



# Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

**EIGHTH ASSEMBLY**

**17 FEBRUARY 2016**

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## **Wednesday, 17 February 2016**

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

### **Government priorities**

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.00): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) after nearly 15 years, the ACT Labor government has lost touch with the priorities of Canberrans who are facing increased cost of living pressures and declining services; and
- (b) the Canberra Liberals are focused on delivering better outcomes for all Canberrans, including:
  - (i) fixing our health system;
  - (ii) investing in education;
  - (iii) building our city;
  - (iv) growing our economy; and
  - (v) leaving no one behind; and

(2) calls on the Barr Labor government to focus on delivering better outcomes for the people of Canberra instead of pursuing light rail.

In October this year the people of Canberra have a decision to make about the future of our city, and it is important that the priorities of both parties are on the table early. It is quite clear that there are differing priorities and, as a result, some quite different policy approaches.

In October people will have a genuine choice about the direction of the ACT, and I think that is a good thing. Personally, I am very positive and optimistic about Canberra's long-term future. But the reality is that Canberrans are currently facing increasing cost of living pressures, record deficit and debt, a failing health system, overcrowded schools, cuts to police, inadequate public transport and declining local services across the ACT. Andrew Barr now wants to spend billions of dollars on a tram network that we do not need and cannot afford, and he wants to continue his massive rate increases which are hurting thousands of Canberra families.

After 15 years in power, Barr Labor has become so focused on itself that Jon Stanhope recently complained that the unions and the factions have "corrupted the

party, robbed it of talent, discouraged people from joining and ultimately leave it devoid of relevance”. Andrew Barr has risen through the ranks of that Labor Party’s factional politics as a student activist and as a political adviser, and his priorities are in many ways shaped by that experience.

My background in the Army before politics, I would argue, has given me a much broader and diverse experience of life and instilled in me the Army’s values of respect, teamwork, courage and initiative. But more than that, the Army has instilled in me the principle that you put your people first and that you leave no-one behind. That important principle has stayed with me and has shaped the way that I view my duty to our community.

Just as Robert Menzies was driven to look after what he described as the forgotten people, it is those same people that my team sees being left behind in our community that now drive me to make a positive change across the ACT. So it is my vision to create a better future for all Canberrans. To achieve that vision, we will fix our health system, we will invest in education, we will build our city, we will grow our economy and we will leave no-one behind.

Turning first to fixing our health system, we have all the elements to make Canberra’s health system the world’s best. We have excellent staff, a medical teaching school, a world-class medical research facility, universities that train nurses, and more. But under Labor we have the longest emergency department waiting times in Australia, the most expensive health costs in the country, a toxic workplace culture and too few hospital beds available for Canberrans.

With a growing and ageing population and health expenditure consuming about a third of the ACT annual budget, we must make fixing our health system a non-negotiable priority. We need to make our health system bigger, we need to make it smarter and we need to deliver better services. This means more hospital beds in more locations, it means a better culture for staff and a better experience for patients, and it means a greater focus on prevention and early intervention.

Equally, investing in our children’s future is a priority. Although we are lucky in our community in many ways, there are too many children facing disadvantage and who are being left behind. The photo of a cage in an ACT public school that was used to contain an autistic child brought home just how dire the consequences are when the system fails. We need to support our teachers who are on the front line of education, and we must make sure that our school system has adequate capacity and that our schools are being maintained properly as core business. We need more help for our children with a disability. We need better prevention and early intervention for our kids in crisis.

We are committed to supporting our children in both the public education system and across independent and faith-based schools in Canberra, and we certainly support the intent of both the Gonski and Shaddock reviews. We want to have school communities where both teachers and parents are empowered. We must also look to the issues of social disadvantage that affect the education outcomes of so many children.

How our city is planned, how our local environment is preserved and how our city is connected are also fundamental to our quality of life. We are privileged to live in a beautiful bush capital. In recent years, however, we have seen Civic and our town centres degenerate significantly whilst our suburban environment has been spoiled in many places. The planning regime and the land release program have become almost unworkable and are not providing good outcomes for anyone.

We support effective policies to reduce carbon emissions, but our environmental policies must also be focused on local conservation across the ACT. We will improve and simplify the planning laws and ease the fees and charges that are stifling innovation and growth, and sending so many of our local city builders interstate. Our laws are resulting in poor planning outcomes and are not supporting homebuyers.

We will increase density and vibrancy in town centres and create a true city heart in Civic while maintaining the character of our suburbs. We will improve the flawed land release system that has been the greatest impediment to affordable housing in the ACT.

Urban maintenance and our local environment is also an area in dire need of attention. Madam Speaker, you would, I am sure, agree that Territory and Municipal Services should not be viewed as a second-order priority as they have become under the current government. Equally, public transport, road infrastructure and roads have been heading backwards under the Barr government. We will invest in buses and road infrastructure that will provide better outcomes and quicker transport for all Canberrans across all of our suburbs. This includes better public transport from Gungahlin along Northbourne Avenue, which can be significantly improved without spending nearly a billion dollars on a tram and tearing down all of the trees.

As a Liberal, it is in my DNA to support economic growth and grow business, as it is for all of my colleagues. It is important to understand that this is not an end in itself but because of the social benefits and the jobs that economic growth creates and the consequential ability to deliver world-class services and infrastructure for all of Canberra. But economic growth requires a dynamic and confident private sector supported by government. We need a cultural change away from the anti-business class warfare view of society that dominates many in this CFMEU-affiliated Labor Party to one that recognises the value of business to our community.

We also need to transition away from Canberra's dependency solely on the federal government and take advantage of sectors where Canberra is well placed to take a nation-leading role, including education and ICT. This can only be achieved by fixing the ACT's restrictive tax and regulatory regime and embracing a culture of innovation and enterprise. We must make Canberra a place where people want to do business.

Through cultural change and targeted policies, we will drive growth and job creation by encouraging innovation and entrepreneurial culture. We will reduce the tax and regulatory burden on business and we will provide better targeted support for key commercial sectors.

As I said before, it is my belief that no-one should be left behind. That inspires me in politics, just as the forgotten people of Australia inspired the founder of our great party, Sir Robert Menzies. I believe that we have a duty to look after the vulnerable and to build a safe and fair community. We will strengthen our communities by recognising and supporting diversity in religion and in culture, and we will sustain a safe and tolerant city for all Canberrans. We will not leave the disadvantaged, disabled or vulnerable behind and we will respect and support our ageing community members. We are committed to closing the gap for Indigenous people.

We will help those who are facing the challenges of mental health, drugs and homelessness, and treat them with compassion. And there is no greater benefit for an individual or greater responsibility for a society than to help our children who are at risk of harm.

We will address housing affordability and make sure that social housing targets are for those in greatest need. We will make sure that we continue to live in a vibrant community by supporting our local arts, sport and cultural organisations, and we will focus on programs that provide benefit to our whole community. We will not unfairly increase the cost of living pressures through massive rate increases and unaffordable projects like light rail.

Politics is a matter of priorities. We will fix our health system, we will invest in education, we will build our city, we will grow our economy and we will leave no-one behind. Indeed we will do much more, Madam Speaker. We can do so much in each of these areas, across all areas of government, because we will not squander billions of dollars on a light rail network as the Barr government proposes to do.

We have already outlined a number of policies that we are committed to that highlight our different priorities. We will stop household rates increasing by 10 per cent a year as they have under Andrew Barr's unfair tax changes. We will limit increases to government charges and taxes that continue to grow well beyond CPI. We will address the ACT's longest wait times for emergency treatment as a priority. We will restore the 60 hospital beds cut from the proposed University of Canberra hospital by the Barr Labor government. We will restore the full \$15 million cuts to police funding by the Barr government. We will place nurses in all of our special schools.

We will provide 50 additional super express buses across our suburbs. We will establish a domestic violence court. We will issue tasers to front-line police to keep them and our community safe. We will introduce coward punch laws to keep our youth safe in Civic. We will provide for testing of autonomous vehicles. We will duplicate Gundaroo Drive. We will duplicate Cotter Road. We will reduce the lease variation charge in Civic and town centres. We will build a flyover on the Barton Highway. We will create a single nature conservation agency. We will create an emergency services statutory authority. We will simplify and improve the ACT planning laws.

Madam Speaker, there is much more to come. We have done the hard work, and we have done the work that will roll out many more policies. I have the team to get this done. My team is unified, it is hard working, it is capable and, most importantly, and

in contrast to those opposite, my team is in touch with their communities. I am proud of the work that my team has done, and I value the diversity and broad life experience that they bring to our party.

