



# Debates

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**Tuesday, 17 November 2015**

**MADAM SPEAKER** (Mrs Dunne) took the chair at 10 am, made a formal recognition that the Assembly was meeting on the lands of the traditional custodians, and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

**Terrorist attacks—Paris, Beirut and Ankara  
Statements by members**

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Urban Renewal and Minister for Tourism and Events) : I seek leave to make a statement in relation to the recent attacks in Paris, Beirut and Ankara.

Leave granted.

**MR BARR:** I thank Assembly members for granting leave this morning. I rise this morning to express horror at the series of recent attacks, deep sadness at the loss of innocent lives, and to convey sympathy to the families and friends of those who are in mourning. I am sure I speak on behalf of the entire Assembly, the entire ACT government and the people of Canberra when I say that our thoughts are with the French, Lebanese and Turkish people as they grieve for the loss of innocent lives from these senseless acts of horrific violence.

Over the weekend our thoughts have gone out to the French community in Canberra and those Canberrans with loved ones in France. I hope they can all take comfort from the knowledge that all Canberrans and all Australians are thinking of them at this difficult time.

As members would be aware, as a gesture of solidarity and to pledge our support to the people of France, on Saturday night Canberra joined cities around Australia and the world in lighting up city monuments in the colours of the French flag. Canberra's Kings Avenue overpass, Telstra Tower and the National Carillon were all lit up with the blue, white and red of the French flag. I take this opportunity to thank the National Capital Authority for promptly accommodating our request after the shocking news broke early on Saturday morning Canberra time. Parliament House was also lit up on Sunday night. Through this symbolic gesture, we joined with the world to demonstrate that we stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of France.

I also take this opportunity to inform members that I have written to the Ambassador of France in Australia, on behalf of the ACT government and the Canberra community, to express our heartfelt sympathy to the people of France.

It is also important that we acknowledge the attacks that took place in Beirut, Lebanon, late on Thursday, 12 November, just one day before the attacks in Paris. These have been described as the worst of their kind in Beirut since the civil war ended in 1990. We express our deepest sympathies to the people of Lebanon and also to the local Lebanese community here in Canberra, who may have had friends who were injured or who may have lost loved ones.

These are the latest in a series of attacks, including the bombing in Ankara, Turkey, where those who suffered were innocent people going about their daily lives or gathering to support peace in their country or their region.

One of our country's, and I believe our city's, greatest strengths is our harmonious, diverse, multicultural, multifaith community that celebrates people from all backgrounds and cultures. I am sure I speak for this Assembly this morning and for the Canberra community when I say that we will preserve and protect this vital character of our local community. We will continue to strive to ensure that we remain harmonious, diverse and multicultural.

The Paris, Beirut and Ankara attacks have devastated families. Our hearts and thoughts go out to those families. At this difficult time we are standing in solidarity with all of those affected by these horrific attacks.

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition), by leave: I thank the Chief Minister for bringing this matter before the Assembly today. I speak on behalf of the Canberra Liberals as I offer our sympathy and support for the people of Paris and of France. Today we mourn those killed, we hope for those who were wounded, and we reach out to all those touched by these tragic events.

The horror that unfolded before us in Paris is almost unimaginable. I echo the feelings and words of so many around the country and around the world. President Obama called it a “heartbreaking situation” and “an attack on all humanity”. And indeed it is. Britain's David Cameron said it was “the worst act of violence on French soil since the Second World War”.

It is not just those in the West who have spoken about these terrible crimes. Indeed the Iranian President sent a message condemning the attacks, and an Iranian foreign ministry spokesman was quoted as saying:

Those terrorist groups that committed the Paris crimes do not believe in ethical principles and they are not loyal to any type of divine religion—including Islam.

A similar statement has been issued by the ruler of Kuwait. The President of the United Arab Emirates stated that they supported doing “what it takes to face terrorism and eliminate it”. The Qatari foreign minister also made a statement. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned what he described as the “despicable terrorist attacks” in Paris.

That is why acts like these most recent crimes will never succeed. Those who seek to divide us, and divide the world, have in fact caused the world to unite—to unite in defence of the shared values that were attacked, from all countries, all creeds and all religions. It is our shared beliefs and values that unite our countries: the love of freedom, of opportunity and of family.

From across the globe, from all sides of politics and from all religious quarters, we have seen not only condemnation but also resolve. Boris Johnson, the Conservative Lord Mayor of London, spoke of the special relationship that binds the cities of London and Paris. He said:

We regard Paris as our sister city, a place for which we have deep reserves of love and admiration and respect.

We are two capitals united in our values—democratic freedom, openness and tolerance. The people who launched the attacks ... have no such values. They wish to undermine the things we hold most precious. They want to set neighbour against neighbour.

They want to spread fear.

They will not succeed.

To borrow from David Cameron once again, he said:

We are shocked, but resolute.

In sorrow, but unbowed.

The French President, Francois Hollande, told 900 members of the upper and lower houses of parliament at Versailles:

France is at war. It constitutes an attack on our country, its values, its youth, its way of life.

France and Australia have a long-shared history. In times of peace and of war, in times of prosperity and of hardship, Australia has stood by France for well over 100 years. We stand with them again today.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo), by leave: On behalf of the ACT Greens I extend our deepest sympathies to the people of Paris and all who have lost loved ones in the horrendous violence over the weekend. In what appear to be coordinated terrorists attacks, many people were killed and many more were badly injured. Many of the injured will wear their scars, both physical and emotional, for the rest of their lives.

The violence in Paris was only one attack in a very violent year. Two days before Paris, Islamic state bombed Beirut, killing 43 and injuring hundreds more. In April al-Shabaab militants killed 147 people at Garissa University in Kenya. In January Boko Haram razed the town of Baga in Nigeria, killing as many as 2,000 people. Of course, January also saw the al-Qaeda attacks on Charlie Hebdo, again in Paris. The list goes on and on.

Sometimes it feels like the world is becoming a more violent place. It is hard to know whether that is in fact true. The people of Europe will remember the IRA, ETA and the Red Brigades. But they will rebuild their community after this bloodshed, just as they have on those previous occasions.

The French nation will be weeping for the victims of this tragedy and they will understandably want to strike back. President Francois Hollande has called for a pitiless response and French jets are already responding over Syria. He has also flagged constitutional reforms to grant greater powers to domestic security forces in times of crisis.

It is an understatement to say there is no simple answer to the question of terrorism. What we do know is that recruits to groups like Islamic state are mostly young, angry men in search of identity and community. History teaches us that future terrorist recruits can be best protected from radicalisation by living with strong community connections and economic opportunities. It may sound difficult to accept at a time like this, but a long-term strategy to reduce terrorism comes through economic development, not more bombs.

This attack on Paris highlights many things. One is that the wave of immigrants rushing into Europe right now is fleeing a murderous regime willing to kill all who oppose it. It is estimated that Islamic state have killed 100,000 Muslims in the past two years. It is also estimated that the war on terror has killed between one million and two million Muslims since 9/11. Given the lack of media and observer access to the region, these numbers are only a best estimate.

Islamic state use Islam as a justification and a rallying cry, but not as a philosophical basis for their actions. They are trying to progress a political agenda wrapped in a religious cloak. In the face of such terror attacks as those in Paris and elsewhere, we must be vigilant not to demonise Muslims. In addition to our deep sympathy for the physical victims of terror, we must also remember the political victims of this campaign.

Keep in mind that terrorists often have the goal of increasing polarisation, and of drawing countries into wars of attrition and escalation. As more countries move more forces into the battle, it will only lead to more violence and more death. As Martin Luther King famously said:

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

Our thoughts are with the French people as they struggle to resist darkness and hate at this horrible time. I join my colleagues in the Assembly in sending our best regards to the people of the French nation.

## **Petitions**

### **Ministerial responses**

**The Clerk:** The following responses to petitions have been lodged by ministers:

By **Mr Gentleman**, Minister for Planning, dated 5 November 2015, in response to a petition lodged by Mrs Dunne on 5 August 2015 concerning the Riverview development site in west Belconnen.

By **Ms Berry**, Minister for Housing, dated 5 November 2015, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Doszpot on 6 August 2015 concerning a development application for a multi-unit development for Housing ACT in Narrabundah.

The terms of the responses will be recorded in *Hansard*.

## **Riverview development—zoning—petition No 10-15**

*The response read as follows:*

Thank you for your letter of 5 August 2015 regarding Petition No.10-15 received by the Assembly in regards to citizens of the Australian Capital Territory's disapproval of the change to zoning from agricultural use to residential use for the Riverview development site in West Belconnen.

The ACT component of the Riverview development site is to be rezoned via Variation to the Territory Plan No 351(V351) - West Belconnen Urban Development. This variation, prepared by Environment and Planning Directorate, was referred to me for consideration.

After consideration of the report on consultation and other supporting documents, I believe that the matters raised during the consultation period have been adequately addressed. The supporting documents with the report on consultation for V351 can be accessed at [http://www.planning.act.gov.au/tools\\_resources/legislation\\_plans\\_registers/plans/territory\\_plan](http://www.planning.act.gov.au/tools_resources/legislation_plans_registers/plans/territory_plan)

It is for this reason that I decided to exercise my discretion to not refer V351 to the Standing Committee on Planning, Environment and Territory and Municipal Services under section 73(2) of the *Planning and Development Act 2007*. I subsequently approved V351 on 23 October 2015.

The development potential of the subject site was firstly realised in the Canberra Spatial Plan and then in the ACT Planning Strategy. The Planning Strategy marked the area as a 'future urban investigation area'. It further stated that "Areas for future possible settlement within the ACT, including Kowen Plateau in the east and west Belconnen, will be considered in a regional context and in terms of their interrelationships with immediately adjoining areas of NSW."

Since 2009, a series of investigative studies have been undertaken for West Belconnen (including NSW land immediately adjacent the ACT border). Based on these investigations, V351 proposes to put the intent of the planning strategy into effect. Though, the creation of a national park does not form part of this draft variation.

As a result of V351, a 360ha conservation corridor will be created as nature reserve along the Murrumbidgee River. If land in NSW is to be developed, it could potentially add another 220ha (including the Ginninderra Falls) to the conservation corridor.

Ginninderra Falls is situated in NSW and is outside ACT's jurisdiction. Detailed planning around Ginninderra Falls is the responsibility of the NSW Government. As such, any proposal regarding a national park incorporating Ginninderra Falls should be referred to the relevant NSW authority.

However, given the cross-border nature of this Riverview development, the ACT Government is prepared to work with the NSW Government if a more comprehensive proposal for the Ginninderra Creek corridor (including the Ginninderra Falls) to become a national park is to be considered by the NSW authority.



I trust that this information is of assistance.

### **Narrabundah—multi unit development—petition No 11-15**

*The response read as follows:*

Thank you for your letter of 6 August 2015 regarding Petition No. 11-15 lodged by Mr Doszpot, MLA on behalf of 333 Australian Capital Territory residents.

I understand the petition brings to the attention of the Assembly that the Community Services Directorate has submitted a Development Application which proposes the demolition of 4 dwellings in Narrabundah (Blocks 22, 23, 24 and 25 Section 39) and the construction of 8 units and an additional dwelling on an adjoining block (block 20 Section 39).

The redevelopment of these properties in Mindarie Street and Boolimba Crescent is part of Housing ACT's ongoing capital works program which supports the renewal of the public housing portfolio. The old buildings will be replaced with new more accessible and energy efficient dwellings that better suit the needs of public housing tenants now and into the future.

The blocks are all located within the Residential RZ2 Suburban Core zone which has, as one of its objectives, the provision of development that is low to medium density in character, particularly in areas close to facilities and services in commercial centres.

Housing ACT has complied with all the necessary development and planning requirements in relation to this proposal. The Development Application has been approved by the ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA) and this decision is being appealed to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) by the Old Narrabundah Community Council Inc (ONCC).

Following the approval of the Development Application, and the lodgement of the appeal by the ONCC, the ACT Heritage Council (the Heritage Council) received an application from the ONCC that nominated Blocks 22, 23, 24 and 25 Section 39 Narrabundah for provisional registration on the ACT Heritage Register.

The Heritage Council is an independent statutory body which is charged with making decisions about the registration of heritage places in accordance with the provisions under the *Heritage Act 2004* (the Heritage Act).

As the Heritage Council has not yet made a decision on provisional registration in accordance with section 32 of the Heritage Act the Heritage Council was requested by the ACT Government Solicitor representing ACTPLA in the appeal to provide advice, under Section 60 of the Heritage Act, on whether the buildings are likely to have significance and, if likely to have significance, whether the proposed development would impact on such significance.

In providing advice under Section 60 of the Heritage Act, the Heritage Council considered the Development Application; the ACT Heritage Register nomination submitted by the ONCC, including all plans submitted; the ACAT documents

related to the appeal (AT 15/34); a condition and preliminary assessment by ACT Heritage as well as its own independent research. Based on that information, the Heritage Council formed the view that sufficient evidence was not established at that time to indicate that the place was likely to have heritage significance.

However, the Heritage Council, in accordance with section 32 of the Heritage Act, must still decide whether or not to provisionally register the place.

There are public housing properties in most suburbs of Canberra. Some suburbs, such as Narrabundah, have a higher percentage of public housing properties than other areas, especially the new suburbs. This dispersal of public housing is considered to be one of the strengths of the portfolio.

By locating public housing properties throughout suburbs people on low incomes have improved access to shops, schools, public transport and other community facilities. Dispersing public housing properties, referred to as ‘salt and peppering’, provides the opportunity to create inclusive communities that allow individuals to build stable and productive links to their community.

The Development Application was subject to public notification in accordance with the requirements of the *Planning and Development Act 2007*. There was no statutory requirement for consultation with the community before submitting the Development Application.

The Executive Director, Housing and Community Services, Mr David Matthews, has agreed to meet with the ONCC following the appeal process on the Development Application. The meeting will provide an opportunity to talk about policy issues such as ‘salt and pepper’ of public housing properties and consulting with the community on redevelopment of public housing properties.

## **Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 39**

**MR DOSZPOT** (Molonglo): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 39, dated 10 November 2015, together with the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

**MR DOSZPOT**: Scrutiny report 39 contains the committee’s comments on nine bills, 23 pieces of subordinate legislation, four government responses and two regulatory impact statements. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

## **Public Accounts—Standing Committee Report 20**

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (10.14): I present the following report:`

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Report 20—*Review of Auditor-General's Report No. 5 of 2013: Bushfire Preparedness*, dated November 2015, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is a very important report on a very important subject dear still to the hearts and memories of many in this city who, with vivid memories, know where they were on the day in 2003 when the fires came to town. That fire is part of the Australian ecosystem is something that I think we are all aware of, but fires through the ACT in the main occur every eight years. A significant fire, on average, over the last 100 or so years, occurs every eight years in the ACT. From 2003 to 2015 is 12 years, so we are in many ways overdue for another major event.

This report looks at Auditor-General's report No 5 into bushfire preparedness. The committee has been able to put together a report with 38 recommendations that cover a large range of issues, from the government releasing documents to the government undertaking additional preparation as to how we counter complacency, not just in the ACT but across the nation, in regard to bushfires. Many of us have heard the expression that there was nothing we could do on the day, and in the face of an overwhelming fire threat, that is true. The question must be: what can you do before that day arrives? Hopefully, this report is greeted in that way.

The committee, as I said, has made 38 recommendations. I will go through a few of them to point out the issues that we have covered. In particular, recommendation 2 says:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government issue an annual statement of resources for each Strategic Bushfire Management Plan produced prior to the start of each bushfire season.

The point of the audit report was that we seem to have this model, "We've got some resources. How can we use them to fight fires?" instead of saying, "What is the fire threat and what resources are needed to make the community safe?" It is important that we get that right. I have used some of the words from the Auditor-General's report. One of the recommendations was that there must be an explicit list of resources. Including that "explicit list" means that you have to detail what the threat is and what you need to combat that threat. When we asked that question, one of the responses from the then minister, Mr Corbell, was that "explicitly we have a rural fire service". If you are going to take that attitude, clearly we are not going to prepare the ACT properly for what might come.

Recommendations 3, 4 and 5 look at some work that the government has that was not released, including the advice that said that it could not release the list of privately owned assets. It is important that we know what we have here and what we are protecting, but if that is done behind the veil of secrecy it is hard to reach a reasonable conclusion about how effective the government has been.

Recommendation 6 says:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure Annual Progress Reports on the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan are made available to the public and the Bushfire Council every year.

You would question why these reports would not be going to the Bushfire Council. The council is made up of experts who are there to advise the government on how to manage the threat of bushfires; if they are not getting the annual progress reports, you have to question what the government is doing.

Recommendation 7 is that the ACT government should confirm by the last sitting day in March next year that all the regional fire management plans have been annually reviewed and updated in relation to fire management zones and that, if this has not occurred, the government should provide specific detail in relation to which plans have not been updated and why. Again you would have to ask the question: why are these plans not being updated and what is the government doing in that regard?

A number of recommendations, from 8 through to 16, look at policy issues and governance arrangements. It is very important that they are agreed to. With recommendation 17, one of the things that the auditor made great mention of was the fact that there is meant to be a memorandum of understanding between TAMS and the ESA in relation to bushfire preparedness but it was not in place when she did the report. And it is important that it is updated annually. The government have an obligation to ensure that it is there. If they cannot get their two agencies to agree, if we do not have that level of cooperation just on the MOU, what is going to happen on the day when things get a bit tense?

Recommendations 18 and 19 look at information on volunteers and how we might have a central pool. With recommendation 20, there have been concerns raised with me, and raised in the committee, that professional development through access to training and interstate visits, particularly of paid members of staff, has been somewhat limited, in some cases not existent at all. It is important that we know what is going on in other jurisdictions. If that means travelling to WA or Queensland, or indeed overseas, where tactics, techniques, equipment and responses are evolving constantly, we need to be part of that equation. I commend the government that, for instance, we have just had a crew of firefighters in Canada. That experience is invaluable; it allows us to gain knowledge of their situation and teach them things that we might know.

Recommendation 21 asks the government to look at how training is delivered to volunteers, with possibly a more involved role. When I joined my brigade 20-odd years ago, all the brigade training was done in house. You turned up; the brigade took care of it. We now have a greater degree of professionalism. Some of that is done by the ESA, and that is reasonably appropriate. But should there be a balance and is there a possibility that there is more training to be done in the brigades? Many members are keen to do that sort of thing.

Recommendation 22 is a vexed issue. It is often very unclear from what the government tells us how many level 3 controllers there are. These are the controllers that govern major events. For instance, in 2003 you had a fire that ran the best part of seven days once it was out of control. If you do not have controllers to run shifts and control multiple fires in different locations, you put yourself at a disadvantage. The advice we were given is that you need a minimum of five trained, experienced, accredited level 3 controllers—that have the appropriate and current accreditation as a minimum. It is up to the government to ensure that that is the case—and that they are experienced. They need to have the appropriate experience to be able to do this. It is not that you have done the course and therefore you are there when a crisis strikes; you need to make sure that the people who are commanding, particularly, the volunteers on the ground know what they are doing.

Recommendation 23 is to review the applicability of the fitness test by which RFS staff and volunteers are assessed. I do not have data for Australian bush fire fighters, but in America one stat I saw said that half of the deaths on fire grounds are from heart attacks from older and overweight men who perhaps should not be on the fire ground. That is not to discourage volunteers, but if you are going into arduous conditions, often very stressful, in a crisis situation, then if you are not fit, not only are you a risk to yourself but, if you are ill or incapacitated, it often takes a whole unit off the fire ground, which leaves other units at risk.

So there is the question of the test. Some say, “I just drive a tanker; I do not need to be able to do the walking or the running.” But let us come up with something that is more consistent with what the firefighters undertake rather than a test. For instance, to be a moderately fit firefighter, you have to walk, I think, 3.2 kilometres in 30 minutes carrying 11 kilos. Most volunteers, I would suspect, do that quite easily. But are they the sort of conditions that we work under? A pump pack on the back has somewhere between 12 and 16 kilos of water. If you are lugging hoses up a hill or if you are carrying a rake hoe through the bush, there are different standards of activity that we undertake. Perhaps it is time the test was reviewed.

Recommendation 24 says:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government detail to the ACT Legislative Assembly on the first sitting day in September every year a detailed summary of the preparation for the approaching fire season including an explicit list of resources and equipment available for the season based on checks of equipment prior to the commencement of the fire season.

That is a very important recommendation. There were cases some years ago where, for instance, half of the tankers, the heavy capacity of the Rural Fire Service, were not available for use on day one of the fire season. They had not been checked; they had not been prepped; they had not been repaired. That situation cannot be allowed to happen again.

There is also, given the weather assessment that the government might get, the growth factors, the curing factors and the rainfall over the winter period. As we approach the season, it is up to the government to assure the people of the ACT, through this place,

that they are ready for the season. It would be appropriate for the minister responsible for the emergency services on the first sitting day in September to make that statement so that people can assess whether the government have prepared properly for the coming season.

Recommendation 25 is about coordination. Recommendation 26 says:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government confirm their commitment to the retention of the Fire Management Unit in TAMS.

There were some moves some time ago to get rid of it; the Liberal Party and the Greens combined to save the fire unit. That is a very valuable unit; it should continue.

There is some concern that some positions at headquarters are not filled, particularly in the rural service. Rec 27 says, "Let's make sure all the positions are filled at the start of each season."

Recommendation 28 goes back to the issue of what we are preparing for and how we prepare. It says:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government adopt and define a 'model of service' or 'standard of fire cover' for bushfire risks in the ACT in place of the current 'strategic bushfire capability'.

This is at the heart of what the Auditor-General was saying in her report. It is well and good to say, "We are prepared because we have got A, B, C, D and E," but if that is not what you need to fight the sort of fire season that is coming, it is next to useless in many ways. What we want to do is work out and, as the auditor said, define a model. What is it that the RFS needs to be capable of doing? If that involves bringing in units from interstate, so be it, but let us make sure we know exactly what we are doing and what standard of fire cover we are providing.

Recommendation 29 builds on that and says:

The Committee recommends that the ... Government predict a range of realistic bushfire scenarios; calculate the resources needed to protect the ACT in line with a model of service; and ensure that these resources are in place by the 2016 bushfire season.

Again this builds on what the auditor was saying. It seems to me we are saying, "We have a Rural Fire Service; they can do that. Therefore we are prepared," rather than saying, "What is the actual threat? What is the risk? What do you need to do to ameliorate that and protect the people of the ACT?"

Recommendation 30 looks at legislation. There were a number of instances in the audit report where the legislation was unclear or the government had not complied. The recommendation says:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government clarify legislative provisions relating to bushfire preparedness which have been identified by the

Auditor-General as unclear, inconsistent, or making insufficient provision for bushfire preparedness.

That is a very important recommendation.

Recommendation 31 looks at approvals. We had incidents related to us in the auditor's report where specialist machinery was brought in to do a job but, because the government had not got approvals to use the machinery, it sat idle for some time. How basic is that? We all know that approvals are needed, particularly to operate in national parks. Get those approvals. You know the machine is coming; hopefully, someone knows that they ordered the machines for a period of time. That just seems like basics to me.

Recommendation 32 says, "Let's make sure that access is maintained in the bushfire prone areas." Recommendation 33 is only that the government investigate the provision of automated external defibrillators. There was discussion about this in the committee and by some of the witnesses. The AEDs are very easy to use these days; the machine itself talks you through the process. It may be something that saves the life of a firefighter.

Recommendation 34 looks at the application of fire retardant by air. Currently the aerial assets that we use, which are normally helicopters and potentially small light aircraft, do not drop retardant. The purpose of retardant is to make more effective use of the water and the drop. It can be done. It would seem, from the evidence given, that we do not take that option. That is a shame. If you can extend the use of the water by putting on a retardant so that it clings or improves the effectiveness of the water that would be a good thing.

The recommendation then goes on to say "through both rotary and fixed wing application, including the use of large fixed wing tankers". We have not had large tankers in the ACT. Before the 2009 fires, the Victorian government were offered a converted DC10, which they declined. Now the Russians have a four-engine jet that will scoop water from a water body without landing—very impressive. The Americans have converted a 747-200 series which, I understand, can drop about 75,000 litres at one drop. So there are technologies emerging. They need to be looked at.

We need to make sure that we are as ready for the fire season as we can be. I will finish at this stage. I will discuss the last four recommendations when I close this debate, Madam Speaker.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (10.30): The inquiry into the Auditor-General's report No 5 of 2013, bushfire preparedness, produced a number of wide ranging recommendations from the PAC committee. The PAC committee focused specifically on strategic readiness for bushfire prevention and preparedness, on the farm FireWise program, and on the implementation and progress of the audit recommendations.

Many of us were here in Canberra at the time of the 2003 bushfires and, indeed, a number of other bushfires that our territory has been subjected to. They provided us

with some important lessons that we need to keep in mind as we go forward. It underscores how important it is that the ACT should be prepared for bushfires now and into the future.

I will not reiterate the recommendations that Mr Smyth has gone through in some detail, but I would like to thank all of the organisations and individuals that contributed to and appeared before the inquiry, including the Auditor-General, responsible ministers, and directorate and agency officials for their collaborative and helpful responses during the course of the inquiry.

I would also like to thank the other committee members, including the chair, Mr Smyth, who brings a lot of knowledge to this particular topic, as well as his excellent chairing skills and his ability to reach agreement on the majority of the recommendations. I also thank Ms Porter, previously Ms Berry and more recently Ms Fitzharris, as members of the committee. I would also like to thank Dr Andrea Cullen, Dr Brian Lloyd, Ms Kate Harkins and Mr Greg Hall for their support of the committee during the course of this inquiry.

Bushfire preparedness is something that we need to think about every day. Many of us live on the urban fringe and are quite susceptible to bushfires. But as we saw back in 2003 and in other instances, bushfires can reach even further into the suburbs than we may have otherwise thought. I look forward to the government's responses to the 38 recommendations of this PAC inquiry into the Auditor-General's report No 5 of 2013 on bushfire preparedness.

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (10.32), in reply: To close, I would also say thanks. Indeed, when we started this report I think Ms Berry and Dr Bourke may well have been on the committee. To Ms Porter, Ms Fitzharris and Ms Lawder, thank you for your assistance in working our way through this report. I think the committee has done a particularly good job in this area. To the secretariat, Dr Cullen was with us at the start. Dr Lloyd assisted, Ms Kate Harkins helped finish and Mr Greg Hall did some of the research for us. Through you, Madam Speaker, I would thank those people in the secretariat as well.

The last four recommendations—particularly recommendations 35 and 36—look at the arrangements. Recommendation 35 says, “Let's make sure there are a number of suitable heavy bulldozers available should they be required.” Particularly in 2003 the heavy dozers were invaluable in cutting roads up on the Franklin Road and clearing fallen trees.

Indeed, I know of one case in the 2003 fire where a very large bulldozer was sitting on a low-loader. A nearby volunteer said, “Are you here to help us?” The guy said, “Well, I can if you want.” The volunteer said, “Put a cut in there.” The dozer driver said, “I will have to go through a government gate, but the gate is locked.” The volunteer said, “You have my authorisation to remove the gate.” They cut a very hasty break behind Bonython Hill, which I believe saved a large number of houses as the fire was threatening that area. I think the volunteer in particular took a great deal of delight in ordering the driver to smash through a gate, but that is a volunteer for you.



The last two recommendations are perhaps the most important, Madam Speaker. After the disastrous 2003 fires the federal government did a report. Peter Kanowski was on that committee along with Stuart Ellis. I have forgotten the name of the third gentleman; I do apologise. One of the things they developed was what they called the bushfire cycle. I call it the cycle of complacency. What they said in the bushfire cycle was simply that there is a major event and governments, like they do, respond. Often a large amount of money and resources are put to the problem to address it.

Then you have the coronial inquiry and the various other inquiries that you might have—royal commissions et cetera—and there is general government acceptance. There is another round of funding and assistance provided to emergency services and communities. Then because of the very nature of fire, the fuel loads have been cleaned out, particularly in significant areas in significant events.

It does take some time for the fuel loads to build back up. In that time people forget. We are human beings. We tend to put the bad behind us. We remember the good and many move on. You then get communities saying, “Why are you doing controlled burns? The smoke is making my washing smell. You are affecting this or affecting that.” Governments themselves think, “We have put a lot of money into the issue. We got new equipment; we got new uniforms; we trained up more volunteers.”

Government can run into the trap of thinking that they have done enough. But the situation always changes. For instance, the threat we faced in 2003 was entirely different from the threat we might face today. Because there was such large-scale destruction of the woody areas up there in the Brindabellas, it has come back as huge gorse or heather. It is quite thick; it is quite deep. In some places you could not drive a truck through it. We face a different sort of threat.

The fires of 2003 have left large numbers of enormous trees standing that are dead. They are ready-made fuel. They have now been curing for 12 years. It will go off and the ground fires that will facilitate that can very quickly, if there is enough vegetation, become crown fires that travel at extraordinary rates.

You only have to go to the RFS’s own website to see the history of bushfire in the ACT. Fire events started to be recorded in 1911. There were major fires in 1919, 1920, 1925, 1926, 1938 and 1939. There were major fires in 1951, 1952, 1978, 1979, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985. In 2001 we had a significant fire that made a run. It was lit by an arsonist in Uriarra and Coppins Crossing. It made a huge run. Who can forget the images of it running right up the gates of Government House and, indeed, almost jumping Adelaide Avenue and almost getting to the Mint?

There was a report done. It made 109 recommendations that the then Labor government received, most of which were not acted on. So by the time we got to 2003 the die had in many ways been cast. It is against complacency that we must guard. It is about the renewal in volunteers, for instance. After 2003 we had an enormous upsurge in the number of people who volunteered and trained. But there were no fires for many years thereafter.

You join a volunteer fire brigade to put fires out. If there are no fires people tend to drift away and we have a natural churn of volunteers anyway. So we have to keep the experience in the brigades. We have to keep the longer serving members motivated so that they can be with the newer members when the fires come. So recommendation 37 is that complacency is guarded against, given the extended period, 12 years, since we have had a major event.

Recommendation 38 looks at how the ACT might offer some leadership nationally on this issue. For those who have not seen it, there is a marvellous exhibition at the Tuggeranong Arts Centre. Mr Corbell opened it, which was good. As a volunteer himself, he understands. It tracks the history and the areas where the fires run.

