partnership agreement on homelessness, which expires on 30 June this year.

Homelessness service providers in the ACT rely on this funding. Successfully combating homelessness is a long-term project, and you cannot deliver long-term projects if every single year the Liberal Party threatens to cut your funding. That sort of uncertainty does not just affect the viability of projects; it damages the ongoing viability of the entire sector and its workforce. Uncertainty is seeing experienced staff leave the sector in search of work with more security.

Preventing homelessness is about making sure that our social safety net is strong when people need it. Sadly, again, the Liberal Party are no fan of safety nets. They are fans of cuts, though. They are certainly fans of taking away the supports that vulnerable people rely on. For example, we know that domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness in Australia. A government that was in the business of caring for the vulnerable might think about that and pause before cutting \$300 million out of domestic violence services in this country. But no, not this Liberal Party. Even as the Prime Minister was awarding Rosie Batty Australian of the Year for her work helping women avoid and leave unhealthy relationships, his Liberal government was cutting away the services that help them to do so.

At every turn the Liberal Party have chosen vulnerable people to be the ones who should bear the burden of their obsession with cuts. I refer to a GP tax on the sick, a federal budget that would see higher income families only \$71 a year worse off but lower income households \$842 worse off, and, perhaps the cruellest of all, cuts to support for those unfortunate enough to find themselves unemployed, and who are left with no assistance whatsoever for six months—I repeat: six months. I do not know who the Liberals spend their time with, but I do not know many working people or low income households who have six months' rent in the bank. And it is pretty hard to pay rent if you do not have a job. It is especially hard if the Liberal Party has ripped away your support and effectively said that you have to fend for yourself.

My government has worked hard to make access to the housing market more affordable for Canberrans. That is why we have campaigned so strongly for tax reform to abolish stamp duty. Again, you would think that every political party truly concerned about housing affordability could get behind such an initiative. But no,

again, not the Liberal Party. They built their 2012 election campaign around opposition to improving housing affordability. We have rejected that approach, and I am proud to lead a government that backs its commitment to the community with actions.

My advice today is that if those opposite really wish to demonstrate their commitment to improving public housing, improving housing affordability and tackling homelessness, they should do the same. I commend Ms Berry's amendment to the Assembly.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (4.49): At around this time each year, we in the Assembly often see a range of motions similar to Ms Lawder's, drawing on the information provided by the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services*, otherwise known as ROGS.

There is a flurry of media releases from all sides of politics when ROGS is released, extolling how we are the highest or the lowest, the best or the worst, or the least or the most expensive in a range of domains. I include the Greens in this space, as ROGS represents a great snapshot of the territory's performance in our own right as well as in comparison with other jurisdictions. It serves to remind us of our successes, and also to challenge us to respond better in areas that may have fallen short of community expectations.

That said, there are some areas on which it is difficult for the ACT to be judged in direct comparison to other states. Issues of percentage versus raw numbers of population are a major headache for us, as very small increases in actual people receiving services can dramatically change the count. Similar things apply in the corrections space, for example, where our assault percentages can be influenced by literally a couple of incidents, thus dramatically changing the percentage in the ROGS figures. Nonetheless, Ms Lawder raises some issues that I know about all too well, from my own time as the Minister for Housing. These issues do require constant vigilance and an ongoing strong commitment to address them.

Housing stress is a very real issue for Canberra, and I think we can all agree on that. The same can be said of increased need for all forms of social and public housing, enhanced responses to homelessness and reducing exits from allied services to homelessness—all points Ms Lawder raised, and that Minister Berry proposed in her amendment to respond to by providing information to the Assembly.

What Ms Lawder failed to mention in her motion that has been captured by Minister Berry's amendment is the ongoing uncertainty in relation to commonwealth funding. This is an incredibly important matter and a clear and present danger to local services and vulnerable Canberrans. Failing to recognise that, or at best overlooking it in a debate on this subject, can be most generously described as negligent.

We in the ACT cannot ever forget how reliant we are on the federal government's policies and funding. But it is fair to say that the current climate of short-sighted, inconsistent and sporadic policy on the run announcements we are seeing from the Abbott government are having a cumulative and disastrous effect on the morale and sustainability of our local NGO workforce, as much as on the public service.

The national partnership agreements are a classic example of this. Towards the end of each financial year there is tremendous uncertainty in the sector as to whether they will be renewed. This started under the Gillard government, when it was extended for 12 months, and the federal coalition government has taken a similar approach. We have been in a situation for two or three financial years where, until the last weeks or month before the cut-off point, there has been uncertainty about the future of the program.

This is no way to plan for the provision of services in such an important sector. It would be fair to say that the last time I went to a national housing ministers meeting, all housing ministers from all jurisdictions, be they Labor, Liberal or Green ministers, were unanimous in the view that the states could not be in a situation where the commonwealth continued to take these 12-month cycles. It is no way to do policy and it is no way to address such an important sector. I hope we can get to a place where a federal government, of whatever persuasion, actually commits to having a long-term strategy and a long-term commitment to these programs so that the states and the NGOs can get on with planning with some certainty.

That said, I would like to move on to the specific issues of housing and homelessness in the ACT. With the amendment that Ms Berry has brought forward, which I will be supporting today, the Assembly is set to get an excellent update and detailed information on a range of matters that Ms Lawder touched on in her motion. It will be an opportunity to look at the size and scope of the challenge facing the ACT, having regard to the impressive amount of effort that is going into service provision. I certainly look forward to then seeing where the Liberal Party land on new policy in this space—whether they are able to present any alternative views and policies on this complex matter or whether it is simply a matter of saying that the government is not doing enough.

As we heard earlier today, the government is currently undertaking a major urban renewal program, and the Public Housing Renewal Taskforce plays a big part in that overall program. I am happy to say that, through a combination of the parliamentary agreement and the work to date of my cabinet colleagues in this term of the Assembly, the ACT government is delivering on the goals of providing safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing, and that they are goals that are shared by both me on behalf of the Greens and the Labor Party. They are challenging goals to achieve. There is pressure in this sector.

I noticed that Ms Lawder in her earlier comments talked about housing affordability and housing prices in the ACT. She made reference to the fact that ACT house prices went up 1.7 per cent last year. That, of course, is quite a small number compared to Sydney particularly—I think they went up by a double-digit figure—and other parts of Australia. I have been noticing lately that there are at least two or three reports a week on house price movements in the paper, and they all show different outcomes. There must be a number of indices out there measuring these things, and it is a funny space to operate in.

In the last 12 to 18 months in the ACT, after a period of probably above average growth we have seen below average growth both in house prices and in rental prices.

Many people I know have taken the opportunity to move house when their landlord has refused to reduce the price of rent because they can get rental accommodation substantially lower than previously.

We face a unique issue in the ACT where we do not have a lot of lower end rental accommodation in the way that you might see it in some of the older cities, where they have some pretty poor standard housing that you can get at a low price. That is something that people have pointed out to me as a real challenge in the ACT—that there is not some of that lower end rental accommodation.

In terms of the urban renewal program, it is worth reflecting on a commitment of the government, on the proposed redevelopment, to being open and transparent with tenants about the government's plans as to which units will be redeveloped and in what time frame. In the period in which I was the minister we set up LINCT, a task force made up specifically of government and NGO organisations, to advocate on behalf of tenants. Key organisations such as Northside Community Service and other NGOs are a part of that task force. It was specifically set up to make sure that tenants had a voice, particularly through their service providers.

Tenants will be given opportunities to speak up as well, but it would not be an unfair comment to say that some tenants perhaps are not confident in approaching government to make their case. So we set that task force up specifically so that there was a check on government, to make sure that, even if our public servants were making the best effort, there was another channel for feedback to either come back to government or for information to be farmed out.

I was pleased with Ms Berry's comments, when she became the minister, about the need to talk with tenants, not about them. Certainly, in my time as the minister, I was very frustrated by the amount of chatter that was going on in the public domain by all sorts of other people who had never lived in the Northbourne flats or in other areas about the flats and about the people that lived there. Often there was a failure to recognise that they were in fact people's homes and communities. So I echo the comments Ms Berry made in her first 24 hours as the minister. I think they were good comments and they underline a commitment by the government to keep working with our tenants as closely as possible. There will be change, and I have acknowledged previously that there will be some difficulty there, but we will work as hard as we can as a government—and Ms Berry has my full support on this—to make sure that tenants are moved in a way that is suitable for them, so that they feel well informed and empowered.

I know that with the first group that we moved out of Dickson flats—there were about 15 to 18 at the time; the number escapes me right now—each tenant was worked with individually. Some of them moved out of the inner north, but they wanted to go to Woden or they wanted to move to Belconnen because that was where they had family. So each tenant got an outcome that was suitable for them. That is the approach Housing ACT is taking and that is the approach I expect will continue. I want particularly to dwell on that point because these are real people. It is their communities and their homes, and we need to not lose sight of that fact as we go through this major urban renewal process.

I also know from my time as minister that Housing ACT is committed to innovation and working in new ways with the estimated 30,000 tenants across Canberra. There are the examples of the affordable housing unit working more closely with aged tenants and providing particular types of accommodation for them, as well as a more streamlined approach to supporting tenants across the spectrum of those requiring little to those requiring more support, and starting to tailor service provision to more accurately match the needs of the tenants.

We also need to work with the private sector in delivering more, and more diverse, affordable housing options. These are all areas that I know Housing ACT is actively working on, with the full support of the government.

I would also like to acknowledge that the pressures facing housing and homelessness services are increasing. This is a real issue that requires a whole-of-government approach, and I see much that is leading towards improving that situation. We will soon see new units built across Canberra that will be reflective of the changing demographic of tenants and those seeking accommodation. We will see new properties built using more environmentally sustainable practices and designed to provide a much more comfortable and less energy-intensive home for tenants.

As all members would be aware, this has been a longstanding issue that I and the Greens have pursued, as many of the current rental properties, private and public, are woefully inadequate in regard to energy efficiency. I am pleased with the progress that is being made in that space. We all know that many properties in Canberra are freezers in the winter and saunas in the summer, and vulnerable Canberrans should not be forced into using inefficient and unnecessarily costly methods of staying comfortable.