There is a clear choice for the future in Canberra—a Liberal Party that is focused on all Canberrans across all of our suburbs or an Andrew Barr government that will burden the ACT with increasing levels of debt and deficit and reduced levels of services, as it increases rates and other fees and charges, which is necessary in order to fund millions of dollars every year in tram payments. The choice in October is this: our future for all Canberrans or a Barr government only for the favoured few.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Urban Renewal) (10.14): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

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

“(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT Labor Government has a strong track record of delivering vital infrastructure, economic growth, and health, education and transport services for Canberrans, as well as fostering an inclusive and welcoming community;
- (b) the Chief Minister, in his statement to the Assembly of 9 February, set out a clear and positive set of Government priorities to make Canberra even better; and
- (c) the Government has stood up for Canberra by strongly opposing cuts by the Federal Coalition Government to the ACT’s health and education systems, as well as its axing of approximately 10 000 public sector jobs from the Canberra economy;

(2) further notes the Canberra Liberal Opposition:

- (a) has defended the cut of approximately \$600 million in health funding made by the Abbott and Turnbull Federal Government to ACT hospitals;
- (b) has defended the Federal Government cuts to the ACT’s education system arising from the refusal to honour the Gonski education reforms; and
- (c) according to all major business groups, is exposing the ACT to extreme sovereign risk and economic uncertainty by threatening to rip up validly executed and commenced infrastructure contracts; and

(3) calls on the Government to continue to focus on delivering the health, education, public transport, renewable energy and economic outcomes Canberrans need, and reject the destructive Canberra Liberal approach to public policy.”.

Last week I set out the government’s priorities for 2016. My statement makes clear this government’s positive plan for Canberra that will make our city even better. I,

like all of my colleagues, am determined that the Canberra of tomorrow will be even stronger than the Canberra of today.

Our community is growing, and we are becoming a truly internationally engaged city. The opportunities that this engagement will provide over coming generations are limitless. But while we stretch to take our place in the world, the government is also working hard to strengthen those essential characteristics that make Canberra such a unique place to live: our world-class education and health systems; our strong transport network; our skills-based economy; but most importantly, Madam Speaker, our welcoming, supportive and inclusive community.

Canberrans have told me that these are their priorities, and every member of my government works every day to deliver on them. We are delivering the health, education and transport infrastructure necessary to avoid service gaps and congestion that are experienced all too often in other jurisdictions.

At the Canberra Hospital we have opened the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children and expanded the emergency department, and we will soon open a 25-bed secure mental health unit. We have invested in Calvary hospital, with a new medical assessment and planning unit, a hospital in the home program and a new birth centre.

Of course, earlier this month construction commenced on the new teaching hospital at the University of Canberra to open in 2018 to provide the people of Belconnen and north Canberra—and indeed the rest of the city—with a state-of-the-art, modern subacute hospital. We are blitzing elective surgery wait lists. We are establishing walk-in centres so that Canberrans receive the right medical care where and when they need it. We are investing in the city's future by ensuring that the city's children receive a world-class education.

We have opened new schools in growing regions, like the Coombs school in the Molonglo Valley and the school at Taylor in north Gungahlin. We have upgraded existing facilities, such as the Canberra College Woden campus and Belconnen High School. We have rolled out an upgraded wi-fi network in all of our public schools so that kids in Canberra's public schools are the best connected in the country.

We saw the opportunity and we have worked hard to get international flights to Canberra. We have delivered on that objective. Canberra will soon be at the centre of a capital express service that connects us to Singapore and to Wellington. This is something that even those opposite seem incapable of finding fault with, even if they cannot quite yet bring themselves to acknowledge what a fundamental game changer it is for our city. The export, tourism and transport opportunities from this breakthrough are simply massive.

Madam Speaker, my government is delivering a transport network that will give our city a massive competitive and productivity advantage in the 21st century. The Canberra light rail network will see our citizens bypassing the sort of horrific traffic jams that are faced every day in cities like Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. We said we would build a legal, convenient and safe ride-sharing system for our city, and we delivered on that. We were the first in Australia to provide our residents with the

lower cost and greater convenience of legal ride sharing. We are fostering an economy that can withstand the savage cuts of federal Liberal governments and to create well-paid, highly skilled jobs in a range of growth sectors.

Our practical support for major employers such as the University of Canberra to compete as a global teaching and research institution will keep creating jobs for our city, generation after generation. We are creating an events calendar that is the envy of cities around the world, from the National Multicultural Festival to Enlighten to major international sporting events viewed by hundreds of millions of people around the world. We are establishing vibrant new entertainment and arts precincts, proving that you do not have to leave Canberra for a great weekend away. In fact, the evidence is suggesting that people are coming here for that experience.

Our social inclusion and equality agenda gives everyone the best opportunity to contribute to our city and the best chance of reaching their full potential. Our city leads the way in the national disability insurance scheme, and we are currently undertaking the single biggest renewal of our city's public housing stock in the history of self-government. The fact that our National Multicultural Festival attracts such amazing crowds and generates such a fantastic atmosphere demonstrate once again just how much Canberrans thrive on diversity and new cultural experiences.

Importantly, we are also standing up for Canberrans' jobs in the face of the most savage attack on our city's workforce in a generation. The federal Liberal government is cutting approximately 10,000 jobs from our city's economy. I think it is fair to observe that anywhere else in Australia facing such a massive disruption to its labour market would be the recipient of very generous federal government transition assistance packages. This clearly does not hold when the federal government is the one doing the sacking.

My government is standing up for Canberra in the face of this onslaught. I had convinced Prime Minister Abbott of no further cuts to Canberra. Unfortunately, the new Prime Minister is not honouring the commitment of Mr Abbott. I extracted that promise from the Prime Minister. I extracted that promise from former Prime Minister that there would be no more major cuts and we will hold the current Prime Minister, Mr Turnbull, to that commitment.

I have not seen anything to indicate from those opposite that they have any inclination to do the same. As I said, the opposition leader is very happy to have his photo taken next to the Prime Minister but he is less keen to endorse a number of the current Prime Minister's public policy statements in relation to policy reform or really to talk about what the federal Liberal government is doing to this city. Indeed, we see now the agenda of the now leader of the National Party and Deputy Prime Minister in wanting to move seemingly all agencies in his portfolio out of this city.

We hear quite a bit of criticism from those opposite on the actions of this government but very little about the impact of their colleagues up on the hill, the impact of their cuts to our city's schools and their cuts to our city's hospitals. The fact is that they have no plan for health, apart from quietly acquiescing to their federal colleagues ripping \$600 million of funding out of our hospitals, and no plan for education, apart

from quietly waving through federal plans to kneecap the Gonski funding reforms and the funding structure that goes with a needs-based approach to school funding.

It is well past time that they stopped defending the indefensible. We all know, and Canberrans know, that these federal Liberal government cuts will have a disastrous effect on our city's hospitals and our schools. These federal Liberal cuts will condemn our kids to a second-class education and put them at a profound disadvantage in a global economy. I cannot remember one single statement from those opposite defending Canberra schools and hospitals from the attacks and the cuts to funding from their colleagues just up the road on Capital Hill. Maybe we might hear such a comment today. It may be very late but it is better than never.

Clearly, their most grievous attack on Canberra's economic credibility, and what puts us at risk, are the propositions that the Leader of the Opposition has just put forth about wanting to attract investment into Canberra. It is the sovereign risk arising from the threat to rip up validly executed infrastructure contracts no matter what the cost to our city's reputation or to future infrastructure projects that we all know are necessary for this city's growth.

All major Australian business and infrastructure groups have condemned such economic vandalism. Even their federal colleagues will not offer the faintest support because they know the risk it poses not just for the ACT but for Australia. But the economic lunatics opposite are willing to trash our city's reputation and, indeed, our country's reputation on the basis of political opportunism. While their focus is on destruction and what they are against rather than what they are, for my government will continue our focus on making Canberra stronger, getting on with the job of delivering education, health, transport, renewable energy and economic development outcomes for Canberra.

We are proud of our achievements and we are also focused on what is needed for this city in the coming decade. We need to deliver for the people of Canberra today, tomorrow, over the rest of this decade and into the future, a positive plan for Canberra's future. We are prepared to stand up for this city, to support its continued development, its continued social inclusion. The contrast is with the negativity of those opposite.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (10.25): This morning we heard Mr Hanson's election stump speech—a speech full of platitudes, generalities and motherhood statements. By the time the election does come around in October—and that is clearly what Mr Hanson was focused on this morning in his speech—I think Canberra will have seen through the magic pudding of promising anything without taking any serious consideration of what it takes to pay for some of those things.

That is the reality of the speech that Mr Hanson gave this morning. It is in stark contrast to the way the Greens have played a role in government and the influence that we have had in terms of delivering outcomes that the people of Canberra want to see: things like action on climate change, action on equality, action on health, transport,

housing and greening our city. These are the things I and previously my colleagues have been focused on, and that is what we believe the people of Canberra are interested in—a broad spectrum of issues. People know that every single day the government has a whole range of things to do. Certainly the government I have been a part of are taking on that full set of responsibilities every single day as we seek to create the best possible city for the future for Canberrans. We are taking the courageous decisions, the decisions that need to be taken in order to prepare this city for the future and deliver for our residents today.