When you look at the old *Canberra Times* maps and the headlines, it is the same story every time. Draw a dot in the centre of town, mark north-west on the map, and that is where the fire comes from. The runs are incredible. If you do the overlay they are always from the same sort of starting area and they always run to the heart of the city. We need to guard against that.

This is often the story around this country as well. In Sydney it is always about Hornsby, the royal national park at Ku-ring-gai, and Minto in the south. In the shire of Indigo in Victoria, it is always the same concerns, as is the case in places like the Dandenongs. In South Australia it is the same story. What happens in the Adelaide Hills if the fire makes a run?

We are the most fire-prone country in the world. Our environment is probably the most shaped by fire of any ecosystem in the world. The Indigenous people had a very strong regime of fire management, a tapestry effect. If you have not read it, I would refer members to Ian Gammage's book *The Biggest Estate on Earth*. It shows quite clearly, by looking through historical records and comparing them, for instance, with the artistic work of Joseph Lycett, that the bush in the Australia of 200 years ago is not necessarily what we see and have today.

Because we changed the practices from about 1850 to the 1950s, there is an enormous spike in the number of significant fire events in Australia. It is only with the reintroduction of controlled burning, particularly in national parks but also in other fire-prone areas, from the late 1950s that we see a moderation of those effects.

It is interesting that as a country plagued by fire, affected by fire, we actually do not have a national bushfire museum. That is what recommendation 38 goes to. You can see the effects and the power of the exhibition at the Tuggeranong Arts Centre. We would appear not to learn that lesson. It happens again and again. It happens around Australia again and again.

One of the things that we as the nation's capital do so well is the program with our students. It would be great if one day there was a national bushfire museum in the ACT that enabled us to help educate young people about the threat and dangers of fire—and the threat and danger of arson, in particular—and how to react, how to save yourself, how to prepare your home and how to live with fire in what is a fire environment.

Recommendation 38 to the government states:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government work with all other jurisdictions to establish a National Bushfire Museum in the ACT.

Concurrent with that, you could also add that there is not a national bushfire memorial or monument. There are individual monuments scattered around. Indeed, the ACT has its own. But to bring that story together as a chronology in the form of a monument to those who have suffered and died but also those who served and to honour the volunteers I think would be a good thing.

We also do not have a national peak research body. There is a bushfire CRC, but it is coordinating activities in the other universities and in the research sector. It is subject to funding. I find it quite amazing that in this day and age there is not, for instance, a bushfire institute of Australia. There is not a peak research body collecting this information, analysing it and using it to prepare us better for the coming fire season. *(Time expired.)*

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Ministerial delegation to the United States and Japan**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Urban Renewal and Minister for Tourism and Events) (10.42): I would like to report to the Assembly on a ministerial delegation that I led to the United States of America and Japan between 5 and 14 October this year. The primary objectives of the United States leg of the mission were to promote and raise awareness of the ACT and the region's strengths as a knowledge economy, a place to invest and establish business links; grow awareness of Canberra's strengths in innovation, research and advanced technologies; and support the efforts of the delegation of Canberra businesses in building networks, demonstrating technology, gaining insights into US industry best practice, exploring opportunities to access the US market and exploring opportunities for investment.

We also spent a few days in Japan to reinforce the government's commitment to strengthening the Canberra-Nara relationship and commitments under our sister city agreement with Nara.

Before I detail the mission activities, Madam Speaker, allow me to reinforce the significance of the Australia-US relationship. The United States is Australia's largest trade and investment partner. Australia and the US conduct more than \$A55 billion in two-way trade per annum and have an investment relationship valued at \$A1 trillion. Nearly 9,000 Australian businesses sell to, or operate in, the United States.

A large proportion of these astonishing figures can be linked to the success of the Australia-United States free trade agreement that came into force on 1 January 2005 and recently celebrated its 10-year anniversary. The Australia-US free trade

agreement has played an integral part in enabling Australian businesses to access greater opportunities for two-way trade and investment with the world's largest consumer market. This is why it is important to proactively engage with relevant cities, government officials and business leaders in the United States. It certainly is fundamental to Canberra's emergence as a global city. The ACT government is committed to creating the right business environment to accelerate business innovation and supporting business investment in future growth areas.

The mission was supported by 22 Canberra businesses through San Francisco and Silicon Valley, with a further 15 travelling to Austin, Texas. With a program focused on ICT and renewable energy, the delegation engaged in building networks, demonstrating technology, gaining insights into industry best practice, and exploring opportunities to access the US market and opportunities for investment. The delegation also explored elements of equity attraction and commercialisation of innovation.

My first two official engagements for this delegation involved visiting the headquarters of two Canberra companies operating in the Silicon Valley area: Seeing Machines and Quintessence Labs. Both of these companies have no doubt benefited from the trade and investment relationship that exists between Australia and the US and have certainly contributed to the value of trade between the two countries.

I first visited the research and development facility in Mountain View, California for Seeing Machines, a great Canberra success story, spun out of a robotics laboratory at the Australian National University. Seeing Machines is a Canberra headquartered company that is a world leader in autonomous vehicle technology. The company was awarded the ACT Chief Minister's exporter of the year in 2014, named *Business Review Weekly's* most innovative product and medium-size business in 2015, and endorsed by Gartner as one of their "cool vendors". Seeing Machines has secured alliance partners with global heavyweights Caterpillar, Boeing and Samsung. Its technology is currently being used in a range of sectors, including mining, road transport and rail, and is expected to appear in private passenger cars as early as 2016. Seeing Machines has shipped more than 4,000 units of its driver safety system worldwide.

Another Canberra business that is positioning our city as a major force in the national and international innovation system is Quintessence Labs. Dr Vikram Sharma, CEO of Quintessence Labs, organised and hosted a tour of his contract manufacturing partner's facility where Quintessence Labs products are integrated into a range of hardware applications for the defence and security sectors. The success of Quintessence Labs in the US market highlights Canberra's significant strengths in cutting-edge innovation commercialised in the sectors of defence and security, information and communications technology and e-government.

Our local businesses and entrepreneurs are positioning Canberra as a major force in national and international innovation systems. Both of these organisations have been previous recipients of ACT exporter awards, and both reiterated their desire to continue maintaining a significant presence in Canberra.

On the second day of the mission I met with Uber at their global headquarters to promote and provide an overview of the proactive and world-first regulations announced to support the implementation of ride sharing services in the ACT. Supporting the introduction of ride sharing is a prime example of the government's commitment to creating the right business environment and, most particularly, supporting business innovation. Uber was keen to discuss the reforms and acknowledged the ability of the ACT government to design and implement these reforms in a relatively short period of time.

I then hosted a renewable energy roundtable event attended by leading US companies such as Tesla. I was joined at the roundtable by Canberra-based innovators and entrepreneurs, including Roger Price, the Chairman of Windlab, and Dr Keith Lovegrove of IT Power. The roundtable enabled me to outline specific investment programs being developed and implemented by the ACT government that support the future development of this sector. The roundtable provided the opportunity to promote local opportunities to invest in solar, wind and distributed battery storage projects. It was also an opportunity to promote closer collaboration of US companies with Canberra-based businesses in research and development activities.

Madam Speaker, the ACT government has the most aggressive renewable energy and emissions reduction targets in Australia, by a significant margin, and amongst the most aggressive targets in the world. The roundtable delegates were very keen to discuss the ACT's renewable energy target of 100 per cent by 2025 and were overwhelmingly positive about the approach the ACT government has taken in sourcing renewable energy for Canberra. Following this meeting I delivered a keynote speech at a lunch hosted by the San Jose chamber of commerce to promote business-to-business engagement with enterprises in Canberra.

Madam Speaker, the delegation then turned its attention to Austin, Texas, where I met with Mayor Steve Adler, to learn how Austin established itself as a destination for multinational investment and technology innovation. The city of Austin has undergone rapid growth in the last two decades, going from a city the size of Canberra to one of the fastest growing cities in America. Austin is now home to more than 2,200 technology companies, employing 120,000 people. In addition to home-grown companies like Dell, Austin also hosts a number of large multinational employers including Apple, IBM, Microsoft, AT&T and Samsung.

Austin has created an ecosystem that welcomes early-stage companies and encourages their growth and diversification. World-class higher education and a first-rate quality of life attract and retain skilled people. A large part of Austin's success is attributed to its proactive and leading tax policy. This is certainly an area Mayor Adler and I had productive discussions about.

As you are aware, Madam Speaker, since the 2012-13 territory budget, the ACT has been implementing a program of significant taxation reform, including the abolition of a range of volatile and inefficient conveyancing duties—over a 20-year period—and insurance duties, over a five-year period. The revenue lost through the abolition of these taxes is replaced through a simpler and fairer mechanism of municipal general rates levied on commercial and residential properties.

Tax reform is also recognised as a key component of the government's business development strategy, with one of the core elements being to create the right business environment. Whilst any reform process is not without its challenges, it is a strong signal to business that the ACT is committed to making Canberra an efficient and fair place to do business.

Mayor Adler noted the challenges Austin are now facing, particularly with transport in the city. Implementing public transport and widening roads to accommodate the city's population growth is a major issue in Austin. According to the mayor, future planning in all transport options is the key to avoiding costly congestion issues as cities grow—a lesson Canberra should recognise now, with our population expected to continue its growth over the coming decades.

Mayor Adler was very generous with his time. I look forward to continued engagement with the mayor and the city of Austin, working towards future collaboration between our two cities.

Together with some Canberra-based IBM executives I then participated in a site visit to the IBM Design Innovation Centre in Austin to see firsthand the scope of IBM's global innovation activities and to gain a better understanding of how they could build on the strong foundations of their Canberra operations.

I also visited the Dell Diamond Baseball Stadium, where I was hosted on a tour of the facility organised by the Australian Baseball League. The tour provided valuable insights to inform the future development and operation of a number of Canberra's sporting venues, most particularly, informing the redevelopment of Narrabundah Ballpark.

On the evening of Wednesday, 7 October I joined the Canberra business delegation at a networking event hosted by Austrade and the Austin Technology Council. The function was delivered to promote Canberra's strengths in innovation, research and advanced technologies and to encourage future business relationships between Austin and Canberra. Twelve Canberra businesses joined me on the Austin leg together with representatives from the Canberra Business Chamber and the CBR Innovation Network. The event provided a great environment for the delegates to interact with like-minded business from Austin, including the opportunity to meet with representatives of the Austin Chamber of Commerce.

Before departing Austin for Washington DC on 8 October, I was very pleased to be able to participate in the launch of Aspen Medical's new 24-hour ambulance service in South Texas. This is another example of a significant Canberra business success story in the United States. As I am sure members are aware, Glenn Keys, the Chairman of the Canberra Business Chamber, leads Aspen Medical. His company has strong roots in the United States, and in the week I was there he launched the expansion of his medical service across Texas. Mr Keys—and, of course, his company Aspen Medical—was recently announced as the 2015 ACT Exporter of the Year.

On 9 October we visited Washington DC, where the main theme of the program was progressing discussions about establishing a formal city-to-city economic and cultural relationship with the US capital. It also provided an opportunity for me to host a roundtable organised by Austrade and the American Institute of Architects. Attendees at the roundtable included Congressman Earl Blumenauer of Portland, Oregon, a strong advocate within the US government for smart cities development; Mr Michael Dixon, General Manager of the IBM Smarter Cities Group, who leads IBM's strategy and implementation for smarter cities and is also an Australian; and Ms Kristen Mitchell, the Director of Smart Growth, Design and Development in the Maryland Department of Planning. The discussion was very engaging and provided an opportunity to share insights on a range of topics, including public transport, urban renewal and digital transformation.

A meeting with the Secretary of Washington DC, Ms Lauren Vaughan, provided an opportunity to directly discuss and explore synergies between the two capitals and to consider the potential for a closer, formalised relationship. Given our cities are both home to national institutions, we recognise that we have a unique opportunity to enable our citizens to directly connect with the cultural, historical, democratic and political spheres of each other's countries.

A closer relationship between Canberra and Washington DC could generate opportunities to advance cultural and education exchange. Both cities boast growing knowledge-based economies. As a result, our higher education sectors in both Canberra and Washington DC stand to benefit from a closer partnership between our two governments. Strengthening the connections between our two cities would provide an opportunity to encourage and support our universities to engage with each other and to build mutually beneficial partnerships.

Following the meeting with Secretary Vaughan, I met with senior officials from the Smithsonian Institution, including Mr Scott Miller, the Under Secretary for Collections and Interdisciplinary Support, and Mr Kevin Gover, the Director of the National Museum of the American Indian, to discuss opportunities for greater collaboration and cultural and educational exchange between Canberra's national institutions and Washington DC.

Some relationships have already been established with some of our national institutions and the Smithsonian, including between the National Museum of Australia and the Museum of the American Indian. I was supported at this meeting by Mr Garry Watson, the project leader of the national capital educational tourism project, and Mr Craig Whelan, the President of the National Capital Attractions Association.

Together a strong case was presented for an inbound delegation of education and cultural leaders from the Smithsonian to visit Canberra in 2016. I must say, Madam Speaker, that the discussion was open, engaging and very productive. The opportunity to host an inbound visit is real and, if secured, would be a significant and tangible milestone in establishing greater ties between Canberra and Washington.

In a meeting with the Australian government's deputy head of mission, Ms Caroline Millar, I advanced the ACT government's economic development agenda, particularly the key themes of the confident and business ready strategy and how it is relevant to building trade and investment links with the USA.

While in Washington, and as a clear statement of the ACT government's intent to build stronger links with the United States, I announced the funding of a new Fulbright scholarship. The Fulbright program has a rich history and legacy, and is focused on educational excellence. There have been over 4,700 Australian and American Fulbright scholars supported in the commission's 66-year history. The ACT Fulbright scholarship will support a Canberra resident travelling to the US, and a US resident to travel to Canberra. A critical part of the scholarship is for recipients to bring their applied learning back to Canberra, or for Canberra to benefit from the knowledge and expertise of innovative Americans.

The scholarship will be delivered in partnership with the Australian-American Fulbright Commission, which promotes education and cultural exchange between Australia and the United States, to strengthen the relationship we enjoy between both countries, and to foster bilateral partnerships and connections. The new ACT scholarship will be focused on innovation and entrepreneurship, which aligns with our goal of supporting Canberra to continue to grow as a smart and vibrant city. The ACT government's partnership with the Australian-American Fulbright Commission is a fantastic example of our city's engagement with the United States and our commitment to continue to position Canberra as an innovative global city.

Madam Deputy Speaker, then crossing a date line, by Monday, 12 October I was in Nara, Japan. It was my first visit to Nara as Chief Minister and I was pleased to be able to meet again with the mayor, Gen Nakagawa, who has visited Canberra on a number of occasions, to further strengthen our close sister city relationship, which has been in place now for 21 years. The mayor and I discussed our future priorities, including focusing on increasing tourism and trade opportunities, developing stronger business and economic ties, and continuing to facilitate the very strong educational exchanges between our two cities.

The Nara sister city relationship is based on a foundation of collaborative education and exchange. Continuing to foster school and sporting exchanges, as well as cultural festivals between our cities, is a very strong priority for the ACT government. The visit to Nara enabled me to see firsthand the value of our close relationship and we look forward to this continuing.

Not long after I returned, the Canberra Nara Candle Festival took place in the Canberra-Nara Peace Park, a much-loved venue in our city that comes alive each year for the candle festival. It is a further strong symbol of the friendship between our two cities. This year, 66 students from the Nara University High School, which is celebrating its 90th anniversary this year, visited Canberra to attend and perform at the event and to spend some time in our local schools. It was wonderful to visit Nara, and I look forward to continuing to work closely with the mayor to ensure that the fantastic relationship enjoyed between our two cities can continue.



This leads me to the final day of the mission and our time in Tokyo, where we completed our 2015 program of bond investor meetings. The organisations we met with were asset managers Prudential Investment Management and Daiwa Asset Management, and life insurance companies Nippon Life Insurance and Dai-ichi Frontier Life Insurance.

We have received strong positive feedback from our program of bond investor meetings, including a sense of increased awareness and improved understanding of the ACT and a positive view of the government's borrowing strategy and objectives which are supported by the territory's stable AAA credit rating and the government's budget plans. Our growing debt financial markets presence, increasing number of benchmark bonds and improving liquidity and investor diversity are anticipated to continue to support our future bond issuance requirements.

In closing, Madam Deputy Speaker, I express my sincere thanks and appreciation for the success of this delegation to those we met—the Invest Canberra team in the economic development directorate, the Canberra Business Chamber and the ACT Exporters Network. I thank them for all their assistance in making this a very successful trade mission. I present the following paper:

Ministerial delegation to USA and Japan—October 2015—Ministerial statement,  
17 November 2015.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Apprenticeships**

### **Ministerial statement**

**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) (11.05): For the information of members I make the following ministerial statement on the importance of Australian apprenticeships for the future workforce of the ACT. In the ACT, as in the rest of the country, we depend on apprentices and trainees in all aspects of our daily lives. From health professionals to the people who build our homes and roads, to those who run our favourite restaurants and cafes or ensure our offices and shops run smoothly, just to name a few, we all rely on quality outcomes of Australian apprenticeship programs. Our local businesses, especially small and medium enterprises, rely on apprentices and trainees to meet their skills needs.

At a national level, apprenticeships and traineeships have been the focus of major reform. A new national body, the Australian Industry Skills Committee, has been established to oversee training product development and to ensure that the proposed reforms to training packages are applied consistently and meaningfully.

A national harmonisation strategy has been implemented to ensure that apprentices and trainees have their qualifications recognised in other states. To date 477 apprenticeship and traineeship qualifications have been harmonised, and another 253 are in the works.

This Friday I will be in Hobart to meet with my counterparts from across the country and with the commonwealth Minister for Vocational Education and Skills at a COAG Industry Skills Council. The discussions are expected to centre on ways of improving vocational education and training nationally and establishing mechanisms to improve quality and consistency whilst ensuring that the needs of students and employers are met at both national and local levels.

It is no secret that one of the keys to a strong apprenticeship system is a meaningful way of engaging with stakeholders. The most obvious of these stakeholders is the industry and employers, but we must also acknowledge the important role played by the registered training organisations, government, and our social partners. Our counterparts in Europe have known this for many years, and we often hold their vocational education and training systems as benchmarks.

To improve our engagement strategy here in the ACT we have created five field officer positions within the Education and Training Directorate. Their role is to engage with students and employers and to identify and resolve any issues early on to support increased apprenticeship completions.

The directorate has also been holding quarterly forums for the RTOs to keep them up-to-date with changes to the vocational education and training sector. I am also very proud of having provided professional development and additional training to the RTOs to ensure that they can deliver their programs efficiently and effectively to students from disadvantaged groups.

As I have mentioned before, 2015 has been a big year for vocational education and training here in the ACT. It is important to acknowledge that there has been some recent negative media attention nationally regarding the poor behaviour of unscrupulous training providers, and addressing these concerns is a key focus for the national VET sector and for all governments. Significant discussion on the range of activities underway to address these issues will occur at the COAG Industry Skills Council meeting this week.

It is important to remember that this behaviour is undertaken by only a small number of training providers, and I would like to acknowledge the fantastic efforts of the many quality training providers here in the ACT in training our workforce and acknowledge the ongoing improvements in the VET system in the ACT.

Apprentices and trainees make up a significant number of our students in vocational education and training, and our government has implemented a major renewal strategy for apprenticeships and traineeships in the ACT. We allocate approximately \$13 million annually to the Australian apprenticeship, or user choice, funds, and currently fund around 5,229 apprentices and trainees. Because of the scope of this

program, it is imperative that these funds be managed effectively and responsibly. It is also important that the user choice program continues to be flexible and responsive to the needs of employers and the ACT economy and that it reflects our training needs and priorities.

To this end, the ACT government has undertaken a review of the user choice funding model, with the goal of modernising it and bringing it in line with the skilled capital program. A great deal of research went into skilled capital, which we launched earlier this year. As I have mentioned in this place before, this has been a very good success story.

We have applied the lessons from skilled capital to the user choice review and made a number of important changes. The new model standardises qualification pricing. This will increase clarity for registered training organisations offering the programs. The rate of subsidy will depend, in part, on how much economic need there is for a qualification rather than focusing only on the qualification's cost. To reflect the importance of market forces in the training sector, registered training organisations will be given greater flexibility in their ability to determine fees. RTOs will also be required to publish their fees so that employers and students alike are able to make well-informed choices, and the government will retain strong oversight of fees being charged.

To ensure access to user choice programs remains open to everyone, concessions of up to \$500 will continue to be available to concession cardholders. We will provide additional training subsidies or loadings to reflect the ACT's training priorities and future skills needs. Further loadings will be introduced to account for thin markets and areas where only the public provider or CIT is able to offer a qualification. Registered training organisations will be paid by government on outcomes and the achievement of competencies and will no longer receive a significant up-front payment prior to any training actually taking place. If a qualification is not offered in the ACT we will continue to provide students with a travel allowance so that they can study interstate. A number of other minor changes have also been made to ensure fairness and consistency in this new funding approach.

To ensure the smooth implementation of the proposed changes, we have consulted extensively with stakeholders, RTOs, students, employers, and peak industry bodies. This has allowed us to garner broad-based support and ensures the changes will be communicated effectively and accurately to all parties. None of these changes could have been made possible without the development of the ACT vocational education and training records management system, or AVETARS for short. It offers users a vastly improved experience and allows the Education and Training Directorate to respond more quickly and effectively to changing market conditions. The changes to user choice should encourage increased enrolments and qualification completions. The new user choice model will play a key role in supporting a vibrant VET sector and will ensure that the training needs of students and local businesses are met.

VET in general and apprenticeships and traineeships in particular must be seen as career pathways. We must continue to work with stakeholders to ensure that people who finish apprenticeships and traineeships are able to access a broader range of

career pathways, and this will help to ensure that they are able to experience personal and professional growth over the choice of their careers and that they have resources to adapt to a changing labour market.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to close by asking you and all here to join me in wishing the best of luck to the finalists that will be representing the ACT on Thursday night at the national training awards in Hobart. I hope we can collectively recognise how important it is to celebrate the successful outcomes achieved by the students, trainees, apprentices and registered training organisations and to recognise just how strong the ACT VET sector is. I will enjoy Thursday night and I will definitely enjoy seeing ACT VET students and employers recognised for the great work they do nationally. I present the following paper:

Importance of Australian apprenticeships for the future workforce of the ACT—  
Ministerial statement, 17 November 2015.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Homelessness services**

### **Ministerial statement**

**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) (11.14): For the information of members I make the following ministerial statement as a progress update on homelessness services in response to the resolution of the Assembly of 5 August 2015.

I am pleased to respond today to the Assembly's resolution of 5 August 2015 on the important issues of homelessness and affordable housing. These are issues that the Assembly has considered at some length throughout the year and acknowledge the importance of a safe and secure home not only as a basic human need but as a critical building block for the development of individuals, families and communities.

I am delighted to report back to the Assembly now about the work the ACT government has continued to progress around these issues and, in particular, to provide this progress update on homelessness services. First and foremost I can advise that the ACT government has actively continued its policy of providing public housing in the ACT for those people most in need. In 2014-15 more than 22,000 Canberrans were provided affordable and secure accommodation in public housing through 10,611 tenancies. Over the same period 553 new tenancies were created, housing 1,126 people in public housing. Of this number, 97 per cent were priority and high needs allocations.

In 2014-15, 248 new public housing tenancies were allocated to households where at least one member was a person with disability. As at 30 June 2015 over 95 per cent of all tenants in public housing were in receipt of a rental rebate, reinforcing the targeted nature of the government's efforts.

The recent independent report evaluation of reforms to the ACT specialist homelessness service system released on 3 August 2015 also noted: a large increase in the number of service users and support periods; more support is being provided in the form of early intervention, prevention and outreach services resulting in better employment and education outcomes; repeat homelessness is declining, but a continuing high level of need remains for accommodation support; the homelessness sector is increasingly integrated with high levels of cooperation between services; and the centralised intake service, First Point, is ensuring that service users with the highest level of need get priority access to services as intended by the reforms.

I am very happy with these results that confirm that the ACT government's efforts in this area are well targeted and are making a positive difference for some of the most disadvantaged members of our community. I can confirm that the ACT government has been active in seeking to ensure the commonwealth continues to provide appropriate funding for housing and homelessness services.

As Minister for Housing I met with my state and territory counterparts on 9 October 2015 to consider a range of housing matters in the context of the anticipated release of the federation white paper on housing and homelessness in the coming months. The ACT government spoke strongly about the need for continuing dedicated funding for homelessness services, and I am pleased that these calls were echoed by my state and territory colleagues. As I have already noted, safe and secure housing is a basic human need, and the government is determined to ensure that all levels of government contribute appropriately to ensure that this need can be provided for all. These activities are not cheap and the ACT government will continue to prosecute the case for the commonwealth government to do much of the essential heavy lifting.

The recent report *Evaluation of reforms to the ACT specialist homelessness service system* noted that between 20 and 30 per cent of clients in ACT supported and short-term accommodation services had recently arrived in the ACT from interstate. This trend has been seen on the ground by support providers such as the St Vincent de Paul Society. This influx of vulnerable and at-risk interstate visitors represents an additional unfunded demand on the territory's services and highlights the need for more cooperative action in this area. The ACT government is already spending an average of \$58 per person per head of population for each person experiencing homelessness, whereas New South Wales spends only \$19 per person per head of population for each person experiencing homelessness.

As Minister for Housing I have written to my New South Wales counterpart seeking a meeting in the coming months to discuss opportunities to develop a better coordinated regional approach to the provision of housing and homelessness services. I have asked that officers from Housing ACT and Housing NSW commence initial discussions that will provide the foundation for increased collaboration. The New South Wales

government's Department of Planning and Environment is preparing a report for the south-east and tablelands regions. A component of this work includes a study of the economic impact of the ACT's housing market on the surrounding regional councils.

Under the ACT-New South Wales memorandum of understanding for regional collaboration that was signed by the then first ministers in 2011, the ACT and New South Wales are now sharing data that will assist New South Wales's development of these regional growth areas. This work commenced with then ACT Chief Minister Katy Gallagher and then New South Wales Premier Barry O'Farrell and continues with the support of current first ministers, Chief Minister Andrew Barr and New South Wales Premier Mike Baird.

The ACT government recognises that the challenge of delivering effective housing and homelessness services demands a joined-up and coordinated approach. The challenge is too great and the risks too large to allow a fragmented approach to this task. As the Minister for Housing I am committed to continuing to work with my New South Wales counterpart to achieve the best possible outcomes for the people of Canberra and the adjoining capital region.

Housing and homelessness issues are not just a matter for government; they affect the Canberra community at large, and our response to these matters defines the type of community we wish to be. Canberra is a socially inclusive community. We are a welcoming and diverse community and we value the colour, depth and greater understanding that this diversity provides. It is therefore appropriate that the ACT government should seek to harness the skills and experience of the private sector and local service providers in seeking to better meet the needs of the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless.

A lot is already being done in these areas, for example, the new Common Ground housing project which opened in Gungahlin in July this year. Common Ground provides the coordinated delivery of stable accommodation with onsite support. It is a modern, purpose-built 40-unit complex that comprises a tenant mix of chronically homeless people and affordable renters—20 of each group—which provides a fine example of an inclusive community environment.

Another successful and innovative housing project is project independence. This new model of home ownership provides people with an intellectual disability the opportunity to acquire equity in a property as well as the ability to live as independently as possible. The ACT government has committed more than \$3 million to the development of the Latham site to include the capacity for 10 residents, with additional space for a live-in coordinator and separate guest facilities. Work on the second project independence development in Harrison is now also well underway.

Both of these examples attest to the government's commitment to pursue innovative housing options and new approaches. They also demonstrate the positive effects of working with our community and business partners to develop housing choices that better meet the needs of the most disadvantaged members of our community. The ACT government will continue to encourage innovative responses through partnerships and collaboration to make housing products available for more people on low and moderate incomes.

I was pleased to be a part of a housing roundtable last month when these issues were canvassed with a range of government, community and private sector representatives. I was encouraged by the genuine commitment to cooperative action and the willingness to explore new and innovative options to these important but challenging issues. I am optimistic that, together, new and viable options can be successfully implemented for the benefit of those on low and middle incomes.

Homelessness and affordable housing continue to be important issues for the ACT government. The Assembly's resolution of 5 August 2015 demonstrates that all members of the Assembly have a keen interest in addressing these persistent issues. I welcome this interest, and I am pleased to provide this progress update to the Assembly. I present the following paper:

Homelessness services—Progress update—Ministerial statement, 17 November 2015.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) (Taxi Industry Innovation) Amendment Bill 2015**

Debate resumed from 29 October 2015, on motion by **Mr Barr**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (11.24): The opposition will be supporting the Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) (Taxi Industry Innovation) Amendment Bill 2015. It is important to note that this bill does not make a value statement about taxis or ride share vehicles. Rather, it provides a legislative backbone for the introduction of ride share services in our legal framework.

The government's complete taxi reform package goes much, much further than this bill. For instance, the day-to-day operations and the fees and charges placed on transport booking services will be determined by regulation. Cabinet can also authorise a compensation package for existing perpetual plate owners. Indeed, the opposition's decision to support this bill does not detract from our strong support for plate holders.

The bill makes a number of changes to the Road Transport (Public Passengers Services) Act, namely to allow for the legal introduction of ride share services in the territory. To do this the bill creates a number of new definitions, including for ride share services and ride share vehicles.

The bill also introduces the term "transport booking service" as an overarching term for taxis, ride share vehicles and hire services. This effectively replaces the concept of

a taxi network and provides a legislative framework for the regulation of taxis, ride share vehicles and hire cars. All transport booking services will require accreditation, while the government maintains a broad regulatory power over the day-to-day operations of these services.

To ensure compliance with the new regime a number of offences are created. Most interestingly, section 36I is added to the act which, amongst other things, allows a court to order a transport booking service to “do stated things or establish or carry out a stated project for the public benefit even if the project is unrelated to the offence”. I note the comments of the scrutiny committee regarding this section. However, I am satisfied with the detail provided by the government when I was briefed on the bill.