We will see a new energy devoted to ensuring our successful “salt and pepper” is maintained by building properties in new and currently under-represented areas whilst still maintaining a tenant-focused approach by working with those who want or need to remain in the inner north and city regions. As I touched on before, that individualised approach is an important part of the story. I think that is a vital thing to do to keep our city as a place of equity and social inclusion. Certainly it is a matter I will continue to support in cabinet discussions on these topics.

We are also seeing some impressive efforts to improve programs supporting vulnerable Canberrans undertaken by the Community Services Directorate, with the human services blueprint, now known as the better services network. I touched on that in some of the other things I talked about. There are significant efforts going on by the directorate, with the support of the government, to help people who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness to improve their situation in life. It is a challenge because people are constantly coming onto that list and it is hard work to keep up with it. But I think the amendment put forward by Ms Berry today, in which she undertakes to provide by the last sitting day in March a range of information that has been sought by Ms Lawder, will provide us all with a sound basis to have that discussion going forward.

I thank Ms Lawder for bringing this matter forward today. It is important that the Assembly remains focused on these discussions, and I welcome the amendment put forward by Ms Berry, which I will be supporting today.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (5.02): I will speak to the amendment and close the debate. I thank members for their contributions today and I thank Ms Berry for her largely helpful amendment. I will make a few comments about some of the discussions thus far. Ms Berry mentioned that the Northern Territory had the highest rate of homelessness, huge areas of land to cover, the enormous difficulties of town camps and connection to land, a mining boom and a transient workforce just for a start.

Ms Berry seems to think that we are okay because we do not have such a high rate of homelessness as the Northern Territory. We do have a high standard of living in the ACT, combined with a small geographic area, which should make addressing homelessness slightly less complex than in a place like the Northern Territory.

Ms Berry also mentioned that the census data showed that many people in the ACT are receiving services from homelessness providers, which is quite true. But she seems to imply that this means that they are not experiencing homelessness. The ABS definition clearly includes those people. They do not have a safe, secure place to call their own, with security of tenure. If you are in a shelter or a crisis service you only have temporary accommodation. This is a common mistake: confusing having a roof over your head, however tenuous or temporary, with having a place to call your own. Homelessness does not mean rooflessness, as I hope Ms Berry will discover as she becomes more familiar with her portfolio.

Obviously, Ms Berry thinks she knows better than the independent Australian Bureau of Statistics. I do understand Ms Berry's reluctance, as has been demonstrated by previous ACT housing ministers, to accept the serious rate of homelessness in the ACT, which is not borne out by the figures. It is not okay to sleep in your car or couch surf. At least you have some sort of roof over your head, but you are still homeless.

We have also had a lot of reference to federal funding through the national partnership agreement on homelessness. This comprised funding for all states and territories, commencing 1 July 2009, and was initially expected to conclude on 30 June 2013. It has been extended twice. The national partnership agreement on homelessness was intended—always intended—to be a time-limited payment, a one-off injection of funds, a big bang impact on homelessness which would then stop and we would go back to the regular funding which comes through the national affordable housing agreement.

The national affordable housing agreement, which no-one has bothered to mention today, also includes significant funding for homelessness services. The NAHA is an ongoing special purpose payment. It is disingenuous and misleading of Mr Barr to say that the homelessness services will be cut and to imply that there is no ongoing funding. That is not the case. There is ongoing funding for homelessness services

under the NAHA. That is not the impression the government wants to project. Those funded specifically under the national partnership agreement on homelessness are quite understandably fighting to get additional funding to get the NPA extended and I understand that entirely.

What we do know is that the ACT government is selling off more public housing properties without a transparent plan of how to manage those tenants. What this will mean is potentially more pressure on the public housing waiting list. It will increase the amount of time people will be waiting to get into a public housing property. It is important for the public housing tenants, interest groups, peak bodies and all of us here to understand the time frame for the redevelopment, the plan for the relocation of ACT Housing tenants, the plan for which tenants will be moved back into the public housing units and the plan to manage the net decline in public housing. I hope that Ms Berry's amendment captures that.

Another important question is how much of the money raised from the sale of public housing properties and redevelopment will be reinvested into affordable housing and public housing in the ACT. I would like to go back briefly to the Auditor-General's inquiry into the national partnership agreement on homelessness, It was report No 4 of 2013. I quote from that report:

People are likely to remain in homelessness programs and initiatives longer if housing affordability is a problem.

This is the Auditor-General saying this. I am sure it is self-evident that I, along with all members of this Assembly, am concerned about homelessness in the ACT. I support homelessness services implicitly. But we must do more than churn people through homelessness services. We must provide exits from homelessness. Therein lies the problem for us here in the ACT, that of housing affordability.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## **Community sector—funding**

**MS PORTER** (Ginninderra) (5.08): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the importance of local community services in fostering inclusion and equality across the ACT community;
- (2) recognises the strong partnerships which exist between the ACT Government and community and not-for-profit sectors in the planning and provision of local services;
- (3) notes the work that the ACT Government is currently doing to:

- (a) pursue reforms which support the long-term viability of the not-for-profit and community sector in a constrained fiscal environment; and
- (b) lobby the Commonwealth for greater funding certainty; and
- (4) acknowledges the risks posed to important community services in the ACT by the continued uncertainty around Commonwealth funding.

I am very pleased to move this motion today about the importance of local community services in the ACT because we all know the integral part the community sector has played in the life of this city-state from its very inception to today. Indeed, when I first arrived in the ACT in 1977 from the Northern Territory it provided me with much-needed support and an opportunity to connect with my community through volunteering and, eventually, paid employment.

Undoubtedly Canberra is one of the best places in Australia to live and to bring up a family. As well, it is a wonderful place to do business. For instance, year after year the ACT education system has been rated amongst the best in the country. As we continue to provide Canberra families with clear pathways from early education and care through to training and higher education, our schools keep topping the NAPLAN scores.

Mr Assistant Speaker, you would be aware that the 2014 NAPLAN test results showed that the ACT was top or was equal top in 16 of the 20 areas tested. The ACT also has amongst the lowest unemployment rates in Australia. Compared to other jurisdictions we continue to enjoy the highest incomes and high participation rates, which are fundamental to improving the health and wellbeing of Canberrans.

Similarly, our health services continue to excel, with the ACT enjoying the highest life expectancy of any jurisdiction in Australia, as well as achieving high childhood immunisation coverage in the general population. This has been achieved through the significant investments in community health services, such as the three new community health centres in Belconnen, Gungahlin and Tuggeranong. This has resulted in better access to the best possible care where it is needed.

These results have not been achieved by chance. On the contrary, they are the results of successive Labor governments working closely with the community and the not-for-profit sector. This has led to better targeted investments in those areas that have a clear impact on the wellbeing of Canberrans.

This is clearly a government that is committed to a vision where all Canberrans are able to fully participate in a healthy, strong and inclusive community. The pivotal role that local community services have played in realising this vision cannot be overstated. As you know, Mr Assistant Speaker, issues such as domestic violence, homelessness and disability are a whole-of-government concern, requiring joint work from the community, government and private sectors—and across all areas of government.

The government has long recognised that, in addition to providing essential services, the community sector is a major partner in its work and is greatly sustained by a large workforce of committed and passionate volunteers. The sector employs approximately



4,000 people. It is an indispensable repository of expertise and professional practice. The volunteer workforce involves over a third of our Canberra community and is one of the highest in the country.

With approximately 150 organisations in a financial partnership with the ACT government, in 2004 the ACT government published a social compact with the specific aim of improving these partnerships to deliver better outcomes to the community. This compact was further developed by the joint community-government reference group, and relaunched in 2012. The compact provides guiding standards in planning, policy development and governance, management and accountability, and the delivery of quality services and programs. This partnership last year resulted in the skilled volunteer community network program, an initiative that is run by Volunteering ACT, to tap into the skills of former public servants by linking them to Volunteering ACT's organisations that are in need of such skills.

The human services blueprint is another example of the outcome of the close partnership this government has with the community sector. The aim of the blueprint is to guide the delivery of human services, across government and the community sector, that are more client driven, more holistic and more responsive to the dynamic and changing needs of the community. This initiative will see families working with trained workers to come up with tailored solutions for specific families because, as we all know, one size does not fit all.

Mr Assistant Speaker, in this time of great challenges, mainly as a result of the federal Liberal government's needless and ill-thought-out austerity measures that are seeing cuts to federally funded programs, the ACT government and the community sector are working together to ensure that community organisations are stronger and more resilient. This is being achieved through the community sector reform program that the ACT government is co-funding. The initiative will see reforms to the relationship between funding bodies and community organisations; the alignment of legislation, regulatory, administrative and reporting requirements; and the development of red tape reduction measures. I am sure that this will be very welcome in the community sector.

These, along with other exciting joint projects such as the establishment of the Common Ground inclusive housing project in Gungahlin, which Ms Berry mentioned earlier in her response to Ms Lawder's motion, the collaborative redesign of our out of home care system, resulting in the child-focused, outcomes-driven "A step up for our kids" child protection services strategy, and the recent \$90,000 grant to men's sheds in the ACT are just some of the good outcomes that have emerged from a strong working relationship with the community and the not-for-profit sector.

However, all these achievements are under threat. Since the out of touch Liberal federal government came to power, we have witnessed a sustained attack on Canberra which has totally disregarded the human cost. It is expected that the ACT government will lose millions of dollars over the next four years since the 2014-15 Abbott budget was delivered. At the same time there will be several thousand Australian public service jobs lost in Canberra over four years which, as we all know, will have a devastating knock-on effect to all Canberrans and see the loss of jobs and livelihoods across all sectors.

We also know that the Liberals wanted to impose a \$7 co-payment on our visits to our GPs. I do not know what is going to happen to that, but hopefully that will go where it should go, which is down. We hear of pension cuts and of \$100,000 university degrees. These seem to be still on the table and still on the Liberal agenda.

On the eve of Christmas 2014, when most people were on holidays, two organisations that I have been involved in and that are providing invaluable services to the Canberra community—Canberra City Care and Karralika—were informed that their federal funding would be discontinued. These two organisations have for many years provided important services to vulnerable people in the ACT. Indeed, my history with Karralika goes back many years to when I was working as the director of the then Tuggeranong community service. We provided transport to people from Karralika to important medical appointments.