I certainly disagree that this government is out of touch with what Canberrans want. In the time that I have been in the Assembly I have worked hard to ensure that we have listened to the community to represent their views in this place, to ensure that the government is hearing people's issues and to make sure we are heading in the right direction. Since I have been a minister I have worked to improve community consultation on issues that I am progressing in my directorates, and I have been pleased to be able to take those views into account while developing policies and programs. It does make for better government when you listen to what the community is saying. You get great ideas and you are able to take the community with you as part of making reforms that need to be made.

If we look at some of the areas that have been touched on in this motion today, it is important not to simply take at face value the platitudes delivered by Mr Hanson but to look at the facts behind each of these areas of consideration. I will turn to a few of those. We have seen Mr Hanson suggesting that the government is neglecting the healthcare needs of Canberrans, and yet this is a government that is investing \$1.5 billion in health care in this financial year alone. The government is investing in new hospital beds and services, new outpatient care and mental health care. It is investing in a secure mental health unit, caring for people in the community and at home, end-of-life care and drug rehabilitation programs and increasing services for women and children.

On the other hand, the Liberals have not been standing up for the health needs of Canberrans when it comes to federal health funding cuts. Due to changes to the way that health funding to the states and territories is being calculated, future health funding will decrease substantially in the outyears by almost \$50 million in 2018-19, meaning that the ACT government needs to look for a way to plug that gap.

This government is also now focusing on preventative health and healthier lifestyles for Canberrans. We know that if we invest in people and support them in actively looking after their health through healthy lifestyles and diets we can save substantial funds from chronic and acute healthcare needs in the future. The Greens are pleased that this government has been able to develop the healthy weight initiative in line with our parliamentary agreement item as a key focus not just in ACT Health but across the government, from programs in schools, delivering more walking and cycling paths and delivering water fountains across Canberra. Members will have seen the water refill stations at the Multicultural Festival which are part of this initiative.

The 2015 budget presented a responsible balance of preventative, chronic and acute spending that responded to the significant reduction in commonwealth health funding

that has been presided over by the federal Liberal government, and complicit the ACT Liberals have been. We have heard very little from them about this. That is a travesty and that shows where the priorities lie for our local Liberals.

Turning to education, again, the government is investing heavily in education. Having just taken over the portfolio, in the first few weeks I can see the enormous energy that is going into ensuring a great educational future for all the children of this city. This financial year alone \$1.1 billion goes to our education system. This funding supports our students and our teachers across Canberra in all of our schools, no matter what type of school, whether they be public, catholic or independent. This funding covers the cost of our teachers, our programs, necessary resources and special needs transport for students with a disability.

As well as this, the government is investing in capital such as building new schools, maintenance of our 87 existing public schools and new ICT in schools. I was able to attend the first day at the brand new school in Molonglo just this month, the Charles Weston School in Coombs. That is a fantastic campus which not only can be enjoyed by the students but has been designed in a clever way so the wider community of Coombs and Molonglo can have it as a true community hub. The government has introduced a program of revitalising school infrastructure and is investing in the much-needed Tuggeranong CIT campus as well as upgrading Bruce and Reid CIT campuses and modernising Belconnen high.

The Greens are pleased the government now has a needs-based education funding system for our ACT education system; it was certainly a top-line item in our parliamentary agreement with the Labor Party. But where are the Canberra Liberals when it comes to education, funding and resourcing? We are still dealing with the fallout of one of the most obvious broken promises from the Abbott government—the funding of the Gonski reforms. This means the ACT now has to increasingly go it alone in developing needs-based funding, and with less money than was promised.

This is only just beginning to play out. We know the later years of that funding agreement are the most critical ones and the ones where the biggest gaps are going to come because of the position taken by the Liberal Party nationally, and we have seen no serious argument with that by the local Liberal Party. It is going to be a tough few years for education funding, but certainly the Greens and the Labor Party are working hard to ensure that we are striving to end the educational achievement gap based on socioeconomic status and that the ACT at least develops a fair, transparent and equitable funding system, despite the federal Liberal Party position.

I note that later today we will talk about public housing. I do not believe the Canberra Liberals could put housing on today's list of things they are focused on, because we know they are, of course, the party that oversaw the biggest sell-off of public housing in the ACT's history. They reduced the level of public housing in the ACT from 13 per cent to less than nine per cent, and they have the hide to tell us today that they are focused on delivering better outcomes for all Canberrans. Talk about leaving people behind. When you start flogging off that much public housing, the most vulnerable people in the community are the ones who are going to feel those sorts of policy outcomes. That is the sort of reality that we can expect to see if Mr Hanson

gets his wish. Nice, fluffy, friendly Mr Hanson goes to the election, being charming and promising everything to everybody. But the reality of what he delivers after the poll, if he is successful, will be very clear for all to see. And this is just an example of the type of position we can expect.

By contrast, we are now in a period of the largest level of public housing investment since self-government. Our last budget alone allocated over \$133 million over four years to renew our public housing and to bring it up to standard to ensure that our tenants are living in public housing stock that is more energy efficient, more affordable, more modern and more livable. This, of course, includes the redevelopment of Northbourne Avenue and the provision of new public housing for those tenants.

The parliamentary agreement has also seen the delivery of the Common Ground housing model after many years of community support. It is right now providing essential services for some of our most vulnerable Canberrans, helping break the cycle of homelessness for those who have struggled. The government is investing in our community for now and for the long term. We are making steps towards meeting our future challenges, transforming the shape and feel of our city, and also delivering the day-to-day services in our suburbs.

When it comes to the economy, the Liberals maintain that the government has lost touch with the priorities of Canberra, but I do not think they understand that people do not support the slash-and-burn behaviour we have seen from the federal government. I think the revenue side of the equation is an interesting discussion, and we are now starting to see a bit more sophisticated discussion at a national level about the fact that governments need to generate revenue to pay for the services for our community.

The ACT has taken the difficult and politically challenging task of shifting the taxation base away from inefficient and inequitable stamp duty and insurance taxes towards a broader based land tax approach, an approach lauded by the Prime Minister on national television last weekend when he said this is clearly the best policy approach to take.

I would be interested to know what the position of Mr Hanson and his colleagues is going to be on raising the revenue that they would need to run the services of government should they take office. I would be keen to see the recipe for that magic pudding which looks after all the interests of all Canberrans in the way that Mr Hanson is presenting it. I would like to hear also some acknowledgement that while some taxes and charges are going up, simultaneously other taxes are going down, such as the gradual evolution of insurance taxes and stamp duty. Insurance duty is due to be completely abolished by the end of June, saving households and Canberra businesses hundreds, potentially thousands, of dollars each year. Every single household in Canberra is benefiting from that, not just the people who own houses. Everybody has insurance. Everybody is benefiting from those tax cuts. That is about making our tax system sustainable; it is about making sure that the government has a reliable source of revenue to deliver the services that this city needs.

I think the reference to leaving no-one behind is interesting when we think about some of the key issues facing Canberra. Let us think about the Mr Fluffy problem. Where have the Canberra Liberals been in helping ensure the government does the responsible thing by dealing with it head on once and for all and ridding this city of the toxic legacy that we have inherited? This is a necessary program for all Canberrans. It removes the spectre of loose-fill asbestos for residents, homebuyers, tradespeople, carers and neighbours. The territory government has been required to incur the full net cost of the scheme. Sure, we got a loan from the federal government for a billion dollars, but we have had to go it alone, despite the commonwealth promising to pay two-thirds of the cost, without real financial support from the federal Liberal government—unless you count loaning us \$1 billion that we also have to pay interest on. That really is not the sort of thing we would expect for such a major issue affecting so many people in our city.

When it comes to community services we have seen some terrible policies coming from the federal government over the past few years which have meant serious cuts to the community and environment sector, such as housing and homelessness policy and advocacy peak bodies, environment groups and peak bodies as well as community legal centres. These are all the critical services that either help the most vulnerable people in our community or protect the environment. What we have seen is ideologically driven cuts from the Liberal Party's colleagues on the hill. It is all about undermining the provision of those services. I do not think that is about focusing on better outcomes for all Canberrans; that is about undercutting the services that help the most vulnerable in our community.

Of course, the motion today finishes—as everything does these days—by creating a dichotomy between what the people of Canberra want in pursuing light rail. That is how the Liberal Party see this; they see it as an absolute dichotomy. I think this morning's radio discussion was an interesting one and showed how the Canberra Liberals are being left behind on this issue. We know the majority of Canberrans support the project and are now getting excited by the prospect of it coming soon. We heard that today in the discussion about the proposed development of Manuka Oval. There is going to be a lot of discussion about that project, but what was interesting was hearing people say, "Well, we're going to need to get light rail there so that we can provide the transport to support and sustain such a large project." I think that reflects the fact that the community understands that you need to invest in good transport infrastructure as our city grows and as the population grows.