There are a couple of further points that I think we should be making with regard to this scheme as a whole. Firstly, I think we need to be very careful that ride share vehicles do not end up becoming quasi taxis with regard to ranks and hails. If that does happen it really does undermine the system of taxis in the ACT even further.

Secondly, I think it is extremely important that advertising of ride share vehicles is closely monitored. If, for instance, a vehicle can advertise that it is a ride share vehicle on the outside of the car it may well, in effect, lead to quasi rank and hail-type services. We need to be very careful if the government is going to go down this regulatory approach that there is indeed a separation or a differentiation between taxi services and those of ride share services. Otherwise we risk further undermining the problems of the taxi industry caused by this government’s change in policy.

As members would be aware, the scrutiny committee’s latest report contained a discussion about the compensation issue for perpetual plate owners, that is, whether perpetual plate holders should be compensated as a result of the regulatory changes pursued by this government. In concluding its discussion on compensation, the scrutiny committee said:

... the Committee notes that in terms of whether the plate holders may be said to have a right to compensation for loss of a property right, the brief discussion above points to two key issues arising. The first is whether the licence plate is properly styled as an interest in property, and the second is if this is so, whether the limitation of the property right is important enough to justify an exception to the principle that provision should be made for compensation.

In effect, the scrutiny committee raises questions about whether the government is obligated to pay compensation to perpetual plate holders for deterioration in their potential property right. However, compensation for perpetual plate owners is outside the purview of this bill. Whilst I support the bill I call on the government to support perpetual plate owners in these very troubling times.

I have spoken before in the Assembly about my concerns for perpetual plate holders. I was disappointed that the Chief Minister, with the support of Mr Rattenbury, failed to support my motion in the October sitting week calling for adequate support for perpetual licence holders. Whilst we can have a lengthy debate about whether a perpetual plate is property or not and, therefore, probably requiring fair compensation, the reality is that compensation is the fairest and easiest way to transition into the



transport booking service model. I note that there may well be other jurisdictions looking to this issue as well. It provides consumers with the same choices and benefits that recognise the significant past investments made in good faith by perpetual plate owners.

Again, the opposition will be supporting this bill today which provides the backbone for a legislative framework to regulate ride share vehicles. However, we should not lose sight of the issue of perpetual plate owners. Furthermore, we must do all we can to ensure that regulations around transport booking services apply equitably to all market participants.

**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) (11.31): I support the reforms that the ACT government is making to public passenger services in the ACT encompassing both ride sharing and taxi services. In my role as minister assisting on transport reform I have worked closely with the Chief Minister to develop these reforms. I think it has been a successful outcome, where we have consulted with stakeholders and moved quickly and responsibly to regulate an industry that needed regulation, balancing a whole range of competing interests.

In my crossbench role, on behalf of the ACT Greens I am also supportive of the reforms. They are a smart response that recognises the changes that were occurring in the industry and have responded in a fair and balanced way. Whenever there are complex reforms such as this, it is almost inevitable that there will be disappointed parties who feel the reforms should have favoured them more or that they have been disadvantaged.

There is no doubt the on-demand transport industry has changed due to the government's reforms but it has changed in a way that will greatly improve the landscape for the users of these services, the public. And we must acknowledge that change to this industry was inevitable. It was occurring anyway, only in a way that was chaotic and unregulated.

Improvements in technology and the emergence of new business models meant that ride sharing services, of which Uber is the best known, were operating regardless, and efforts to stop this were fruitless. The services existed, people wanted to use them and the technology was there to support them. Regulation was the smartest option.

I can tell members that I attended the ministerial Transport and Infrastructure Council recently, and the people working in this area, the ministers and the officials, were very supportive of the ACT's actions. They were only negative about the fact that their own jurisdictions had not been able to respond in the smart and nimble way that the ACT did.

Canberrans had been asking for change to their on-demand transport system, even before this government began the 2015 taxi industry innovation review. Canberrans are familiar with traditional options for on-demand travel, taxis and hire cars. They have had basic choices of fares—structured taxi fares and fares negotiated through hire car drivers or services.

However, now is the time for us to embrace the future. New technology and new business models were coming to the ACT even if we tried to hide from them. What this government has done is create a regulatory framework that allows new providers and new technologies into the market but also creates a fair playing field so that our traditional taxi and hire car industries have the opportunity to survive and prosper.

With the exception of recognised improvements in wheelchair accessible taxi services since 2010, the quality of taxi services, including wait times, pricing and the overall travel experience, in the ACT has remained a matter of disparate community opinion.

Canberrans have actively looked at other urban transport markets and have seen innovation underway in travel service. They have taken up the opportunity to use these new services too. According to a survey the government undertook during the taxi industry innovation review of just under 2,000 respondents, over 70 per cent had tried ride sharing in other jurisdictions. "Please allow us to take advantage of these innovations," so many Canberrans have told us through the surveys, in email after email and in social media. They want us to give them the new opportunities. The government is now providing that opportunity, through its reforms following careful review, against our deeply held values for personal safety, protection of property and privacy.

We also paid close attention to our city's desire for continuing taxi and hire car services. We received over 2,000 responses in various forms to our consultations. Canberrans, individually and collectively, said they wanted more choices. Now, thanks to these amendments people who live in the ACT and people who travel to the ACT have more service options for travel, supported by a legislative framework. Taxis, hire cars, regulated third-party taxi booking services, ride sharing and other new models are now options to choose from.

With these choices come new driver and vehicle experiences. They also present new smart phone applications through which to book services. New fare structures are also being introduced. With our proposed reforms, consumers may face shorter wait times for travel service and they may also, through the competitive environment we have sought to build, experience lower fares overall as well as see competition developing.

More than one new and innovative business model is interested in operating in the ACT. Uber and ONTAP have entered. More are approaching the government to understand the new and open approach and I am sure that Canberrans will appreciate such options as they unfold.

What we want in the ride share industry is an industry that provides strong, baseline service quality and true choices for consumers for years to come. Such an industry must be competitive, viable and sustainable. Through the amendments in this bill and other reform measures, we have introduced a better equity of costs for the entire breadth of industry suppliers, existing and new. The first stage of reforms introduces a significant reduction in key costs facing the taxi industry and hire car operators. In the second stage, regulatory fees will be required for booking services, drivers and operators participating in ride sharing.

The amendments which support greater competition allow removal of regulatory burdens that are not required, especially in an environment that is becoming more competitive and whose success will depend on the judgement of the consumers. These were unnecessarily prescriptive rules such as what drivers should wear and how they should behave. Drivers who want to serve customers well in order to compete do not need these kinds of rules prescribed.

As the Chief Minister and I have both said before, the amendments we are making enable the taxi industry to have a strong future in the industry. It will have exclusive access to the rank and hail market. This market makes up around half of the trips the taxi industry undertakes.

There has been considerable discussion about safety in this new environment, and the Chief Minister in his in-principle speech has outlined how the amendments support safety. The safety standards proposed not only directly support the safe operation of ride sharing but also apply to business models and their participants in the future.

New booking services will have to become accredited and regulated as transport booking services. All drivers and vehicle owners undertaking public passenger service will undergo an accreditation and ongoing registration process. Background checks, periodic health assessments and ongoing reporting will be among their responsibilities. Public passenger vehicles too must adhere to fundamental safety standards, regardless of what kind of business models they are affiliated with. Passengers in the ACT can take comfort that safety is foremost and permanently on the agenda of the government as new on-demand transport businesses are considered for entry into our marketplace.

I note that the scrutiny of bills committee has commented on the bill, recommending the minister respond on matters related to compensation of perpetual taxi licence holders and the operation of a court order provision in section 36I of the bill in relation to certain offences. The Assembly considered the issue of compensation in our last sitting and agreed in its resolution that the government will review how the introduction of ride sharing has influenced the price of perpetual taxi plates two years after the commencement of ride sharing in the territory.

As I said earlier, regulating this industry is a balancing act. It is important to balance the needs of consumers, drivers, plate owners, operators and new and emerging businesses. We need to consider each of these stakeholders and we cannot do so in isolation of the others.

The emergence of ride sharing technologies and the government's regulation of the industry are likely to have impacts on all of these stakeholders. But so too would failing to take action; this would also impact on all of these stakeholders. I understand that there is disappointment from perpetual plate owners. Their investment will be devalued by the change in regulation. But I do not think the government is obliged to try to create a special, protected market for perpetual plate owners, especially when that would entail ignoring other emerging technologies and markets and a government obligation to make sure they are properly regulated for the sake of all stakeholders. The ACT has not issued a perpetual taxi licence in 20 years, and the government must always retain the ability to change regulations in the interests of the community for which it governs.

The scrutiny of bills committee also raised an issue about section 36I of the bill. It provides the court with the power to make a range of orders against a corporation that is a transport booking service if the corporation has been found guilty of certain offences. It can, for example, publicise an offence or require a project for public benefit. The government has included this section to provide the required flexibility and powers to deal with a new competitive environment with a range of new participants. To explain the power a little further, these kinds of markets can involve big and well-resourced companies and it is important that there are appropriate powers to ensure these companies adhere to the regulations we have established.

It is important to emphasise that these powers are not conferred on an administrator but only on a court after it has made a finding of guilt against a corporation. These provisions are closely based on existing provisions in the Crimes Act. In the interests of protecting public safety and the public interest, it is important that powers of this kind be available to a court. Nonetheless, in future the ACT Parliamentary Counsel's Office will consider the drafting of such clauses in light of the committee's questions and propose to the government any alternative drafting that might be beneficial. However, the current drafting is based on a clear precedent and the Parliamentary Counsel's Office advice and will remain in this bill.

The government will be carefully assessing the impact of the reforms. We will be establishing a steering committee and stakeholder engagement process involving government players and players from the industry and the community sector. We will look at implementation issues, including what training should be mandatory. We will also monitor the value of perpetual plates ahead of a formal review in two years time. We will monitor quality of service, including supply and wait times, safety outcomes, wheelchair accessible taxi service quality, impacts on pricing, the viability of drivers and operators and the pricing behaviour of taxi perpetual plates, among other factors. This is the prudent thing to do when so many consumers and other stakeholders depend on this vitally important industry.

The government has been proactive in establishing an environment in which consumers will have more options for travel, including new suppliers to choose from, new ways to book that travel and new ways to pay for it. All the while the amendments in this bill we are debating work to uphold the safety and protections that Canberrans want and expect.

Lastly, I note the excellent work done by officials leading up to the passing of this legislation. They have taken a complicated area of policy and worked through all of the issues in a thoughtful and intelligent way. They have also worked very hard to do that in the time lines that have prevailed upon them. The outcome is that the ACT is leading in this area of policy and regulation. In fact, in many ways we are the envy of other jurisdictions, and the efforts of government officials have been a key part to this. I thank them for their efforts. I will be supporting the bill today.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Urban Renewal and Minister for Tourism and Events) (11.43), in reply: Last month I tabled the Road Transport (Public Passenger

Services) (Taxi Industry Innovation) Amendment Bill. The bill was introduced as a concrete step to realising the government's strategic transport vision for Canberra and our broader public transport improvement plan. The bill focuses, refreshingly, on consumer outcomes. As a component of this, it specifically addresses passenger safety, new opportunities for on-demand travel and new levels and structures of prices.

The amendments in this bill encourage long-term innovation and new means of on-demand public transport. But in doing so, the amendments also support several key priorities of the government, including economic growth, stimulating healthy and sustainable competition for the benefit of consumers, and developing Canberra into a leading digital city.

The amendments in this bill are well considered and they reflect analysis from government, independent economic modelling and the experiences of other jurisdictions. Moreover, they also reflect the extensive and continuous community engagement that the government has undertaken during this review process. In fact, of all the issues this year that have generated a significant flow of correspondence, this one has been at the top of that list, and overwhelmingly positive regarding the approach that the government has taken.

From the beginning of the year we started a conversation with the community about the future of on-demand transport in the ACT. We released a discussion paper that asked specific questions, and through an extensive public consultation phase the government listened to Canberrans. And consumers made their voices heard overwhelmingly. We understood how so many of them wanted new ways to travel, new ways to book that travel and new ways to pay for it.

We also engaged with industry—with the existing taxi and hire car industries, as well as future businesses and potential ride share providers. We listened to what, I would have to say, was a wide range of needs, wants and concerns across all of those parties. Through this legislation we have sought to balance what were on many occasions competing interests and widely divergent views. Through all of this, we focused on the consumer and on safety for the whole community. We also determined that the best way forward for industry was to put in place risk-based regulatory settings that provided for a level playing field.

The bill presents a regulatory framework that will more fully allow for innovation and for competition within the taxi and hire car market—again, for the benefit of ACT consumers. It will address aspects of innovation and new business models. It also addresses public safety, accessibility, consumer protection and ongoing provision of existing services through a more level, competitive playing field.

Firstly, the bill will allow for the long-term presence of ride sharing in the on-demand public transport market. Specifically, it will formally introduce the concept of ride sharing and define its associated participants and trade equipment, which include booking platforms and services, drivers, vehicle owners and, of course, the vehicles themselves. The bill introduces the concept of the transport booking service, or TBS, to apply across all on-demand transport business types. This will make the oversight of transport business models—existing and new—much easier.

Through the amendments, the government will require all public passenger drivers participating in ride sharing to undergo police background and traffic history checks and a commercial driver health assessment. Vehicles used for ride sharing must also undergo a roadworthiness check, either by the Road Transport Authority or an accredited vehicle inspection provider. The amendments will ensure that Access Canberra plays an integral and final role in the accreditation process for new business models as well as continuing that role for the taxi and hire car industry.

Insurance arrangements and other operational requirements will also be in place. These requirements are largely similar to those in the existing taxi industry, but with some intended differences based on the nature and operation of the services provided. The bill also enables our Road Transport Authority to collect data on drivers and vehicles to help in monitoring and enforcement. These requirements and others are central to upholding the safety of our community and travellers to the ACT.

The community clearly wants taxi and hire car services, including wheelchair accessible taxi services, to continue to play a central role in on-demand transport and to form the basis of differentiated service and competition for the industry. Therefore these services must remain viable and sustainable. For that they need a more level playing field in which to compete.

This bill addresses this important community objective in several ways. Firstly, the legislation will allow standard and WAT taxis to continue to play an exclusive role in providing rank and hail service, whilst at the same time taxis will be able to provide booked services. As well, they will be able to operate either independently—and this is important—or through a transport booking service.

Hire cars will only be able to provide booked services. Again, they can operate independently or through a transport booking service. Finally, the ride sharing service will only occur through a booked service and through a transport booking service. The amendments also remove restrictions on the ability of drivers and operators—that is, vehicle owners—to access work through multiple transport booking services. This is another important reform.

In addition to the reforms contained within this bill we are also helping the existing taxi and hire car industry by significantly adjusting their regulatory costs, which will enhance their capacity to compete with new entrants. Several key costs for taxi and hire car operators will be significantly lowered during the first stage of reforms, such as costly government plate annual fees and the removal of the \$350 annual taxi and hire car operating fee.

As the other leg of these cost adjustments, the amendments within this bill introduce regulatory fees for ride sharing services. These include application and accreditation fees for ride sharing booking services of \$600 for the booking service and \$20 per driver annually, respectively; licence fees for ride sharing drivers of \$100 per year; and application fees for ride sharing operators of \$50.

For the entire taxi industry, the bill and regulation amendments to come will remove unnecessary regulatory burdens on taxi services, such as a range of prescriptive requirements on operational matters. Restrictions on operators' and drivers' ability to access work through multiple booking services will be removed. The reforms support driver viability outcomes through more accessible workers compensation and dispute resolution mechanisms. Further, the bill will allow for workers compensation in circumstances where drivers and operators are asked to have an exclusive relationship with a transport booking service.

No other jurisdiction has levelled the playing field in this way, putting the taxi industry and new entrants in a fair framework with a good basis to compete. The bill helps us to protect consumer pricing outcomes. We are therefore allowing for the regulation of prices, and this extends across all services. Current maximum taxi fare arrangements will remain in place until we determine that sustainable competition is established.

The proposed amendments will allow for the availability of regulation of the fares of hire cars and ride sharing. This recognises that the new kinds of transport services may introduce pricing practices that may not fully align government intentions or consumer outcomes and equity. Therefore this gives the government tools—and, I stress, only if required—to stop or place limitations on any future undesirable pricing practices.

Finally, the bill, in regulating fares, allows for a regulated reduction in the maximum surcharge on electronic payments. This is another important measure for consumers, who have been gouged for too long. We intend to replace the 10 and 11 per cent surcharges and reduce that to a maximum of five per cent.

In moving to reduce the regulatory burden, the bill does not remove all of the government's powers to take action, as I discussed in my presentation speech. This is an important point to note. There has been some media reporting to the effect that this is a deregulation of the taxi industry. It is not a deregulation—not a complete deregulation. There are still important powers retained. It is a regulation of ride sharing rather than a deregulation of the taxi industry. Specifically, it allows for refining and reducing of regulatory burdens. Let us be very clear: we are reducing regulatory burdens but not eliminating them altogether. This will be achievable chiefly through subordinated regulation and a range of other instruments.

This morning I have spoken about a great deal of industry change, and indeed there is. But it is important to make clear that there will be no change to the wheelchair accessible taxi, or WAT, service, the centralised booking service for WAT passengers and drivers, or any change to the taxi subsidy scheme. Over the next two years we will observe the WAT service carefully and make sure that the customer experience is not impacted in a negative way.

The taxi subsidy scheme will not apply to ride sharing services in the ACT. The scheme represents a substantial fare subsidy arrangement. This decision reflects another important way of supporting the quality of our WAT service.

I have outlined here reforms that are ready for debate. The government will continue to consider further key reforms in coming months. We will consider formal training requirements for drivers participating in ride sharing and other new business models, and also any further requirements for taxi and hire car drivers. Elements of training that we will give special focus to include effective service to passengers living with disabilities, and service to risk-based passengers such as those who are intoxicated. The government, through the ACT CTP scheme, will also consider the development of a new compulsory third-party insurance premium class for ride sharing drivers.

Successful implementation of our reforms is, of course, absolutely critical. Without this the reforms would be pointless. The commencement of the first stage of reforms, which began on 30 October, enables us to begin the immediate implementation of fundamental changes to the on-demand industry. That the introduction of ride sharing has already begun affords us the benefit of seeing how the industry is beginning to evolve. This will help inform the implementation process further.

During this vital phase we will continue to focus on engaging industry and the community. We are convening an implementation working group composed of key government agencies, industry and community representatives to assist in considering implementation issues, additional reforms and other matters that may arise in the coming months. Such engagement can only contribute positively to the quality of outcomes.

Ride sharing has been well received by the community, and successful passage of this bill will enable us to focus on implementation. I thank members for their support and commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

## **Revenue (Charitable Organisations) Legislation Amendment Bill 2015**

Debate resumed from 29 October 2015, on motion by **Mr Barr**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (11.59): The opposition is concerned by the haste with which the government is putting this bill through and potentially the lack of consultation. Even as late as this morning, groups that we have been in contact with or who have contacted us said either (1) that they were not aware of the bill and are concerned about its implications or (2) that they were not consulted at all and are even more concerned about the process.



The purpose of the bill is to close a loophole that the government believes is allowing a bleed of some \$2 million of revenue. It is brought about by efforts in WA and the Northern Territory, where various groups have challenged whether or not they are entitled to concessions—and have lost, although there is a case that has just finished in Victoria where it went the other way. So there is some doubt over the approach that is being taken here. Indeed, at the moment I understand that the institute of engineers is locked in ACAT with the ACT government over this issue, as to whether or not they should be listed as a charity.

For those who do not remember the debate back at the turn of the century, the people in government then, the Howard federal government, looked at closing off some of these loopholes and there was an enormous fight over the issue of whether advocate groups could be considered to be charities. The advocate groups were left in the fold. So there is history in this. As a consequence of those efforts early in the century, the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission was established. That operates at the commonwealth level. I understand the government is meeting with the ACNC tomorrow. All jurisdictions are meeting with it to look at further harmonisation.

In my consultation with various groups, I had correspondence with and then met David Crosbie from the Community Council for Australia. I would like to read from a letter he has written to Mr Barr and cc-ed to me and Mr Rattenbury:

Dear Chief Minister

I write in regard to the above amendment bill to express our concern that the ACT government is intending to develop an ACT specific definition of charities, ignoring all legal and other conventions, and over-riding existing legislation and regulations.

Such a move has the potential to alienate the whole charities sector if it proceeds with steps to make up its own definition of charity.

There is a definition of charity in the bill. It continues.

We already have a nationally regulated definition of charity; the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission, the ruling of the Australian Taxation Office, and well established guidelines have now evolved from High Court decisions. The sector does not need new ACT specific regulations imposed on all charities—there is already excessive red tape and compliance costs.

While we recognise the ACT government has been one of the first governments to support the work of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission and agreed to harmonise its legislation with the national regulator, this new move is a step backwards and counterproductive to the over-arching principles.

Yours sincerely ...

It is signed by David Crosbie, CEO of Community Councils for Australia

This morning I have proposed to the Greens and the government that perhaps we leave off this bill until later in the week with the possibility of perhaps sending it to a committee. Neither of those options will get off.

One of the interesting parts of the bill is that it specifically takes community housing in this bill out of the definition of charities. I understand that it is covered in the rates bill, but what are the implications of taking it out of this bill? I do not think that has been suitably addressed. We have been approached by some of the not-for-profits in that sector who are very concerned about this and the precedent that it has perhaps set.

I am worried by the undue haste that we seem to be showing. I call it our just-in-time legislation. You table it on Thursday one sitting period and you do it in the next sitting period. There has not been a lot of time on this bill. There has not been a lot of time for consultation. Yesterday afternoon I was still meeting with groups that asked for specific amendments to the act. I have had those drafted, but those groups have now come back and said, "Perhaps our understanding of the bill was not as clear and perhaps we do not need the amendments."

There is certainly a level of uncertainty over the effect of the bill. I do not see the need to pass it today; a couple of extra days would not hurt. And whether or not we need to pass it now, if it could be left to February, it might be even more appropriate given the way that the government, because they have got the numbers, aided and abetted by Mr Rattenbury, say they will table a bill and pass it on the next sitting day. For most community groups, it is almost impossible, in some of those short time frames, to consult with their members. Indeed, some groups would not have had a board meeting between the tabling of this bill and the debate on it today.

There are a number of problems here. The Chief Minister assures me it is all okay. Mr Rattenbury assures me that the meeting tomorrow is just the first step in a long path to work towards harmonisation. But I would suggest to members that we will be back to amend these bills; we will be back to look at the definition of what a charity is and how it works in the ACT. And we will need to look at the consequences of actions. Decisions in court cases in the Northern Territory and WA went one way, while a recent decision in Victoria went the other.

There is uncertainty in this. To say that there is an agreed path forward for this when there is a great deal of uncertainty and when you have got a peak body like the Community Council for Australia saying that this is backward and counterproductive is a warning to us all.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (12.05): I will be supporting the bill before us today that seeks to protect the integrity of the common understanding of what a charity is, and what they can receive, under the relevant existing ACT legislation relating to tax.

I note that in recent days there have been some issues with the bill raised with my office. As Mr Smyth has outlined, he had some similar approaches. But I have followed up a range of these matters, had further discussions with the Chief Minister and his office, and reflected on both the bill itself and the tabling speech. I am

confident that these amendments will not impact on what most in our community would consider to be charitable organisations.

If we go to the actual organisations outlined as being charitable organisations, the list includes animal welfare bodies, anti-discrimination bodies, aged-care organisations, charities relieving poverty, churches and other religious organisations, cultural institutions, early childhood and primary schools, environmental organisations, and hospitals.

Beyond these definitions, however, are organisations that can be considered peak bodies, professional associations, political parties and trade unions. The bodies captured by this new definition and that are large enough to pay wages above the current payroll tax exemption of \$1.85 million dollars a year in Australia-wide wages—and that is quite a high threshold, I think you would agree: we are not talking about a local charity organisation here; we are talking about an organisation with a substantial payroll—will now be required to pay tax. It is a notion that I agree with—in a sense, paying their fair share of tax.

This is in some regards quite a complex area of tax law and legal definition, but I am reassured that there are both objection and appeal rights in the legislation—and, further, opportunities for organisations that may be formed in future to directly approach the Commissioner for ACT Revenue to seek the relevant exemptions they believe they are entitled to. It is important to note that there is a mechanism in the legislation for people to go to the revenue commissioner and seek a specific declaration of them as a charity.

There have been suggestions that certain organisations might not be covered that currently believe they are covered. In terms of the types of organisations that I read out before, I think the scope for an organisation to approach the revenue commissioner to seek a further declaration if they feel that they have been unfairly judged in this process points to the fact that there are adequate safeguards in this legislation to achieve the objective we all have in mind, which is that genuinely charitable organisations should have this exemption. It is a goal we want to deliver to enable them to use the dollars they receive as a charitable organisation to go as far as possible in achieving their charitable goals and not simply disappear in tax revenue.

Various questions have been raised in the last day or so. I note Mr Smyth's observation about just-in-time legislation and my apparent complicity in that. I would remind Mr Smyth that it was I and my Greens colleagues who brought the change in standing orders to this place which requires that a piece of legislation cannot be debated in the same sitting period. So even a bill that is introduced on—

**Mr Smyth:** It was always the case.

**MR RATTENBURY:** No, it was a change to the standing orders last term, Mr Smyth. I am sure you recall it. I am happy to go back and check the records, but I recall it being a specific change to standing orders last term to exactly ensure that there is space between sitting periods. The fact that members may not focus on a bill until a party room meeting on a Monday or a Tuesday morning is a different matter from the matter of when it is introduced and debated.

I will keep my remarks short today but, in closing, while I understand that some members in the community have some concerns about this bill, I believe that the bill is constructed in a way that will achieve the objectives intended and will not have unintended consequences. Nonetheless, there are a number of safeguards and opportunities for genuine charities to make sure that they are covered by this legislation. The community sector will no doubt be forthright in bringing forward any concerns they have on an ongoing basis, but I think there is scope for those discussions and understandings to continue to improve and that this legislation delivers on the objectives it was intended to.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (12.10): I recall that a few years ago the ACT was, I think, the first state or territory to agree to support the work of the ACNC, the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. I recall that quite well because I worked in the not-for-profit sector at the time, and it was seen as a way of reducing red tape, supporting the work of not-for-profit organisations. To me, this bill seems a bit of a back to the future approach, where we are introducing another definition of charity and additional red tape for not-for-profits and charities. I am a bit perplexed by that.

I would like to ask whether the Chief Minister, in his response, would talk about the consultation he may have had, for example, with community housing providers. Recently I had some discussions with some in the community housing sector, and they have expressed surprise, alarm and a bit of concern about these proposed changes. They were surprised they had not been consulted about them.

I would just like to read a couple of comments that I have received this morning. One is:

Removing exemptions for stamp duty, land tax, and rates would be a massive own goal for the ACT Government because they allow community housing providers to provide more and better services to more people, which takes heat off ACT Housing (which runs at a massive loss), and encourages social and economic participation on two counts. Firstly, safe and affordable housing means better participation education, better health, and a reduction in use of other services (particularly the mental health system, but also the cops and justice system etc). Secondly, the less people spend on their housing ... the more they'll be able to spend participating in the local economy, e.g. buying fresh fruit and veg, sending their kids on school camps etc.

Another comment is:

It's out of step with what other governments are doing (SA, for instance, has legislated that local councils must provide rates exemptions).

And finally:

If this is really the case, it's outrageous that affected organisations are finding out as legislation hits the assembly.

They are some comments that I have received from some people in the community housing sector over the past few days.

I will keep my comments brief as well, but it is perplexing that we are introducing our own legislation rather than having a harmonised, nationally consistent approach—having, with much fanfare, adopted the ACNC approach a few years ago. I look forward to the Chief Minister’s comments; hopefully, he can allay my fears on those particular questions.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Urban Renewal and Minister for Tourism and Events) (12.13), in reply: The Revenue (Charitable Organisations) Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 protects the status of charities in the ACT. Let me be very clear: this is not a bill about regulation; it is a bill about taxation. The bill provides certainty for all charities by restricting access to tax exemptions for organisations that have a commercial and political focus.

The bill addresses the uncertainty caused by a number of court cases that have broadened the definition of “charitable purpose” and brings the legal definition back to the more traditional definition of what makes an organisation a charity. What we are doing today is putting in place a measure to ensure the viability of important tax exemptions that are given to charities which provide certainty and protection for charities that meet the more traditional definition.

Let us be very clear: this bill does not affect organisations whose predominant activities are charitable. Charities will not be affected in any way by this legislative change. The contribution these organisations make to our community cannot be underestimated, and the territory government is committed to supporting the important work that they do in Canberra.

I repeat: this is not a bill about regulation; it is a bill about taxation. Specifically, it is about the entitlements of a narrow subset of organisations to benefit from ACT tax exemptions. The bill does not create any new red tape or compliance costs for genuinely charitable organisations. What the bill does, Madam Speaker, through you to the opposition members, is narrowly target four types of organisations named in the legislation as “excluded organisations”. These are: political parties; industrial organisations; organisations that promote trade, industry or commerce; and professional organisations. I do not think there is anywhere in the community where the common perception would be that these types of organisations are seen as charitable in the traditional sense of what a charity is or what it does. I have not heard many people argue that the Liberal Party is a charity.

For the vast majority of organisations, the process for seeking a taxation exemption—and let me remind members, this is about taxation exemptions—remains exactly the same. The difference will be for the excluded organisations. Whilst political parties and unions are excluded entirely, and rightly so, the bill does contain an important safeguard to ensure that other organisations can still apply for a tax exemption. They must first satisfy the commissioner that they meet the prerequisites to be recognised by a beneficial organisation determination.

The types of organisations that will qualify for the determination are those that have a predominantly charitable purpose where the aspect that would otherwise exclude the organisation from exemption is not a significant part of its activities. An example would be a health promotion organisation with a minor professional purpose. For trade, industry and commerce bodies and for professional organisations, there is little doubt that they were disqualified from tax exemptions on the basis of charitable status across all Australian jurisdictions until a few years ago. They have always been liable for territory taxes and have paid tax accordingly and fairly. However, the meaning of “charitable purpose” is rooted in common law and, therefore, court decisions in other jurisdictions have an influence on the type of organisation that can access tax exemptions in the territory, hence the need for this bill now.