The Karralika family program provides, for example, integrated services for families impacted by alcohol and drug addiction to improve child, parent and family wellbeing, family functioning, social cohesion and connectedness to the community for long-term recovery and improved outcomes. It achieves this by working collaboratively with government and non-government agencies to break intergenerational cycles of addiction and disadvantage through an integrated approach.

As we all know, alcohol, tobacco and other drug use contribute to and reinforce the social disadvantage experienced by adults, children, families and communities in the ACT and surrounding New South Wales region. The Karralika family program is the only service in the ACT and southern New South Wales that has delivered this family program. For 30 years it has integrated comprehensive alcohol and drug treatment with early intervention and prevention to strengthen parenting, family relationships and childhood development to break the cycle of disadvantage.

Also important are the programs delivered by Canberra City Care. They have successfully provided support, food and clothing to Canberra families for over nine years through their partnership with the federal government's emergency relief grant program. In my conversations with them I have been made aware that there was a noticeable increase in families seeking assistance from Canberra City Care in the second half of 2014.

It is estimated that there were 45,000 occasions when people were assisted by a meal being placed on their tables over the course of a year through their HandUp food care pantry. As the unfair federal Liberal government's budget continues to bite, this number is expected to grow. The emergency relief funding has provided Canberra City Care with the opportunity to help families during these very challenging times.

There is a growing awareness in many developed countries, and indeed within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD, that statistics such as gross domestic product do not give a clear picture of the experience of ordinary people. As the Secretary-General of the OECD stated:

Measuring the progress of societies continues to be one of the key priorities of the OECD. Focusing on people's well-being and societal progress requires looking not only at the functioning of the economic system but also at the diverse experiences and living conditions of people and households.

That is a quote from Angel Gurría, Secretary-General of the OECD. Obviously, shifting the focus to the wellbeing of people offers policymakers a different perspective of what policies work and what policies can empower a community to act to achieve higher wellbeing for its citizens.

As members in this Assembly well know, the place you choose to live—sometimes you have not much choice in that—will have an impact on your quality of life. This Liberal Party ideology of indiscriminate slash and burn totally ignores the human factor and what effect this has on the wellbeing of people. It is undermining the progress that this ACT government has made over many years.

As I started by saying, the ACT is a great place to live and work. Organisations such as Karralika and Canberra City Care are now under threat from this federal Liberal government's cuts. But not only are those organisations under threat; it is also the livelihood of all the people that they work with, provide services to and that will contact them in the future that is threatened. Their livelihoods are under threat because these organisations have contributed greatly towards supporting vulnerable people and families challenged by adversity. They have delivered positive social impacts for all Canberrans.

Canberra offers many opportunities for those who live here. This Labor government is committed to continuing to strengthen our relationship with the community sector to ensure that all Canberrans can take full advantage of these opportunities. Having worked for many years in the community sector, I know firsthand what impact funding cuts and funding uncertainty have on forward planning.

I did experience this when I was the CEO of Volunteering ACT and worked on the board of Volunteering Australia, when the then Liberal federal government was threatening to slash money in the community sector. Of course, it has an impact on forward planning and staff retention on the one hand and, on the other hand, on the wellbeing of those accessing the services, as the Chief Minister referred to in an earlier debate today.

I therefore thank the ACT government for their continued advocacy to the federal government in this regard, as Ms Berry mentioned in the earlier debate on homelessness. She has written a letter to Minister Morrison. I am aware that this government is continuing to lobby, and to encourage our colleagues across states and territories to lobby, the federal government about its decisions. I encourage them to continue to do so. I commend this motion to the house.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (5.23): I am pleased to rise today to talk about the importance of local community services in the ACT and have this opportunity to talk about the pivotal role of local community services and the difference they make in the

lives of many. I thank Ms Porter for bringing this motion today. I agree with Ms Porter that local community services foster inclusion and equality across the ACT community.

Ms Porter has referred to the cuts that have recently been made to community organisations. Unfortunately, as we all know, the federal Labor Party left a huge mess, including a \$47 billion budget deficit for 2013-14. The previous Labor federal government left behind a \$310 billion government debt for 2013-14. This was catastrophic. The budget deficit and government debt left behind by the previous incompetent Labor federal government has meant that cuts were made.

The changes proposed by the current federal government are motivated by a desire to ensure a more sustainable welfare system. The proposed measures seek to strike a balance between providing incentives towards greater individual responsibility and self-reliance while at the same time providing support to the most vulnerable members of society. The measures proposed by the current federal government address the need to better target payments to those who need them most and to provide incentives.

Having said that, let me say that I strongly support the funding of community services. Ms Porter encouraged us all to write and express our concerns about the cuts in funding. In actual fact, I wrote to Minister Morrison on 23 December last year in relation to his decision last year to de-fund some organisations. I was deeply concerned about the federal government's announcement to de-fund some organisations and cut funding for others. My letter to the Minister for Social Services urged him to reconsider his decision to de-fund and cut money to these organisations. So I share Ms Porter's concerns.

But what has the ACT government done in relation to proposed cuts to community funding? Why have we waited until today to bring a motion on this issue? Why hasn't the ACT government taken action sooner? As I mentioned before, I wrote the day after the minister's decision in relation to proposed funding. I took prompt steps to engage with the federal government on this issue.

I am fully supportive of local community services in the ACT. There are many community services that I and others in this place have engaged with in one way or the other or are otherwise aware of through the fantastic work that they do through other channels. They include those mentioned by Ms Porter, but there are many more. I will not go through the list I prepared earlier.

I am happy to support Ms Porter's motion today. As I have said, I have already written to the minister, but I am quite happy to support the motion today because it is a very important issue, of importance to all Canberrans.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Women and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Social Inclusion and Equality) (5.27): I thank Ms Porter for her motion and for her advocacy on such important community services and organisations. This motion speaks to

fundamental values of our government and to a social policy platform I am proud to pursue as a minister. In all of my portfolios, and in many across the government, there is an opportunity to champion inclusion and equality, and the dividends which can flow not just for individuals but for the wellbeing of entire communities.

As one of the main points of contact between government and the community, the community services sector is an important place to bring these goals into our programs and services through a focus on participation and inclusion, including for those experiencing disadvantage.

As we know, on high level indicators Canberra performs well. The OECD has, again, ranked Canberra as the most livable city in the world. It affirms what we know—that Canberra is a fantastic place to live. However, alongside this endorsement it is also worth considering that many people measure the quality of society by the way it responds to those most in need—to the one in seven households who struggle to survive on a minimum income; to the one in four people who will experience a mental health problem in any 12-month period; to the one in six young people who have caring responsibilities; and to the one in 25 people who experience severe or profound disability.

The need to pursue inclusion and equality in our community goes far beyond notions of disadvantage. It extends to the people who are our neighbours, people that we see at the shops, people standing at bus stops and people at the desk next to us at work. We need to remember that exclusion can take many forms—the woman who is too frightened to leave her home because of the way people may respond to how she is dressed; the old man who has given up his drivers licence and can no longer catch up with his mates; and the girl whose parents cannot afford for her to go on school excursions or take swimming lessons.

I am proud of the work that the ACT government has done in working with the not-for-profit and community sectors to create positive change in people's lives. Local community services are the cornerstone of this work. The ACT is fortunate to have 4,000 community sector workers spread across many fine organisations. Some of these workers work full time; some are part time and casuals; many more are volunteers. These people and the local community organisations that employ them are the people who, day in, day out, work to support inclusion and equality.

One example fresh in my mind is the Rotary Club of Canberra, which coordinates the Foodbank services in the ACT. It provides some 500,000 meals to Canberrans each year, in close cooperation with organisations such as UnitingCare Kippax and Canberra City Care. The ACT government is a proud supporter of this work, through funding to Rotary for transport costs associated with this work. The government also provided a grant of \$200,000 towards the enormous new Foodbank warehouse being built in Sydney, which will grow the volume of this service. This is one example among many.

Our community services need government support and government investment. In 2013-14 the Community Services Directorate provided funding to 28 organisations under the community services program alone. Sadly, this commitment to the

community services is not replicated at the commonwealth level. Ms Porter has described the devastating impact of cuts to just a couple of local service providers across the ACT. This uncertainty and angst are being felt deeply amongst all organisations, their staff and their clients. Many of our local community organisations receive direct funding from the Australian government, and many receive Australian government funding via national partnership agreements between the ACT and the commonwealth. Our community feels the impact when key services are cut. We can all continue to write letters, but I do not think paper cuts are going to make a difference here.

The actions of the commonwealth also show a lack of recognition of the extensive reform process underway—again, through close partnership between the government and the community sectors—on the way services are funded, shaped and delivered.

The development of the ACT's human services blueprint and our community sector reform program has been based on a genuine conversation, partnership and commitment between community and government. The blueprint is transforming the way we deliver services in the ACT. It is enabling community, health, education and justice systems to work together, to join up support for people and families.

Three better services initiatives are providing simpler supports for people when they need it. The one human services gateway, the strengthening families program and the local services network for west Belconnen are changing the way we deliver services. In time, other services and supports will link in to build a human services system that is truly about delivering better outcomes for people and making the best use of available resources.

In terms of funding, through the red tape reduction program, recent changes to the way government purchases and contracts services have delivered savings in time and effort to local community organisations. These savings are worth over \$2.6 million annually to those organisations. Every hour of administration which is freed up is more time a community sector organisation can focus on its core business. Simple measures, such as establishing a single relationship manager structure, mean that local community organisations can get used to dealing with just one person in government, not five or six. We are also in the process of developing fairer and simpler contracts, developing simpler tender prequalification processes, and further reducing reporting requirements. These reforms are in response to the constrained fiscal environment of today.

Our community service providers understand as well as anyone the need to find efficiencies and to achieve outcomes they get funding for. But it is reckless and naive to expect wholesale funding cuts not to have a damaging impact on the ground, in the ACT and nationwide. The ACT government is genuine about ensuring that social inclusion and equality are reflected in the way our policies are developed, in the way our programs and services operate, and in the way our infrastructure is shaped and delivered.

As the minister responsible for carrying this agenda forward, I will continue an approach that is broad and consultative across governments, within the ACT and with the community sector. Our next steps will be informed by a strong evidence base and

a commitment to measuring our progress so that we are clear about the difference we are making in people's lives. Working closely with the local community sector will be central to achieving this. I commend the motion to the chamber.