The Canberra Liberals are totally off the mark with their view of the car-dominated Canberra of the future. You can ask Canberrans how they think transport infrastructure should be spent—and this work has been done independently—and they say the majority of it should go to public transport, then to cycling and walking infrastructure. Infrastructure for cars comes last. That is what the public say when they are asked. Investing in these sustainable transport infrastructures is also the responsible thing to do.

I should quickly turn to issues of environment and climate change. We heard Mr Hanson say this morning that he has a commitment to making it easier to develop.

But that is code for removing a range of important safeguards. We heard, again, that dichotomy where there is inconsistency in the policy position—promise everything. But let us see the reality of it. Mr Hanson gave us a spiel on the fact that we need to protect our bush capital, but he wants to make it easier to clear that bush capital and build houses on it. That is what we heard him say this morning. That is the reality of it.

We know this Liberal Party is committed to rolling back our renewable energy targets and our greenhouse gas reduction targets. They have made that clear in this place, and that is not the position Canberrans want. We know they want serious actions on these issues. We know they perceive themselves not just as local Canberrans but as global citizens who have to do their part to protect the future of not just this city but all future generations and people right across this planet.

I will not be supporting this motion today. I will be supporting Mr Barr's amendment. I think this provides a much more balanced account than the fantasy case we have seen Mr Hanson put forward this morning. (*Time expired.*)

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.40): Madam Speaker, we will not be supporting the amendment, you will not be surprised to hear. But let me say that I am actually greatly encouraged by the response from those opposite. Instead of critiquing the priorities of the Canberra Liberals, what I said in my speech, both Mr Barr and Mr Rattenbury spent about 95 per cent of their time critiquing the federal Liberal government. They are welcome to do so, but the reality is that what we are talking about here are the priorities of the Canberra Liberals as opposed to the priorities of the ACT Greens and the ACT Labor Party. It may be interesting to talk about the federal Liberal Party and the federal Labor Party, but if that is all they have got to critique my priorities, they are on thin ground. I invite them to read my speech and next time listen to what I have to say, critique what I have to say, rather than defaulting to the mantra that the federal Liberal government is bad and therefore that is the only case they have to make.

These two men are contending for the position of Chief Minister in October, and they need more of a critique on us than simply a critique about the federal Liberal Party. Let me say very clearly that we want as much funding as we can have from the federal government no matter who it is. I have been consistent across the board when we have called for that additional funding, be it in health or be it in supporting jobs.

Andrew Barr says that he has never seen me say anything about this. Rubbish. I have been on the front page critiquing the federal government, and I will do so whether it is Liberal or Labor. But I am still proud to have a photo with the Prime Minister, with my federal leader. Where was Mr Barr when Kevin Rudd was taking what he called his meataxe to the federal public service here in Canberra, stripping thousands of jobs? And where is the photo of Andrew Barr with Bill Shorten?

The reality is that this is about decisions that need to be made. This is about priorities. As much as Mr Rattenbury complains that we are making this a juxtaposition between our priorities for all of Canberra as opposed to light rail, there is a significant truth in that. Light rail, particularly a light rail network, will take hundreds millions of dollars that could otherwise be spent on other priorities. That is what politics is about. The

reality is that Mr Barr and Mr Rattenbury favour the tram, the first phase of which will service about one per cent of the population in peak hour, and they want to roll out a whole network across Canberra. We disagree with that. The reality is that that will afford us in government to allocate resources to other priorities. We have different priorities. We do not want the longest waiting times in Australia in our ED. We do not want schools that are over capacity. We do not want declining levels of usage of buses across Canberra. And I could list any number of other priorities. We will not be cutting police resources, and so on.

One slightly odd statement from Mr Rattenbury is that we did not support Mr Fluffy. That is outrageous. It is not true. It was actually the Canberra Liberals that led the charge on Mr Fluffy, getting immediate support for Mr Fluffy home owners. And I worked in a bipartisan fashion with Ms Gallagher to try and get as much money out of the feds as we could. I think she would attest to that. So that is an absolute nonsense claim.

As is much of what is in the amendments. The government has a strong track record of infrastructure? There has been infrastructure built; I do not deny that. We had a dam that went from \$140 million to \$409 million. We had a GDE that has been a debacle. We have a jail that has exploded in cost and is full despite our being promised it would not be. We have a secure mental health facility that we were promised would be open in 2011 that is not open. There is the bush healing farm. We have litigated dozens of these similar cases.

What about the health system? If the toxic culture we talked about yesterday, with the longest waiting times in an emergency department in Australia, is what they think is delivering on health, they are misguided. I would invite the Chief Minister to go down to the ED on a Friday or Saturday night and take a look for himself.

If cages in our schools is their claim for success in our education system, and overcrowded schools, again, that is a record of failure. Remember, as our schools are overcrowded, that it was Andrew Barr who cut 23 schools. Andrew Barr cut 23 schools. Let us not forget that for the parents who are struggling when schools are over capacity.

There are transport services that he lauds. The reality is that the usage of public transport has gone down under this government, particularly under Mr Rattenbury. As he focuses on the tram, we have seen fewer people using buses.

As I mentioned before, there is the issue of federal government reductions, also in health and education expenditure. Firstly, as we have litigated in this place before, the expenditure we are talking about was never in the federal budget. But I would like to see that money. Let me make no bones about it. Don't think I want to see less money. I want to see more money. I want to see as much money as possible come into our health system.

When it comes to things like Gonski—if they had listened to my speech, they would have heard I said I support it, as I do the Shaddock review—the reality is that, because it is needs-based funding, when Ms Gallagher signed up to Gonski funding it actually

meant a net reduction in ACT education funding. The decision to sign up to Gonski reduced the payments in SPP that were coming to the ACT by \$30 million. It is important that we do not just throw out slogans and words but that we look at the underlying facts, the detail, the reality.

When it comes to the issue of light rail, I know that now the only federal politician on the Liberal side Mr Barr seems to like is Jamie Briggs. He is the only one that he regularly quotes. It seems that Jamie Briggs is Andrew Barr's go-to man for economic advice. That probably explains why we have the biggest debt and deficit in the ACT's history under this Treasurer—the greatest Treasurer in ACT history, but only on the metric of greatest ever debt and greatest ever deficit.

Quite clearly there is a difference in priorities. We have priorities focused on the people of Canberra, all of the people of Canberra. The Greens and the Labor Party in this place seem to be content to roll out a narrow agenda based on light rail, and their defence of it seems to be to attack a government in a different parliament rather than focus on the debate that is relevant in this place.

Maybe that is why, over recent days, we have seen debate led by the Labor Party on matters of penalty rates, which are in the federal government's remit; on issues like same sex marriage, which are in the federal government's remit; and on issues like euthanasia, which are in the federal government's remit, a matter which is coming on later. It seems that the narrative from ACT Labor and the Greens is to attack the federal government rather than critique us. I take great comfort from the fact that this government and the Greens are unable to critique our agenda. It brings me great comfort.

The reality is, though, that when all is said and done, there is a difference in our priorities. I have outlined them today, and I have outlined a positive agenda. I have outlined a very positive agenda for all of the ACT, and I have outlined what my priorities are. I have also outlined a number of policies that we have already announced. We will continue to roll out policies to inform that agenda, to realise that agenda, should we be successful in October.

As I said before, there is a clear choice for the people of Canberra. It is us, the Liberal Party, that are focused across policies and priorities across all our suburbs, as I have outlined—fixing the health system, investing in education, growing our economy, building our city and leaving no-one behind. Or there are Andrew Barr and Shane Rattenbury, who will spend taxpayers' money on a tram, who will continue to triple rates. The choice is as simple as this. It is our future for all Canberrans or it is the Barr government for only the favoured few.

Question put:

That **Mr Barr's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

Mr Barr  
Ms Berry  
Dr Bourke  
Ms Burch  
Mr Corbell

Ms Fitzharris  
Mr Gentleman  
Ms Porter  
Mr Rattenbury

Mr Coe  
Mr Doszpot  
Mrs Dunne  
Mr Hanson  
Mrs Jones

Ms Lawder  
Mr Smyth  
Mr Wall

Amendment agreed to.

Question put:

That the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

Mr Barr  
Ms Berry  
Dr Bourke  
Ms Burch  
Mr Corbell

Ms Fitzharris  
Mr Gentleman  
Ms Porter  
Mr Rattenbury

Mr Coe  
Mr Doszpot  
Mrs Dunne  
Mr Hanson  
Mrs Jones

Ms Lawder  
Mr Smyth  
Mr Wall

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## Concessions

**MR DOSZPOT** (Molonglo) (10.55): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that an expenditure review of the ACT Concessions Program was conducted in early 2015 and was opened up for public consultation;
- (b) that in November 2015 the Government released a discussion paper *Options to improve the fairness and targeting of the ACT Concessions Program* for public comment;
- (c) that consultation on this discussion paper ended on 12 February and three days later the Chief Minister has already announced possible changes via the media with limited or no consideration of community feedback;
- (d) cost of living pressures such as rates and taxes are all creating unfair financial difficulties on Canberra's senior community; and
- (e) that Canberra seniors have been left in a state of neglect and uncertainty in regards to imminent changes to the Concessions Program; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) clarify the uncertainty surrounding changes to the ACT Concessions Program and acknowledge the concerns of the Canberra community;
- (b) assure the Canberra senior community that this review is not just another cost cutting exercise by this government; and
- (c) recognise the difficulties that current cost of living pressures are causing older Canberrans.