The High Court case of *Aid/Watch* in 2010 revolutionised the Australian law on charities, and after the *Aid/Watch* some commerce and industry peak bodies and professional organisations took the opportunity to challenge their non-charitable status with state and territory revenue authorities. Let us call this for what it was: an attempt to make windfall gains in the form of substantial tax exemptions and refunds at the expense of the broader community.

There are now varied and confusing precedents from various courts in Australia on the question of whether peak bodies and professional organisations meet the common law definition of “charity”. A 2012 case in a Western Australian tribunal extended charitable status to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Western Australia. I will repeat that—a Western Australian tribunal extended charitable status to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Western Australia. However, last month a case handed down in the Victorian Supreme Court denied the same status to the Law Institute of Victoria, a peak professional body.

All of this is causing uncertainty in the sector and costing both the sector and the territory a lot of money in litigation costs, though the lawyers always seem to find a way through these things, Madam Speaker. Addressing this uncertainty is also why the bill prevents the commissioner making retrospective reassessments of tax for excluded organisations. This will secure revenue already paid to the territory which is now under risk from current and future court decisions.

In the long run the bill will mitigate the revenue risk caused by judicial decisions on whether a particular professional, commercial or industrial organisation is eligible for a tax exemption. I stress that the bill does not impose any restrictions on political activities of genuine charities, consistent with the High Court’s finding in *Aid/Watch*. This bill recognises the difference between advocacy about genuinely charitable matters and advocacy for the interests of a specific commercial industry or professional sector.

Turning to the comments of Ms Lawder, I understand there has been some discussion about the taxation treatment of community housing providers. Let me make a clear and unequivocal statement: this bill makes no changes to the taxation status of community housing providers. I repeat that: this bill makes no changes to the taxation status of community housing providers.

The territory government is committed to reducing the regulatory obligations of the Australian not-for-profit sector, but it is important that the government acts to clarify the intent and operation of our legislation, most particularly around taxation exemptions. For the fourth time I repeat: this bill is about taxation exemptions, not regulation. I commend it to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

## **Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill 2015**

Debate resumed from 29 October 2015 on motion by **Mr Barr**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (12.22): Madam Speaker, we are very used to getting what we call SLABs from the Attorney-General's department. Now we have what would appear to be a SLAB from the Treasurer's department. This is an omnibus bill that makes amendments to a series of acts, firstly to concessions in the Duties Act. It changes the way we deal with concessions for deceased estates and for corporate reconstruction duty, where it will provide a full relief on corporate reconstruction transactions in relation to the dutiable property transactions.

It looks at the status of forces agreement, and given the large number of military people in the ACT it will:

...provide an express exemption from motor vehicle registration duty for foreign military personnel who are eligible to import their vehicles duty free under the Status of Forces Agreement between Australia and their home country.

It helps clarify what a new home is for the purpose of first home owner grants. Under the Land Tax Act it looks at relevant years of income and clarifies that applications for discounted land rents are not always required to include evidence of the lessee's income for the previous two financial years. Backdating applications for discount land rent gives the Commissioner for ACT Revenue the discretion to approve an application for discounted land rent and apply an approval retrospectively in appropriate cases.

Under the Land Tax Act it looks at applications for corporate builders' exemptions that currently require a builder or a developer to apply to the ACT Revenue Office for the exemption rather than have the exemption automatically applied. In regard to objections to land interest under the Rates Act, it looks at objections to a rates interest. As with the Land Tax Act, the Rates Act will be amended to allow the taxpayers to object to the interest payable on overdue rates through an objection to a decision of the commissioner.

The Taxation Administration Act looks at acting arrangements which allow the Under Treasurer to make acting arrangements for the Commissioner for ACT Revenue. Currently it has to be determined by the minister so the commissioner can get some leave, which might be appropriate in the lead-up to Christmas. Under the sale of land provisions the commissioner will be required to give notice that a parcel of land is in arrears once the owner has been notified.

They seem like sensible amendments. I note the consultation was all largely internal, and I have been assured by the briefing that I had—I thank the Treasurer for the briefing—that these are all revenue neutral. With that, we will support the bill.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (12.24): As Mr Smyth has noted, this bill is essentially a taxation SLAB. It makes a number of changes across seven different revenue-related acts to clarify and simplify some of the systems we have in place for our taxation as well as introducing a number of relatively minor but important improvements.

In terms of the Duties Act, this bill clarifies when duties are payable on off-the-plan purchase agreements. It clarifies the dutiable value of deceased estates, and it covers full duty relief with corporate transfer of assets, and this will now match other jurisdictions. In regards to land rent, the bill includes an administrative provision to reduce unnecessary requirements for documentation of income for eligibility for the land rent scheme, although it does not change the eligibility criteria. It very much goes to the administration of it.

It also introduces a new process whereby corporations carrying on business as a builder or developer on residential land will now have to apply for the automatic exemption at the beginning of the two-year period to ensure that they are aware that it is only a two-year exemption and that tax will be payable after that period.

When it comes to objections to interest, the bill introduces provisions to allow taxpayers who object to interest that has been accrued from land tax and from rates. These objections will give taxpayers rights to object that align with approaches taken on other taxes, which is clearly something that will improve consistency.

Finally, on payroll tax, this bill clarifies that contracts are not subject to payroll tax if they are solely for the conveyance of goods by an owner-provided vehicle. This is also in line with other jurisdictions. There are also a number of other minor technical and grammatical amendments across the various revenue acts. Overall, the amendments in this bill today are simple improvements on current practices, and the Greens will be supporting this legislation.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Urban Renewal and Minister for Tourism and Events) (12.26), in reply: I thank members for their support of the bill. It is a simple and necessary bill developed to improve the administration of the territory's taxes. It delivers improvements to a variety of tax legislation through simplification, clarification and consolidation of existing principles.



As members have outlined, it amends the Taxation Administration Act 1999, the Duties Act 1999, the Rates Act 2004, the Land Tax Act of that year, the Land Rent Act 2008 and the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 and the Payroll Tax Act 2011, presenting minor policy and technical amendments that will help support the effectiveness of our tax laws. These improvements will also assist taxpayers in understanding their obligations and will provide administrative efficiencies to the Revenue Office.

The bill improves equity for taxpayers. For example, currently ACT taxpayers can formally object to the Commissioner for ACT Revenue regarding interest on some tax assessments. However, this objection right does not extend to interest charged on rates or land tax. This bill will allow objections to be lodged to interest charged on these two tax lines if an assessment of rates or land tax includes a refusal to remit any interest charged. This amendment, therefore, ensures that access to the objection process is applicable equally across all taxes and enhances the standards of the objection process.

The bill will address some administrative concerns that will result in land developers and builders being unaware of their land tax liabilities. The bill addresses the issue of awareness of liabilities by maintaining the exemption but now requiring corporations to apply to the revenue office to receive it. That will make affected taxpayers aware of the imposed conditions such as the two-year exemption period and will assist in reducing the potential for tax defaults.

To increase the legislative and administrative clarity of the Rates Act and the Land Tax Act, the bill consolidates provisions relating to the sale of land that are currently found separately in both acts.

The bill will achieve greater legislative harmonisation with other jurisdictions in relation to duties. The Duties Act currently provides 95 per cent of duty relief to eligible corporate groups who undertake a reconstruction of that group where there has been no change in the ultimate beneficial ownership of the group's assets. The bill will increase this duty relief to a full 100 per cent on eligible reconstructions and will consolidate the corporate reconstruction provisions currently placed in the various sections of the Duties Act into one section.

The Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill will improve the functionality of the ACT tax system for both administrators and taxpayers. It provides a valuable reduction of red tape and simplifies processes. Importantly, the amendments to this bill will also protect the integrity of the tax system for the territory and help ensure our tax laws are operating as they were intended and with appropriate fairness.

The bill is also an example of more efficiency to come from the ACT Revenue Office. The good news is: there is even more efficiency to come from the ACT Revenue Office as it undertakes a range of major improvements to its operating systems and customer service delivery. Through the revenue collection transformation program, a vital investment made by the government to transform the Revenue Office—I thank those opposite for their support of this initiative—we will be further improving systems, stakeholder engagement processes and customer experiences.

Future legislative amendments to improve and amend tax acts will allow the Revenue Office to implement its smarter digital services into a modern and suitable legislative framework. I thank members for their support of this very important area of law reform and commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

**Sitting suspended from 12.31 to 2.30 pm.**

## **Questions without notice**

### **Health—elective surgery**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Health. The AIHW 2015 report on elective surgery waiting times shows that in 2014-15 ACT public hospital waiting lists had 13,958 removals and also had 14,550 additions. Over the year the ACT elective waiting list grew by 592 patients—the biggest percentage growth, being 4.1 per cent, of any state or territory. The ACT Health website says that there were 4,486 people waiting for surgery. Minister, why, in 2014-15, of all of the states and territories, did the ACT have the highest rate of increase in waiting times for elective surgery?

**MR CORBELL:** We continue to face significant pressure in relation to the number of additions to the elective surgery waiting list. What we have seen is that the number of additions has been in the order of 55 per cent, and that is despite there being only a 17 per cent increase in the population. That is since 2002-03. So it is an ongoing trend. That is the key challenge that we face as a jurisdiction.

I am very pleased to say that for 2014-15 ACT public hospitals performed 11,875 elective surgery procedures. That is the highest number on record for any year. So we are doing more elective surgeries than ever before and it is a better result even than for the 2013-14 year. And in the first quarter of this calendar year we performed 3,124 elective surgeries. We are seeing increasing growth in additions but we are also seeing record numbers of elective surgery.

Moving forward, my objective as health minister is to significantly reduce the number of long waits. People should not be waiting longer than clinically indicated, and at the moment too many people are. We are going to be taking steps to address that issue.

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

**MR HANSON:** Why is it, minister, that after nearly 15 years of ACT Labor government, elective surgery waiting lists are still getting longer?

**MR CORBELL:** I think the key issue is not the length of the list but whether or not people are getting their surgery within the clinically indicated time. Obviously we will see growth. We are seeing growth; we are seeing growth for a range of reasons, but there is still an unsatisfactory number of people who are waiting longer than the targets set out under the elective surgery targets that the territory has agreed to. So that is our focus as a jurisdiction, and I will have more to say about how we will be responding to that challenge in due course.

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

**MR WALL:** Minister, is the data on the ACT Health website correct when it says that there were 4,486 people waiting for surgery today, which is exactly the same number as was listed on 9 October this year?

**MR CORBELL:** I would have to check that figure. I will take the question on notice and provide an answer to Mr Wall.

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

**MR WALL:** Minister, why does the ACT government continue to fall behind the rest of the country in the delivery of elective surgery?

**MR CORBELL:** I simply refer Mr Wall to my previous answer. The reasons for elective surgery delay are complex but there are ways of addressing them. As health minister I have been working closely with my directorate on what steps can be taken to do that, and I will have more to say about that in due course.

### **Housing—cleaning contract**

**MS LAWDER:** My question is to the Minister for Housing. In July 2012, Spotless entered into a new total facilities management contract with the Community Services Directorate to provide maintenance services for Housing ACT properties. Minister, when is the contract between your directorate and Spotless due to expire and have any changes to the scope of this contract been made recent months?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Lawder for the question. The contract with Spotless was for an initial five-year term with a possible performance-based extension of a further five years. A decision regarding the extension of that contract will need to be made prior to its expiry date, which is June 2017. I do not have any information on me on whether or not there has been any change to the scope of that contract. However, I will get some advice and if there has been I will bring it back to the Assembly.

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

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, have any Spotless staff who work on implementing the maintenance contract had their employment terminated this week?

**MS BERRY:** That would be a decision for Spotless to make. I am not aware of anybody that has had their employment cease this week, but that would be a decision for the contractor, not the government.

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

**MRS JONES:** Minister, have CSD made any complaints or demands, or been made aware of any complaints or demands which have been made, which would lead to staff changes at Spotless?

**MS BERRY:** I am not aware of any instructions that have been provided to Spotless to change their employment arrangements. Again, that would be a decision for the employer to make.

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

**MRS JONES:** Minister, has Spotless been meeting its obligations under the total facilities management contract?

**MS BERRY:** As far as I am aware, they have.

### **Education—ICT training**

**MR DOSZPOT:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Training I refer to the findings of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, ACARA, which suggest that Australia's level of computer literacy in years 6 and 10 is in decline and warrants serious attention. ACARA says that the decline is most noticeable in the ACT, with the ACT posting the single largest drop in achievement of any state or territory in both year 6 and year 10. Notwithstanding that the ACT's results were generally stronger than in other jurisdictions, to what do you attribute this significant decline in computer literacy in our schools?

**MS BURCH:** I thank Mr Doszpot for his question and also, in it, acknowledging that the ACT is generally stronger. Yes, there has been, in this report, a noticeable decline in these reporting frameworks. But it is also very clear that the ACT results are stronger than average. The report itself goes to some of why—

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MS BURCH:** What they have put forward could be. Kids, students, are certainly using social media. They have access to smart phones and iPads. But it is important that we keep their focus on STEM training. Interestingly, in the same article, in the same newspaper, there was "Today's girls look to the future by mastering code". So there was another story in the same copy of the *Canberra Times* that promoted girls from Canberra Girls Grammar who are doing exceptionally well. It goes on to say that they speak four languages—HTML, CSS, JavaScript and PHP.

What are we doing to make sure that our students remain on top of STEM training? I refer members opposite to our commitment to a centre of excellence in science, technology, engineering and maths that will be established at the Caroline Chisholm School.

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

**MR DOSZPOT:** Minister, what resources are directed to ACT public schools to ensure that all students have appropriate computer skills and access to appropriate ICT equipment?

**MS BURCH:** ACT public education has strong access to ICT resources and support through their teachers—and recognising that this report went across government and non-government schools. Here in the ACT we are undertaking significant change in the way technology is assessed and delivered across our schools to make it easier for teachers and students alike to integrate ICT across the curriculum.

The directorate has been supporting teachers in developing their skills by leading the nation successfully in implementing simple to use platforms like Google apps for education. Teachers can now integrate a range of ICT tools directly into their classroom. We indeed have a significant uptake across our schools of Google apps education. I think we are leading the nation on that. We also have the fastest wireless speed times across our schools to make sure all our students in all our schools have good access to ICT.

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

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, how many schools have dedicated teacher-librarian positions and/or ICT teachers with the necessary skills to teach students ICT subjects?

**MS BURCH:** I will have to take on notice the number of teacher-librarians in schools because local schools make decisions about what additional resources they want to have in their schools, but we have made a dedicated and a firm commitment to provide upskilling and teacher training so that they can deliver on these curricula. We are at the forefront of delivering on the Australian curriculum. We are at the forefront of Google apps for education and, as this report identifies, we remain strong and above the national average.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** Apart from Google apps, minister, what are you doing to address this decline?

**MS BURCH:** The education council advisory group is looking at how are our students smart citizens on the internet and with regard to information technology. On that committee we have the e-commissioner. We have also got representatives from—

*Mr Smyth interjecting—*

**MS BURCH:** You can make all the fun you like about Google apps for education but this is transforming our teachers and students alike to learn, teach, create and be innovative around the classroom. I would suggest that those opposite may want to visit a school to see how Google apps for education is transforming education.

As to the fourth part of the question: what am I doing to support STEM training in schools? Again, I refer those opposite to our commitment for a STEM centre of excellence in Caroline Chisholm School.

### **Expenditure review—concessions**

**MRS JONES:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, in March this year you announced a public consultation on the expenditure review of the ACT concessions program. On 15 November you released a discussion paper on the review, which outlines possible changes to the concessions program. Chief Minister, why has it taken more than six months for you to release the discussion paper and submissions on this review?

**MR BARR:** These are important issues and the government is taking a careful approach to its consideration of all the complex issues that are associated with the concessions program. I add that there are two specific challenges that we need to respond to. The first is that Mrs Jones's colleagues in the federal government have cut the national partnership on concessions. So the Liberal Party has cut \$2.2 million out of the concessions program in the territory. The second is that there is obviously an ongoing debate in relation to various eligibility provisions at the commonwealth level for various commonwealth concessions. In this instance there are impacts on the ACT concessions program around the eligibility criteria that the commonwealth set, because eligibility for a number of our concessions is linked to commonwealth eligibility criteria.

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MR BARR:** I do find it a bit rich that the Leader of the Opposition and others would interject and seek to score political points on the concessions issue when their colleagues and their political party have cut funding for the concessions program. There are many choices that the federal government faced in their previous budgets, and they made the choice to cut the national partnership on concessions, to reduce funding. The only decisions taken in the past two years to reduce funding to concessions have been taken by the Liberal Party—imposed upon all Australians, all states and territories, by the Liberal Party through their cuts to the national partnership on concessions. Missing from any of the commentary from those opposite through any of this process has been any acknowledgement that their own party is in the business of cutting concessions.

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

**MRS JONES:** Chief Minister, why did you wait until the second stage of public consultation before releasing public submissions from the first stage of consultation?

**MR BARR:** Because we are undertaking an extensive community consultation process.

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

**MR DOSZPOT:** Chief Minister, is removing concession fares on public transport for seniors card holders striking the right balance between ensuring the concessions program is appropriately targeted and the risk involved in adjusting concessions for vulnerable households that could lead to households entering crisis?

**MR BARR:** This range of issues is one that the government is consulting on; hence the process. I have got to say that the hypocrisy of the Liberal Party on this issue—having presided over a cut to the concessions program, cutting the national partnership on concessions, ripping \$2.2 million out of the ACT concessions program and tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars out of the program of all other states and territories, to come into this place and attack this government for undertaking a consultation process in relation to the fairness of our concessions program into the longer term—is breathtaking.

But what I will say is that we will consider these issues carefully and over an extended period. And I must say that the idea of being attacked for taking too long to consult and having too many rounds of consultation, coming from those opposite, is again breathtaking.

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

**MR DOSZPOT:** Chief Minister, how is increasing the eligibility for the seniors card to 65 years of age extending a helping hand to Canberrans in need?

**MR BARR:** Our focus is to extend concessions based on income. Surely even those opposite would agree that concessions should be targeted to those most in need. Surely even those opposite would agree with that fundamental starting point, that our concessions program should target those most in need. If you simply have an age-based criterion and not an income-based criterion then you are not targeting your concessions to those most in need.

Those issues are raised in the consultation process and we look forward to community feedback. I invite Mr Doszpot to make a submission. He can put on the public record his view as to where concessions should be targeted. It is open to the opposition to put in a submission and actually to have a view on this. He may want to talk to his federal colleagues about why they cut the concessions program in the first place.

### **Economy—employment growth**

**MS FITZHARRIS:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, could you please explain to the Assembly the importance of generating jobs in the ACT for our economy and our community.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR BARR:** They are very excited today, aren't they, and it is good to see. Jobs are at the centre of what this government is about. Every day, every member of my government is focused on creating jobs for Canberrans. Jobs are not just about numbers in a spreadsheet, job numbers in the ABS statistics. They are more than just a source of income. Jobs are an inclusive force in our community, binding members of our community together. They are a force that provides self-esteem. They help us aspire higher and meet those higher aspirations.

Canberra has a well-earned title as the world's most livable city. That would not be possible were it not for our strong track record of creating jobs. It is our collective success as an economic community in creating jobs for individuals that drives the incomes that maintain our high standard of living that we all enjoy and that our loved ones enjoy.

Jobs give government the resources to deliver the services that our community values and our community demands, whether that is maintaining our exceptional urban and natural environments or supporting every Canberran to make a meaningful contribution to their community regardless of their circumstances.

The government has a successful strategy to support jobs growth, built on creating the right business environment, accelerating business innovation and supporting new business investment. Creating the right business environment is what allows local businesses to seize new opportunities when they arrive. As we are working through a number of reform processes to streamline our city's regulatory framework and our taxation framework, we are ensuring that we are creating the right environment for job creation. We created Access Canberra to make it simpler and easier to do business in Canberra.

We want to ensure that Canberra is a city that generates innovation, and this is our core business. Harnessing innovation into business growth will guarantee that future generations will continue to enjoy the livability and prosperity that our city has offered. We continue to invest in accelerating business investment, and we are now a national entrepreneurship leader, with innovations like the Canberra innovation network that are becoming national models for others to learn from.

We are a young city and a relatively small one. We need to continue to look beyond our borders for new investment and opportunity. That is why the government has been so active in leading trade delegations to China, Singapore, Hong Kong, the United States and Japan to support Canberra businesses to enter into new markets and to ensure that new investment opportunities are realised.

It is interesting that those opposite carp and criticise but have had nothing positive to contribute to this city's jobs growth. Their party is the party that cuts jobs—the party that cuts jobs in this city.

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

*Opposition members interjecting—*



**MADAM SPEAKER:** Let me hear Ms Fitzharris.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Chief Minister, what else is the government doing to support jobs growth in the ACT?

**MR BARR:** We are supporting a number of areas of the ACT economy that are making significant contributions to employment growth. Our education sector employs nearly 19,000 Canberrans and brings talented people into our city every year. This pipeline of talent is crucial to our city's future, and one that we will continue to support through a range of government policy interventions to support the rapid growth of our higher education sector. I note that most of those policy interventions were opposed by the Canberra Liberals.

Our visitor economy employs 15,000 people. Our goal is to grow this and its economic contribution from \$1.8 billion to \$2.5 billion by 2020, by investing in new events for the city, the new city branding, marketing, and working to attract new aviation services. And we are well on our way to achieving that. We have seen significant investment in new hotel stock in the city in recent times. This is a very pleasing response to the government's initiatives in these areas.

The buildings that we live, work and play in are central to our enjoyment of this city, and our construction industry employs 15,000 Canberrans. Our urban renewal and infrastructure agenda are supporting jobs in this sector. I am very pleased today to be able to commit to a significant boost for the Woden town centre that will attract complementary private sector investment in the town centre for further economic growth for Woden. This is a significant announcement for the economic growth of our town centres.

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

**DR BOURKE:** Chief Minister, how well is this approach working when compared to the rest of Australia?

**MR BARR:** The starting point for our city is that the Liberal Party in federal government has, in fact, cut 9½ thousand jobs from our city since they were elected—9½ thousand jobs cut from us by the Liberals. This is the best effort and the contribution of the party of recession for this city, the ideological crusade of those opposite to cut jobs in our economy.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR BARR:** You can see by their response that they are very sensitive about this issue. And so they should be. The Liberals have been very industrious and very busy in the job-cutting business. They are very good at cutting jobs, but they have not made much of a contribution at all to the creation of new jobs in our city.

What is pleasing to see in response to the federal Liberal agenda for Canberra is the state of the Canberra economy. That our state final demand grew by 5.4 per cent in the year to June 2015 is very pleasing. It is the second-strongest result in Australia.

The policies that this government has put in place have supported that economic rebound, turning the economic corner for this city.

What we need is the federal Liberal government to stop cutting Canberra. That is what we need. Interestingly, we got that commitment from the former Prime Minister, Tony Abbott. It will be interesting to see whether the new Prime Minister is prepared to continue that commitment.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Supplementary question, Ms Porter.

**MS PORTER:** Chief Minister, are there any risks to job growth in the ACT?

**MR BARR:** The biggest risk is the Liberal Party. That is very clear. It is the party of recession. They are about introducing sovereign risk into our infrastructure markets now. Even their job-hating colleagues up on the hill think that this mob are economic lunatics. Even the economic vandals on Capital Hill think that down here on City Hill we have the economic lunatics.

The best thing I can say about former Prime Minister Abbott was that he reached the conclusion that he would stop kicking Canberra. What we want to hear from—

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

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

**MR BARR:** Prime Minister Turnbull is that there will be no more cuts to Canberra. So I have written to the Prime Minister and I am meeting with him next week. I will be seeking that reassurance, the same reassurance that Prime Minister Abbott was able to give after his destructive 2014 budget. Prime Minister Abbott was able to give that assurance. So we will be calling on the Prime Minister to do exactly the same in the lead up to the federal budget next year, because we have already heard that they are cutting 200 further jobs from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

That is disappointing for Canberra, disappointing for that department and I hope that it does not start a new round of public sector job cuts. But we do know that the Liberal Party has form on this; so we will be asking this question directly of the new Prime Minister.

### **Transport—planning**

**MR WALL:** My question is to the Minister for Capital Metro. Minister, in 2012, as the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development, you were responsible for the implementation of the transport for Canberra plan. In a recent report the ACT Auditor-General points out that reporting on the transport for Canberra plan was lax, ambiguous and inaccurate and, furthermore, a working group set up within your directorate did not meet as required and failed to properly oversee the implementation of the transport for Canberra plan. As a result, most of the targets set forth in the transport for Canberra plan were not met. Minister, given that capital metro has not released a construction update for 13 months, are we beginning to see the same problems which plagued transport for Canberra materialise with capital metro?

**MR CORBELL:** Of course I do not have administrative responsibility for transport for Canberra and in relation to the other part of Mr Wall's question the answer is no.

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

**MR WALL:** I will direct the question again, and ask the supplementary. Minister, are we seeing the same problems that plagued transport for Canberra materialise with capital metro? Given that you have failed to ensure that the transport for Canberra working implementation group continued to meet as required, how can Canberrans trust that you can deliver a \$783 million light rail network?

**MR CORBELL:** The answer to the first part of Mr Wall's question is, as I stated in my earlier answer, no. In relation to the second part of his question, I simply direct Mr Wall to each of the milestones that have been in place for the capital metro project and state clearly and unequivocally that all of them have been met by the Capital Metro Agency to date, and I look forward to continuing to meet them. In particular, I look forward to advising Mr Wall of the government's decision on the selection of a preferred bidder to build light rail for Canberra.

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

**MR COE:** Minister, why didn't the government ensure that the transport for Canberra implementation working group was meeting as required?

**MR CORBELL:** I do not have portfolio responsibility for that matter.

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

**MR COE:** Minister, how can Canberrans have trust and confidence in your government given the issues that have plagued transport for Canberra?

**MR CORBELL:** I have not had responsibility for transport policy since 2012, so those opposite may wish to update their knowledge of the administrative arrangement orders.

### **Planning—transport**

**MR SMYTH:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and concerns the Auditor-General's report into the frequent network and the light rail master plan. Minister, it was revealed by the Auditor-General that a transport for Canberra report card, released in September 2014, was ambiguous and at times inaccurate, with no evidence presented to support some claims. The transport for Canberra report card was released under your control as Minister for Planning. Minister, how did you allow inaccurate information to be released?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Smyth for his question. Of course transport planning is an important part of the ACT government's program to alleviate congestion across the ACT. As you have heard from the Infrastructure Australia report, there will be a possibility of \$700 million in congestion costs across the ACT if we do not get transport right.

We have learnt from the previous responses. Indeed, we are now planning a light rail network for the whole of the ACT. As discussed earlier, the network will grow with the territory over the next 25 years. The first part will cross Lake Burley Griffin to the parliamentary triangle and service some 60,000 public servants there. It is important that we learn from the reports earlier mentioned and move forward with the best possible plan for the territory.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, did you become aware that the information contained in the transport for Canberra report was inaccurate before seeing a copy of the Auditor-General's report?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Smyth for his supplementary question. I cannot recall the actual dates of reading those bits of information, but I will take that on notice and come back to Mr Smyth.

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

**MR COE:** Minister, do you stand by your figure of \$700 million of congestion or is that another inaccuracy that Canberrans have to deal with?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** That was the information supplied by Infrastructure Australia when we were talking about congestion earlier in the year. So it is important that we do the best we can to remove congestion across the territory. Of course, that is by a future date of 2031.

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

**MR COE:** Minister, how do you describe the discrepancy of \$700 million when just two weeks ago the department of infrastructure said that congestion would go from \$200 million to \$400 million?

*Mr Corbell interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Corbell, I have not called you. Mr Gentleman, the Minister for Planning.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Thank you, Madam Speaker—

*Mr Corbell interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Sit down please, Mr Gentleman. Mr Corbell, that is twice I have called you to order when you are answering questions on behalf of other people.

**Mr Corbell:** Madam Speaker, I've interjected twice in question time today.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Do you really want to go down this path? Do you want to be warned? I have called you to order twice already for answering questions when other people have the call. I remind you that I give the call and if you persist in doing this I will warn you.

**Mr Corbell:** Madam Speaker, on the point of order—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** It is not a point of order. It is a ruling.

**Mr Corbell:** With your indulgence, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Yes.

**Mr Corbell:** Madam Speaker, those opposite have persistently and wilfully interjected throughout question time. At no time have you suggested to the Leader of the Opposition or any of your Liberal colleagues that they will be warned for their consistent interjections. I interjected twice in question time and I am being warned, effectively. Madam Speaker, I simply draw to your attention the discrepancies in your rulings in relation to disorderly conduct in this place.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I call the Minister for Planning to answer Mr Coe's supplementary question.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do thank Mr Coe for the supplementary. It is the result of different data sets being studied. There are two different sets of data that were looked at in regard to congestion for the future of the territory.

### **ACT Health—accommodation**

**MS PORTER:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, today you announced that up to 1,100 staff would be moving to Woden. Why has this decision been made?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Ms Porter for the question. I was delighted to join with the Chief Minister today to announce that there will be a major boost for the Woden town centre in the coming year with the decision to relocate approximately 750 personnel of the ACT Health Directorate to a new headquarters location in the Woden town centre and that, combined with the Chief Minister's announcement of a further 350 staff associated with the operations of Access Canberra, there will be around 1,100 ACT public servants calling the Woden town centre home in the coming year.

This is a really important announcement for the Woden town centre. It is really important to support jobs and to support retail activity in the Woden town centre. Along with the Chief Minister, I and my ministerial colleagues spent a significant period of time a couple of months ago talking to retailers in the Woden town centre. In particular, we listened to the views of small businesses in the town centre that have been absolutely devastated by the massive cuts to the federal public service that have hit the Woden town centre hard.

This Labor government has been listening to the concerns of those traders, of those retailers, of those small business operators and today we have responded. We have responded with a decision that will see over 1,000 ACT public servants underpinning and helping growth and activity in the Woden town centre. This is a really important decision.