**MS BURCH** (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Racing and Gaming and Minister for the Arts) (5.34): I rise today in support of Ms Porter's motion on this very important issue of community services and the ACT government's history of commitment to a strong partnership that we have formed with our not-for-profit community sector. I commend Ms Porter for her continuous support of our community organisations and recognise the work she did in those organisations before she entered this place.

Over my time as a minister, I have seen firsthand the great work done by charities, not-for-profits and community organisations in our city. These organisations deserve recognition, especially in a time when many organisations are facing an environment of rising demand and ongoing commonwealth funding uncertainty.

In particular, I want to reiterate Ms Porter's recognition of the strong partnerships that exist between the ACT government and the community not-for-profit sector. We are partners in delivering positive outcomes for disadvantaged people in our community. The future role of government will not be limited to that of funder and purchaser; we will be co-investors, with the community sector, in positive social impacts and outcomes.

This will require a mature relationship built on trust, cooperation and mutual determination. This relationship is already strong in the ACT. We recognise that there is room for improvement and considerable opportunity to grow and prosper together. The government is working with local community services to create a society where everybody has the opportunity to participate and benefit equally—socially, culturally, and economically.

This Labor government has a proven history of working with and supporting our not-for-profit sector. We have supported countless organisations to provide services to those in our community who are most vulnerable and those in our community who simply need some additional support.

This government has invested millions of dollars in programs and services designed not only to support our local community but to ensure that they have a thriving and well-supported community sector. In a recent announcement, there was an investment of \$16 million in the "A step up for kids" program, a program Mr Gentleman would have the absolute pleasure and pride to deliver, to make sure that this investment supports the most vulnerable in our community.

Additionally, we have seen investment in the national disability insurance scheme which will not only see reform in the way services are provided to people with a disability but also, over time, see enormous growth in the market. Indeed, the level of funding which this government has committed to the NDIS is unprecedented and demonstrates this Labor government's support of the long-term viability of the not-for-profit community sector.

Last year the commonwealth and ACT governments invested \$1.5 million to help service providers better understand their business and what they need to do to adopt and adapt to the NDIS environment. This year will see further investment in the sector. I believe that by supporting our organisations to prepare for the NDIS, we are supporting a more robust and effective sector here.

With this in mind, it is indeed a shame that there are organisations in the community sector that have had their money slashed by the commonwealth government and that remain in a time of financial uncertainty, as Ms Porter has touched upon. Ms Lawder seems to celebrate that the Liberal Party will attack the community sector and defends the cut to their funding.

This government recognises that inclusion and equality matter for people, particularly for people with a disability. They want to achieve and live and be valued as part of this community.

Like other states and territories, the government is committed to achieving inclusion and equity by continuing to support the national disability strategy. We will be developing the new disability inclusion statement, which will set out a guiding vision for an inclusive Canberra community that enables Canberrans with disability to fulfil their potential.

I look at some of the community organisations that are under financial threat from the commonwealth government. The Nican organisation and others have been defunded, and this was in the weeks before Christmas. It is a vital organisation that serves our community well and that will no longer be supported and funded through the commonwealth.

It is widely recognised that Canberra has a thriving community sector with unique relationships with government and an ability to work together to deliver the best outcomes for the community we serve. We have a high population of people that are willing to volunteer in the community. This shows an incredible commitment and is testament to the level of social conscience in a public service town. There is an extraordinary level of volunteerism from within the public service.

As Ms Porter has articulated in her speech, we are fortunate in the ACT not only in that we have some of the lowest unemployment in all of Australia but also in that we have incredibly high participation in both volunteer and paid employment. Our community sector is a growing sector. It currently employs approximately 4,000 individuals, many of these across the 150 organisations that the ACT government has a financial partnership with.

I want to go to a few comments that came up in this debate. It is true that we live in a prosperous city—indeed, what is recognised as simply the world's best city in which to live. But, as Ms Porter has articulated, there is a sustained attack on Canberra. We see people losing their jobs; we see services closing. Ms Porter made mention of one, the Karralika family service, which is unique here and will no longer be provided with funding.



Ms Lawder asked what we have done. We have done plenty. We have stepped in to underpin the enormous funding cuts that the commonwealth have applied to our health system. We will not stand by and let the commonwealth have a negative impact on the health of our community.

I brought to this place a motion that asked this Assembly for support for me to write to the federal government seeking that they honour their commitment to the national education reform agenda. We have seen the commonwealth pull out \$32 million of funding in the non-government sector. It was a simple motion, a motion of support to the non-government schools here in the ACT. I sought for this Assembly to support me to stand up for Canberra and to support that position. But, under the leadership of Mr Doszpot, the Canberra Liberals voted that motion down. They see nothing wrong, it would seem, in the fact that \$32 million is being pulled out of our non-government schools. That is not an inclusive community. That is not the community that I want to see.

Mrs Dunne is about to get up and talk about the wonderful community of Belconnen. Let us reflect on the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre, which had an absolute, clear focus on supporting our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The commonwealth funding has ceased. They have no interest in supporting our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community through those additional funds through the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre. That is indeed a sad indictment.

We talk about an inclusive community. As the former Minister for Women I did all I could, and now Ms Berry as the Minister for Women will do all she can, to make sure women are included in our community. That is in stark contrast to Mrs Dunne's words:

... often women have somewhat of a luxury about whether they are in the workforce or not—a luxury that often does not accrue in the same way to men ... And it is often the case, especially in a town like Canberra where perhaps people are not quite so dependent upon a second income, that women, especially in their middle years ... are more inclined to move in and out of the workforce as it suits them ...

That is an appalling statement for a member over there to make, a member who is supposed to be standing up for the vulnerable—women, single income women, women who may be suffering abuse. They are the words of Mrs Dunne—that women move in and out of the workforce as it suits them. There are many women in this town who have a reality that is very different from what Mrs Dunne's words seem to represent. Women here often do not have a choice of moving in and out of the workforce; they have an absolute requirement to work to put food on the family table. It is damning of her that Mrs Dunne should come to this place and use words like that and not support Canberra women.

This Labor government not only recognises the strong partnerships that we have with our community but actively fosters and encourages their growth. I thank Ms Porter for this motion and I commend it to the Assembly.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (5.44): I will be supporting Ms Porter's motion today and I welcome her bringing it forward and the opportunity to discuss the matters contained in her motion. The federal Abbott government's first budget presented a narrow-minded vision for a harder, meaner, dumber, poorer Australia. The biggest hits were on the most vulnerable in our community—young people, the elderly and the sick. Along with sweeping cuts to the public service, the budget has hit these Canberrans hard. I am particularly concerned by elements such as cuts to welfare support for our young people that put at risk the financial wellbeing of those under 30 and increase the risk of homelessness, issues impacting on aged pensioners, cuts to universities and student funding and the cuts to single-parent payments.

I would particularly like to focus on community organisations as opposed to some of those individual impacts, because that is the essence of Ms Porter's motion. It is actually the community organisations that will bear the brunt of those impacts on individuals because they will be the ones who are there to support them. It is worth looking at a couple of different sectors where we have seen a particularly harsh impact.

I will firstly focus on the housing and homelessness sector, which we were discussing earlier today. We are seeing the national rental affordability scheme with a discontinuation of incentive allocations, the national homelessness research strategy with reduced funding and, as I discussed earlier, the national partnership agreement on homelessness with simply a 12-month extension. The budget provided a stay of execution to the majority of the nation's housing and homelessness providers for at least a year, but certainly plenty of question marks remain.

With the large national affordable housing agreement funding pool and the national partnership agreement on homelessness transitional agreement to remain for the next 12 months, now more than ever the sector and the ACT government will need to work together to prepare and engage with federal policy directions to ensure the ACT does not lose out any further in the coming years.

The cessation of the national rental affordability scheme round 5 allocations will not have an immediate effect on the ACT affordable housing sector's growth, but the announcement that it will be reviewed will cause some providers to rethink any future construction at a time when this activity is actually needed. It was disappointing and slightly paradoxical, however, to see that funding for homelessness research has been cancelled just as the federal government calls for more review and evaluation of programs. I do not know where they think this information is going to come from; it seems an odd decision.

I would also like to mention the Community Housing Federation of Australia, an organisation that does some excellent work in its area of expertise. Its funding ends in June this year. This is an example of another important advocacy organisation which is facing an uncertain future.

We then turn to the legal aid and community legal centre area. Cuts to legal services and community legal centres mean that those who most need support in difficult times

are going to be hit the hardest. This is at odds with the ACT government, which has announced \$416,000 over four years to support and enhance the work of the ACT Aboriginal Legal Service.

Community legal centres are an efficient way to use the limited funding for legal services, as their front-line delivery and advocacy save costs further down the line. An independent economic cost-benefit analysis commissioned by the National Association of Community Legal Centres determined that every \$1 the government spends on CLCs returns \$18 of economic benefits accrued to society. These include financial, social and health benefits as well as removing pressure on the court system.

Despite some suggestions to the contrary, legal aid and the community legal centres in the ACT are well integrated and are careful to complement each other and avoid duplication. I note that although the CLCs and legal aid receive federal funding, a significant amount of their activities and advice relate to the ACT community, and the benefits of their work are clearly enjoyed by the ACT community and the government. Losing their services will be of detriment to the ACT and is likely to lead to worse outcomes for disadvantaged groups and greater cost pressures in other parts of the justice system in the longer term.

In the case of legal aid, the budget cut is in the order of \$15 million over the next four years. The government's mid-year budget update had already cut \$43.1 million over four years to legal policy reform and advocacy funding. This is another way to hurt the most vulnerable people in our society, such as migrants, who will end up representing themselves without any assistance. Not only does this lead to injustice, but it is ultimately a false economy as court time is wasted and unsatisfactory verdicts are appealed.

The ACT Women's Legal Centre will have its federal funding reduced from 1 July 2015, resulting in a reduction in staff and services provided to the ACT. This will impact its ability to provide services to vulnerable women, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients who are using the service since the removal of the care and protection solicitor position at the ACT Aboriginal Legal Service this year.