The motion I bring forward in the Assembly today highlights the uncertainty that has surrounded the proposed changes to the ACT concessions program for almost a year. As I have already mentioned, and the motion notes, the expenditure review of the concessions program was opened up for public comment in March and April 2015, with a total of 24 submissions offered from the community. Then in November 2015 the government released a discussion paper detailing proposed changes to 10 concessions open to feedback from the public. Now after almost a year of indecision from the government, those that receive concessions will still have to wait until the June budget is released to fully understand which concessions will be targeted and how in the government's cutbacks.

Public consultation on the discussion paper released by the government closed last Friday. By Monday the Chief Minister had already told the media, and we saw the headline in the *Canberra Times*, that cuts would be announced in the ACT budget and signalled in which areas these cuts would be. I thought the idea of public consultation was to provide the community with a legitimate chance to provide feedback to Mr Barr. It would appear from this situation that it was all for show—the normal “consultation, consultation”—yet the bottom line is, “We know what we're going to do. Just let them talk and we'll do what we want to do after all.” That is exactly what is happening here.

How, I ask, in less than three days, was Mr Barr able to review and consider the public feedback and consult with the relevant departments and organisations that should be involved in a decision such as this? How in such a short amount of time was the government able to properly consider the long-term effects that cutting particular concessions will have on the people of Canberra? I also find it quite astounding that this is coming from a government that claims to be developing an age-friendly city. It has even developed a strategic plan for positive ageing. I ask, Madam Speaker: what positives are there in this situation?

I very much doubt that the ACT senior community are feeling positive about the situation they find themselves in, with no details or information about when and exactly what changes to the concessions program will occur. I also doubt that seniors are feeling positive about the increasing hikes they are seeing in their rates while the government considers cutting back the water and sewerage concessions for home owners. Why are these draconian and drastic measures being considered? It is to fund Mr Barr's platitudes to the Greens, the biggest self-indulgent act by any ACT government to date—the light rail—and everybody in Canberra has to suffer for it.

Although the territory is relatively young in age as a jurisdiction, like many other towns and cities across Australia, the ACT's population is ageing. Figures from the Australian Bureau of Stats from 2012 reinforce that statement. Statistics predict the ACT population will rise to just over 904,000 people by 2061. The number of Canberrans aged over 65 is set to double from the 2012 census level of 11 per cent to 22.5 per cent by 2061.

An increasingly ageing population will continue to place pressures on economic prospects in Canberra and Australia wide. It will present new challenges and opportunities for Canberra and the current and future ACT governments will need to address the potential economic implications of these future demographic changes. These will include implications on our labour force supply, changes to our health system and increases in aged-care provision, not to mention the flow-on effects into every other aspect of local government services, including transport, housing, education and planning.

Each state and territory in Australia offers a range of concessions to improve the affordability of goods and services to people on low incomes such as concessions for health services, transport, education, utility costs and council rates. Concessions often benefit those with disabilities, pensioners, young people and those who are unemployed. Those who receive concessions generally rely on this support system as a means of helping them to meet their very important areas of need.

Yet here in the ACT seniors have been left virtually in limbo by this government. The government has said there will be changes but has not assured the people of Canberra what these changes will be. The Chief Minister was asked in this very chamber if he could assure seniors that they would not be worse off under any changes to the concessions program and he could not, or would not, provide any assurance whatsoever.

As the shadow minister for ageing, my office has received countless phone calls, emails and letters on this issue—pensioners seeking further information, seniors looking for reassurance when facing an uncertain future and elderly Canberrans who are horrified that after a lifetime of working hard in the community they may not be supported during their well-earned retirement. These are real people, Mr Barr, with real lives that will be affected by changes to the concessions program. But all the government seem to care about is cutting costs and the budget bottom line, and for what purpose? Again, it is to meet their one big aim that is going to affect all Canberrans.

The cost of living pressures that are being placed on the Canberra community are growing and this means that some of the most important issues to people living in Canberra are the fees and charges they will incur when going about their everyday lives. These are things like the cost of rates, the cost of parking, the cost of registering a vehicle, commercial rates and land taxes—just to name a few—all of which have increased under Labor, and all of which are increasing far higher than normal CPI.

For example, utility costs continue to grow. Water and sewerage prices have more than doubled since 2001. Growth in the cost of water and sewerage in the ACT over the last 10 years has outmatched CPI growth by approximately 60 per cent. The cost of parking has significantly increased in the last couple of years, as well as the cost of driving licences, parking permits and registering a vehicle, which are all becoming more expensive here in Canberra.

When I am out in the community increases in cost of living is raised nine times out of 10 as one of the most fundamental concerns Canberrans have. Many elderly constituents approach me who have lived in the same area all their lives, bought houses there and find themselves in the position that they now cannot afford the fees and charges placed on them by this government.

Rates all across Canberra are increasing and residents are struggling to meet the rising costs. In the 2015-16 financial year rates in Aranda have risen 11.1 per cent, in Red Hill by 10 per cent, and in suburbs like Ngunnawal residents are paying \$134 more than the previous year. That is a 10.4 per cent rate rise there as well. This government is asking those on low or fixed incomes to keep meeting these increasing charges year after year, and people are struggling. And now Mr Barr is trying to add to the problems of those that need the concessions by cutting or changing those concession outlines.

At an age when maintaining your independence is of the greatest importance, senior Canberrans have told me that they simply can no longer afford to keep a vehicle on the road. This not only impacts people going about their everyday lives; it also impacts their ability to participate socially within the broader Canberra community. The government's answer to this is to reduce the motor vehicle registration concession by half to all those on pensioner or veteran cards. They will now need to look for an extra \$265 a year to keep their car on the road, on top of their annual third-party insurance and other road user fees.

You would think that if the government is cutting motor vehicle registration they must want pensioners to use public transport instead. Wrong again, it would seem, because that concession is being reduced as well or could be completely cut altogether. The government has suggested concession fares should be removed for seniors card holders or restricted to off-peak periods only: "You can go to the shops. You can catch the bus to go to the shops, but only when nobody else is using the buses."

Their rationale for this change as stated in the discussion paper was to improve the sustainability of the concessions program by reducing access to the concession for seniors card holders. This is absolutely ridiculous. In the government's own words, they basically said that they do not want seniors card holders to use this concession because it is costing the government too much money. Well, Mr Barr, the only reason it is costing you too much money is because you have got money earmarked for other purposes. I would have thought it would be obvious that if you stop people using a concession, you will save money. If the government decide to remove concession fares for seniors card holders, this will save them \$350,000 a year to help pay for that

\$700 million to \$800 million light rail. Sadly, this is all about cutting costs to pay for a light rail that we cannot afford and we do not need.

Changes to concessions will not only impact elderly individuals and couples in the community when choosing means of transport but also could start to impact on Canberra community groups and facilities too. Canberra schools, universities, churches, sports groups, childcare providers and retirement villages do not pay rates, and now the ACT government's latest suggestion is that these rate concessions could be removed as well. Like everyone else in the ACT, these organisations will remain in limbo until the June budget.

It is clear that the full effects of these changes on the back pocket of Canberrans will not be known until the government are clear about which concessions will be reduced or cut. However, they have for the past year allowed those who rely on the ACT's concessions program to endure a scare campaign full of waiting and uncertainty. By the time the June budget rolls around, seniors and other concession card holders will have been waiting almost 18 months for the answers.

A recent survey conducted by the ACT's Council on the Ageing reflects clearly the lack of support that these changes have in the community. It showed that in the past 12 months more respondents used the motor vehicle registration, energy and utility concessions more than any other concession. It also suggested that of 33 older Canberrans surveyed, 68 per cent did not support the transferring of water and sewerage concessions to the energy and utility concession.

In response to this suggestion, COTA ACT have recommended in their submission that "concessions on utilities and rates should continue to be available at current levels to pensioners and part-pensioners to support low income people to remain in their own homes." It further recommended that the government examine the potential for flexibility for people to decide how best to use their concessions within the energy and utility rates area.

In the same survey, over three-quarters of respondents did not support the reduction or removal of public transport concessional fares for seniors card holders. Comments indicate that elderly people rely heavily on public transport when they cannot drive and that many people were confused by this proposal, as they believed the government strongly advocated for the use of public transport in Canberra. I can understand their confusion.