It also allows us to see the collocation of a range of ACT Health Directorate functions that are currently spread across multiple sites. We have five leased premises, including three on Moore Street, the former north Curtin primary school and some staff located at the Callam offices. So these non-clinical functions are to be re-directed and be collocated in new, modern accommodation at Woden. We will be proceeding as a matter of urgency to seek requests from the market for suitable accommodation.

This will allow us to provide more modern and contemporary office accommodation. It will bring the ACT Health Directorate headquarters functions closer to the front-line operations of the Canberra Hospital. It will free up older premises for redevelopment, such as the old north Curtin primary school site, the old ESA headquarters site. And it will mean that we will be supporting jobs, growth and investment in the Woden town centre at a time when it desperately needs it.

I think the Chief Minister is to be commended for leading the engagement with the Woden retailers and Woden small businesses. It was great to talk to them a couple of months ago. Today we have responded very clearly and unequivocally in supporting jobs, in supporting growth and development in the Woden town centre and hopefully giving confidence too to the owners of the Woden shopping centre, Westfield, so that they can bring forward investment as well in Woden, help with the revitalisation of Woden and grow it as one of our very important town centres.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Supplementary question, Ms Porter.

**MS PORTER:** Minister, what are the expected benefits for ACT Health?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Ms Porter for the supplementary. Collocation will, of course, improve coordination and communication between the different parts of ACT Health. It will provide modern office facilities, and that is important as well. But, importantly, it will see our corporate and administrative functions closer to the key service delivery point for ACT Health, which is, of course, the Canberra Hospital.

We already have multiple journeys and multiple staff moving between the campus of the Canberra Hospital and ACT Health's headquarters, which is currently in Moore Street here in Canberra city. Obviously, having that function physically closer to the Canberra Hospital means that it will be more convenient, with better access for staff of ACT Health to work with our front-line service delivery at the Canberra Hospital. It will also mean that a number of staff who are performing administrative and corporate functions at the Canberra Hospital will be able to locate off site away from the campus—they do not need to be on campus to be delivering those functions—but they will still be close to the campus because they will be at the new Woden site.

This is a very important outcome for ACT Health. Obviously, the other aspects of these changes relate to a new modern shopfront to be delivered for residents of Woden and Weston Creek through the Access Canberra staff move. But for Health, what I can say very clearly is that this is a great outcome for value for money in terms of the leasing costs that Health will incur for its staff accommodation. At the same time, close proximity to the Canberra Hospital will improve the access that we have when it comes to the delivery of front-line hospital services for the Health Directorate. *(Time expired.)*

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

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Minister, what type of space is needed and how will the decision on the new premises be made?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Ms Fitzharris, could you rephrase that so that it relates to the minister's portfolio, in terms of the type of space related to Health; otherwise it is outside the minister's responsibility.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Minister, what type of space is needed for ACT Health staff, and how will the decision on the new ACT Health premises be made?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Ms Fitzharris for the supplementary. We estimate that around 11,000 square metres of office space will be required for ACT Health functions. Combined with Access Canberra functions, it is around 15½ thousand square metres of office space.

The government will move to a registration of interest process this week, which will encourage building owners and operators in Woden to lodge their interest in providing suitable accommodation that meets the specifications and requirements for the office space that we have identified. The registration of interest process will close early in December. The registration of interest will identify that a lease is sought from as early as possible in the next calendar year. We anticipate that the procurement process and evaluation will be progressed and potentially completed by the end of the first quarter of next year.

We are demonstrating that we are serious about getting this move underway. We want to see better support for Woden, for the Woden town centre, for the commercial viability of the town centre, and also we want to see value for money for ACT taxpayers and better access for the day-to-day work that ACT Health staff do in our headquarters, with our front-line service providers at the Canberra Hospital. This move ticks all of those boxes. It is a great outcome for Woden; it is a great outcome for Health. We look forward to getting on with implementing it.

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

**DR BOURKE:** Minister, what benefits will this move of ACT Health to Woden have for the Woden community?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I am not sure how that relates to the ministerial responsibilities of the Minister for Health. Many of these questions have been a bit tenuous in that regard. I will allow it on this occasion, but members really need to be more mindful of whether the questions relate to the minister's responsibilities.

**MR CORBELL:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. What is really clear from the consultations the government undertook a couple of months ago is that there is a strong desire amongst Woden retailers, property owners and the community to see Woden established as a health hub, as a place of health excellence in terms of service delivery and policy development, and that is across both the public and private sectors.

We are responding to that very clear signal that we received from the community and the business sector. We see the real potential for Woden to emerge as a health hub, as a health centre. Obviously we have the Canberra Hospital in the Woden Valley. We have already got the federal Department of Health there. That has a range of functions in the Woden town centre already. The relocation of the ACT Health Directorate in Woden will further strengthen that.

We also have a broad range of private sector health operations also basing themselves in the Woden Valley. For example, there is the excellent ACT orthopaedics function, which is a private facility operating in the Woden Valley. There are other diagnostics and specialist health services located in the Woden town centre, and allied health services as well. Bringing those all together and strengthening Woden's reputation as a centre for health services and health delivery is one of the significant benefits that the Woden community will see from this relocation of the ACT Health Directorate to the Woden town centre.

### **Transport—public**

**MR COE:** My question is to the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services. Minister, will the ACT government meet its target of getting 10.5 per cent of Canberrans to use ACTION to get to work by 2016? If not, how far short will we be?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I thank Mr Coe for the question. ACTION is continuing to make a range of improvements to increase the patronage of ACTION services. Over the past couple of years there have been a significant number of improvements designed to increase patronage. In terms of the timetable, we have seen additional services added to the ACTION network. In terms of on-time running, we have seen an increase from 67 per cent to 79 per cent and above in recent times, as well as improvements to physical infrastructure, new buses and the addition of things such as the live tracking of our buses, the NXTBUS service, so that customers can have certainty about where they are going.

Despite that, and going to the core of Mr Coe's question, which is the 10.5 per cent target, it does seem unlikely that that will be achieved in 2016. Nonetheless the government will continue to improve the service and seek to encourage Canberrans to take the bus, on the basis that too often the stories that appear in the press and the way ACTION is talked about are quite negative, yet those who use the service find it to be



a very good service. So part of our job is to break some of that negative cycle regarding the commentary about the bus service and encourage people to use it more frequently.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Supplementary question, Mr Coe.

**MR COE:** Minister, why has there been a decrease in ACTION boardings each year you have been the minister?

**MR RATTENBURY:** As I said, ACTION has continued to provide an improved service. Clearly some people are choosing to take other options. Some of them are driving; some people will be taking up active travel options. Our job is to keep improving the service and making it an attractive alternative to other options.

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

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, what effect has poor ACTION patronage had on increasing congestion?

**MR RATTENBURY:** There has been no specific analysis done about it. Ms Lawder in her question clearly is surmising certain theories on her part. I think it would be fair to say that obviously more people catching buses means that there are fewer people potentially on the roads taking their private vehicle. That is part of the reason the government is actively working to improve public transport options and make them more attractive to Canberrans so that we can tackle emerging issues of congestion in this city.

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

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, is there general satisfaction with the intertown bus service?

**MR RATTENBURY:** We do undertake satisfaction surveys of the ACTION service. I can inform the Assembly that in the past year that satisfaction rating has gone up from 67 to 75 per cent. Despite the suggestions coming from across the chamber, Canberrans are more satisfied with the ACTION service. As I said in my earlier remarks, there are some challenges because seemingly every other person in this town wants to have a go at running the ACTION bus service down. There are some perception difficulties—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Dr Bourke:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker, the continuous interjections from the opposition are interrupting Mr Rattenbury, which is unparliamentary.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I ask members of the opposition to be a little more restrained in their interjections. It is harder for Mr Rattenbury at the other end of the chamber to deal with that than for those people who are closer. On the supplementary question, Mr Rattenbury.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. The point I was simply trying to make is that it is a source of frustration for me that those people who actually use the service are very satisfied but, unfortunately, there are perception issues around the ACTION bus network, often driven by stories emanating out of this place or stories that focus on the negative elements of the ACTION network. It is our job—

**Mr Coe:** On a point of order, if we could stop the clock, Madam Speaker—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Yes, could you stop the clock.

**Mr Coe:** The question that Ms Lawder asked was simply about whether people are satisfied with the intertown bus services and not with ACTION in general.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** That reflects my notes on the question: what is the general satisfaction with the intertown bus service? I ask the minister, under standing order 118, to be directly relevant to the question.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I did, right at the start of my answer, provide a statistical number for members of the opposition. But we do not have a breakdown, to my knowledge, of asking people specifically about specific services.

### **Roads—Majura Parkway**

**DR BOURKE:** My question is to the Minister for Roads and Parking. Minister, can you inform the Assembly about the opening of the bridge on the Majura Parkway?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Dr Bourke for his question. As members are aware, construction on the Majura Parkway commenced in February 2013 and is scheduled for completion by June 2016. Construction of the road carriageway works on Fairbairn Avenue to the Federal Highway interchange were completed earlier this year and opened to the public in May. This included the section of off-road path that is being built at the same time. In more recent times, construction works have focused on construction of the bridges over the Molonglo River and Fairbairn Avenue and the widening of Pialligo Avenue and Morshead Drive, including associated on-ramps.

The northbound Molonglo bridge was completed for two-way traffic on 11 November prior to the opening of IKEA on 16 November. The bridge across Fairbairn Avenue was also opened at this time; however, the southbound on-ramp from Fairbairn Avenue to the Majura Parkway is still under construction. The closure of Morshead Drive between Fairbairn Avenue and Pialligo Avenue will facilitate this construction as well as enabling the work on the Duntroon No 1 cricket oval to be progressed.

The opening event was great. I would like to thank the team at Roads ACT for the work that they put into its organisation. I was very happy to attend the inspection event with Anthony Albanese MP, who worked hard with the then Chief Minister, Katy Gallagher, to organise joint funding for the project back in 2012.

Along with others in attendance, I inspected the bridge, which is an impressive structure. In the past, I have had an opportunity to walk through the hollow inside passage of the bridge, which is quite a sight. The bridge may not have the appearance from the outside, but inside there is a tunnel for services which is big enough to drive a small appliance through. It really is a good feat of engineering. I was pleased to see this bridge open and I have enjoyed seeing its progress across the river as I drive home from the Assembly on sitting days.

The construction of the southbound bridge across the Molonglo River is nearly completed, and both it and the southbound on-ramp from Fairbairn Avenue will be opened early in the new year. The works at the Duntroon No 1 cricket oval will be completed by March 2016 and the overall project is on track to be completed by June 2016.

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

**DR BOURKE:** Minister, how will the completion of the project facilitate improved travel times in the territory?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Dr Bourke for his supplementary. The Majura Parkway is forecast to carry around 40,000 vehicles a day by the year 2030. The new road will play a significant role in the improvement of people's travel times within our region by easing congestion.

Already motorists are realising the benefits of the new parkway and when fully completed the road will improve traffic flow, safety and capacity on the ACT road network, reduce travel times, improve access to the Majura valley, provide dedicated on-road cycle paths to encourage active travel, provide an off-road, shared use path, support infrastructure for the Canberra International Airport to become a major international freight and commuter hub and improve access to the national and regional freight route. It is estimated that by 2021 it will take seven minutes to travel from the Federal Highway to Fairburn Avenue via Majura Parkway, as opposed to 20 minutes via Majura Road.

Reducing travel and commuting time is an important task for any government in Australia and is one that this government takes seriously and tirelessly works toward achieving. The national and regional benefits of the Majura Parkway are now beginning to be realised, and the full benefit of the project will be seen upon its completion in June next year.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Supplementary question, Ms Porter.

**MS PORTER:** Minister, what benefits will this project provide to the larger freight network?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** It is an important question. I thank Ms Porter for that question. As I have said, it is forecast to carry around 40,000 vehicles a day, including some 6,000 trucks by 2030. The existing two-lane Majura Road carried only 18,000

vehicles a day, of which 2,800 are commercial or heavy freight vehicles, until the parkway began its staged opening. Once complete, the parkway will make accessing the Barton Highway from Majura Park easier and provide a direct connection between the Federal and Monaro Highways.

All of these routes form part of the national freight network. This will enable improved productivity for commercial movements and will enable national, regional and local markets to be accessed more easily. Improved freight productivity is very much in line with the national heavy vehicle reform agenda, particularly given that the freight task will double over the next 15 years. Efficiencies, use of newer performance-based vehicles and lower operating costs afforded by improved infrastructure are key to achieving this.

Infrastructure Australia assessed the Majura Parkway as a priority project because it offered benefits to national freight movements. Even though opened only in a staged manner at present, it is clear that the route will be very attractive to commercial and heavy vehicles.

The opening of the Majura Parkway was one of the factors that influenced IKEA to open up its store in Canberra. This sort of investment in the national freight network provides more incentive for investment and business confidence in the ACT, providing jobs and growth.

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

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Minister, how will the final completion of the—

*Mr Coe interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I am sorry, Ms Fitzharris. Mr Coe was interjecting and I could not hear what you were saying. Could you start again please?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** How will the final completion of the Majura Parkway benefit the territory?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Fitzharris for her interest in roads across the territory. The Majura Parkway will provide benefits in a number of different ways. Nationally, it will contribute to improved productivity for freight traffic and contribute to the national economy in this way, which is vital given the role that road transport freight has nationally. At a regional level the Majura Parkway will link to the Monaro and Federal highways and provide improved access into the New South Wales region and access from the region to Canberra Airport and the transport freight related businesses that are operating from this hub.

Locally, the Majura Parkway adds additional road capacity to the arterial road network. This is necessary given the continued growth of population in Gungahlin, increased employment in the Majura valley and increased commercial activity around the Canberra Airport and the Majura business park. The recently opened IKEA store shows this rise in commercial activity and business confidence in the ACT.

In addition to the main parkway, the project includes an off-road cycle path which runs parallel to the roadway and provides for better active travel connections between the city, Russell, Majura business park, Gungahlin and other parts of the territory. This cycle path also offers access to the various agribusinesses in the Majura valley and presents an opportunity for cycle tours of the area.

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

## **Supplementary answers to questions without notice**

### **Education—ICT training**

**MS BURCH:** I have a general response to a question about teacher librarians and support within libraries. Eighty of our schools have support in libraries through teacher librarians or school admin assistants.

### **Planning—transport**

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Earlier I took a question in regard to congestion costs in the territory, referring to the Infrastructure Australia report earlier in the year. I just want to clarify that the audit report prepared by Infrastructure Australia and launched by Minister Jamie Briggs earlier in the year found that without an additional investment the cost of road congestion in the ACT will increase from \$208 million per annum in 2011 to \$703 million in 2031.

### **Housing—cleaning contract**

**MS BERRY:** I took a question from Ms Lawder regarding the Spotless contract. I can confirm that the scope of the contract has not changed and that Spotless are fulfilling its obligations under the contract.

## **Papers**

**Madam Speaker** presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act—Auditor-General's Report No 9/2015—Public Transport: The Frequent Network, dated 6 November 2015.

Standing order 191—Amendments to the Building (Loose-fill Asbestos Eradication) Legislation Amendment Bill 2015, dated 2 November 2015.

**Mr Barr** presented the following papers:

Mr Fluffy loose-fill asbestos—Update on the ACT Government response to the issue—Quarterly report—1 July to 30 September 2015.

ACT Asbestos Response Taskforce—Pilot Demolition Program—Lessons Learnt Workshop—Executive summary, dated August 2015, prepared by Value Network Pty Ltd.

Public Sector Management Act, pursuant to sections 31A and 79—Copies of executive contracts or instruments—

Long-term contracts:

Adam Stankevicius, dated 21 October 2015.

Andrew Whale, dated 29 October 2015.

Gregory Jones, dated 27 October 2015.

Short-term contracts:

Andrew Whale, dated 27 and 29 October 2015.

Claire Barbato, dated 21 and 22 October 2015.

David Jones, dated 12 and 23 October 2015.

David Snowden, dated 27 and 29 October 2015.

Geoffrey Rutledge, dated 29 and 30 October 2015.

Karl Alderson, dated 29 October and 2 November 2015.

Magdalena Drejer-White, dated 16 and 21 October 2015.

Megan Brighton, dated 21 and 23 October 2015.

Natalie Howson, dated 21 and 23 October 2015.

Samuel Engele, dated 13 and 15 October 2015.

Shaun Strachan, dated 21 and 23 October 2015.

Steven Sanbergs, dated 24 and 29 October 2015.

Susan Chapman, dated 23 October 2015.

Contract variations:

Calvin Robinson, dated 14 and 20 October 2015.

Christopher Webb, dated 13 and 15 October 2015.

David Peffer, dated 12 and 13 October 2015.

Megan Brighton, dated 21 and 22 October 2015.

Tracy Stewart, dated 12 and 13 October 2015.

Tracy Stewart, dated 12 and 13 October 2015.

Financial Management Act, pursuant to—

Section 25—Consolidated Annual Financial Statements, including audit opinion—2014-2015 financial year, dated 28 and 29 October 2015.

Section 26—Consolidated Financial Report—Financial quarter ending 30 September 2015, including financial instruments signed during the quarter.

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Annual Report 2014-2015—Land Development Agency—Corrigendum.

**Mr Corbell** presented the following paper:

Civil Law (Wrongs) Act, pursuant to section 205—General reporting requirements of insurers.

## **Electricity Feed-in (Large-scale Renewable Energy Generation) Act**

### **Papers and statement by minister**

**MR CORBELL** (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for the Environment and Minister for Capital Metro): For the information of members, I present the following papers:

Electricity Feed-in (Large-scale Renewable Energy Generation) Act, pursuant to subsection 22(5)—Wind auction review—

Summary report, dated August 2015, prepared for the Environment and Planning Directorate by Jacobs.

Government response to the summary report.

I ask leave to make a statement in relation to the papers.

Leave granted.

**MR CORBELL:** I am pleased today to table a review of the 200 megawatt wind energy capacity release made on 7 April last year under the Electricity Feed-in (Large-Scale Renewable Energy Generation) Act 2011, as required under section 22 of that act. This is the capacity release that allowed the ACT to conduct its first wind auction in 2014. The intent of the act is to provide feed-in tariff support for large-scale renewable energy generators, with a minimum generating capacity of 200 kilowatts.

The act originally passed in December 2011 has four objectives: to promote the establishment of large-scale renewable energy generators from a range of sources in the Australian capital region and elsewhere; to promote the development of the renewable energy generation industry in the ACT and Australia; to reduce the ACT's greenhouse gas emissions and assist it in reaching its emission reduction targets; and to reduce the ACT's reliance on non-renewable energy sources while minimising costs to electricity consumers.

The first wind auction opened for proposals on 17 April 2014 and closed on 3 September that year. Eighteen proposals were received from 15 proponents. The total capacity of all the proposals was 1,221 megawatts, six times the capacity for which feed-in tariff entitlements could be granted.

I announced the successful proposals of the first auction on 5 February this year. They were the 19.4 megawatt Coonooer Bridge wind farm located north-west of Bendigo, Victoria with a feed-in tariff price of \$81.50 per megawatt hour of output; the 100 megawatt Hornsdale wind farm, located south-east of Port Augusta, South Australia, with a feed-in tariff price of \$92 per megawatt hour; and the 80.5 megawatt Ararat wind farm located near Ararat in western Victoria, with a feed-in tariff price of \$87 per megawatt hour.

I am pleased to report to the Assembly that all three wind farms have reached financial close and all are under various stages of construction. The government is currently assessing proposals made in a second 200 megawatt wind auction that closed for proposals on 14 October this year.

The act requires that a review of each capacity release be undertaken within six months of the last grant of feed-in tariff entitlement. The act also requires the responsibility minister to present a copy of the review to the Assembly no later than six months after the end of the period for the undertaking of the review.

On 19 May this year the Environment and Planning Directorate engaged Jacobs Group (Australia) Pty Ltd to undertake the review. Its final report was delivered to the directorate on 30 July this year, within six months of the last grant of feed-in tariff entitlements under the capacity release that was made on 5 February this year.

The review includes a number of key findings and highlights the overall success of the first wind auction. In summary, the review found that the wind auction was successful in contributing to each of the objectives of the act. In particular, it found the wind auction further consolidated the ACT's reputation as a hub for renewable energy. It found that the output of the auction's successful proposals will abate around 11.7 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions associated with the voluntary surrender of large-scale generation certificates.

The wind auction process recognised and encouraged innovation and best practice in local community engagement. The review found that the treatment of Treasury financial guarantees was highly successful in enabling the government to compare and understand the risks and costs associated with various options, allowing it to select the most appropriate option.

Stakeholders to the review agreed that the wind auction allowed the government to procure wind energy at a highly competitive price. The review concluded that the government successfully leveraged the experience of the solar auction and built lessons learnt into the administration of the wind auction. Finally, the review found that the proposed evaluation framework was transparent and well received by proponents, but that the process could be further improved by clarifying requirements for non-Australian capital region components.

In summary, the review has found that the first wind auction conducted by the government was successful in incentivising the uptake of large-scale wind energy at highly competitive prices, which ultimately will result in less costs being passed through to ACT electricity consumers.

The first wind auction built on the experience of the solar auction held in 2012 and 2013 to deliver three high-quality wind projects that would not only deliver competitively priced renewable electricity but also produce major local investment benefits for the ACT, including the establishment of a new renewable energy skills centre of excellence at the CIT; two new global wind operations centres right here in Canberra; a new ANU course in wind development; and several new locally-based jobs that will focus on the management of three new wind farms.



The value of the local economic benefits of the first wind auction have been valued in excess of \$250 million to the local economy. The success of the first wind auction continues to move the ACT towards meeting its renewable energy targets and demonstrates the territory's continued leadership on climate change and renewable energy. I commend the paper to the Assembly.

## Papers

**Ms Burch** presented the following papers:

Education and Care Services Ombudsman, National Education and Care Services Freedom of Information and Privacy Commissioners—Annual report—1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015.

Official Visitor Act, pursuant to section 17—Annual Report 2014-15—Official Visitor for Disability Services.

## Public Accounts—Standing Committee Report 18—government response

**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) (3.42): For the information of members I present the following paper :

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Report 18—Inquiry into elements impacting on the future of the ACT clubs sector—Government response.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

I want to thank members of the standing committee for their report, along with the individuals and organisations who took the time to make submissions or appear as witnesses at the public hearings. Community clubs play an important role in the life of the territory. We have all supported the many club-sponsored teams on a Saturday morning or have visited our local clubs through the year. However, our clubs are so much more than just a place to watch sport or to go for a meal. Clubs create communities, as was demonstrated by the 85 or so letters received by the committee detailing the support that clubs provide to local choirs, swimming clubs, charitable organisations and a range of other community groups.

The government has always recognised the unique and valuable roles that community clubs play in Canberra. That is why securing the long-term financial viability of the club sector is indeed important. The government supports the efforts that community clubs are making to diversify their business models away from reliance on gaming revenue.

This government is committed to continuing to explore opportunities to best assist clubs to remain viable well into the future. It has delivered on this commitment through the ongoing implementation of commitments through the memorandum of understanding with clubs; significant reductions in red tape over the past 18 months, while continuing to work with ClubsACT about how we can do more of that; changes to tax rates that provide a benefit to all clubs but are particularly geared to helping our small and medium size clubs; and significant reforms delivered as part of the gaming machine reform package, which include commencement of the trading scheme, a reduction of gaming machine numbers in the territory and more assistance for our small clubs.

Through the community clubs task force the government is providing practical assistance to help clubs diversify their business operations. To date, we have listened to the concerns of seven clubs and have successfully addressed the concerns of three. We are continuing to work with the remaining clubs to help them achieve their objectives.

I am, and have always been, approachable and ready to provide the support that I can to clubs. To further enhance operation of the community clubs task force the government has agreed, or agreed in principle, with all of the standing committee's recommendations relating to the task force. The coordination and accessibility of the government are also seen in the services provided by Access Canberra, which is a one-stop shop for government approvals, and which has proactively engaged with the club sector since it was established in November last year.

We remain committed to preserving a strong harm minimisation framework to protect vulnerable problem gamblers and their families within the ACT. That is why we have either agreed or agreed in principle with many of the standing committee's recommendations relating to harm minimisation. We will continue to work to ensure that vulnerable members of our community are provided with the best consumer protections that we can provide.

In closing, I want to again thank the standing committee, the community clubs and those who have made comments. I recognise the presence of ClubsACT here today. No doubt they have a keen interest in the government's response. I will now work across the club sector—as would be appreciated, the committee report was handed down on 27 October, which is not that long ago—so that our positions are clear about what is agreed, agreed in principle and the like.

My job over the coming weeks is to work across government on those elements that it has been agreed will progress, with a clear work program very early in the new year about what we will get on to. My priority and my task for the new year will be to have a very clear time line about how we progress these elements that are worth progressing.

I want to thank the committee. I look forward to ongoing discussions with ClubsACT to make sure that our community clubs here in Canberra are supported, because they support our community in the broadest and deepest sense.

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (3.47): That would be the most disingenuous delivery of a response to a report that I have heard in all my time in this place. If members had listened to the minister speak, she said on a number of occasions, “That’s why the government has either agreed or agreed in principle with many of the standing committee’s recommendations relating to harm minimisation or the task force.” What she did not tell them was that most of the recommendations have not been agreed to or have only been noted by the government. At a quick tally—and I do apologise because I am doing this on the fly—it would appear that 10 have only been noted and 10 have not been agreed to.

What we have is a minister who had an opportunity and failed. What we have is a government that say that this is a club town, and they walked away from this report. And the club industry in this city should be disgusted with this government and their response. We had from the minister a very short tabling statement because she had nothing to say. She said:

To further enhance operation of the community clubs task force the government has agreed, or agreed in principle, with all of the standing committee’s recommendations relating to the task force.

What—one, two or three recommendations relating to the task force? She went on to say:

That is why we have either agreed or agreed in principle with many of the standing committee’s recommendations relating to harm minimisation.

But when you read the report, Madam Assistant Speaker, you will see that they have snubbed the public accounts committee, which in its tripartisan approach worked very hard to deliver a path for the future, a sustainable future for ClubsACT—and this minister must go. This minister is not up to the job of any reform. In every portfolio she has touched—whether it be education, emergency services or the gaming and racing portfolio—she fails.

On recommendation 1, the response is: “Agreed.” The recommendation reads:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Legislative Assembly formally acknowledge the role that ACT clubs play ...

Yes, it is kind of hard not to agree with that. In recommendation 2, the committee said:

The Committee recommends that, following an audit of all current club leases and permitted uses, and following consultation with clubs on proposed leases, the Government determine a list of permitted uses on club sites which must include community benefit.

The response is: “Noted.” There is no commitment to assist the clubs to diversify. There is no commitment to assist the clubs to move away from poker machines as their primary source of income. “We will note it.” We heard the glib lines, such as,

“We will be working with them in the new year.” It would be my bet that they will not be working with you, because they will be appalled by this response.

In recommendation 3 the committee said:

The Committee recommends that the Government move an amendment to the ACT Territory Plan to provide for a specific overlay of the uses allowed on land leased by clubs, subject to planning and building codes.

The response was: “Not agreed.” No reform; no movement; no path forward.

Recommendation 5 was:

The Committee recommends that the Government invite representatives of the community sector and the sport and recreation sector and arts sector to join the community clubs taskforce.

The response was: “Agreed in principle.” We then go to recommendation 6, which reads:

The Committee recommends that a taskforce be established ‘to develop an action plan for problem gambling’ with an initial focus, ‘to reduce the duration of gambling problems when they arise in individuals using targeted approaches.’

The response was: “Not agreed.” How can you not agree to have a task force approach? We have task forces for everything. The standard government answer is, “Let’s put a task force in place,” but not when it comes to problem gambling. You just walk away from that. I have not read the little paragraphs below, so I may have got this wrong. I doubt it, because this is a minister who cannot lead and has lost the opportunity here.

Recommendation 7 reads:

The Committee recommends that the Government not apply a Lease Variation Charge when clubs seek to vary their leases to assist in diversifying their revenue base.

The response is: “Noted.” Recommendation 8 reads:

The Committee recommends that the Government not charge planning fees when a club submits Development Applications that assist the club to diversify its revenue base.

The response is: “Not agreed.” So this is about the revenue for the government. It is not about the future of the clubs. And so it goes on. Recommendation 10 reads:

The Committee recommends that the Government remove the \$250 per day limit on withdrawals from ATMs in club venues.

The response was:

Not agreed.

The ACT Government is committed to retaining its withdrawal limit as an important harm minimisation measure.

They say to people in the ACT club sector, “Not agreed.” And so it goes on. Here is another recommendation:

The Committee recommends that there be no net loss of land zoned in the ACT Territory Plan as CFZ.

That is the community zone. The government response was: “Noted.” Recommendation 17 reads:

The Committee recommends that the Government match the clubs sector levy paid to the PGAF—

the problem gambling assistance fund—

dollar for dollar, to fund programs to assist additional research and amelioration of problem gambling.

The response was: “Not agreed.” The government get \$33 million a year from the gambling sector, and how much do they put back in? When we last asked it was less than \$400,000 that was put directly into addressing problem gambling. They take that and they blame the club sector, and the blame game continues. We do not tell Ford every time there is a road death that they have to run a road safety program, or Toyota or Holden, but when there is a problem gambler it is the club’s problem. And the government takes the money and walks away from it. The government ought to be ashamed of themselves.

Recommendation 18 was that there should be a whole range of studies done. The response was:

Noted.

The government notes the preferred range of ... projects ...

In recommendation 19, the committee recommended that when the result of each study is received that it be tabled in the Assembly. The response was: “Noted.” They probably will not go ahead, so we will not get those tabled here, members.

Recommendation 21 reads:

The Committee recommends that the Government re-establish a full Professorial Chair of Gambling Studies at the ANU.

The response was: “Not agreed.” All members of the committee—Liberal, Labor and Greens—agreed to this, but not the government. This is a government that has no commitment to problem gaming and addressing those issues in the ACT. This is a government that is simply committed to its coffers, and it should be ashamed of itself.

Recommendation 24 reads:

The Committee recommends that all EGM payouts over \$800 be paid by cheque or EFT.

The response was: "Noted." Recommendation 25 reads:

The Committee recommends that the Government pursue, at a national level, maximum \$1 per spin and bet rates ...