Like other CLCs, the Women's Legal Centre is a cost-effective provider of legal services and estimates that its services provide an almost seven-fold return on investment. I note that the Women's Legal Centre are getting a double whammy because, with low interest rates, the money they are receiving from the ACT Law Society's trust fund is also being reduced. They are in particularly difficult circumstances.

Similarly, the ACT Environmental Defenders Office will lose its federal funding from 1 July next year, putting it at risk of closing or at least reducing its services. The EDO's advice and casework primarily relate to environmental matters, noise, planning laws and regulations and biodiversity, which are important issues to the ACT community. The EDO's work likely keeps considerable pressure off the ACT court system, as well as producing improved outcomes for the community in environmental matters.

In the health space we are seeing changes to Medicare locals, which will be replaced by primary health networks from 1 July 2015. Funding will have to be found within existing resources. It is expected to be reduced, and further details on their role and boundaries are not known. I am a strong supporter of Medicare locals and their work in coordinating a range of local health providers to deal with primary healthcare needs. On top of that, we have the prospect of some sort of co-payment. I am not quite sure where that is up to federally, but, again, that is an extra impact for those who are most needy in our community.

These are just some of the service providers in the community sector that Ms Porter refers to in her motion that are under in the pressure in the ACT as a direct result of pressure from the federal government. These are important organisations that deliver services to the most needy in our community. The cuts or funding uncertainty as a result of federal government action put them in a position that is simply impossible. What do they do with their staff? How do they prepare and plan to continue to provide the necessary services to their clients?

The community sector does great work in our community, particularly in supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable Canberrans. We are seeing the federal budget cut both services and funding directly to the most vulnerable individuals and also cut services and funding to community organisations. That has a double effect that is creating a climate of uncertainty, and it is certainly limiting the long-term viability of these organisations.

I welcome Ms Porter putting a spotlight on these issues today. We are in a situation that is incredibly difficult for these organisations and the important work they do. I am pleased to support Ms Porter's motion today.

**MS PORTER** (Ginninderra) (5.53), in reply: I thank members for their support of the motion and of the community sector. Ms Berry is correct when she says we need to measure our community and our government by the way we work with those most vulnerable. To be an effective government we need to work in cooperation with the community sector and with the community itself, as we cannot do it by ourselves. Ms Berry pointed out clear examples of how this government does this.

Ms Lawder seems to believe that because of the so-called budget black hole the federal Liberal government claimed they found when they came into office it is okay to fix the debt by punishing those who can fight back the least—the most vulnerable, the unemployed, the students, the sick. Not satisfied with that, Ms Lawder seems to think it is okay to take funds away from community sector organisations—literally taking the rug from under their feet before Christmas—because the Liberal federal government cannot bring itself to tackle the big end of town. Of course, that did not stop the Liberal federal government adding to the debt by its own decisions after coming into office and then having the gall to complain that the debt was growing.

If Ms Lawder thinks picking on the vulnerable to fix one's problems is okay, I am not sure what her letter to Minister Morrison could have said. As Ms Berry said, writing letters is not enough. I also wrote about these cruel cuts, but it is not enough just to sit

by and write letters. I moved this motion to highlight the good work of our community sector and the partnership this government is pleased to have with it and to decry the cuts outlined clearly by those in the chamber. Members heard Mr Rattenbury just now outline a number of cuts due to federal government action.

Yes, the funding cuts to Karralika and CCC happened in December and it is now February, but this is the first opportunity I have had to stand up in this place to move this motion. That does not mean we on this side of the chamber have been idly sitting by in the intervening period; far from it.

I commend this motion to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to.

## **Territory and municipal services—urban maintenance**

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (5.56): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

(a) the general poor state of urban maintenance in Belconnen, including:

(i) long grass;

(ii) weed infested median strips;

(iii) unkempt parks;

(iv) cracked and dangerous paths;

(v) the dilapidated state of many shopping centres; and

(vi) the build up of combustible material in urban open spaces; and

(b) the steady increase in rates for Belconnen residents; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to reprioritise the upkeep of the urban amenity of Belconnen.

Mr Assistant Speaker, your electorate flyer entitled “Belconnen update 2015” trumpets the headline “Belconnen is surging ahead”. But I ask you, Mr Assistant Speaker: is it really surging ahead or is that just spin?

In your document, you talk about recent and new developments, and you talked about them last week here as well. Some of them are very laudable. But some of my constituents may doubt whether any of them are particularly on time. It is also worth noting that many of the things that you trumpet are not government initiatives but private initiatives, and I think that it is a bit rich for a Labor member to trumpet private initiatives as if they belonged to his government.

Mr Assistant Speaker also talks about things that have not happened yet, and he is very keen to talk about the upgrade to the Cook shops. But as we all know, secretly, this is an initiative which is very much on the never-never. You say, Mr Assistant Speaker, that this will be completed within two years. I was told by the minister six months ago that it would be completed within two years. Does this mean that there is a rolling two-year time frame which means that, like tomorrow, we will never get there?

Meanwhile, business owners have to continue to wait for an upgrade to their shopping precinct, one that is nearly half a century old. And this is not the only shopping precinct. There is a lot of consultation, drawing of plans and putting together schemas and artists' impressions, but the shop owners around Belconnen are left deeply disappointed, as the shop owners in Florey and Evatt are, because they have been enticed by artists' impressions but they have nothing to show for it. And there is no funding, even on the never-never, for shopping centres such as Florey and Evatt, where there are demonstrably great needs.

As I said before, Cook is more than half a century old. As we all admit, it is looking a little run down. It is not very inviting for the local residents to visit the shops and it makes it hard for local businesses when the physical environment is as challenging as the economic environment.

In the budget, in relation to shop upgrades there was \$2 million over two years to be shared for refurbishments between Cook, Rivett and the shops at Mannheim Street in Kambah. Mr Rattenbury has told me that the Rivett shops refurbishment would get the lion's share of the budget allocation, which also had to fund, as I have been told by Mr Rattenbury's office, future strategies for co-funding shopping centre upgrades. I deplore the fact that we would be looking at co-funding shopping centre upgrades and having the private domain being upgraded at the same time as the public domain is. But this is a very vague thing and it seems—

*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.*

**MRS DUNNE:** My concern especially about the Cook shops is that the development is so on the never-never and there are so many other claims on that \$2 million that I fear that there will be very little, if anything, left by the time we get to the Cook shops.

A conspicuous absence in Mr Assistant Speaker's flyer is any statement about the urban amenity of Belconnen, and this is what I want to concentrate on here today. All members of the Assembly get a lot of feedback about urban amenity, and it is breathtaking, when Mr Coe and I and Mr Hanson and I and others go to the shops, that we are constantly bombarded by people who will come to talk to us about the failing urban amenity in Belconnen: the footpaths, the grassed areas, the infestations of weeds, the general rundown appearance of many of the local shopping centres, their parks and playgrounds, the presence of rubbish in recreational areas, dirty blocks and many other issues.

Mowing is, of course, a constant theme. I have written to the minister, Mr Rattenbury, on a number of occasions in relation to mowing. On other occasions I have been able to refer people to the TAMS website to see when mowing is scheduled for their area. But at one stage the website had not been updated for some months and it was difficult to let residents know when their area might be mowed. And it was a particular problem over the Christmas period. If you drive around Belconnen or walk or take your dog down to the dog park you will see what is happening there. The parks and playgrounds, the median strips and reserves—all the open areas suffer from unkempt grass and choking weeds.

My personal favourite was until recently the state of the median strip on Ginninderra Drive between William Webb and Coulter drives. It is a full masonry median strip on a slope with cement-inserted rocks, but all through the Christmas period and until about 10 days ago it was armpit deep in weeds. About 10 days ago somebody went over it with a whipper snipper and cut it off about three or four inches above the ground. All the weeds are still there and they will come back.

The infestation of weeds in the areas around Ginninderra Drive and Copland Drive is of considerable concern and what we are seeing is that there are now so many weeds that the process of mowing actually spreads the weeds. There has been an infestation of weeds on the median strip in Copland Drive, but the mowers go from that median strip into the Ginninderra Creek corridor and those weeds are now appearing all across the corridor because you mow in one place, you pick up the seed and you transmit it somewhere else. Do that over a couple of years and you get weed infestations elsewhere.

The residents of Crace made it to the front page of the *Chronicle* over the holidays because of the problem of weeds in their area. Although the residents of Crace have taken it upon themselves to do a great deal, a quick drive around Crace or a walk around Crace will show that there are waist-high weeds all over the place. They are a real problem because there are parts of Crace where houses are not completed and there is uncertainty as to who is responsible. But in the public median strips across Crace, in my electorate, there are waist-high weeds which have been to some extent addressed by the residents themselves.

An area that is a constant problem is John Cleland Crescent in Florey. John Cleland Crescent is a street that runs through the middle of Florey where, except for one small area where there are units, there is no public frontage on the street. It is a continuation of back fences. There were bad plantings made when the suburb was built. The useful life of most of the plants in the area has been well exceeded. Many of them are dead. It is a place which is just a build-up of weeds, rubbish and infestation across people's backyards onto the public land. As someone said to me the other day, "I suspect the government gets the impression that that is good enough for Florey." It would not be tolerated in Red Hill or Forrest but perhaps the government thinks that that is good enough for Florey.

This is a constant theme that I hear when I talk to residents. Belconnen residents say that they believe that the standard of maintenance in Belconnen is worse than it is in other parts of Canberra.

The footpaths, of course, are a common complaint. There is always cracking. I did notice the other day that I got a letter from the minister which I think was 10 months in the writing. It did say that many of the areas that I had complained about have been fixed. There is a problem if it takes 10 months to get an answer on some of these things.

One footpath along Ginninderra Creek, which is one that I use regularly, was badly broken up—and the minister did take steps to address the issue—with weeds growing through the cracks. I wrote to the minister and some work was done about this about 18 months ago, but because it was a patch-up job the results have been short-lived. The cracks from the past have reappeared and the grass is starting to grow through those cracks again so that the path has degraded considerably. I wrote to the minister about this because it is a very busy bicycle path, but it is unlit. The problems there were so great that it became a hazard at night for cyclists, and cyclists were complaining to me about that.

Trees have caused problems. In one case I was asked to tell the minister that the overhanging trees were so low that trucks would strip the branches from the trees and leave the debris strewn on the road. After my representations the trees were pruned, much to the relief of the residents.