Both the motor vehicle registration and public transport concessions have been highlighted to be significantly reduced or completely cut. The government's message is unclear. The government is also considering cutting the concessions received by part-pensioners. The decision to limit the concessions to 75 per cent would reduce the cost of the program by around \$3.5 million per annum to go towards light rail. Has the government considered that not all who receive a part pension from Centrelink are well off and that pensioners often receive only very modest incomes? Yet this government is ready to cut concessions without a moment's thought to how these changes might affect people's quality of life.

It is becoming increasingly harder, Mr Barr, for senior citizens—you are laughing as usual—and that is something that is real in the community. Apparently you are finding it very difficult to understand how the ageing are coping with issues that you are trying to make even harder for them. It is becoming increasingly harder for senior citizens in Canberra to maintain their lifestyles. House costs are higher, rates are tripling and general costs of living are getting more and more expensive. For people on fixed or reducing incomes, living in the ACT is not easy. In fact, many older Canberrans are choosing to retire elsewhere. Concessions are designed to assist financially disadvantaged people to meet these costs of living. The indecision, lack of certainty and limited consideration of community feedback in regards to the review of the ACT concessions program clearly demonstrate that those opposite do not prioritise our senior community members. (*Time expired.*)

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Urban Renewal) (11.10): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

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

“(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT Government wants to ensure that the ACT Concessions Program is targeted to help those who need it most;
- (b) the Government is committed to extending a helping hand to Canberrans in need, and making sure vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our community have access to concessions for transport and essential services;
- (c) in November 2015 the Government released a discussion paper Options to improve the fairness and targeting of the ACT Concessions Program, and that the discussion paper provides detailed information on a range of options to improve the fairness and targeting of the ACT Concessions Program;
- (d) further changes to the social security system by the Commonwealth Government may affect the eligibility arrangements for the ACT Government Concessions Program;
- (e) the federal Liberal Party cut funding to concessions programs in the ACT by terminating the National Partnership Agreement on Certain Concessions for Pensioner Concession Card and Seniors Card Holders; and
- (f) the ACT Government has stepped in to provide support for low-income Canberrans at a time when the federal Liberal Party has been cutting benefits and raising taxes on the least well off in our community; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) write to the Federal Liberal Government to condemn its cost-cutting exercise of terminating the National Partnership Agreement on Certain

Concessions for Pensioner Concession Card and Seniors Card Holders and their neglect of low-income earners;

- (b) continue to provide support for low-income Canberrans, including through the ACT Concessions Program and the provision of high quality health, education and community services; and
- (c) take into account input provided by the community to the November 2015 discussion paper and continue to explore options to make the ACT Concessions Program fairer, in order to ensure Canberrans who most need help continue to receive assistance.”.

As a Labor government, we believe in supporting Canberrans who need a helping hand. We believe in ensuring that Canberrans in need and vulnerable and disadvantaged Canberrans have access to concessions for essential services and transport. We also believe in ensuring that all Canberrans have access to high-quality education, health and community services. We also believe every member of the community should be able to contribute to society to the fullest extent possible. This may shock some opposite who believe, in fact, in cutting funding to schools and hospitals.

But supporting a community goes beyond just a concessions program, as important as that is. It also involves delivering high-quality services and facilities for our community: community health centres, quality public schools, culturally appropriate assistance for our Indigenous communities, better transport, and better public transport systems. These are all examples of this government’s plan to strengthen our community and to leave no-one behind.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is worth remembering just how important concessions are in addressing economic or social disadvantage. Making sure vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our community have access to concessions for transport and basic services is a key pillar to strengthen our community as a whole.

To make it easier for Canberrans to access information on the range of territory government concessions available and the eligibility requirements for each, the ACT government set up a one-stop shop, if you like, an assistance website at [Assistance.act.gov.au](http://Assistance.act.gov.au). It is a place that pulls together information from across the territory and, indeed, Australian government and local community organisations to provide that one-stop shop.

In order to ensure government assistance goes to those who need it most, concessions are generally provided to those most in need on the basis of particular eligibility criteria, most significantly around financial disadvantage, but also taking into account age, special needs, charitable or public benefits status, or other particular circumstances. We have done this in the context of a challenging fiscal environment generally and something that was completely ignored by the shadow minister in his contribution: the significant cuts to concessions funding delivered by his Liberal Party colleagues, who cut the national partnership on concessions.

Everything that Mr Doszpot said should have been directed at his federal colleagues, who cut the funding for concessions, who abolished the national partnership that was working to assist all states and territories to deliver more concessions. What did his party do in 2014? They cut it. All the cant, all the hypocrisy that we have just heard from the shadow minister needs to be brought to this Assembly's attention and the wider Canberra community's attention for exactly what has happened in the past two years. It is that concessions have been cut by the Liberal Party, not just here in Canberra but right across Australia. That is what his party stands for, and that is what he is accountable for.

Let us be clear that expenditure on the territory's concessions program has been rising. My government has been increasing funding for concessions every year. Expenditure on centrally administered concessions increased over five years by 54 per cent, an average annual growth rate of nine per cent from about \$30 million in 2008-09 to close to \$47 million in 2013-14. We budgeted \$51.3 million for the concessions program in 2015-16, which included one-off supplementation of nearly \$7 million, or an increase of 15 per cent on the original budgeted amount, to meet increased demand for concession payments.

This is in addition, of course, to that from the commonwealth. This is our money, new money coming in. Of course, what we have seen from the commonwealth government was a cessation of the ongoing concession funding of \$2.2 million to the ACT in the commonwealth's 2014-15 budget.

We were not going to sit back and let the most vulnerable in the community suffer from this cut. It meant that the ACT government stepped in and met the shortfall, as any responsible government would do. We have sought to explore what improvements can be made to the territory's concessions program's fairness and targeting to best address social disadvantage while also exploring ways to strengthen the long-term sustainability of the scheme. As such, last year we announced a review into the scheme.

Four key principles underpin the review—equity, effectiveness, accessibility and transparency—to ensure that the concessions are targeted at those with the greatest need; that concessions assist with access to essential services considered fundamental to a reasonable quality of life; that information about concessions is accessible to all low income households; and that concessions are regularly monitored and reviewed.

The review currently underway is about ensuring that our concessions system is financially sustainable in the long term but most importantly it is about providing the greatest benefit to the lowest income Canberrans. Making sure that vulnerable and disadvantaged people in the community have access to concessions for transport and basic services is a fundamental principle for my government and this will not change.

As I have said many times, this review is about the government committing to maintaining the overall amount delivered through concessions but it is about ensuring that those who need the assistance are the ones who are receiving it. We want to target our concessions to those who need assistance the most. Let us be clear: the only

government and the only party that are cutting concessions in this city are the federal government and the Liberal Party.

My government's review has examined the nature, the eligibility, the usage and costs of the concessions program, current and future demand profiles for concessions and the impacts on the territory budget. The analysis drew on extensive modelling undertaken by NATSEM and data available from various sources, including the commonwealth, other states and the Northern Territory, ACT government agencies, Icon Water and ActewAGL.

Of course, as part of this process community input has been an important part of considering how we improve our concessions program. The territory government has worked closely with peak bodies in the community sector such as the ACT Council of Social Service to develop a discussion paper. The community was invited to have their say about the discussion paper which was titled, "Options to improve the fairness and targeting of the ACT concessions program." This was issued in November last year. Consultation closed last week.

The government will now consider the submissions. As I indicated in response to media questions during the week, we will announce our response in due course. But I can reassure the Assembly and the community that any changes will be built on the fundamental principle of making the concessions scheme fairer. What we have heard from the shadow minister is an attack, firstly, that we are taking too long to do this and that there is a scare campaign out there being run. You are responsible for that, Mr Doszpot. You are the one. It is in your power whether or not there is a scare campaign on this matter.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Mr Doszpot, please sit down. Stop the clock. Mr Doszpot, you were heard in silence. You will hear Mr Barr in silence. Mr Wall, stop interjecting and yelling across the chamber. Mr Barr.

**MR BARR:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It cannot be both; it cannot be that the government is being too hasty and taking too long. It cannot be that we are being fair and unfair. It cannot be that we are consulting and that we are not consulting. If you were to weave your way through the ramble that was the speech to open this debate, we were simultaneously being accused of all of those things.

Then at the end he suggests that we were running a scare campaign, when we stepped in to fill the cuts made by the federal Liberal government to concessions programs here in the territory, when we are looking to make the system fairer and to target assistance to those who need it most.

I will be very clear in stating the values that we hold and the values that we will apply to this task. That will always be to want to target assistance to low income earners. I am not in the business of providing concessions to the richest people in this city. I would hope no-one is in the business of providing concessions to the richest people in this city. If that is what those opposite think a concessions programs is, to provide

concessions to the highest income earners in the city, then I would fundamentally question what they believe in and what they think the purpose of a concessions scheme is about. Why do you think we have it? It is not to funnel money to rich people. It is to direct money and support to the lowest income Canberrans. They are the values, the value—

**Mr Doszpot:** Like Oaks Estate, is it?

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Mr Doszpot!