The response was: "Noted." Where is the commitment? There is no commitment, no leadership and no notion at all from this minister. This minister is a disgrace and she should resign. Recommendation 26 reads:

The Committee recommends that the Government investigate differential tax rates for clubs that have better problem gambling measures in place.

The response was: "Not agreed." If you do a good job, there is not even a reward here. So why would you do a good job? The government is going to blame you, the government is going to take the funding, and this government under this minister is not going to help you. The government and the minister ought to be ashamed.

It goes on, Madam Assistant Speaker. Recommendation 34 reads:

The Committee recommends that the Government review current Electronic Gaming Machines storage provisions to facilitate removal of Electronic Gaming Machines from club floors with a view to making the reduction permanent.

The response was: "Noted." We talk about getting machines off the floor and the response is "noted". There is no commitment at all and no leadership from this minister. In recommendation 35 the committee recommends that the government consider how best to devise a water subsidy scheme for eligible clubs that extends the community WAC subsidy for clubs that invest in water security infrastructure and extends subsidies for water. The response was: "Noted." Again, if you do the right thing, this is not a government that will reward you. If you do the right thing, this is a government that will continue to tax you, because that is all it is about.

Recommendation 37 reads:

The Committee recommends that the Government fund a study into the cross-border leakage of ACT gamblers into NSW.

The government response was: "Not agreed." Aren't you even vaguely interested, as a government, in how different regimes of gaming and taxation affect what goes on in the ACT? Aren't you even vaguely interested in actually operating from a position of knowledge about how gaming occurs in the ACT and what leaks over the border, which we have no control over? Apparently not, Madam Assistant Speaker.

Recommendation 38 is that, when the results of the study into leakage are received, they be tabled. The response was: “Not agreed.” They are just not going to do it. Recommendation 41 reads:

The Committee recommends that Phase One of the Government’s Clubs reform package be no shorter than three years.

The response was: “Not agreed.” There you go. It is a tripartisan committee and I think all members voted for this in the end. A tripartisan committee said, “Make it three years, give them some certainty, give them a go, let them diversify.” Not this government. There is no leadership, no direction, no plan and no ambition. They are just interested in the revenue.

Recommendation 42 reads:

The Committee recommends that the Government give no less than twelve months notice of their intention to move to Phase Two of their Clubs Reform Package.

The response again was: “Not agreed.” All they asked for was some certainty. We cannot even give the club sector and small businesses some certainty. We heard the government at question time say how interested they were in supporting small business and securing jobs. Well, they want certainty too. All of those little businesses—the bakers, the butchers and the suppliers that hang off clubs—want their club to have certainty, so that they can give certainty to their employees, and the chain goes on. But the government says, “No, we’ll change this at the drop of a hat because we won’t even give you 12 months.” Who in the modern world in the business community does less than 12 month planning? No-one. It is ridiculous. Again there is no leadership. The opportunity is blown. That is just appalling.

Recommendation 45 reads:

The Committee recommends that the Government undertake an assessment of the contribution of clubs to the ACT community.

The response was:

Noted.

The contribution of clubs to the ACT community has been acknowledged by the government, and in the PAC report itself ...

But we do not know how big it is. We do not know what it genuinely is. Why wouldn’t you want to fund a study to find out what you are dealing with, how important it is and how many people it really employs? What are the knock-on effects? What are the second and third round effects? What are the contributions to tourism? What are the contributions to the wellbeing of people? What are the contributions to community safety? Wouldn’t you want to know that? Apparently not.

This report is the epitome of abject failure in terms of policy development for problem gaming in the ACT. It is the responsibility of the minister. She is an abject failure in bringing this here when almost half of the reforms have been rejected out of hand. They are just not going to happen.

The question is: what is left? The answer is: not very much. If you are in the club sector, you might have been looking for some hope. You might have been looking for a little bit of certainty—perhaps a small Christmas gift from the minister who botched up Christmas last year so badly and so appallingly. You would think they might want to give consideration to giving a clear indication to the club sector that they have actually read the report, that they have read the submissions and that they understand the difficulties that are faced.

You would think they would actually read, for instance, the ClubsACT submission about what is required, much of which is picked up in our report, and have done something concrete about it. All we got was a snow job. The minister picked two very small areas with which she agreed, or agreed in principle, to give the illusion that this report was moving forward.

This report is a failure. This minister is a failure. The Chief Minister should remove her. Reshuffle her out, get rid of her in any way possible, and give the club sector of the ACT the sort of minister they deserve—somebody actually with the wit, with the ken, to make it work for them, instead of producing that drivel and dropping that in the Assembly today.

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (3.59): I would like to make a few remarks in relation to this process. It really is an insult to the committee process, to the MLAs and, indeed, to the committee office when this committee seemingly went to great lengths to put together a report that, by and large, had tripartisan agreement and that in effect paved the way for this government to undertake policy reform in what is a tricky area of policy. Instead the minister has totally squibbed the opportunity. It could not have been any easier. She had the cover of Labor, Liberals and the Greens, all in agreement on numerous policy areas. Instead we see this gutless response.

The actual document, the formal response, squibs out of all the recommendations. We then heard the speech today, which did not go to the core of the issues at all. This is a government that has a big stake in the club sector. It is a government that draws millions of dollars in revenue through pokies, not only through government coffers but also, as the governing party, through the Labor Club. We believe that this government has a conflict of interest when it comes to governing in this space. That is why it would have been an even better opportunity, under the cover of Labor, Liberals and the Greens all being in agreement, regarding recommendations for the future of this sector.

It begs the question: if the minister is not going on the advice of the witnesses to the committee, if she is not going on the advice of the committee, if she is not going on the advice of Labor, the Liberals and the Greens, whose advice is she going on? Who is actually steering the ship? Either we have a situation where the minister is negligent and has no idea about how to govern or there are other forces at play here which are dictating how policy is generated within that portfolio.



One way or another, it is a real worry that you have a minister with a very clear conflict with regard to the Labor clubs, and she had the cover of this committee to bring about some certainty and stability, and she squibs that opportunity. It is an insult to all involved in that committee and I hope that she has a good think about this response and comes into the Assembly at a later date with some revised responses to each of the recommendations.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Paper**

**Ms Burch** presented the following paper:

Gaming Machine Act, pursuant to section 168—Community contributions made by Gaming Machine Licensees—Report by the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission—1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015, dated 20 October 2015.

## **Planning and Development Act 2007—variation No 343 to the territory plan**

### **Papers and statement by minister**

**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): For the information of members, I present the following papers:

Planning and Development Act, pursuant to subsection 79(1)—Approval of Variation No. 343 to the Territory Plan—Residential blocks surrendered under the loose fill asbestos insulation eradication scheme, dated 11 November 2015, together with background papers, a copy of the summaries and reports, and a copy of any direction or report required.

Planning, Environment and Territory and Municipal Services—Standing Committee—Report 10—Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No. 343—Residential blocks surrendered under the loose fill asbestos insulation eradication scheme—Government response.

I ask leave to make a statement in relation to the papers.

Leave granted.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Variation 343 to the territory plan proposes to permit unit titled dual occupancy development on blocks within the residential RZ1 suburban zone. The variation will only apply to blocks that are 700 square metres or larger that have been surrendered under the loose-fill asbestos insulation scheme. The variation provides an opportunity to increase housing choice in established areas, and will also assist in recouping some of the government's costs incurred by the asbestos eradication scheme.

The variation represents a modest increase in residential density on these surrendered blocks. Dual occupancy development is already permitted on blocks over 800 square metres or larger in the RZ1 zone. However, they currently cannot be unit titled. Reducing the minimum block size to 700 square metres or larger for surrendered blocks only adds approximately 200 more dual occupancy opportunities on the subject blocks.

Notwithstanding this, concerns about potential impacts have been addressed through additional provisions in the variation to protect residential amenity and character. These include a maximum plot ratio of 35 per cent and a building height of one storey for dual occupancy developments that do not both front the street. These provisions are aimed directly at dual occupancy development where one dwelling is behind the first dwelling.

There is also a design criterion that will apply to dual occupancy development to ensure that the amenity of existing areas is maintained and supported. This provision will ensure that dual occupancy developments will be designed to a high quality whilst minimising its impact on the neighbourhood and streetscape.

Draft variation 343 was released for public comment between 10 April and 25 May this year and attracted 124 submissions. The main issues related to potential impacts on residential amenity and character. A report on the consultation responding to the issues raised in the submissions was prepared by the Environment and Planning Directorate.

No changes were made to the draft variation because the issues raised in the public submissions can be dealt with through the planning provisions already included in the draft variation. Under section 73 of the Planning and Development Act I referred the recommended draft variation to the Standing Committee on Planning, Environment and Territory and Municipal Services. On October 27 this year, the standing committee tabled its report No 10 in relation to DV 343.

I have prepared the government response to the four recommendations in the standing committee report. I have agreed in principle to improve the presentation of complex draft variations to facilitate public understanding of their content. I have also undertaken to explore options to increase housing choices throughout Canberra, including titling options for medium density housing. This will, of course, include considerable public consultation if any amendments to the territory plan go through as proposed. In relation to the last of the four recommendations, I can advise that the asbestos response task force already has a consultation plan and support strategies in place to assist with the next stage of the asbestos eradication scheme.

Two of the four standing committee members made recommendations in relation to DV 343. I have also included responses to the three additional recommendations in the government response to the standing committee report.

I want to thank the chair of the standing committee, Ms Meegan Fitzharris MLA, and Dr Chris Bourke MLA for their recommendation that the variation proceed. I note the recommendation in relation to applying a 50 per cent plot ratio to dual occupancy

development on the surrendered blocks whether both dwellings address the street or not. I acknowledge that this would make it more feasible for many of the surrendered blocks to accommodate dual occupancy dwellings without the rear dwelling being considerably smaller than the front dwelling.

After careful consideration of this recommendation, I have decided to proceed with the variation with the existing 35 per cent plot ratio. I am mindful that the draft variation that was released for consultation had the 35 per cent plot ratio, and changing it to 50 per cent now would be a surprise to many in the community. I do not disregard the 50 per cent plot ratio out of hand; I think it has merit. But it needs to be considered in a broader, more strategic review of residential zones. This will allow consideration of appropriate provisions to limit the potential impacts of the 50 per cent plot ratio on surrounding dwellings.

Lastly, I can advise the two members of the standing committee that at the completion of the first refusal process the ACT government will explore any options available to it to consolidate blocks for multi-unit developments. However, there are strong controls in place in the RZ1 zone that may prevent this. Should any suitable sites in the RZ1 zone be identified, they would need to be considered on their merits and, if deemed appropriate, would be subject to further territory plan variation processes.

I am satisfied that variation 343 strikes a balance between modest increases in residential density and protecting residential amenity and character. It will also assist in recouping some of the costs incurred by the asbestos eradication scheme.

The ACT government did not ask for or anticipate the asbestos insulation problem, but I am proud to say that we have dealt with it and we continue to deal with it head on. We have not balked at difficult decisions. Amending the territory plan in relation to surrendering blocks is one part of the response.

## **Papers**

**Mr Gentleman** presented the following papers:

Official Visitor Act, pursuant to section 17—Annual Report 2014-15—Official Visitor for Children and Young People.

Children and Young People Act, pursuant to subsection 727S(5)—ACT Children and Young People Death Review Committee—Annual Report 2014-15, dated 30 October 2015.

## **Children and young people's commitment Paper and statement by minister**

**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): For the information of members, I present the following paper:

ACT Children and Young People's Commitment 2015-2025—Priority areas.

I ask for leave to make a statement in relation to the paper.

Leave granted.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** As the Minister for Children and Young People I thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Assembly today about the ACT children and young people's commitment 2015-2025. In presenting today's statement I acknowledge my colleague Minister Burch, who initiated the development of this piece of work in May 2014 in response to the need to replace the ACT children's plan 2010-2014 and the ACT young people's plan 2009-2014, both of which ceased at the end of last year.

The commitment has been developed through extensive consultation with children, young people, community agencies and the ACT government. It has been informed by an evidence base and developed using a consultative community engagement process. Over 1,500 people provided feedback during the first round of consultations. A further 87 people provided feedback during the final round of consultations. This rigorous consultation has shaped the creation of the commitment's key priorities.

The commitment sets the vision for a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to promoting the rights of Canberra's children and young people who are aged from zero to 25 years. It is a whole-of-government commitment to work genuinely with our community to ensure Canberra remains a great place for children and young people to live, to learn, to work and to thrive. Our children and young people have identified to us what they see as priorities for them. Our children and young people want strong families and communities that are inclusive, supportive and nurturing; access to quality healthcare, learning and employment opportunities; and to be kept safe and protected from harm. They want the implementation of policy that enables conditions for them to thrive. They want advocacy for their rights, and they want to be included in decision making, especially in areas that affect them; ensuring that they are informed and have a voice. Fundamentally, they want to belong to strong families that are able to meet their needs.

We are lucky to live in a city with quality healthcare, learning and employment opportunities. Our children and young people have told us they need to be able to continue to access these opportunities in order to thrive. Access to quality healthcare and education are the building blocks of development. We will commit to providing children and young people with access to culturally and developmentally appropriate healthcare which is affordable. We know that readily accessible healthcare is a protective factor for children and young people. Healthcare prevents problems compounding and improves the long-term outcomes for individuals, families and their communities.

Young people have also told us that education is vitally important to them. While many young people transition well and remain engaged in the school system, we must ensure that for young people who are more vulnerable there is help and support available so that they do not get left behind. We will support these children and young people through the implementation of a world-class ACT curriculum from preschool to year 12 aligned with the Australian curriculum. This curriculum will ensure that our children transition through school having attained the skills for life which will set them up to live life as best as possible.

To ensure that our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are not left behind we will continue to work collaboratively with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and organisations. In this way we can ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are fully engaged in lifelong learning and positive generational experiences, as outlined in the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement 2015-2018.

Providing our children and young people with quality healthcare, education and employment opportunities is not a small task. We will measure our progress in fulfilling these needs through the children and young people's outcomes framework. This framework tracks nationally recognised indicators of health, wellbeing, learning and development outcomes over time. Our children and young people have identified that they require the government to implement policy that enables the conditions for them to thrive.

Access to safe and affordable housing is protective as a factor for children and young people. Safe accommodation provides a young person with the ability to engage meaningfully with their community and environment, particularly while reducing the impacts of poverty and vulnerability. For example, domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children in Australia. As the Canberra community unites against these criminal behaviours we must ensure that our vulnerable children and young people remain supported and protected. Safe and secure housing provides a refuge for families fleeing violent homes and an opportunity for the affected individuals to regain their independence.

We recognise that to ensure the safety and security of our children and young people we must deliver a substantial and sustained reduction in the levels of child abuse and neglect; address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the statutory system; and invest in trauma-informed services that engage with vulnerable families. We will work to keep our children and young people safe and protected from harm. This is what we are doing through the implementation of a step up for our kids and the blueprint for youth justice in the ACT.

In the bigger picture, most children and young people in the ACT are faring well. We can and will improve our services and programs to build resilience, identify the strengths of our children, young people and their families, and build their capacity to overcome risk factors to development. This work will be done through the implementation of the human services blueprint's better services initiative and the strengthening families project. We will improve outcomes for families and contribute to system-wide reforms that provide targeted, much-needed support for children, young people and their families.

Children and young people have told us that they want to grow up in communities that are inclusive, supportive and nurturing. An example of this is the access to safe playing spaces. Our children deserve to grow up in neighbourhoods with good parks, playgrounds and play spaces; areas in our community which provide the opportunity to explore the self and environment and, through play, develop skills necessary for adulthood. By prioritising safe, inclusive community environments, such as our parks

and play spaces, we will promote the positive development of our young children as they transition from early childhood and build their personal capacity to achieve their best possible lives.

Our children and young people have asked us to advocate the importance of their rights to the broader community. We have the opportunity to build a stronger and safer community for children and young people by creating broader awareness of children and young people's rights across the government, the community and the media. Through this process there is an opportunity to tailor our focus and ensure the needs and rights of children and young people and their families living with disabilities are well understood. We are committed to understanding the challenges faced by children and young people when they take on caring roles for persons living with a disability. These challenges include engagement with the education system, financial stress and compromised health and wellbeing.

I will turn now to the final priority of the commitment. Our children and young people have told us they want to be heard. They need to be included in decision making, especially in areas that affect them so that they can be informed and have a voice. Social inclusion and youth engagement is a priority for our government. We recognise the importance of engaging with the younger members of our community to collaboratively build policies and services that are effective, targeted and respond to their needs.

This is an important opportunity across the whole of government. Youth engagement is not the sole responsibility of the human services system; our children and young people are innovative. They have ideas, they know what is important to them and most importantly, they know what they need. We must respect their intelligence and consult with them meaningfully in varied and genuine ways about the issues that affect them.

We can learn and we must learn from our children and young people. Our children and young people have a lot to offer, and through the ACT children and young people's commitment we commit to listening to their voices. The commitment is something that we, as a government, are proud of. The commitment sets a broad direction for us as a government and the community to promote the rights of children and young people, and sets a framework for how we can achieve this through policy areas and areas of action.

At its core the commitment is a celebration of the strengths of our children and young people. However, the commitment also recognises that we must provide support to the more vulnerable members of our youth community to ensure that their development is not hampered and they do not fall behind.

To ensure this whole-of-government commitment to children and young people, the children and young people's task force will continue to oversee the implementation, promotion and dissemination of the commitment both across government and to the broader ACT community.

It is against this background that the commitment's progress will be monitored annually through a ministerial statement to the Assembly that allows us to celebrate progress and identify opportunities for improvements. This annual ministerial statement will coincide with the release of the ACT publication, *A Picture of ACT's Children and Young People*, which has been reviewed to ensure that it can be the reporting mechanism of the commitment's key priorities. I will present an annual statement to the Assembly regarding the progress of the commitment and our efforts to meet its priority areas.

Madam Assistant Speaker, I look forward to presenting our progress to you and celebrating the success of our children and young people with you. I am committed to a Canberra where every child and young person is provided with the supports they need to thrive. This is a vision for Canberra that I am proud to be a part of. I commend the ACT children and young people's commitment 2015-2025 to the Assembly.

## **Official Visitor for Homelessness Services—annual report 2014-15**

### **Paper and statement by minister**

**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): For the information of members, I present the following paper:

Official Visitor Act, pursuant to section 17—Annual Report 2014-15—Official Visitor for Homelessness Services.

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

Leave granted.

**MS BERRY:** Today I am pleased to table the 2014-15 annual report for the Official Visitor for Homelessness Services. The official visitor scheme is in place to safeguard the interests of both people being held in government institutions and people staying in community facilities who would not be able to move elsewhere if they experienced an issue with their accommodation or service provider. The objective of the scheme is to detect and prevent systemic dysfunction in these locations. For homelessness services, this means the scheme provides a monitoring and complaints mechanism for people residing in crisis accommodation and who are dependent on service providers or accommodation managers for care and support.

Ms Dianne Lucas is currently serving a three-year term as the Official Visitor for Homelessness Services. In this role Ms Lucas inspects properties used by ACT specialist homelessness services. She is available to talk with and receive and consider complaints from people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and who are staying in multiple occupancy and supported accommodation facility for homeless people provided by an organisation that is funded by the territory.

As part of the official visitor duties, Ms Lucas makes two scheduled visits a year to each visitable place. In addition to these visits and talking with residents, the official visitor fulfils her role by inspecting records, reporting on the standard of facilities and providing quarterly reports to me, which are collated into the annual report, which I have presented today.

I am pleased to report that in its first year of operation Ms Lucas visited 33 visitable places providing supported housing to young people, single men, single women, women and children escaping domestic violence, women who are pregnant or with babies and women exiting the Alexander Maconochie Centre. At all of these visits Ms Lucas talked with residents about their accommodation and identified any issues that they may have had with the service provider. She facilitated discussions between individuals and service providers to ensure early resolution of issues.

I particularly note the low number of official complaints. That only two official complaints were received indicates the quality of services provided and the residents' high level of satisfaction with the accommodation and support that they receive. Both complaints were resolved satisfactorily. There were no referrals to investigative entities and no systemic failure was identified.

In her final report Ms Lucas noted that she remains impressed with the homelessness response in the ACT and the dedication of services to working with and achieving outcomes for their clients.

## Papers

**Ms Berry** presented the following paper:

Estimates 2015-2016—Select Committee—Report—*Appropriation Bill 2015-2016 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2015-2016*—Government response to Recommendation 65.

**Ms Burch** presented the following papers:

### **Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)**

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Cemeteries and Crematoria Act—Cemeteries and Crematoria (Perpetual Care Trust Percentage and Perpetual Care Trust Reserve Percentage) Determination 2015 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-298 (LR, 30 October 2015).

Children and Young People Act—Children and Young People Amendment Regulation 2015 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2015-32 (LR, 14 October 2015).

Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act—Crimes (Sentence Administration) (Sentence Administration Board) Appointment 2015 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-288 (LR, 22 October 2015).



Food Act—

Food (Fees) Determination 2015 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-292 (LR, 29 October 2015).

Food (Regulated events) Declaration 2015 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-286 (LR, 15 October 2015).

Health Records (Privacy and Access) Act—Health Records (Privacy and Access) (Fees) Determination 2015 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-294 (LR, 29 October 2015).

Legal Profession Act—Legal Profession (Volunteer Solicitor Practising Fees) Determination 2015—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-290 (LR, 26 October 2015).

Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act—Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods (Fees) Determination 2015 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-295 (LR, 29 October 2015).

Planning and Development Act—Planning and Development (Land Rent Payout) Policy Direction 2015 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-308 (LR, 12 November 2015).

Public Health Act—Public Health (Fees) Determination 2015 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-293 (LR, 29 October 2015).

Public Trustee Act—Public Trustee (Investment Board) Appointment 2015 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-296 (LR, 2 November 2015).

Radiation Protection Act—Radiation Protection (Fees) Determination 2015 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-291 (LR, 29 October 2015).

Road Transport (General) Act—

Road Transport (General) (Public Passenger Services Licence and Accreditation Fees) Determination 2015—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-297 (LR, 29 October 2015).

Road Transport (General) Non-Refundable Fees Determination 2015 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-289 (LR, 22 October 2015).

Road Transport (General) Act and Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Act—Road Transport Legislation Amendment Regulation 2015 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2015-33 (LR, 29 October 2015).

Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Act—Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) (Exemptions) Amendment Regulation 2015 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2015-34 (LR, 29 October 2015).

Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Regulation—Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Parking Authority Declaration 2015 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-287 (LR, 22 October 2015).

Taxation Administration Act—Taxation Administration (Eligible Impacted Properties—Loose-fill Asbestos Insulation Eradication Buyback Concession Scheme) Determination 2015 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-307 (LR, 12 November 2015).

## **Community councils**

### **Discussion of matter of public importance**

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Dr Bourke): Madam Speaker has received letters from Dr Bourke, Mr Coe, Mr Doszpot, Ms Fitzharris, Mr Hanson, Mrs Jones, Ms Lawder, Ms Porter, Mr Smyth and Mr Wall proposing that matters of public importance be submitted to the Assembly. In accordance with standing order 79, she has determined that the matter proposed by Ms Lawder be submitted to the Assembly, namely:

The importance of community councils in the ACT.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (4.27): I am pleased to talk about the important role that community councils play in the ACT. We know that they are an important part of our community. There are a number of community councils obviously throughout the ACT and the one I am most familiar with, of course, is the Tuggeranong Community Council. There is also the Woden Valley Community Council, the Gungahlin Community Council and community councils in Weston Creek, the inner north, the inner south and Belconnen. There are quite a range of community councils.

It was disappointing recently to hear the Chief Minister disparage the role of community councils in the ACT because community councils represent a wide range of Canberrans. They have people of all genders, all ages, all ethnic backgrounds involved, and I know that because I go to a number of community council meetings. During the annual reports hearing on 4 November this year the Chief Minister said:

The idea that a community council is in any way representative, given that most of the attendees are of one particular gender in some councils and, again, way out of connect with the demographic distribution of people living in particular regions, is another example of where communication and consultation need to be much broader.

In essence, the Chief Minister was saying that community councils are not representative or particularly useful in their contribution to debate on planning and other matters in our community.

Community councils have a number of successes under their belt, and I point out that they are run by volunteers. These are people who give up their time and effort in order to improve our communities. There is an old saying that if you are not part of the solution then you are part of the problem. These are people who are trying to be part of a solution. It is very disappointing to see their tireless efforts being run down by the Chief Minister.

This is not the first time. Unfortunately, the ACT Labor government has a bit of a history of community council bashing. Back in 2012 in this place then Labor backbencher Mr Hargreaves called the Tuggeranong Community Council an old persons club and referred to its members as a geriatric mob, nothing but a self-help group that he “would not touch with a barge pole”. That was pretty unfortunate, and even more unfortunate is the fact that Mr Barr is continuing that history of

badmouthing community councils. It is plain to see that this ACT Labor government is not supportive of community councils and the work they do and does not value the contribution that they make.

When I attend regular meetings of the Tuggeranong Community Council I see the fantastic work that they do and try to do, sometimes against the wishes of the government, on behalf of Tuggeranong residents. The aim of the Tuggeranong Community Council is to provide a coordinated voice for issues affecting the Tuggeranong Valley, and it represents a wide range of residents in Tuggeranong.

One achievement that the Tuggeranong Community Council is very proud of is the decision of the federal government Department of Social Services to stay in Tuggeranong. I know my federal colleague Senator Seselja lobbied hard for that, but the Tuggeranong Community Council certainly played its part in that decision as well.

The Tuggeranong Community Council also lobbied for a greater CIT presence in Tuggeranong, because approximately 75 per cent of students at Woden came from Tuggeranong. Now there is going to be a CIT in Tuggeranong, on Anketell Street, and a lot of that is thanks to the tireless lobbying of the Tuggeranong Community Council. It is also an example of how community councils are effective at representing and advocating for a wide range of people in the ACT.

I am not familiar with all the community councils in Canberra but I am sure they all have their role to play in representing the views of a diverse range of people. I have been to the Woden Valley Community Council, for example. They have done a lot of work in lobbying government departments to stay in the Woden area. We heard today about an announcement in that regard.

Community councils are closely involved in planning consultations. The Tuggeranong Community Council has been very much involved in the clean-up of the lake, Lake Tuggeranong, and lobbying for wetlands or other solutions to the problems we have seen in Lake Tuggeranong.

More recently Glenys Putulny was elected president of the Tuggeranong Community Council. Beverly Flint is one of the deputy vice presidents. In relation to Mr Barr's comment about gender, I am not too sure exactly what he was referring to because, from my experience of the Tuggeranong Community Council, the Tuggeranong Community Council does have a range of genders represented, as are the people who attend the council meetings, which, incidentally, are held on the first Tuesday of each month at the Southern Cross Club in Tuggeranong, if you would like to go.

Many of our Assembly colleagues have attended those meetings. It is hard to understand why they then denigrate the importance of them. Many times I have heard members of the Labor government talk about how they consulted with the community councils. An example earlier this year was when we talked about the closure of Tharwa Drive. One of the defences that the government put up was that they had consulted with the Tuggeranong Community Council. It appears to be one of those things where the government want to have their cake and eat it too. They denigrate councils when it suits them and they use councils to support their argument when it suits them.

We value the role of community councils and think they play an important role. The ACT government provides funding to the seven community councils across the ACT, which are Belconnen, Gungahlin, north Canberra, inner south Canberra, Woden valley, Weston Creek and Tuggeranong. Recently there was a review by the Auditor-General of community funding. I do not understand why, if this Labor government feel that community councils are not contributing and are not fulfilling the role they are supposed to through their funding, the government would keep funding them if the they truly believed the councils were not fulfilling an important role in our community. It is one of those things where you are trying to have your cake and eat it too.

We value the role of community councils. We are always attending community council meetings so that we hear the views of residents. I think many members of the Assembly value the role of community councils and I am sure do not agree with the views that were expressed by the Chief Minister during the annual reports hearings. I believe that community councils provide a valuable mechanism for representing and advocating the views of everyday Canberrans. They are volunteers who are out there doing their bit, trying their hardest to make our communities better places. I think there have been many successes that we can point to where they have done that.

Perhaps some councils are not as effective as others. I can only base my views on the ones that I have attended. But it is much better to listen and to go and talk with people who are willing to play their part than it is to always hear those people who want to harp, complain and whinge without actually playing a role in trying to achieve something and make communities better. That is what community councils are trying to do. That is what the volunteers who become the executive, the committee, of community councils do. They have a genuine desire to make Canberra a better place, most especially their own local region.

More recently I have seen a number of Labor and Greens candidates suddenly starting to turn up to community council meetings. Those candidates must either believe that there is value in community councils or they have been directed to go there by members of their parties for some reason. Again, if you believe they are not useful why are you going to those meetings?

*Mr Coe interjecting—*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Order, members!

**MS LAWDER:** They even preselect people who have been—

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Ms Lawder, please address your remarks through the chair.

**MS LAWDER:** I beg your pardon?

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Please address your remarks through the chair.

**MS LAWDER:** Who was I talking to? I am sorry. I was a bit thrown by that—who I might have been speaking to at the time. Yes, there has been a person preselected who I believe is a chair of a community council. I am sure that person was a bit taken aback by the Chief Minister's remarks as well.

I believe the councils play an important role in our community. Most especially I believe the Tuggeranong Community Council do a great job in representing the views of their members and the wider community. They have a number of subcommittees, such as an environment one, a transport one and a health and community one. Again, they are all led by volunteers and they undertake enormous hours of work in order to try and represent the views of the community and improve their own communities.

I congratulate those people who are part of community councils. I hope they continue doing that work and do not become discouraged by the words of the Chief Minister. I commend the work of community councils throughout the ACT.

**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) (4.38): I thank Ms Lawder for bringing this matter of public importance here today. Canberra is developing into a vibrant capital city, becoming one of the most livable and prosperous cities in the country. As Minister for Planning I hope to see Canberra further mature into a sustainable and more innovative city. Engagement and consultation with the community, I am proud to say, is essential to the work of the Environment and Planning Directorate and, indeed, all functions of the government.