Many constituents, particularly those in Weetangera, complained to me over a period late last year that they had contacted Canberra Connect on a number of occasions in relation to dead and dying trees in their suburb but nothing happened. When I made representations, happily, those things were fixed.

Mr Rattenbury, the minister, tells us from time to time, “There is no need to write to me. All you have to do is contact Canberra Connect or “fix my street”.” Quite frankly, it does not work. It should not have to be the case that members in this place have to make representations about dead and dying trees. But if constituents ring fix my street or Canberra Connect and say, “I have got a dead and dying tree,” nothing happens. They might do it two or three times. They come to you, they write to you or they send you an email; you do something about it and suddenly it is fixed. If Mr Rattenbury does not want members writing to him about dead and dying trees and holes in footpaths, actually get the Canberra Connect system to work and get fix my street to work and then we will all have a lot less to do.

There are potholes everywhere. You have to remember that Canberra is a blessed place and there are many retired government engineers around the place who can tell you just how bad the roadworks are. I was recently told by a retired government engineer that if you fix a pothole properly it will last longer and be stronger than the road around it. But we constantly have the case in the ACT where we waste money because we fix a pothole and the next time it rains that same pothole is there for all to see again.

Playgrounds attract a lot of attention from residents. And there was some mention last week about the Holt community park. I have had representations from people involved in the Holt community park who have taken it upon themselves, very



laudably—and they should be congratulated for the work that they have done over the years—to try to keep the Holt community park in good order. But they lose heart when there is no support from the government.

One member of the Holt community group said the depression under the swing was so big that little kids cannot get on the swings anymore. He told me that the gardens in the area had never been watered and as a result the plants were struggling. They are doing the weeding, they are trying to keep the plants up, but they do not have the capacity to water. If they had the capacity to water we would have a much better Holt community park.

There are places all around the area where there are informal paths. Informal paths indicate to most people that that is where people need a path. If there is a track worn through a suburb, that is where people need a path and something should be done about it. There are places on Southern Cross Drive opposite Ross Smith Crescent which children going to schools in Florey use on a regular basis but where nothing will be done to formalise the paths.

These are just a small sample of the kind of feedback I have been getting. As I said earlier, a cursory drive around Belconnen or a walk with or without your dog will show just how tired and bedraggled the area has become.

One issue that I am particularly concerned about is the build-up of fire fuel in areas like the Ginninderra Creek corridor, which after the 2003 bushfires was given a great deal of attention but which has not had very much attention lately.

But the thing about this is that the people of Belconnen are paying royally for very bad services. Just as an example, people in Aranda have gone from paying \$1,678 on average in 2010-11 for their rates to \$2,351 in 2014-15, an increase of 40 per cent over four years. Macquarie has increased 26 per cent, Macgregor 10 per cent and McKellar 25 per cent. There is a whole lot of revenue coming out of Belconnen and the people of Belconnen are not getting the services they need.

**DR BOURKE** (Ginninderra) (6.11): I am delighted to hear that Mrs Dunne has noticed that I sent a brochure out to residents in Belconnen telling them what the government has been doing for them. I will just take a bit of time to list those things because Mrs Dunne does not seem to think it is a good idea that we actually go out and tell our constituents what we are doing.

**Mrs Dunne:** You have just got to tell them the truth, Chris.

**Ms Burch:** On a point of order, there was an interjection from Mrs Dunne implying that Dr Bourke was, indeed, not truthful to the community. I ask for that to be withdrawn.

**Mr Wall:** On the point of order, Madam Assistant Speaker, Mrs Dunne did not make a reference to Dr Bourke not telling the truth but made reference to his flyer not telling the truth.

**Mrs Dunne:** I withdraw, Madam Assistant Speaker.

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Ms Lawder): Thank you. Dr Bourke.

**DR BOURKE:** Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. Let us just talk about some of the things that I put in this brochure to tell my constituents about what this government is doing in Belconnen. We will start with the Calvary hospital. There is a new \$19 million Calvary hospital multistorey car park for 700 vehicles—something that people in Belconnen have been looking for for a very long time, and now it is going to be delivered. It is going to make better access for patients, visitors and staff. The work also includes an electrical substation, which I note in my brochure, which is going to secure and expand Calvary's power supply. Calvary's services will also grow, with an additional 15 acute beds in 2015. That is this year. There is another intensive care bed, \$1½ million for birthing services, \$1.9 million for lymphoedema services and \$1.3 million for ophthalmology. These are particularly important services that my constituents will be very happy to receive and are glad to hear about.

What about the Belconnen Community Health Centre's new nurse-led walk-in centre which opened in July last year, the Aranda ambulance and fire station, which is going to provide safer and faster response times in the area and is going to be completed in 2016, the Charnwood fire station and John Knight park, with its new outdoor fitness equipment and the recent upgrades to the playground equipment and picnic facilities? What about the Emu Bank upgrades and wetland development, the Scullin shops, which were upgraded with an aviators and travel theme, and the Cook shops, which already have their public toilets in place?

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Order!

**DR BOURKE:** I can see, Madam Speaker, that the thought of public toilets excites members of the opposition, and rightly so, because this is something that is very important when you go to the shops—for older people, for people with children—to have that kind of facility available. That is what has already been delivered by this government at the Calwell shops.

At the Charnwood shops there is the new community gathering space, better signage, parking, bike racks and picnic tables. And, of course, the major piece is the University of Canberra public hospital situated at the north-west corner of the UC campus. Construction is expected to begin in 2015. These are things that have happened, are happening or are going to happen in my electorate. My constituents want to know what is going on, they want to know what is going to happen and they need to know what has been done. I think it is a bit rich for Mrs Dunne to come into this place and criticise my work as a representative telling my constituents what the government is doing.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Justice, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Transport Reform) (6.16): I would like to address some of the specific elements of Mrs Dunne's motion regarding the state of urban maintenance in

the Belconnen area. There are quite a few. She certainly made a colourful contribution to the debate and probably selectively brought out a few facts, so it is worth reflecting on what is actually happening on the ground.

In terms of long grass, as members will be aware, grass growth varies depending on the season. During this summer Canberra has experienced an exceptional season. It has been particularly wet, with above average rainfalls across the city. This has been great news for farmers in the ACT and surrounding areas, who are having such a good season. It has also been great news for Canberra's gardeners. Canberra is certainly looking green for this time of year and people's gardens are looking so healthy, although, as I imagine members in this place would have noticed, it is quite hard to keep up with the growth. We are all having the same experience with our gardens as is happening throughout the entire city.

There has been a reduced need for watering this summer, which has certainly helped the thousands of new trees and shrubs that TAMS have planted along our roads, parks and town centres over the past few years. The rainfall has reduced the need for watering, which has been great for filling the Cotter Dam. I think it is much better to have lush growth than the dry and dusty conditions we became accustomed to during the years of drought not so long ago. But that is the glass half-full perspective on the additional rainfall. The glass half-empty scenario so well enunciated by Mrs Dunne creates the situation that has provided challenges for the maintenance of our public spaces.

TAMS mows over 4½ thousand hectares of urban spaces across the city, using a fleet of up to 80 mowers plus additional contract mowers along arterial roads. In the last three years the area of urban mowing has increased by approximately 315 hectares across Canberra. TAMS, at the start of a season, designs its mowing programs to account for average rainfall, as has been experienced in recent years. In an average year the grass growth slows to almost nothing from the end of December to late February. The mowing and weed spraying programs are designed to take this into account. We do not want to be running mowers around all through January when there is no grass growth. That would be terribly inefficient and I imagine members in this place would be complaining about the wastage.

But during the Christmas holidays this year the ACT received over 100 millimetres of rain. The continuing rainfall during summer has resulted in extraordinary grass growth, requiring mowers to be operating when they are not normally required. As a result, work programs have been reviewed and additional resources allocated to get the mowing back on schedule. This includes staff working longer hours and weekends in the Belconnen region. TAMS has also engaged additional casual staff and local mowing contractors. We are reviewing the mowing program weekly to ensure resources are allocated as efficiently as possible. I was the first to admit when I was in Belconnen the other day that I was not happy with the state of things, but I do ask Canberra residents to be patient and acknowledge that we have had an extraordinary summer. The team that do the mowing are working as hard as possible to keep up with what has been an out of character season.

The same situation applies to the weed infested median strips. I particularly note Mrs Dunne's reference to Ginninderra Drive between William Webb and Coulter Drive. I noticed that one as well the other week on the dam and I was, frankly, pretty unhappy with it. It is the specific one I discussed with TAMS. I think it got the whipper snipper treatment because I had particularly mentioned that one to them. I know the whipper snipper will only have a short-term effect. The weeds have grown quickly this season, for the same reasons I have just talked about. Weeds normally die off over our hot, dry summer months, but, again, they have had the ability to survive this summer.

As part of the TAMS routine weed control programs, granite road medians are treated with a pre-emergent herbicide that restricts weed growth and generally lasts up to six months, but due to the extraordinary rain during this period the effectiveness of the pre-emergent herbicide has been reduced. Weeds in gaps in concrete medians are also spot sprayed twice annually, in spring and summer, as part of the routine weed control program.

Additional resources have been allocated, targeting weed control. Many medians in Belconnen were treated in late January and early February 2015. However, it can take a while for the weeds to die off. I anticipate that Belconnen residents will see an improvement in the coming weeks. We have made a particular effort to target that area because of the problems that we have seen.

In terms of the observation of our unkempt parks—and I think this goes to some of the previous issues—TAMS has a regular schedule for park maintenance. They are assessed regularly for issues including litter picking, mowing, weed spraying, shrub bed maintenance, graffiti removal, playground maintenance and barbecue cleaning. The frequency of the inspections varies depending on the size and usage of the park. High-use parks such as town parks have a more rigorous inspection program than smaller district or neighbourhood parks. The number and type of inspection each park receives is regularly reviewed and neighbourhood parks requiring additional work maintenance are placed on the winter maintenance program.

Town and district parks are cleaned weekly and neighbourhood parks are generally litter picked monthly prior to mowing. Litter-picking programs are adjusted as required to target areas requiring a specific effort. Rubbish bins are only provided at town district parks and they are emptied as identified during the regular inspections. There is also a range of other treatments, but in the spirit of time I will keep going.