**MR BARR:** And the interjections from Mr Doszpot indicate exactly where his values are on this. He finds it objectionable that our purpose would be to redirect money away from high income earners to the most vulnerable Canberrans. That that is worthy of interjecting on speaks volumes of his starting point in this debate. But that is his position: that a concessions program is about high income earners.

No, it is not, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is about providing assistance to low income Canberrans and looking at our system to ensure that where we might be inadvertently providing assistance to high income earners, we can redirect that money to those who need it most. That is something that I think the vast majority of Canberrans—perhaps Mr Doszpot aside—would agree is the purpose of a concession scheme. It is to provide money and assistance to those who need it most. Surely in the design of our system, the design of our scheme, that is what we should be focused on.

That is exactly what my government is endeavouring to do, to provide more assistance to those who need it most. The contrast between the two parties could not be clearer. The other side of politics has cut funding for concessions, not just here in Canberra but right across Australia. I get interjected on when I state the values that we will apply to this, the values that we will apply to this to direct money to low income Canberrans. That is worthy of an interjection, repeated interjections, from those opposite. There you go. You have displayed in the last few minutes exactly the differences—why people are in politics and who they are here to help.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR BARR:** And off they go. Off they go again.

**Mrs Jones:** Tell the single income families of Belconnen.

**MR BARR:** And here is Mrs Jones now joining the chorus. She and Mr Doszpot believe that money from the concessions program should be steered away from lower income households to continue to support high income households.

*Mrs Jones interjecting—*

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Sit down, Mr Barr. Stop the clock. Mrs Jones, you have an opportunity to stand after Mr Barr to speak to this motion if you wish. I would ask you to remain silent until such time as you have the floor. Mr Barr.

**MR BARR:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I said, there we have it. In the approach to this debate, in the interjections we know exactly where the Liberal Party stands. They cut funding to concessions. In their view concessions funding should not be targeted to those who need it most.

Let me repeat for the benefit of people in this chamber, people listening to this debate and people who will read it later on. Where did the funding cut come? It came from the abolition of the national partnership on concessions in the 2014 federal government budget, from Tony Abbott and Joe Hockey, both now historical figures. Nonetheless, they represented contemporary Liberal Party values. We have contemporary Liberal Party values on display. The thing to cut in the 2014 federal budget was the national partnership on concessions. That is what they thought they should cut.

Then they have the hypocrisy to come into this place, move a motion like this and accuse the government of running a scare campaign on a process that we are undertaking over a period of time to better target concessions to those who need them most. I am happy for that contrast in values and that contrast in approach to be very clear, as it is this morning, as it will continue to be throughout presumably the rest of history. We know where the Liberal Party comes from and we know what they stand for. *(Time expired.)*

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (11.26): I welcome the opportunity to discuss this topic today because the Greens agree that it is important to get the concessions scheme right for the people who need it in the ACT. We cannot ignore the impact of taxes and charges on our low income residents, and the Greens fully support providing relief to low income earners where it is appropriate.

Concessions in the ACT come in a wide variety of forms. There are rebates for rates, water and sewerage; energy concessions to help people pay their energy bills; special rebates if you unfortunately need home dialysis or are on life support; transport concessions including drivers licence concessions, taxi assistance and ACTION bus concessions; health concessions to help people with artificial limbs, spectacles and other equipment; and even assistance if you cannot afford to pay for a funeral—not to mention all the assistance the government provides to people and organisations to help fund the services and necessities for those in need. This includes places and organisations that offer food, legal advice, services, housing, microcredit loans and various scholarships. And these concessions, rebates, waivers and support all need to fit in with the various concessions that the federal government makes available through its schemes.

I think that underlines the fact that there are a plethora of rebates and concessions available out there, rightly so, but at the same time it invites the questions: are they targeted to the best possible place? Can it be done more effectively? Can they be better targeted? These are the questions that I think are worth asking. To me, that is not something we should not be doing. It is something we should do.

I believe the ACT is a caring place. It is a place where we look after the people in need in our city. We still have people in poverty in Canberra, and that is something that I think surprises many people in this city. We in this place get an insight into it because we get invited to a range of events. We have exposed some of the issues and therefore we have a special responsibility to make sure that we are getting this right. And this government is intent on ensuring that the concession schemes in place in the ACT are going some way to support people through difficult times.

My colleague Amanda Bresnan also worked to ensure that people who cannot afford to pay their fines would be able to pay them off over a number of payments, rather than in a single lump sum. Her legislation was passed in the last Assembly, and this is now a standard offer to people who cannot afford to pay their fines. It gives them options to work their way through repaying it over a period and I imagine this has now stopped quite a few people losing their drivers licences over the years.

If Mr Doszpot was truly concerned about people in need, people who cannot afford to put three square meals on the table, people who cannot afford to get healthcare appointments, let alone pay for them, he would not be questioning the need for this review the ACT government is undertaking. He would be supporting the government's plan to ensure that assistance is targeted to the people who need it, and of course this includes pensioners and seniors.

The Greens believe that this review is a sensible thing to do, and it is the responsible thing to do. We need to make sure that our rebates and waivers are truly helping those in need and are not accidentally going to support people who do not actually need the leg up. And it is well worth referring to the paper released by the government at this point which does flag a range of options. It is important, I think, first of all to note the opening sentence in the paper:

The ACT Government wants to ensure that the ACT Concessions Program is targeted to help those who need it the most.

That is the very first line of the discussion paper. I am perfectly comfortable with that. That is what we should be doing.

But it is interesting to go through the paper. There are ideas in here that will be debated. That is the exact point of putting the paper out and seeking community feedback.

If you go to page 11 of the paper, for example, it is one example that shows the percentage of households accessing the water and sewerage concession by quintile. There are five income quintiles. One is the lowest, five is the highest. As you would hope and expect, most of the concessions are going to the lowest quintile. The vast bulk goes to the two lowest quintiles. But there are people in the fourth and fifth income quintiles who are receiving concessions. That begs serious questions. Do they actually need the assistance or should we be targeting that assistance to people who, frankly, need it more? To be in the highest income quintile and be receiving concessions from government defies logic.

Surely there are people in the community who need it more than somebody in the highest income quintile. Yes it is a small percentage, but 10 per cent of the households accessing the water and sewerage concession are in the fourth income quintile. I think it is well worth having a look at that and saying, "Is that the best way to spend the resources we have and help the people most in need in our community?" I think that is a fair question to ask there. So I am quite supportive of the government undertaking this sort of review.

Mr Doszpot singles out seniors as being under financial pressure. However, he should be assured that seniors in need will continue to be supported by this government. The Greens have the same concerns, ensuring that we do not leave people behind. There are a wealth of concessions available to people in our community which have grown over the years and were developed by various government departments over the past few decades. The Greens support the idea of looking at all of these concessions as a whole to ensure that these various means of financial support are actually targeting the people who need it; that people are not doubling up; and that, for that matter, we are not leaving gaps. This is an important principle. We need those concessions to reach people who need them.

At the moment we have a system, if it can be called that, but I do not think it is as cohesive as it could be. Until recently you had to apply for these concessions in various ways, through various directorates, with no centralised ACT government support. I reckon we can do better than that. That is another opportunity in reviewing the concessions. The ACT government is now working to streamline those systems and part of this process includes looking at who delivers it and how, whom it goes to and is it the right scheme.

The expenditure review committee that is looking at the ACT concessions program undertook consultation last year, starting with public comment last April and May. Twenty-four members of the community and peak community organisations lodged submissions to that process, and a discussion paper was put out for consultation over summer, with submissions closing late last week.

The government will spend the next few months looking at the feedback, and I believe a new concessions proposal will be put together by the time of the next ACT budget, leaving time to take account of any further changes that the federal government makes in the budget this year because, of course, the Treasurer and Chief Minister has outlined today the impact we have seen on the ACT of federal government changes to concession schemes. One of the options we will have is to see what the federal government does in its budget and contemplate how the ACT may need to respond to that. I think that is a responsible thing to do as well.

The Greens certainly support concessions. We know that they are important for seniors, for pensioners and also for all the other people in the ACT who need them, who are struggling, be they people with a disability, people who have found themselves unemployed, with disability issues that mean that they cannot work, either temporarily or permanently. We have advocated strongly for the indexation of energy concessions—members who were here last term will remember my taking that issue

up with gusto—and supported the overall increase in the concessions support expenditure in the last two budgets.