We all know that we have one of the most educated and engaged communities when it comes to planning our city. During the year consultation has occurred on the following projects in my portfolio: the statement of planning intent, the Woden town centre master plan, the Mawson group centre master plan, the Belconnen town centre master plan, the Curtin group centre master plan, the Calwell group centre master plan, the eastern broadacre study, the city and Northbourne urban design framework, the ACT freight strategy and the low emission vehicle strategy. Community councils have made an important contribution to all of these consultations, and continue to do so.

However, it is vitally important that we seek the views of the widest range of Canberrans in demographics, location, age and gender if we are to build a city that is for all Canberrans. Whilst we value the role that all community councils play in the planning of this city, we cannot rely only on their views to guide the city for the future.

No better evidence of this can be found than in the statement of planning intent which outlines the five-year plan for our nation's capital. The statement is now available online at [www.planning.act.gov.au](http://www.planning.act.gov.au) and sets out the short, medium and long-term actions to deliver the best planning outcomes for Canberra.

Throughout a period of six weeks in March to April we were in contact with over 170 members of the community and key stakeholders. This was achieved through workshops, online surveys and feedback forms. Of these, over 120 stakeholders attended six workshops to provide feedback surrounding the statement of planning intent.

We have also been able to successfully harness social media to receive responses from numerous constituents across the ACT. These responses provided by members of the community allow us to address their concerns and update our proposals based on the community's feedback. We have received steady support for the statement with consistent messages on the importance of urban renewal and place making, prioritisation of the planning framework, pursuit of innovation and, more simply, just to get on with the job of delivering outcomes-based planning options.

We also carried out extensive consultation with several community councils regarding what developments the local community would like to see in the future. Some of the councils who participated in the statement of planning intent workshops were, of course, the community councils around the city, including the Belconnen Community Council, the Gungahlin Community Council and the Tuggeranong Community Council.

I make particular mention of the young planners session we had. It was aimed at engaging them in quick rounds to extract their ideas, their vision and how to make where they live better. These young people are the future of our city, and the decisions we make today are the ones that they will have to live with. We must engage with them in a way they want to be engaged and we must continue not only to hear their ideas but to put them into action. That is what the statement of planning intent has delivered, and only because we engaged in such a diverse range of groups and views.

Leading up to the current proposed town centre master plans we always survey our local constituents. We discuss the relevant proposals and vision for these town centres to gather local intelligence and feedback to our initial plans. Discussions, of course, also involved vast consultation with community councils regarding the master plans for Belconnen, Curtin and Kippax, to name a few.

Prior to the release of the light rail network plan in recent weeks extensive consultation was carried out across all Canberra on the light rail network as it will be built as leading infrastructure. In addition to discussions with these local community councils, we also contacted a wide range of constituents. These included academics and researchers, government agencies, other community groups, both the young and the elderly, and business groups. Some of the groups contacted included the Housing Industry Association ACT, the Heritage Council ACT, ActewAGL and several CSIRO organisations. We continue to engage through our consultations in the community and online, closing on 11 December this year, for that process.

Perhaps the work of the Tuggeranong Community Council is what I am most familiar with, and I was pleased to hear Ms Lawder's comments on the council earlier. I mention their engagement, in particular their work on the Tuggeranong waterway program including detailed, continuing studies with Waterwatch, their work on the activation of Anketell Street and Tuggeranong town park, their efforts with footsteps to follow, their support for the Tuggeranong CIT and the walk-in centre and, of course, their great support for Southquay as well.

I am committed to building a sustainable city with a high quality of living. These developments require consultation with community councils, the youth and elderly, businesses, students, researchers and many other stakeholders. I want to genuinely engage with the community to build a conversation that ensures that Canberra remains the world's most livable city.

Every group mentioned has a unique and creative view which is relevant to the future of Canberra. By extensively engaging a large demographic, we are able to obtain a more diverse response about the town centre master plans, the light rail network and, of course, the statement of planning intent. The only way to get the broad community knowledge surrounding Canberra's future is to address and contact all of our constituents, which allows us to receive feedback from all Canberrans.

While of course we value the role of the community councils and the work they continue to do throughout the year, I make no apology for drawing on those in our community beyond the community council structure. Governments must reach out to those who may not naturally step forward to put their views. We must ensure that we capture the hopes and ideas of all Canberrans if we are going to realise the potential of our very bright future.

**MRS JONES** (Molonglo) (4.45): I want to add a few comments on this matter of public importance around the suggestion that the community councils are unrepresentative. While I understand that the councils have a certain type of person on them, I do rate them for the effort that they put in. In the last few years I have seen regular surveys of their areas. They seem to get a reasonable response from people about the prioritisation of the issues that have been raised and they add other issues and concerns. I think they are very good bodies. They add concerns to the agenda that could easily fall off the agenda of politicians, who perhaps develop agendas that are different, for various reasons.

I particularly want to add a couple of comments about the community councils that I have been involved with or had a close association with. Attending community council meetings has not always been easy for me as a candidate or even as an MLA. They are not there to make me happy. They are certainly there for very specific outcomes for their community, and I think we are better off for their work and voicing their views.

The Weston Creek Community Council has been around since 1991. It has voiced the needs of the Weston Creek area for some time. I thank the council for its continuous involvement in local issues. Present position holders and generous volunteers include Tom Anderson as chair, Pat McGinn as deputy chair, Jenny Adams as secretary, Chris Wilson as treasurer, and Max Kwiatkowski, Janice Paull and Shelby Schofield as committee members. Many people I meet throughout the community have also been involved in the past. These people raise issues about green space, sporting facilities, road infrastructure needs, public amenities, community meeting places, environmental management, local shop upgrades, TAMS funding, waste disposal, parking and public transport. To me, those are fairly straightforward needs of the community.

The Woden Valley Community Council's chair and publicity officer at the moment is Martin Miller. The deputy chair is Mike Reddy, the treasurer and publicity officer is Bill O'Brien, the secretary is Archana Boniface, the minutes secretary is Timoshenko Aslanides, and the committee members include Jenny Stewart, Chris Erett and Julian Fitzgerald. They engage widely across Woden seeking comment from the community. In particular, they are currently pursuing local needs regarding parks, parklands, car parks, ovals, development, the arts, graffiti concerns and facilities for youth and our aged.

I look forward in the upcoming era to also, potentially, be working with the Tuggeranong Community Council. Formed in 1983 and now with over 100,000 residents in Tuggeranong, I think the community council have been working continuously. I remember attending their meetings during the 2010 federal campaign when I stood for the seat of Canberra. They are known pretty well by businesses, residents, schools and community groups, and many of those people benefit from their hard work. I thank the current position holders and principal volunteers—president Glenys Patulny, vice-president Wayne King, treasurer Max Flint, vice-president and publicity officer Beverley Flint, secretary Paul Nichols, minutes secretary Tom Lindenmayer, committee member Darryl Johnson, and all the past volunteers.

I thank those councils in my electorate. We know that the Gungahlin Community Council has done a lot of work over the years and has been led by people with a variety of very strong political views at times. Good on them. Those people put in the hours and they did not get paid. They did not get much of a pat on the back, but they were doing what they believed in. I put on record my thanks to them. They should keep going. If they annoy people in the Assembly, they are probably doing their job.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Urban Renewal and Minister for Tourism and Events) (4.50): I welcome the opportunity to talk a little about community councils today. They certainly can play a part in government's engagement with the Canberra community, particularly on future planning, city resilience and sustainability issues. To be effective, community councils in the ACT must operate as apolitical organisations that provide a voice for the community on issues affecting particular regions of the ACT at a grassroots level.

As we have heard, there are seven community councils in the territory—Gungahlin, north Canberra, Tuggeranong, Weston Creek, Woden Valley, Belconnen and the inner south community council. They can play a role in helping to inform policy development and program delivery, and to provide community feedback through the planning process, as well as working together to strengthen community spirit by organising events, festivals and activities.

However—and this is the point that I was making in the annual report hearings when I was asked a question about ways to improve community consultation—the point needs to be made that consultation with the community must adapt to people's changing preferences. This does not mean scrapping old forms of consultation, but it does mean being open to new ways to engage and communicate.



I made the point in the annual report hearings that there is a place for community councils as a form of community engagement, but that was only one form and it could not be the only form. Mrs Jones hit on a very important point in her speech, observing that, from her own experience raising a young family, it was not always easy to get to meetings. That was the exact point that I made in my comments to the committee. The times are not family friendly—

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Order, members!

**MR BARR:** I quote from *Hansard*:

It is incredibly important that community engagement is more reflective of the community at large. That means, in particular, there is a need to find new ways to engage with working age families who, for obvious reasons, will not be attending public meetings during dinner time or putting-the-kids-to-bed time, and younger people who have no interest in hanging out in those sorts of meeting environments but who want to engage with government in different ways.

There is a real need—and I repeat this—to broaden consultation. I make the point, as I did in the annual report hearings, that there is a place for community councils, but it is not the only form and it should not be the only form.

Ms Lawder made an interesting observation in her comments about the issue of engagement with the Tuggeranong Community Council about a road closure. It was very clear from that process that just engaging with the community council was not sufficient. That reinforces the point that I made in annual report hearings and that I will continue to make. Yes there is a role for community councils, but they are not representative; they are not elected by the community at large. They are elected by members of that community council. That is not necessarily reflective of the entire community in the way that this place is, where everyone over the age of 18 who is eligible to enrol to vote and who casts a vote gets to vote for members of this place. This place is far more representative than a community council will ever be, and that is as it should be.

*Mr Doszpot interjecting—*

**MR BARR:** It is important, and I repeat this for Mr Doszpot so that he will stop interjecting, that consultation must adapt—it simply has to—to people's changing preferences for how they engage with government. It does not mean scrapping old forms of consultation, but it means being open to new ways. How about that? Open to something new, Mr Doszpot. How about that? Why do we not do that? Why do we not acknowledge the community councils that are doing just that? For example, Belconnen Community Council's involvement in the Belconnen master plan process involved multiple forms of communication to reach out to members of the community who would not or could not attend a public meeting.

What did they do? They conducted some surveys, which they promoted through their mailing list, their website, their Facebook page, their Twitter accounts, as well as in their regular column in the *Chronicle* and at local events. They did all of this outreach over two months. They got 232 responses, which is probably 200 more than they would have got if they had just held a meeting. It was still only 232 responses, but at least it helped form the basis for a more representative survey report to government.

More generally, the Belconnen Community Council have recognised the need to raise their profile in the community and to not just liaise with the community through public meetings that are often attended by a very small number, as we have all heard, of very dedicated people. Meetings may be held at times that most people cannot attend or in venues that some people are not comfortable attending. Ms Lawder talked about the Southern Cross Club in Tuggeranong. It is a great venue, but there are some people who do not like to attend meetings in gambling venues. There are some people who hold that view, so they will not attend.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Order, Mr Hanson and Mr Coe!

**MR BARR:** It is a simple statement of fact: some people do not like going to clubs, and they will not go to meetings there. It is as simple as that. More generally, the Belconnen Community Council have recognised this and have sought to increase their liaison with the community outside of just holding public meetings. They have sponsored and held stalls at parties at the shops in Scullin and the Charny Carny. They have sponsored the Hawker fete and partnered with Westfield Belconnen to host a photographic exhibition of Belconnen and judging of an arts competition. They have increased their presence and engagement through social media.

The Belconnen Community Council has also made strong representations by participating in key forums and providing numerous community submissions on issues of local concern. Recent examples include hosting a forum with the Belconnen Community Service on the impact to the Belconnen town centre if the department of immigration leaves Belconnen. It has met with the University of Canberra vice-chancellor on the future of the university and the connections to be made between the University of Canberra and the town centre.

The council have provided a submission on the proposed smart parking trial, and are one of only two councils to engage on this important initiative. They participated in a forum held by the planning minister on the statement of planning intent, and then subsequently hosted their own forum. The Belconnen Community Council's work online and on the ground shows how community councils can be effective, constructive and influential.

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Order, Mr Hanson!

**MR BARR:** I acknowledge that other community councils are also undertaking changes to the way they engage with the community, and this is a great thing. But it will not be and it cannot be the only way that the government engages with the community. We will push ahead with a variety of other consultation mechanisms. I commend the planning minister for specifically seeking to engage with other sectors of the community who are not represented in these forums. That can only be a good thing. What have those opposite got against broader consultation?

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR BARR:** What have they got against broader consultation that gets them so agitated on this issue? Why are they so agitated on this to bring it forward as a matter of public importance? To interject throughout my entire speech speaks volumes as to the level of agitation that there is. They are trying to score a cheap political point and misrepresent what I said in the committee. Let me be very clear: this government will engage in a much broader form of consultation. We will use a variety of consultation tools. I was particularly pleased to see the data on the time to talk website, which showed that there is particularly strong engagement with people under 50 using that form of consultation, and it is particularly strong with people under 30—people who have not been heard. *(Time expired.)*

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (5.00): Mr Assistant Speaker—

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

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Mr Rattenbury, please be seated. Mr Doszpot, do you have a point of order?

**Mr Doszpot:** I would like to raise a point of order. I stood way before Mr Rattenbury did. The government has already had two speakers, Mr Assistant Speaker.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Doszpot.

**Mr Doszpot:** But it is the opposition's turn for a speaker.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Mr Doszpot, be seated. Mr Doszpot, there is no point of order. Mr Rattenbury, you have the call.

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MR RATTENBURY:** It is a cruel world, folks, isn't it? It is a really cruel world. I would like to thank Ms Lawder for bringing on this matter of public importance on the importance of community councils in the ACT. The community councils do play an important role in our participatory democracy. They do provide a clear and established mechanism for people to work together, to advocate for their community, to raise issues with government, to campaign on local issues and to progress change.

Community councils provide a conduit for people to engage with government processes and to make their views known on issues affecting their local areas. Through their engagement with the government processes, council members often spend a lot of time researching and understanding complex issues and developing expertise in areas of public policy.

As with many community organisations, groups are often run by a small number of dedicated volunteers working in their own time to advocate for their local community. Of course, they are by their nature self-selective groups and they rely on people having the time and energy to put up their hands and to do the work. Certainly in my time as an MLA I have developed good relationships with community councils. Just in the past two weeks I have had meetings with both the Woden Valley and Weston Creek community councils and discussed issues of interest with those communities.

I also like to attend meetings of the community councils and residents groups regularly to provide information about government projects and to take questions without notice. I certainly see it as part of my job as a minister and also as an MLA and local member to make myself available at such forums. I also find it very valuable as a better way of understanding community views on a range of issues. Along with, of course, all the other conversations we have with people in the community, the community councils do provide a particular perspective and a particular focus on a range of issues.

I think it is worth noting here that there was some discussion earlier about the seven community councils. We do, of course, also have a range of other community organisations in particular residential areas. For example, there is the Kingston and Barton Residents Group, who I met with the other day, the Narrabundah Community Council and there are others across the city that have perhaps areas of smaller focus and that nest under those more regional community councils.

I know government directorates regularly engage directly with the community councils as part of their community consultation processes, both to provide information and to take feedback on projects and issues. Again I would like to say that this is an important forum through which to seek community views. Of course, there are other ways for the government to communicate with the community. To garner a broader cross-section of views, the government needs to explore new ways to connect with people from different ages and backgrounds, such as online and through social media.

I think the discussion that has gone on today has been very interesting in that respect. Having a meeting at 7 or 7.30 at night is necessarily going to be limiting for a range of people. I do think that the community councils tend to attract a certain type of person. It is quite appropriate that they go to those meetings, but I think it is really important—I actually support the comments that the Chief Minister made here—to make sure that there are other ways, in recognition of the fact that there are other groups. The community councils necessarily, because of the time of day they have their meetings, tend to exclude some people out of sheer practicality. It is not because they want to be exclusive but because that is just how people's lives are.

I know, for example, that the government is starting to successfully use online tools to engage with the community on specific issues. TAMS, for example, conducted a survey last year. We were looking at changing the Nightrider bus service. We had two models in mind but we were not sure which we should go with. We were frankly open to either of them. So we put it out as a community survey, particularly online where our target demographic of younger people who use this service really engaged in it. It helped us make a very clear decision.

Similarly, sport and rec recently used an online survey on the design of the Lakeside Leisure Centre water park, which attracted over 1,000 votes. I think that that was another good example. If we had gone to Tuggeranong Community Council we perhaps would not have got such a comprehensive result, for example.

Certainly online processes can be a way of engaging a larger number of people in government decision-making but, again, these things cannot be exclusive. There is a segment of the community that will not be comfortable dealing with online mechanisms. Also, of course, an online mechanism does not allow for that more in-depth discussion and hearing of other people's views. It is clearly a case where we need to think about the various channels we can operate through.

I will be interested to see how the community councils adapt and respond to the changing political landscape with the five new electorates. I think that there are real opportunities for the community councils to have a stronger voice in these smaller electorates and there are electorates where there will be more than one council. This may mean working more closely together to advocate at an electorate level or perhaps thinking about how those groups operate going forward.

There are also opportunities for the councils to use new technologies to broaden the scope and depth of engagement in their communities and to use online tools—the sorts of things I have been talking about—to open up conversations with a larger audience. As I said before, I think people will always want to come together to discuss things, but there is a range of ways to do that.

Like many small community organisations, in the future community councils will continue to face the challenges of attracting and retaining people in a climate of decreasing volunteerism and attracting members from a range of backgrounds to ensure that their membership is reflective of the community that they represent. This is an issue right across the board, whether it is a sporting organisation or a range of the community organisations that we all meet. We know that they are struggling to find people who will volunteer. The community councils will face the same challenges. Certainly over the years, the various presidents and members of the executives that I have spoken to have lamented sometimes how few members they have to rely on.

I know that being part of an organisation like a community council provides a great opportunity for people to engage in active citizenship and to make a constructive contribution to the community they live in. They are passionate advocates for the issues that they care about and they certainly are an important part of the life of our city. I thank them for the efforts that they make. I look forward to continuing to engage with the community councils over the coming months and years.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** I call Ms Fitzharris on the matter of public importance.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Oops! Mr Doszpot has disappeared.

**MS FITZHARRIS (Molonglo) (5.07):** I was not going to rise. Mr Doszpot obviously thought it was not so urgent to address this matter raised today by his colleague Ms Lawder. As a former executive member of the Gungahlin Community Council—perhaps the only MLA in this place who has been a former executive member of a community council—I am very pleased to talk about this today.

As members have noted, community councils certainly do play an important role in the public debate. I know our officials across many ACT directorates put in a lot of time and effort going along to brief members of the community about local issues. In the Gungahlin Community Council we are frequently joined by officials from the Economic Development Directorate and from Capital Metro. Certainly Roads ACT are always very generous with their time at the Gungahlin Community Council and, more recently, the Public Housing Renewal Taskforce.

Community councils do a great job and they do help the government to provide a forum for more detailed consultation. I certainly enjoy the debates and getting to know other members of the community. For the record, it is a great opportunity for people to go along to meetings, find out more about local matters that are being raised, have a say on planning processes or just raise an issue that needs to be addressed.

For the most part, being on a community council, as others have said, is rewarding and another way to become involved in your local community. Indeed it certainly also is an activity that does require a lot of input from very dedicated volunteers. For the record, I still regularly attend the Gungahlin Community Council meeting and also the Belconnen Community Council meeting.

But as much as I do appreciate the work our community councils do, they cannot and will not be the only way we communicate with our communities, as members have recognised this afternoon. If all we did was go to community council meetings, we could not argue that we have fully consulted with our community. Why is this? It is because community councils, although they do have very dedicated members, do not necessarily reflect every aspect of our community, nor does everyone in our community get their information only from community councils.

For example, the 2011 census tells us that the median age of people in Gungahlin is 31, and that slightly more women than men live in Gungahlin. I doubt there is anyone younger than 31 who regularly attends a Gungahlin Community Council meeting and for the last two years there have been no women on the board of 14 members and, I think, among the seven members recently elected this year. In fact, very often I am one of only a small number of women who do attend the meetings.

Mrs Jones indicated why this might be: because many women in their 30s and 40s may have parenting responsibilities that prevent them from heading out to a meeting on a Wednesday evening. But certainly the Gungahlin Community Council

alone has also recognised that the time of their meetings may not necessarily work very well, particularly for working families and for men and women with young children. They have since changed their starting time from 7.30 to 6.30.

I am not sure from my attendance at those meetings since that change that it has necessarily increased the take-up of people attending the meetings. I think there is more that we can do to encourage women and younger people in particular to engage more broadly in our consultation processes.

I commend very much Minister Mick Gentleman for his recent broad, extensive and personally engaged work on the statement of planning intent released earlier this week. It would also be worth while considering how else we engage, for example, with people with a disability, people from a variety of multicultural backgrounds and our Indigenous community in the broader consultation process. My observation of community council meetings is that these groups in our community are not necessarily well reflected in the attendance at those meetings.

I certainly know the position for me. I have been going regularly to the Gungahlin Community Council for many years now. But certainly leaving home at 7 o'clock, right at the end of dinner, leaving your husband to put the kids to bed is not always the ideal time to go. People have very busy lives and more often than not it is a fact that our community councils quite rightly have a number of very committed people who may be semi-retired or retired who do have the time to contribute.

I am very proud of the work that they do. I pay particular tribute to recent presidents of the Gungahlin Community Council, Alan Kerlin, Ewan Brown and more recently Peter Elford, who has been the vice-president there for many years and who has just stepped up into the president's role. They certainly do raise a lot of issues and deal with a wide range of input coming to them as well. Without this work we would be denied an important community engagement tool.

*Discussion concluded.*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Before I call the Clerk, Mr Doszpot raised a point of order during the MPI debate regarding his assertion that he had risen before Mr Rattenbury. I draw members' attention to page 161 of the *Companion to the Standing Orders*, where it is stated:

Members wishing to speak must rise and address the Speaker from the place allocated to them in the Chamber; should two or more Members rise, the Speaker must call upon the Member who, in his or her opinion, rose first. However, the Speaker may have regard to the alternation of the call.

In this case, Mr Rattenbury from the crossbench was the next alternate for the call.

## **Statute Law Amendment Bill 2015 (No 2)**

Debate resumed from 29 October 2015, on motion by **Mr Corbell**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.13): The opposition will be supporting this bill. It is to amend a number of ACT acts and subsidiary laws for statute law revision purposes only. As such, as I said, we will be supporting it. It was introduced by the Attorney-General on 29 October and is divided into three schedules. The schedules are only present to group the various amendments and provide some clarity. The first schedule contains minor amendments to four acts and regulations with a more substantive change within the bill. The Auditor-General Act 1996 is amended to give the minister more flexibility in how a response to an Auditor-General's report may be presented and extends the period of presenting the response from three months to four months. This seems to be a reasonable and measured adjustment. Importantly, this amendment does nothing to change the reporting arrangements of the Auditor-General.

The Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 2008 and the Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act Regulation 2008 are amended to bring them in line with the current national poisons standards. This is a standard agreed by all states and territories and enables uniform drug supply across Australia. It is important that the territory meets its obligations under the national agreements in this way.

Finally, the Road Transport (Third-Party Insurance) Act 2008 is amended in a number of ways. This bill allows surveillance film to be included within the meaning of the "required document" to ensure that parties have enough information to assess the liability and quantum for motor vehicle accidents. These amendments also enable the courts to issue a stay in proceedings and order parties to comply with the pre-trial requirements, such as compulsory conferences and exchanging final offers before taking further action.

The bill also allows technical and structural amendments to the Legislation Act 2001. These are noted in the government's documents to be minor, non-controversial amendments initiated by the Parliamentary Counsel's Office. A one-year amendment provides more flexibility in relation to tabling requirements for documents that must be presented to the Legislative Assembly.

We will monitor the effects of these changes in the bill but, in the broad, I thank the PC's office and the members of the directorate who have brought these changes forward to help streamline our processes. Hopefully, it will lead to more effective and efficient government. Goodness knows we need it.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (5.16): The bill makes minor and technical amendments to several ACT acts and regulations. I agree they are minor and non-controversial and am happy to support the bill.

**MR CORBELL** (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for the Environment and Minister for Capital Metro) (5.17), in reply: I thank members for their support of this bill.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.



Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

## **Holidays Amendment Bill 2015**

Debate resumed from 29 October 2015, on motion by **Mr Gentleman**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (5.17): This bill makes Easter Sunday a public holiday. I suspect the majority of people in the ACT probably think that Easter Sunday is already a holiday. In that regard I suspect most people would say it probably should be. I think the dilemma, though, is who gets to pay for it. It is well and good for the government to gazette holidays, but they do not pay for them—the business community pays for them. I think there is a level of angst in the business community where they now see that we have the most public holidays in the country and there does not seem to be an end to the number that the government will gazette as public holidays.

I note the Business Chamber has put out a media release saying the ACT government must remove a current day off before introducing Easter Sunday public holidays. I do not think people begrudge anyone having a public holiday where it is reasonable and appropriate. But what we seem to have is just addition of holiday after holiday without any regard for the due impact on the business community that gets to pay for it and, indeed, their families. There is a contradiction because we often say this will compensate people who are not able to be with their families on the public holiday, but the people who lose the most are the owners and the proprietors, particularly in the retail, tourism and hospitality sectors. If you are, for instance, in one of the large malls, you are obliged to open. If the mall says you will open, you will open. So it means that you then pay the higher tariff for the staffing. Your costs are fixed, so obviously the additional funds required come out of any profit you may make on the day. That is the problem.

There seems to be a fundamental lack of understanding of how business operates and what these imposts will be on the business community, particularly on the owners. Often what owners will do is that they will run the day themselves with family—they will bring in their kids. I grew up in a family business and on Saturdays and Sundays—maybe it is why mum and dad had 10 kids—we had plenty of staff. I suspect most businesses do not have that number of offspring to man the cash registers and look after the customers.

It is a dilemma that needs to be addressed. There needs to be greater understanding of what the impact of this is on business and what it costs business to pay the rate that is set before we go ahead and continue to make holidays. The Business Chamber—I know Mr Wall has more to say on this—has made the suggestion that perhaps we should look at the number of holidays before we keep adding. Perhaps there are some holidays that are no longer appropriate.

I have said this in this place before: it is clear that the word “holiday” comes from “holy day”. These days were initially given so that businesses were shut out of respect in the Christian tradition that we come from—they are basically the essential days of the Christian churches—so that people could attend church. Indeed holy days were mandatory days on which people had to attend church. That is where we get the tradition of the holidays from. Time moves on. People still celebrate, and they celebrate in different ways. It is interesting that the number of holidays is going up but church attendance is going down. It is an interesting correlation.

I think we have to keep it in context. For instance, that is why Good Friday and Easter Monday are holidays. In fact they are part of what used to be called the Octave of Easter, which was an eight-day event in the Christian churches. That has shrunk over time. Christmas Day is clearly the birth of Christ; Boxing Day is the feast of Stephen, the first martyr; New Year’s Day was in relation to the Epiphany and was a Christian festival, and so it goes on.

The world has changed; I respect that. The practice of business has changed. I can remember a time when, for instance, even the *Canberra Times* was not published on Good Friday and Christmas Day out of respect. We see that most of the journals are now published at least on Good Friday. The movie theatres were closed. Even the pubs were closed. Just about everything used to be closed on Good Friday. Now we have footy matches and all sorts of things. Life moves on, and people celebrate these days as they see fit. But, at the end of the day, somebody pays. Every day we gazette as a public holiday is an extra impost on business. The government must come to an understanding with the business community. They seem to have forgotten them over the last 15 years. They have certainly forgotten them when they make these extra public holidays.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (5.22): I will be supporting the passage of this bill. It follows on from last year’s Holidays Amendment Bill which designated Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year’s Day as public holidays and ensured there was also a weekday holiday if one of these days fell on a weekend. The 2015 Holidays Amendment Bill designates Easter Sunday as a public holiday. As Mr Gentleman pointed out when he tabled the bill, the act currently does not provide for Easter Sunday as a public holiday because when it was legislated there was an assumption that business did not take place on a Sunday. Sunday was the day of rest, and that is, of course, not the norm anymore in our modern working environment.

I believe that Easter Sunday should be a public holiday. It is appropriate, fair and really what people expect should occur on Easter Sunday. It is a special day for many people, a religious occasion, and working people should be given time to spend with their families and their friends or be compensated for giving up that privilege. As Good Friday, Easter Saturday and Easter Monday are already public holidays, it is also strange that Easter Sunday is not. It makes it difficult for some people to use the Easter period as a time to take a multi-day break.

Last time we spoke about holiday amendments, I pointed out that Australians already worked long, hard hours and that this was encroaching more and more on their home

lives. We are near the top of the list of nations with the longest working hours. Almost three-quarters of Australians take work home with them at least once a week. Forty-one per cent of Australian workers usually work between nine and 11 hours every day compared with 38 per cent of workers globally. I think workers in Australia deserve their public holidays. They deserve some time off and they deserve full public holiday entitlements when they do work on these public holidays.

As with the previous changes the Assembly approved for public holidays, New South Wales already observes Easter Sunday as a public holiday, and this will now see the ACT in alignment with New South Wales. The ACT government will bear some costs in order to implement this change, as will some industries, especially the hospitality and retail industries. That is an important point to make. Mr Smyth in opening his remarks said only business pays for this. There are a range of 24-7 government operations that are covered by this—emergency services, corrective services, and a range of agencies and health services which are also impacted by this. I agree that though it remains appropriate to make Easter Sunday a public holiday and I support the benefits in terms of work-life balance, family time and entitlements, it is important that the ACT workers also get this, and that is why I wanted to comment on the fact that the government is also impacted by this provision.

I commend the government and Mr Gentleman for bringing forward this change, and I hope that this does enable workers in our community to enjoy more time with their families and other members of their communities.

**MR WALL** (Brindabella) (5.26): A number of points have been covered off in this debate by the three sides of this chamber, from public holidays being great and we should have more of them to classifying days such as Easter Sunday as a public holiday being an appropriate step. It is a significant day for so many in our community, particularly those of faith. It is right that the penalty rates be paid on it. But I think the underlying motivation needs to be explored as to why this change is being brought about.

Nothing is more telling about the motivations behind this particular change to public holidays than where it was announced. The announcement by the government that they were going to bring about this legislative change and gazette Easter Sunday as a public holiday was launched at the ACT Labor Party conference earlier this year. It was made as an announcement to their core base—the union movement—the base that underwrites and underlies the Labor Party. It goes to show that the consequences of such a change were not considered. We did not see any discussion broadly with the business community. There was very little discussion with the business sector to understand what the impact is on them.