In terms of footpaths, this is an area where I work collaboratively with Minister Gentleman, who is now the Minister for Roads and Parking, but on behalf of the government I will make a few remarks. Regarding the maintenance and conditions of the community path network across the territory, as I have explained before in this place, Roads ACT has a systematic approach to inspections, repairs and replacement of damaged sections of footpath. If an issue is noted as an immediate safety hazard, repairs are promptly completed. Renewal of damaged sections of path that present a less immediate risk are scheduled into larger programs of work in order to ensure that the ACT government gets the best value for money.

Additionally, and consistent with the Roads ACT asset management operational plan for community paths in the ACT, inspections are targeted according to assessed risk. So areas in Belconnen receive inspection of all the suburban footpaths every four years, and in group centres and local centres it is every three years. In areas around community facilities, including shopping areas and schools, as an example, it is every two years. So you can see the prioritisation there based on higher usage levels. The next scheduled inspection in Belconnen is due for completion in August 2015.

Works have recently been completed or are programmed in Aranda, Belconnen, Bruce, Charnwood, Evatt, Flynn, Giralang, Hawker, Holt, Kaleen, Macgregor, McKellar, Melba, Spence and Weetangera. Works are also due to be programmed in Aranda, Belconnen, Bruce, Cook, Florey, Fraser, Giralang, Hawker, Higgins, Page and Weetangera. This is starting to sound like an Alistair Coe adjournment speech.

At Mount Goodwin in Macgregor, where I have recently visited with a constituent, the path network in the parkland is due to be completely renewed before the end of the 2014-15 financial year due to the particular problems in that area. A re-levelling of pavers has recently been completed in Belconnen along the waterfront. I know that there have been some particular issues there with vehicles going on the pavers and damaging the area. Footpath works have also recently been completed in Aranda, Belconnen, Bruce, Charnwood, Evatt, Florey, Fraser, Giralang, Holt, Latham, Macgregor, McKellar, Page, Scullin and Spence. Additional footpath grinding work will be programmed as raised by public inquiries.

I noted the comments that were made about whether the public should have to make the effort to report these things. I have just talked about the regular maintenance program that TAMS has in a range of areas, but there is no harm in taking advantage of the fact that the community are also able to spot things. I would rather work with the community to have them inform the government if there is a problem than simply employ staff who drive around looking for problems. I would like to focus TAMS resources—and they are constrained in places—on repairing things, and we can work in partnership with the community to identify problem areas.

In terms of shopping centres, Dr Bourke has made some comments in that space already. There are currently a number of works underway in the Belconnen region. Upgrades that have been undertaken in recent years include the Melba, Holt and Scullin shopping centres. Upgrades are currently being constructed in the Belconnen region at the Charnwood—Tillyard Drive—and Cook shopping centres. Forward designs have also been completed for Florey and Evatt, and they will be upgraded as the funding becomes available.

Mrs Dunne spoke of the new approach of seeking a co-investment model with shopping centre upgrades, and I welcome what I took to be her positive remarks on that approach. It has been a source of frustration for me that TAMS goes around and often does really great work on public unleased land—upgrading footpaths and putting in new lighting and shrubbery: all of those kinds of things, depending on what a centre needs—and the residents come along and go, “Well, that’s terrific, but the shopping centre still looks a bit drab.” I can understand why people say that, because

if no work has been done on the privately owned building then it can be a bit incongruous. I am very keen to explore an approach where there is a stronger partnership and we say, "If we're going to do the job, let's do it properly." I have asked TAMS to work on looking at a model there. We will still need to be mindful that in some areas there might not be private investment to be had, and we cannot let those areas just drop off the list and be left to deteriorate without support. We will need to find a way to balance those two things. But I think there is certainly scope for that co-investment.

In terms of the build-up of combustible material in urban open spaces, I would like to assure the Assembly that the significant rain throughout January has resulted in low fire dangers across the territory. Grass curing, or drying, reduced from 70 per cent to 50 per cent, which has in turn reduced the likelihood of grassfires at this time. So the actual risk has dropped.

The longer term seasonal outlook is unclear at this stage and TAMS is working with the Bureau of Meteorology to keep as up to date as possible. Urban open space is continually monitored for combustible material build-up, and as yet the percentage has not reached a concern due to the moisture content of the material.

What I can say, though, is that TAMS is preparing a series of controlled burns across the territory, a number of which will be in the Belconnen region, but currently all the sites are too green and too wet to burn. TAMS has been in consultation with the Rural Fire Service and agreement has been reached to commence the autumn burning program earlier than usual, in February, should conditions be warm enough to induce the drying of fuels and yet benign enough to allow us to safely consider introducing fire into the landscape.

I go into some detail here to simply highlight for the Assembly both the dynamic nature of fire protection in the territory but also to give members that information so that, if constituents are concerned, they have the information to reassure them that TAMS is monitoring this closely. Because of the rainfall, the actual fire danger is quite low. The grass may look thicker or longer, but because of the moisture content it does not represent the fire risk that the perhaps untrained eye might be concerned about.

In terms of potholes, members may have noticed a recent story in the paper. In the last two years TAMS has adjusted its program. The previous performance mark was to fix potholes within seven days. That is now within 24 hours, because it improves safety on our roads. It has actually resulted in a 70 per cent drop in complaints about road pavements and has resulted in a significant drop in the number of insurance claims against the ACT government. I think that is one of those very practical changes that we have been able to make in TAMS that have a positive benefit for our community.

Mrs Dunne has called on the government to reprioritise the upkeep of the urban amenity of Belconnen. This is always an interesting question. Next week Mr Doszpot will have one for us to prioritise the inner south of Canberra, as he has done before. What I can say to this Assembly is that the government does not prioritise any parts of Canberra. The government delivers for all parts of Canberra. We are not going down some parochial pathway. We are delivering to all of Canberra.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR RATTENBURY:** We are delivering to all of Canberra because this government does not have favourites. This government services all parts of Canberra equally to make sure that all parts of the city get looked after. I will not be supporting Mrs Dunne's motion today. I now move the amendment that has been circulated in my name:

Omit all words after paragraph (1), substitute:

- “(a) that hard working Territory and Municipal Services staff and contractors work in all conditions to maintain the ACT's parks and public places, including through the recent exceptional growing season in Belconnen;
- (b) the ACT Government's continued investment in maintaining and improving Canberra's shopping centres, parks, playgrounds, lakes and wetlands in all parts of Canberra, including Belconnen; and
- (c) that the quality of the environment and services were contributing factors to Canberra being selected by the Organisation for Economic Development as the best place in the world to live.”.

The amendment underlines the fact that TAMS staff work hard to maintain the ACT's parks and public places, including through this exceptional growing season. I have added in Belconnen. I realise that my amendment would be out of order if I did not because Mrs Dunne has focused her motion on Belconnen. I would like to reiterate the point that the government seeks to deliver for all of Canberra. I suspect that, in view of the way I just phrased that a few minutes ago and the much laughter in this place, I have got a quote coming that is going to be taken out of context. I conclude by thanking the staff of TAMS for their considerable effort in the upkeep of the city.

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

## **Adjournment**

Motion (by **Ms Burch**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## **International Asperger's Day**

**MR WALL** (Brindabella) (6.32): I rise this evening to acknowledge International Asperger's Day, a day aimed to give recognition to the families and carers of those living with Asperger's syndrome and acknowledging the achievements of people with Asperger's syndrome in our community. I especially pay tribute to the work of Autism Asperger ACT, a not-for-profit charitable organisation which aims to provide information and support to people involved in the autism and Asperger community in the territory. They are also an active voice in promoting and developing services to meet the specific needs of people who have an autism spectrum disorder.

Asperger's is considered a spectral disorder and nowadays is considered part of the autism spectrum, or ASD. ASD is a lifelong development disability that affects how a person communicates and relates to other people and the world around them. It is a spectrum condition which affects each person differently, although they often share common areas of difficulty. Symptoms typical of Asperger's include social awkwardness, delayed motor development, a heightened sensitivity to loud noises, lights, or strong tastes or textures, and a propensity to be preoccupied with only one or very few interests.

Autism Asperger ACT relies heavily on its membership and the generosity of individuals to help raise awareness and to increase service delivery and support for people with ASD. Autism Asperger ACT provides a range of workshops for people with ASD, their families, carers and professionals within the ACT region. These workshops help to provide people with ASD support and assistance and help to educate families, carers and professionals within the ACT about ASD. A special activity that takes place each month is a games day, which sees children with ASD and their families getting together, sharing experiences and having fun at the same time.

This year, in recognition of International Asperger's Day, Autism Asperger ACT will be giving away two free tickets to a talk by Graeme Simson, the author of international bestseller *The Rosie Project*. Graeme will be talking at the National Library on 29 April as part of Autism Awareness Month. Anyone interested in being in the draw for those tickets is encouraged to enter online at [www.autismaspergeract.com/rosieproject](http://www.autismaspergeract.com/rosieproject).

I acknowledge the executive members of Autism Asperger ACT who continue to work hard and promote the aims of the organisation: CEO Peter Brady; president Peter Maskell; vice-president Trish O'Neil; secretary Liz Blakey; treasurer James Austin; and committee members Daniel Munro, Lora Shaw and Raj Satija. I also acknowledge the volunteers who work tirelessly to support this local organisation and raise awareness in the ACT and, of course, the individuals and the families who deal with living with this condition on a daily basis.

I encourage everyone in our community to support the activities associated with Autism Asperger ACT. Anyone interested in further information should visit their website.

## **ACT Greens**

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (6.35): I rise today to draw the Assembly's attention to the fact that today, 18 February, is the 20th anniversary of the ACT Greens being elected to the Legislative Assembly of the ACT. For 20 years, since February 1995, the ACT Greens have had continual representation in the Assembly. Over that period we have worked hard to represent the people of Canberra who want to ensure that human rights, environmental rights, animal rights, and a sustainable and democratic future are a key part of the ACT agenda.



We are a city full of people who work hard and think hard about the policy issues that face Australians and how best to solve the problems facing the most vulnerable and those who do not have a voice. As a result, we have a progressive town; we have a voting population who expect that their local government will stand up not only for their rights but also for what is right.

The Greens have been standing up, often as a lone voice, representing the community, calling for accountability and slowly changing the culture of the ACT government to be more open, more responsive, and more consultative. We have pushed the government of the day to understand the challenges to our earth's future and the need to have a sustainable *modus operandi* within the bounds of our everyday lives. As a result, we are now the jurisdiction in Australia with the government best preparing our city for the future challenges that we face.

After 20 years of speaking up and representing the community's calls, we can now proudly report that we have the strongest legislated greenhouse gas reduction target in the country, with an achievable plan to be carbon neutral. We have serious government investment in wetlands, improving water quality as well as providing amenity for local wildlife and residents. We are the only place in Australia to have allowed same-sex marriages and to have a ban on caged hens and sow stalls. We are also transitioning to a sustainable transport plan that services all people, no matter how they wish to get around.

There simply is not enough time for me to reel off the long list of things that have happened as a result of having Greens in the ACT Assembly, but I take the opportunity to acknowledge my predecessors and thank them for their work over the years: Kerrie Tucker from 1995 to 2004, Lucy Horodny from 1995 to 1998, Dr Deb Foskey from 2004 to 2008, and, of course, my former colleagues in the Seventh Assembly from 2008 to 2012, Meredith Hunter, Caroline Le Couteur, and Amanda Bresnan. Former MLA Lucy Horodny reflected today that she thought one of the most significant things she achieved was:

... more subtle but powerful things like changing the culture in the Assembly and we introduced language that had not been in use much before like ecologically sustainable and factoring in the real life cycle cost of products. Also climate change and the real cost and the real effects. It was our language that really shifted some thinking.

This has been echoed by former MLA Dr Deb Foskey, who worked hard to follow up Kerrie and Lucy's work to introduce the concept of triple bottom line, not just as a topic but as a lens. This is now a standard process when evaluating major government decisions through the cabinet process. Dr Foskey said today she is particularly proud of the work she did for residents of the Narrabundah long-stay caravan park, ensuring that when the private owner sold the land the residents were not simply evicted but that the ACT government stepped in and did a land swap with the owner to preserve the homes of those residents, some of whom had lived there for over 20 years. That caravan park is still home to more than a hundred people today and is an important part of the affordable housing options available in the territory.

One piece of legislation passed during the term of Dr Foskey—during the period of ALP majority government—was the anti-SLAPP legislation—strategic lawsuits against public participation. I note that this is exactly the type of legislation they are rolling out in Tasmania right now. Those kinds of SLAPP suits are now possible in Tasmania, but we can be proud that we have upheld people's rights to protest peacefully here in the ACT.

Madam Assistant Speaker, although I am currently the lone Greens member of the ACT Assembly, I stand here today to follow a long tradition of working to ensure that ecological sustainability, social justice, peace and non-violence and grassroots democracy are principles that are upheld here in the ACT.

### **Mon National Day**

**DR BOURKE** (Ginninderra) (6.39): A few weeks ago I was honoured to represent our Chief Minister at the national day celebrations of Canberra's and, indeed, Australia's, Mon community. Mr Din Pla Hongsa, President of the Australia Mon Association, presided at the celebrations, which featured the community in national dress, Mon traditional dancing and a delicious banquet of Mon dishes at Merici College.

The Mon are a very proud, independent and ancient ethnic group of the Thai-Burma region. They constitute about three million of the 60 million people of Burma or Myanmar. The Mon have had to fight for their independence for over 1,000 years. In more recent times they have fought against the central Myanmar government for autonomy and rights over natural resources.

Mon refugees fleeing the conflict first arrived in Canberra in 1995. Today there are about 200 Mon in Canberra—the largest Mon community in Australia. They are part of the Mon diaspora around the world. The largest Mon community outside Asia lives in the USA; Australia is home to the second largest community outside Asia.

Celebrations of Mon National Day are observed on the first waning day of the 11th lunar month, usually around February each year. The Mon have observed the day annually since 1947, the day before the end of British colonial rule. Mon National Day also marks the founding in 825 AD of the Mon kingdom of Pegu, in lower Myanmar. The day is an opportunity for the community to come together to celebrate the Mon people's rich history and the unique culture that has survived centuries of struggle against conquerors.

Among the celebrations of Mon culture, it is understandable for the community to have mixed emotions about years of warfare that have forced many away from their homelands as refugees. The Mon remember people at home, jailed for celebrating Mon National Day, and those Mon people, including family and loved ones, who still suffer human rights violations as they struggle for autonomy and genuine peace in their homeland.

Mon families have made a new home in Canberra, with younger members of the community born and raised here as Canberrans with a proud Mon cultural inheritance. I am grateful they share their culture with us in many ways, including at our annual National Multicultural Festival and other cultural events. The Mon are a very welcome part of Canberra's proud and vibrant multicultural community.

### **Heart Foundation ACT**

**MR DOSZPOT** (Molonglo) (6.42): Last Friday I was among over 300 attendees at the Heart Foundation ACT's 2015 fundraiser, the Hearts of Valour Ball at the Hyatt Hotel. The patron of the Heart Foundation ACT, Richard Rolfe OAM, welcomed the guests and explained the theme of the night: the celebration of bravery and recognition of some of Australia's most courageous citizens—in this case, our five Cross of Valour recipients: Darrell Tree CV, Victor Boscoe CV, Allan Sparkes CV, Timothy Britten CV, and Richard Joyes CV. The commemorative program referred to "bravery being a deliberate choice: to go from a place of safety to danger or remain in a perilous position to provide help". It said, "The Cross of Valour, Australia's highest award for bravery, is awarded for acts of the most conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme peril."

During the night we heard about these incredible acts of bravery under circumstances of extreme peril from five very humble individuals whose personal stories and courage had to be coaxed from them by the very capable MC, Ray Martin. Ray had to draw on all his years of interviewing techniques to get these wonderful heroes to open up and share their stories of courage with us.

The hearts of valour event also included recognition of the living Victoria Cross recipients—Keith Payne VC, OAM; Mark Donaldson VC; Ben Roberts-Smith VC, MG; and Daniel Keighran VC—and also George Cross recipient Michael Pratt GC.

I thought Dame Quentin Bryce's description of the night as a "nationally significant event" and Major General the Hon Michael Jeffery's comment of "a remarkably historical evening" summed up the unique event that it was.

Credit must go to the Heart Foundation ACT patron, Richard Rolfe, and his wife, Debbie, for their incredible organisation and effort and the inspiration to get all these people in the one place at the one time. To have four Victoria Cross recipients, five Cross of Valour recipients and one George Cross recipient, people who are also Australia's 10 diamond jubilee medallists, all on stage together, and then to have Doug Baird, father of Cameron Baird VC, welcomed on stage to represent his son, Australia's 100th Victoria Cross recipient, who paid the ultimate sacrifice last year, was one of the most inspirational highlights for many of us on the night. Other highlights on the night were inspirational speeches from Major General the Hon Michael Jeffery, the Hon Dame Quentin Bryce, the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson, Keith Payne VC, and Ben Roberts-Smith VC. A moving letter from former Prime Minister John Howard was read by Hugh Riminton.

The business side of the evening was a great credit to Heart Foundation ACT CEO Tony Stubbs and his enthusiastic staff. They made sure the raffle tickets, auctions and silent auctions were displayed to advantage to generate much-needed funds to carry on their good work.

For more than 40 years the Heart Foundation of the ACT has established a great reputation for its dedication to saving lives by improving the heart health of Canberrans. Through the generosity of the many sponsors, including presenting sponsor HP and supporting sponsor Audi, as well as the 300-plus attendees, the funds raised on the evening for the Heart Foundation exceeded \$100,000.

In addition to the significant money that was raised on the night for the Heart Foundation, there was interesting interaction with other charities with quite a history of support for our armed forces and our inspirational military and civilian heroes—charities like Soldier On, Legacy and the RSL. On the night, the Canberra Raiders unveiled their Anzac round commemorative jerseys, which will all be auctioned off for these charities that do such a great job in assisting veterans and their families.

Through the efforts of people like Richard Rolfe, the Heart Foundation, the 10 diamond jubilee medallists, the Australian War Memorial and the Royal Australian Mint, the night became a strong affirmation of support for and recognition of our civilian and military heroes. The evening was a great success on many levels. The heart has a history as the symbol of bravery through lifesaving acts. Through the hearts of valour fundraiser, the proceeds will make a welcome addition to bolster the ongoing efforts of the Heart Foundation ACT.

### **Terrorism—Libya**

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (6.47): I rise tonight to talk about a very sad and tragic event which occurred earlier this week. On Sunday the terror organisation ISIS released a video which purports to show the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians. The Egyptians had been held hostage for weeks after being taken by ISIS militants while working as labourers in Sirte, Libya. In most cases the beheaded men were taken when militants stormed their housing complex. They were then murdered. The beheadings continue a trend of deplorable executions carried out by ISIS. Sadly, we know all too well the threat they raise to our security and to our way of life.

The Coptic Church is a term used to describe Egyptian Christians. The Coptic Church is based on the teachings of St Mark, the author of the book of Mark in the New Testament. St Mark was a missionary to Egypt in the first century AD. Christianity spread through Egypt in the first and second centuries AD and New Testament writings dating from the second century have been found in Egypt. The Coptic Church is now more than 19 centuries old.

The Nicene Creed, a central statement of Christian belief which is recited in churches throughout the world, was written by St Athanasius. Athanasius was the Pope of Alexandria, the leader of the Coptic Church, from 327 AD to 373 AD. The Catechetical School of Alexandria is the oldest catechetical school in the world. It was established in 190 AD and continues to play an important role in theological training for the Coptic Church.

Since its establishment the Coptic Church has been subject to significant persecution. However, the church has remained committed to its core beliefs. There are two dioceses of the Coptic Church in Australia, based in Melbourne and Sydney. St Mark Coptic Church in Kaleen is part of the Coptic Orthodox Church Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions.

St Mark's, through its priest, Father Michael Zamer, has prepared a book of condolences for the 21 Copts. The book is available for signing tomorrow. I encourage all members to attend St Mark's and sign the book between 4 and 6 pm tomorrow or to arrange another time for signing. As well as this, I encourage all members to keep the families and friends of those executed in your thoughts and prayers. I hope that an event like this does not occur again.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.50 pm.**