The comments from the Canberra Business Chamber are, in this instance, very measured and quite accurate and underline exactly what the issue is. The statement that has come out from the Canberra Business Chamber says:

We understand that Easter is a special time that people want to spend with family and friends ... The introduction of Easter Sunday as a public holiday will also bring us into line with our neighboring jurisdictions over the border in NSW.

However, for businesses to have to meet the wage costs associated with 14 public holidays, when other jurisdictions only have 11 or 12, is a significant burden. It will impact on their capacity to employ people and open on public holidays.

As this holiday falls on a Sunday, it won't affect the working week, but it will erode business profits, particularly for those in tourism and hospitality.

It is those industries that will be hit the most. It is the small businesses, the family operations, those that only employ a small number of people but try to do their part in creating jobs, creating opportunity and creating wealth for people in our community. To put it into perspective, the Chief Minister has said on occasion here, "Look, if a restaurant or a cafe wants to open on a public holiday, so be it for them, but they have the opportunity to institute a surcharge." Canberra is a well-off and fairly affluent city, and a surcharge for those of us that choose to go out or dine out is something we may be willing to accept. But many businesses do not have that luxury. I look at the retail sector in the ACT. So many businesses that operate in retail do so in large shopping malls. They are required as a stipulation of their leases that they open on every trading day.

The implementation of another public holiday particularly at Easter means it is going to be more attractive for people to travel. I do not think any of us begrudge that, but the unintended consequences are that there are going to be less people potentially in our shopping malls. These businesses are going to be required to open and pay penalty rates or, as we are seeing more and more often, the owners will choose to work the business themselves and give the staff the day off simply because they cannot afford to pay the wage costs.

For these sorts of businesses in retail that means there is no ability to implement a surcharge. If they do open their doors and they are open for business, if a product is any dearer on a Sunday to what it is on a Wednesday or a Thursday or any other day of the week, people will not buy it. Retail in this town is already on a hiding to nothing when you compare it against online marketing. The advent of online marketing has been great to give consumers choice and opportunity, but what we forget is that our bricks and mortar establishments have suffered as a result of this, and yet another policy change is making it harder and harder for these businesses to operate.

I have spoken to a number of small businesses about this change and what it means to them, and what they have been doing recently on public holidays given the tough economic position that they are in is that they are running the risk of jeopardising their tenancy positions in malls and closing their doors on public holidays because they fear the penalty they are liable for under their tenancy is less than the bottom-line loss that they will face if they do open their doors and do hire some staff under the penalty rates.

It is prudent that, as the Business Chamber suggests, we have a discussion to draw a line in the sand and say 14 public holidays—which is where we are at at the moment—is enough. If we do not like where they are allocated, let us look at

positioning some of them in more appropriate places. Family and Community Day falls a week from the October long weekend and it drives businesses nuts. For four days leave people are getting a huge holiday, which is great for the individual, but for business it is an absolute conundrum of meeting staffing demands, meeting the needs of their customers and meeting their business obligations. All the while, members opposite seem to think that another public holiday is a good thing for all and that everyone wins. But there is a cost, be it government to pay for the nurses or our firies who work on those days or the small businesses that employ juniors and so many other Canberrans.

As I have said Easter is a significant day for so many in our community. The opposition will be supporting the passage of this legislation, but we really do want to highlight the impact that yet another public holiday has on our business community. We want to highlight that 14 public holidays—the most in this country—is probably about the bag limit of how many we should be having in this city. We hope that there is a constructive conversation about how holidays in future are allocated so that everyone is consulted and these things are not simply made as a gesture to the union movement to shore up their largesse come an election year.

**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) (5.32), in reply: I am very pleased to hear the comments from Assembly members today and very pleased to hear all Assembly members supporting this important bill. I am very pleased to speak in favour of the Holidays Amendment Bill.

In addition to the religious significance, the vast majority of Australians enjoy Easter as a four-day holiday weekend starting on Good Friday and ending on Easter Monday. This extra-long weekend is an opportunity for hardworking Australians to take a well-deserved break or to get together with family and friends. Easter often coincides with school holidays, so many people with school-aged children incorporate Easter into a longer family holiday. Easter is the busiest time of year for domestic air travel in Australia and a very popular time for gatherings such as weddings and christenings.

There are many festivals held over the Easter holiday in Australia. Performers and audiences travel long distances to attend music festivals all over the country, including our very own National Folk Festival here in Canberra. Football season is well underway by Easter and all codes schedule special matches over the Easter holiday period which are well attended.

The amendments proposed by this bill will now give more Canberrans the opportunity to participate in these events. Together with last year's amendments to the Holidays Act that ensured that Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day are now public holidays on the actual days they fall, this bill continues the government's reforms to the ACT's public holiday regime. It responds to the community's views that Easter is also a significant holiday period compared to Christmas and New Year. There is an expectation that it is important that public holiday entitlements be afforded to all workers during these periods and that the system is made fairer for those who have to spend their time at work instead.

I respond to some of the comments that we have heard here today. I respond to Mr Rattenbury's comment—in regard to the question, “who pays for this?” in Mr Smyth's contribution earlier—that government does not pay for the public holiday. It actually does. There are quite a number of government workers that would be working on Easter Sunday where penalty rates will apply. Those include doctors, nurses, police, rangers, bus drivers, paramedics, and the list goes on. In fact, it would be interesting to have a look at the number of public sector workers that will work shiftwork on those days and the number of private sector workers that will.

I am very pleased that the Canberra Liberals are supporting this important proposal to amend the Holidays Act.

On 5 August 2014 I announced I would examine the treatment of Easter Sunday and Anzac Day, well prior to our annual conference. Anzac Day is not a public holiday when it falls on a Sunday, although the substitute public holiday does occur on the following Monday. In light of stakeholder responses, changes to Anzac Day arrangements will now be reconsidered at a later time, given that it falls on a Sunday in 2021. This will allow additional time to consider how best to strike a balance between the divergent positions of employer and employee representatives and the costs and benefits to the ACT community.

It is acknowledged that the amendment is likely to have the greatest impact on essential services, including the health and hospitality sectors. There have been several unsuccessful attempts by employers to remove penalty rates from some of the awards in these sectors, and the addition of public holidays in some years will inevitably encounter a level of opposition.

On 19 December 2014 the federal government engaged the Productivity Commission to undertake a review of the workplace relations framework and released terms of reference for the review. On 22 January 2015 the Productivity Commission released five issue papers covering a range of matters, with submissions from stakeholders due by March this year. The draft report was released by the Productivity Commission on 4 August this year. This draft report covered a range of matters and contained 45 draft recommendations and one draft finding; there were a number of areas where the Productivity Commission was seeking further information as well. The Productivity Commission is continuing to consult on its draft report, and I understand that the final report is due to be provided to the federal government by the end of this month.

As I have mentioned in the Assembly previously, the ACT government has very serious concerns about the number of recommendations and is keeping a watching brief on the developments in these areas. These concerns particularly relate to the potential erosion of workers' rights. And while the commonwealth has ruled out immediate changes to penalty rates, the commission's draft report overcomes this barrier by recommending that the Fair Work Commission introduce the new penalty rates as part of its four-yearly review. In fact, as part of its four-yearly review of modern awards, the Fair Work Commission has already commenced reviewing penalty rates in a number of awards in the hospitality and retail sectors.

The commission argues the changes would act as a floor to the penalty rate and employers may decide to pay more if they find it hard to attract employees on Sundays. The commission stated that while penalty rates have a legitimate role in compensating employees and should be maintained for working long hours or at unsociable times, Sunday penalty rates for cafes, hospitality, entertainment, restaurants and retailing should be aligned with Saturday rates.

The ACT government opposes the commission's proposal to change the Fair Work Act to establish a minimum standards division within the Fair Work Commission that would have responsibilities for matters including setting minimum wages and is also concerned with the recommended changes to the unfair dismissal system such as removing the emphasis on reinstatement as a primary goal.

The income of lower paid workers needs to be protected. Lower paid workers contribute to the incomes of entire families and this government is committed to protecting those workers. The bill is the perfect opportunity to remind all Canberrans of the broader impact of penalty rates on cost of living issues for families and full-time students, equity for low paid workers and how penalty rates allow working single parents to manage the complex challenges of income stability and child care.

Penalty rates are a representation of our social contract and an understanding of the economic foundation of our standard of living that includes a minimum wage, pensions, public transport, accessible education, universal health care and welfare that is there when you need it. This is the basis for a shared prosperity that all of us can enjoy.

There are benefits from public holidays that are not captured by traditional economic indicators. There is the literature that supports the fact that there are substantial benefits from the coordination of leisure time and it is contended that there are benefits from increasing the number of public holidays to within the range of 13 to 17 per annum.

Productivity, health and socioeconomic benefits increase when citizens are given more opportunity to coordinate their leisure time with more public holidays. Madam Deputy Speaker, as you would know and as Minister Burch would know, as shiftworkers previously, it is important to have some coordinated family time in your life. This also increases the utility of leisure time on holidays and normal weekdays and weekends. In fact, it is reported that a person's wellbeing is improved in anticipation of taking a holiday. Further, this literature highlights that countries such as the United States and Australia, where there are lower numbers of public holidays than in the European Union, would benefit from increasing the number of holidays.

In conclusion, it is vital that we value the interests of those members of our community that have to work in retail or hospitality sectors or at hospitals or emergency services or who have family members working in these industries. These members of the community should also be entitled to unite as families over holiday periods like Christmas and Easter; if they have to work, at the very least they should be properly compensated for the time spent away from those families on these important occasions. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

## **Adjournment**

Motion (by **Ms Burch**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## **Kulture Break**

**MR WALL** (Brindabella) (5.42): On Thursday, 12 November I had the privilege of attending Kulture Break's thankyou event for sponsors and supporters of the great work that they do in our community throughout the year. Kulture Break, led by the ACT local hero for 2013, Francis Owusu, and his team do a fantastic job introducing and using arts as a form of expression to empower young people's lives throughout the ACT. Focusing on the delivery of dance classes, mentoring and social skills, with programs run both in house and throughout the ACT and public school system, Kulture Break are a well-respected and well-known charity service provider.

As founder and CEO of Kulture Break, Francis Owusu started Kulture Break in 2002. This charity provider was born out of Francis's desire to give back to the community. Kulture Break, as Francis has so aptly put it, is a reflection of his belief that life is characterised not by what you have received but by what you give.

Aside from their in-house dance programs, Francis and his team run two other very successful programs: every chance to dance, which is an online dance resource program for primary schools created by Francis to meet the needs of schools at a curriculum level; and one of the most well known programs run by Kulture Break, dance nation, held each year with participants from schools throughout the ACT.

Dance nation enables individuals and schools to come together through dance, with this year's theme being freedom. This program is designed to enhance student wellbeing, dance skills and social skills as well as community connectedness.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank Francis, his staff and volunteers for their continued contribution to Canberra's youth. I also thank Kulture Break's major sponsors, who have helped them—not just this year but for a large number of years—to carry out the fantastic work that they do in the community. Those sponsors include Maxim, the Tuggeranong Hyperdome, Lennox Motors and Synergy. I thank them for their continued support of this vital organisation.



Lastly, I would like to make note of an upcoming end-of-year event, a production called *Imagine*, which is to be held on Saturday, 12 December. I urge all members of the ACT Assembly to support this great charity service provider and view the skills and the passion that are on show with all involved in Kulture Break.

### **Greyhound rescue**

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (5.44): On Sunday the ACT Greyhound Support Network had their second birthday. I want to congratulate Gabby Openshaw, who set up the network. It is to rescue greyhounds that have been abandoned or are ill, and they have done a great job.

Let me give some of the stats from the weekend. They had a get-together at Weston Park opposite the train. Forty-three greyhounds attended. Tammy Ven Dange from the RSPCA attended and judged two competitions—the barest bum and the greyest muzzle. I will read in a bit from Tammy later. Pups4Fun donated a pamper session to each of the winning greyhounds as well as a massive birthday cake. Dallas, a photographer from Dog Tog, attended and took photos.

Let me turn to some of the achievements of turning two. In that time members of the ACT Greyhound Support Network have re-homed about 200 greyhounds, which is a pretty extraordinary effort; they have raised well over \$20,000 for charity to support dogs that have been abandoned or dogs that are retiring from racing and have uncertain futures; and they have been very active in promoting greyhounds as pets in the community. Something that I note Gabby is particularly proud of is the establishment of a blood donor program at the Animal Referral Hospital. Often greyhounds are hooked up and give their blood and this allows plenty of blood to be available for other dogs who come in as patients as well as saving greyhounds from being permanently hooked up in these facilities.

One of the interesting rescues involved a couple who had lived in Gordon but now live in Bonner who had to go out and buy a bigger car because they took not one but two greyhounds. They found what turned out to be a brother and a sister, Kadan and Lizzie; they have now got both those dogs and absolutely love them. You really have to congratulate that level of commitment to such a good cause.

Let me read a bit from the article by the CEO of the RSPCA, Tammy Ven Dange. It is headed “The lean, bald bums and other amusing things about greyhounds”. It says:

Today I attended the second birthday celebration of the ACT Greyhound Support Network. Like so many other not-for-profits, this group of people formed together because they saw a need and decided to do something about it. In this case, a few people in Canberra had big hearts for rescuing greyhounds from the racing industry that might have been put down otherwise. They realised that these animals had special needs because of where they came from, and formed a group to help local owners and foster carers. Today I understand that there are about 200 people engaged in this local network.

I'll admit that I didn't know a lot about greyhounds before I started interacting with the ACT Greyhound Support Network. At RSPCA ACT, we have only seen one greyhound surrendered to the shelter since I've been there, and where I grew up in the United States, greyhound racing was illegal. What I can say from my frequent interactions lately is that greyhounds are really lovely dogs with a few odd traits.

Here are a few of interesting things that I have learned about greyhounds recently:

**The greyhound lean**—when the dog likes you and wants a pat, they will lean into your body. Their height is perfect for a quick pat without having to bend down to reach them.

**Lazy, lazy, lazy**—much to most people's surprise, greyhound are really lazy dogs that don't need a lot of exercise. As such, they are actually great for apartments and small home dwellers—

as Mr Coe will confirm. It continues:

**Lack of recall**—greyhounds seem to have a mind of their own. As a result, the inability of their owners to recall many of them by name makes it harder to allow these dogs off lead in public areas. Between this and their laziness, they are starting to remind me more of cats than dogs!

**Bare bums**—a common problem that many of them have is the lack of hair on their bums and hind legs. Many owners say that they have been able to correct this with proper diet, but it's also a funny badge of honour that many of them carry with pride too.

**Blood donors**—greyhounds appear to be the “Type O” blood suppliers of dogs. Unfortunately, this has also resulted in many former racers being completely exploited as forced donors in a lucrative but largely unheard of blood bank industry.

**Sit Fido?**—while I hear from owners that they will sit from time to time, I have honestly never seen a greyhound do so. They will stand or they will lay down. Rarely will you see them do anything in between, and some people say that this is because their size and shape makes it more difficult to sit than other breeds.

**The friendly rub**—some greyhounds that are forced to wear muzzles will appear to be very “friendly” by rubbing their head against (and often between) your legs. They are actually trying to take off their muzzles. Unfortunately, greyhounds are the only breed that must pass a formal test in the ACT (and other states and territories) to be able to walk in public without a muzzle. Personally, I have seen way too many other breeds that have higher prey drives than many of the greyhounds that I have met, and yet they don't have to pass a test.

**Dress up**—

And it goes on about how people enjoyed the dressing up. On the day it was Donny who won the prize of the bare bum, because both his cheeks were bare of hair.

## Renewable Energy Day

**DR BOURKE** (Ginninderra) (5.50): On Friday, 30 October I attended the fascinating Renewable Energy Day at the sustainability hub of CIT Bruce campus in my electorate. The day was sponsored by the CIT; Windlab, one of the winners of the ACT's wind auction; and the SERREE industry cluster. The acronym SERREE stands for the South East Region of Renewable Energy Excellence.

The SERREE industry cluster is a network of over 500 members, including renewable energy businesses, researchers, interested community members, educators and governments, collaborating on renewable energy in our region. It is an initiative of industry partners and Regional Development Australia's ACT and New South Wales branches.

The ACT government's commitment to renewable energy is well known. Perhaps in the ACT the importance of the renewable energy industries in our regional economy is less appreciated. With growing numbers of wind farms and commercial and private solar installations in our region, it makes perfect sense.

The SERREE industry cluster is bringing together a diverse range of stakeholders and initiatives through forums and roundtables to discuss the way forward for the industry and our region. The range of exhibitors brought together at the open day was extraordinary, including inventors and start ups; solar installers and designers; the big energy companies; wind farm operators like Windlab and Zhenfar who took part in the wind auctions; companies such as SolarHub, Solastor and SolarShare; the ANU Energy Change Institute; and government agencies such as our own Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, the New South Wales Office of Environment and Heritage and NICTA.

Appropriately, one of the stars of the day was the CIT sustainability hub itself with a range of operating renewable energy systems incorporated into the building for training purposes. The day included the launch of CIT Bruce's renewable energy skills centre of excellence. It will provide skills, training and qualifications to meet the needs of the renewable energy industry. Training to operate and maintain wind energy technologies begins in semester 1 next year. The director of CIT technology and design, William Nauenburg, says the centre will provide new and existing learners with the skills and qualifications they need to operate and maintain wind energy technologies for an exciting career in an increasingly significant field.

A collaboration with energy industry companies, including Neoen and the Hornsdale Wind Farm, will give students access to hands-on experience as they study and graduate with industry-relevant qualifications. CIT and Neoen have signed a 25-year funding agreement to support training at the renewable energy skills centre of excellence. CIT also announced that it is planning to equip the centre for training and qualifications in areas of renewable technology such as solar, microgrid and battery technologies.

Another feature of the Renewable Energy Day was the bus tour of renewable energy features in the region, including the ANU big dish, the capital solar farm and the Veolia bioreactor. This was just a taste to launch the renewable energy trail SERREE is developing in the region. Current trails cover renewable energy installations from hydro at Jindabyne to solar at Royalla, wind farms east and north of Goulburn and the wind farms east of Lake George.

I was especially pleased at the Renewable Energy Day to see CIT working so closely with the SERREE industry partners in creating training opportunities for young people in these emerging career pathways.

**Mr Henry Laska**  
**HeartStrings appeal**

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (5.53): On 5 November I attended the Canberra Symphony Orchestra's Llewellyn series No 4 concert, which was highlighted as Rachmaninoff. Although it was a fantastic program, as usual, I do not particularly want to dwell on the program; I want to speak about the fact that this was the last concert under the leadership of Henry Laska, the retiring CEO of the Canberra Symphony Orchestra. I want to pay tribute tonight to Henry and the great work he has done for the Canberra Symphony Orchestra over his seven years at the helm.

We were reminded on the night that while most subscription orchestras in Australia experience very high levels of re-subscription by subscription members every year, in the order of about 75 per cent, the Canberra Symphony Orchestra excels: 96 per cent of subscribers renew their subscription every year. And the Llewellyn series of concerts, two concerts on successive evenings, usually have in excess of 1,000 people each at each concert. Many of the larger and better funded orchestras around the country would be extraordinarily jealous to see that many people at an entire subscription series.

It is quite clear that the work that has been done by Henry Laska over his time at the CSO, along with the artistic directorship of Nicholas Milton, the principal conductor, and the great leadership of the CSO board, currently chaired by Sir Angus Houston, is testament to how much Canberrans value their orchestra and also to the great work that has been done by Henry himself.

When Henry came on board, the CSO was in trouble. He has brought it from a struggling organisation to a thriving organisation. The people of Canberra owe Henry, and his wife Dianna, who is an active and ever-present volunteer for the CSO, a great debt of gratitude. I pay tribute to Henry Laska and to his wife Dianna, and I wish them well in the next phase of their life.

While I am on the subject of the CSO, I would like to draw to members' attention the HeartStrings appeal, which is an appeal for a contribution of \$60 from someone more privileged to allow a family to attend the Shell prom concert who normally would not be able to afford to do so. I would encourage members to consider contributing in their Christmas giving to the Shell prom HeartStrings appeal. The tickets will be

distributed through charities such as Menslink, Red Cross, the Woden Community Service and others. This is one of the many aspects of community participation where we see the CSO working hard. I pay tribute to the CSO and to its outgoing director, Henry Laska.

### **Community councils**

**MR DOSZPOT** (Molonglo) (5.57): It gives me great pleasure to speak tonight in support of the important work that community councils do for the citizens of the ACT. Unlike those of us in this place, members of community councils get no pay for the work they do. The councils mostly meet at night after most of their members have already put in a full day's work. The research they do, they do in their own time and with their own resources. Yet we in this place, and even the bureaucrats, often rely on them for information, for comment and for consultation.

One only has to look at the very protracted discussions associated with the Canberra brickworks development to realise how important local community groups and councils are. The Yarralumla Residents Association, in cooperation with the Inner South Canberra Community Council, did a great deal of research and assessment of the various plans that the LDA put forward over several years to develop the brickworks and surrounding areas along with the LDA's own unworkable road solutions.

The residents were active, informed and engaged, and, surprise, surprise, just recently the LDA admitted defeat and agreed that the proposals put forward by the opposition, the YRA and hundreds of residents' individual submissions were all sensible and appropriate compromises and suggestions. The LDA finally agreed to that after years of putting the community through agony. Of course, the proof will be in the final development, and it will be only then that the residents will know if the government really did listen to them and that the government will deliver on its new commitment.

When I was a member for Brindabella I well remember a former ALP member for that area John Hargreaves regularly berating and abusing the Tuggeranong Community Council, I think mostly because they did not agree with what he was telling them. As an MLA for Molonglo, I am fortunate to have a number of community councils, residents association, trades associations and other local groups like Neighbourhood Watch who are proud of where they live and want to ensure that they get the very best facilities and outcomes for their suburbs. I meet with them regularly and they know that my door is always open to them.

Only last weekend I was at the Hackett shops. Hackett has a longstanding issue with the government over a very modest desire for public toilets and tables and chairs. I am determined that they will get these despite another Molonglo MLA, namely Minister Rattenbury, constantly suggesting each year that there is not any money. I point out that this is the same argument and the same excuse he has dished out to the Oaks Estate Progress Association, another great community council who are active in defending and promoting their suburb, which is in the electorate of Molonglo.

I have sponsored petitions from several community councils in this place. One most recently was from the Red Hill Residents Group concerning the lack of government consultation over redevelopment of public housing. Earlier today the government finally tabled its response to the Narrabundah Community Council's petition over lack of consultation also on public housing development. The constant complaint of community councils is that this government does not consult and does not listen to the views of the community. And we know why.

The Chief Minister has set out the official opinion of the government to community councils. Chief Minister Barr has told us and community councils across Canberra quite clearly what he thinks of them. He said recently:

The idea that a community council is any way representative, given that most of the attendees are of one particular gender in some councils and, again, way out of connect with the demographic distribution of people living in particular regions, is another example of where communication ... needs to be much broader.

Translate that and I think it gets back to the Hargreaves approach: community councils do not always agree with the Labor government and, therefore, must be ignorant and out of touch or, in Chief Minister Barr's view, not hip enough. We know he believes that anyone over 45 should not have an opinion on anything in this city. Just go back to the criticism of the demonstrably failed Westside pop-up village. He will not accommodate any criticism of that particular failed experiment.

In summing up, I place on record my thanks to all the community councils, residents groups and other local associations who do a great body of work for the betterment of this city. I apologise if I inadvertently miss any of the groups but I list those that quickly come to mind: the Inner South Canberra Community Council, which includes Deakin, Barton, Kingston, Griffith, Red Hill, Narrabundah, Yarralumla and Oaks Estate; the Inner North Canberra Community Council, which includes Downer Community Association, Hackett residents, Watson Community Association, Ainslie Retirees Association, Neighbourhood Watch, the Dickson Residents Group, Canberra City Residents Association, Hackett Neighbourhood Watch, Reid residents, Russell reservists, Turner residents, Watson Community Association, Watson woodlands; the Yarralumla Residents Association; and the Oaks Estate Progress Association. (*Time expired.*)

### **Amaroo scout group**

**MS FITZHARRIS** (Molonglo) (6.02): On Tuesday, 27 October I was lucky enough to have the Amaroo scout group come to the Assembly. Around 25 enthusiastic members of the Amaroo scout group attended with their leaders. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your welcome to them in the chamber.

The main reason for the scouts visiting me at the Assembly was for them to work towards their citizenship badge. An aspect of the citizenship badge is to watch a parliament in action and learn about government processes. The scouts sat in the observers area and watched members in action talking through legislation, a

particularly complicated piece of legislation on that day. Thank you to all of the members in the chamber who waved hello to the scouts when they were announced. They were very excited to be mentioned.

After watching the sitting, the scouts came to a meeting room where the scouts asked me questions about all aspects of government and the Assembly. There were many very intelligent questions asked. Some of the questions included asking about the differences between the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker and the Assistant Speakers, what it is like working in the Legislative Assembly, and the differences in the Hare-Clarke electoral system. We also spoke about some of the issues that members had been debating—for example, the Mr Fluffy legislation.

While the scouts were at the Assembly, I was privileged enough to take part in the investiture ceremonies of two new scouts. For those who are not aware of the practices of scouts, the investiture ceremony is when a scout-to-be publicly announces their commitment to the scout law by making the scout promise. Once they have made the scout promise, they have officially become a scout.

The scouts all stood in a U-shape around the room as scout section leader and patrol leaders walked the two new scouts through their promise. The new scouts were presented with badges to show that they were members of the Amaroo ACT and Australian scout movements. I was lucky enough to present the new scouts with their badges. I was very touched to then be presented with an Amaroo badge myself by the scout group. I look forward to attempting to sew the badge onto my blanket for the next time we go camping. It was wonderful to be included in the ceremony.

I would like to thank the Amaroo scout section leader, Brent Juratowitch, and also Bill Davison and Geoff Santleben, for bringing the group along to the Assembly. The scouts were all very well behaved and asked some terrific questions.

Having the Amaroo scout group visit really enforced the importance of educating the younger generation on what our great Assembly does and how the Assembly and the government can help them. Canberrans should be more aware of the issues we debate and the legislation we enact. Whether residents know it or not, the decisions we make here in this chamber do affect them all. Educating our children is the first step we can take to ensure each Canberran knows how the government and the Assembly work.

It was truly fantastic to see so many young Canberrans interested in the processes of the Legislative Assembly and the everyday work of all MLAs. It was a pleasure to host such an inquisitive group of young people. I thank them and wish them all the very best for the rest of their scout training.

### **Diwali Mela festival**

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (6.05): Today I would like to speak about an event I went to last Saturday, which was the annual Diwali Mela celebration. I was there, as were my colleagues Mr Hanson and Mr Smyth, as well as my Liberal colleague Mr Jacob Vadakkedathu. Diwali is the largest Indian festival and is celebrated by Hindus around the world. It is known as the “festival of lights” and represents the

victory of good over evil as well as the beginning of the Hindu new year. Diwali traditions include people cleaning and decorating their homes as well as buying new clothes and gifts for their family and friends. In many regions of India, Diwali is a five-day festival.

Diwali celebrations have been taking place in Canberra for many years and the Diwali Mela celebration has been taking place since 2003. The festival is supported by all the community organisations of Indian cultural background in the ACT. This year's Diwali Mela was held at the Albert Hall and Lennox Gardens. The celebration was expanded this year to include a "celebrate Diwali in the city" event in Garema Place. The celebration in Garema Place allowed even more people in the ACT to try Diwali sweets and join in the celebrations.

The theme of this year's celebration was "unite and celebrate". The celebration was a day-long festival that culminated with grand fireworks. There were many performances from Indian community organisations and individual artists. There were also many food, craft and competition stalls. I very much enjoyed the festivities, including witnessing the hotly contested cooking competition, and I happily sampled the entrants' cooking.

I would like to congratulate all of those involved with Diwali Mela, and particularly chairman Krishan Aggarwal. I would also like to thank Lucky Prasad, Thamotharan Sritharan, Prathibha Nagabhushan, Arun Venkatesha and Surender Sharma, as well as the large number of volunteers who helped out. I encourage all members to attend next year's Diwali celebration and to visit the Diwali Mela website at [diwali.wonderwebworks.com.au](http://diwali.wonderwebworks.com.au).

## **Returned and Services League**

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (6.07): There are RSL branches and sub-branches throughout Canberra, including Barton-Capital, Belconnen, Campbell-Russell, City of Canberra, Hellenic, Gungahlin, Peacekeepers, Vietnamese, Woden Valley and Tuggeranong.

The Australian Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League, which was the forerunner to the RSL, first sold poppies for Armistice Day in 1921. In Australia on the 75th anniversary of the armistice, which was 11 November 1993, Remembrance Day ceremonies became the focus of national attention. On that day the remains of an unknown Australian soldier exhumed from a First World War military cemetery in France was ceremonially entombed at the Australian War Memorial. This ceremony touched a chord across Australia and re-established Remembrance Day as a significant day of commemoration, as it remains today.

This year I was pleased to volunteer for the Tuggeranong RSL sub-branch to sell poppies, which raises funds for the very important programs of the RSL. They run them to support our veterans and their families, to provide wellbeing, care, compensation and the commemoration of serving and ex-serving Defence Force personnel and their dependants. Coming from a military family myself, I am well aware of the work that the RSL do and have done for many years.



I would like to take this opportunity to specifically thank the King family—John, Sandra, Jennifer and her daughter, Danielle—who I worked alongside at the Chisholm shops selling poppies. I also thank the president of the Tuggeranong sub-branch, David Woolf, and the Tuggeranong sub-branch RSL executive and members for their dedicated service. Many of them volunteered their time to sell poppies in the lead-up to Remembrance Day, as did members of many of the other RSL clubs. Well done to all those volunteers.

This year, 11 November marked the 97th anniversary of the armistice, which ended the First World War. Each year on this day we observe one minute's silence at 11 am in memory of those who died or suffered in all wars and armed conflicts. While the ceremony for Remembrance Day last week was damp, it was a respectful, moving and fitting commemoration of those who died or suffered in all wars and armed conflicts.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.10 pm.**