The review of the concessions scheme is now well underway and I look forward to the ongoing community discussion to ensure that we get this right. I agree that it is certainly important, in the face of growing demand, that the review is not used as a vehicle to cut the support to the community across the board but instead to target the assistance to those who really need it. I encourage members to actually read the discussion paper to contemplate why people in the fifth income quintile are being given government concessions. We should ask those questions. We should make sure that we are distributing the resources as effectively as we can across the community to make sure that we are helping those who genuinely need assistance to make ends meet.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (11.35): It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Mr Doszpot's motion. I commend him for his concern for the people that he represents. I would like to make a few comments about the ACT concessions program and the review which I have, as you would imagine, been following quite closely. According to ACT government documentation:

ACT Government Concessions aim to promote equity in the standard of living and access to essential services for all members of the ACT community. Concessions seek to do this by providing financial assistance in a range of areas, including energy, water and sewerage, public transport, motor vehicle registration, drivers' licences and spectacles, which seek to ameliorate the cost of such services for people particularly those on low incomes.

Also from the ACT government website:

The ACT Concession system is largely based on income and asset tests, determined by Commonwealth assessment under concession cards. There are also age-related concessions through the seniors' card such as occurs with public transport and motor vehicle registration concessions.

My understanding was the review was to examine the nature, eligibility, usage and costs of the ACT concessions program, the current and future demand for concessions and the impact on the ACT budget. When Mr Barr spoke he asked where we believe concessions should go and whom we believe they should be aimed at. I would be very happy to respond to Mr Barr in that respect, having worked in the community sector with some of our most disadvantaged citizens.

Before I go to that though, I reiterate Mr Doszpot's concerns about the timing relating to the review. Public consultation was conducted on the discussion paper released in November last year. There was around a four-week time frame for consultation. And most people in the community sector believe that is inadequate. It happens time after time after time, especially over a Christmas and January period when very many people in the community sector take leave.

To me, it goes against the ACT social compact which was one of those much-touted agreements that the government brought in a few years ago and seems apparently to have sat on a shelf and been completely ignored since then—those in-principle

agreements between the government and the community sector about the length of time of consultation and the period during which consultation is not adequate. But again that appears to have been ignored in this case.

Only a few days after the public consultation closed on 12 February the Chief Minister announced possible changes to the concessions program. This, to me, raises questions about the seriousness with which the Chief Minister took the comments raised in that consultation that were put forward to him.

*Mr Barr interjecting—*

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Mr Barr!

**MS LAWDER:** It is one of those examples of a sham consultation, the consultation you have when you are not really having a consultation because you are going to go ahead and do whatever it was that you intended to do in the first place.

**Mr Barr:** Read it. Read the article. What did I announce?

**MS LAWDER:** The Chief Minister, when he spoke, complained about interjections across the chamber which, of course, we would take a lot more seriously if he did not do it all the time.

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Ms Lawder, I have already asked Mr Barr to come to order, thank you.

**MS LAWDER:** Certainly. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. How the Chief Minister considered those comments from the consultation in just a few days remains to be seen.

Cost of living pressures are something that face all Canberrans. It is even worse for those people on low incomes for whom, for example, housing takes up a very large chunk of their disposable income. They are already living in housing stress or even housing crisis. Rates and taxes, drivers licence, registration cost, they are all going up time and again, far more than CPI.

We all know the reason for that largely is to fund this government's ideological, reckless, headlong pursuit of light rail, and those charges are going to keep going up and up and up. We all know that, and it is something that constituents raise with me time after time. Targeting people on low incomes, disadvantaged Canberrans, in a cash grab to help fund the light rail, is completely unethical.

In the *Canberra Times* on Tuesday there were some supposed changes flagged to the concessions program, including reconsidering the no-rates policy for community groups, schools, childcare providers and sports groups, to name a few. That will be interesting, if that comes about. We already have the most expensive child care in Australia here in Canberra. If we are going to remove the no-rates policy for childcare providers, we know that that cost is going to be passed onto consumers. So we will go from having the most expensive child care in the country to the most ridiculously out

of control childcare costs in the country. Is that where we want to be as a city and as a territory? Hopefully not.

We have also heard flagged through the *Canberra Times* potential changes to water, sewerage and electricity discounts for people on Centrelink payments and healthcare card holders. Changes that remove or reduce concessions currently received by Canberrans will place an even greater cost of living pressure on those households, those people who are in need of our support, not those that are currently undergoing a bit of a scare campaign of fear of what is going to happen to them because we are supposedly not going to hear any more from the Chief Minister until the budget. So those households will be living with that uncertainty until the budget and wondering what is going to happen to them in the future. I, for one, think that is very, very unfair for those already disadvantaged households.

The concessions program is important for looking after our most vulnerable Canberrans, and they are only one part of complex arrangements for supporting people in our community. In the ACT we are lucky. We have quite a high standard of living. But we have what is more like a two-tier or two-speed economy where we have a big chunk of people on pretty good incomes but we also have a deeply marginalised, low income sector in our community. These are the people who use the concessions program and who cannot absorb any more changes to their already stretched budget.

It is the cost of the tram that is going to affect these deeply marginalised people in our community, people who will not be able to afford to register their car or get their drivers licence. Unless they happen to live on Northbourne Avenue, which is highly unlikely given that we are moving all the public housing tenants out of there, they are not going to be able to get around to meet their friends. They are not going to be able to be part of any social inclusion agenda. They are going to be even more marginalised than they already are.

Chisholm, according to the *Dropping off the edge* report, has one of the highest levels of disadvantage in the ACT. Oaks Estate is another example. They do not even have bus services. These are the communities that are going to suffer even more than they are now. Between now and June those everyday Canberrans are going to be left in the dark about what changes are going to be made to the concessions program, how those changes will affect them and their families and their everyday life.

We are talking potentially about people for whom some of these are life-changing decisions. These are people who are already in housing stress. They are people who are already at risk of homelessness. Any changes will really impact on them. It is another example of the ACT government failing to communicate adequately with Canberrans.

The concessions program has to be fair, it has to be accessible, it has to be adequate. The concessions program has to be a mechanism that delivers the social inclusion and equality agenda. It should not be part of a scare campaign against our most disadvantaged citizens.

I commend Mr Doszpot for bringing this motion today, to shine a spotlight onto what is happening with the concessions program and try and get some answers out of the Chief Minister. Of course, all he does is talk about the Liberals instead of actually answering the questions. I commend Mr Doszpot's motion to the Assembly.

**MR DOSZPOT** (Molonglo) (11.45): I will speak to the amendment, Madam Deputy Speaker. I must say I was quite astounded by Mr Barr's outburst regarding what was basically, as we pointed out, our concern for the community. The disadvantaged and the lower earners in our community will be most affected by the changes that Mr Barr has mooted in his front-page article. Even though he claims he has made no decisions, he made very clear statements regarding the direction in which he was heading, without reading all of the submissions that have come in. You may shake your head, Mr Barr, but you had already made up your mind as to what you were going to do.

I was also quite intrigued by Mr Barr's personal attack on me and on the opposition—that all of this is actually the fault of everyone else. According to him, he is being forced to take this position because of the federal government. According to him, it is because of my scaremongering; it is because of the opposition. Mr Barr, it is time you took responsibility for your own actions. You have made decisions—

**Mr Gentleman:** A point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Stop the clock. What is your point of order, Mr Gentleman?

**Mr Gentleman:** The standing orders ask members to refer their comments through the chair. Mr Doszpot has referred comments directly to Mr Barr on two occasions. He should refer his comments through the chair.

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Mr Doszpot, will you refer all your comments through the chair, please?

**MR DOSZPOT:** I will, Madam Deputy Speaker. I note that Mr Gentleman's contribution to these debates seems only to be about the enormity of my—

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Sit down, Mr Doszpot. I do not want a commentary about the ruling. I have upheld Mr Gentleman's point of order. I asked you not to refer to people across the chamber but to address your comments through me. We do not need a further discussion about that ruling.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not making any comment on your ruling; I am simply referring to Mr Gentleman's ability to contribute to any debate in this place apart from bringing up points of order which have little relevance to the actual content of what we are debating. But—

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Mr Doszpot, sit down. They do have relevance because they relate to a point of order. That is the whole point. Members can stand in their place and raise a point of order; the chair then has the ability to decide whether that point of order is valid or not, and I have done so. We do not need to talk about the

fact that Mr Gentleman has raised a point of order in this place, because that is normal practice. Mr Doszpot, you may continue.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, Mr Barr has a record of misrepresenting me from the very first year when I came into this place. The then Speaker had to—

**Mr Gentleman:** A point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Sit down. Stop the clock, please. What is your point of order, Mr Gentleman?

**Mr Gentleman:** It is about the use of the term “misrepresenting”. It is inappropriate in this matter. I ask that he withdraw.

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

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Yes, Mr Hanson.

**Mr Hanson:** I am not sure that the word “misrepresenting” is on the list. It is a debating point. I would ask you to consider whether that is going to be another word that is ruled out. I am not sure whether that is a word that has been considered to be unparliamentary previously.

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I will check with the Clerk. Mr Gentleman, the point of order is not upheld. However, Mr Doszpot, you know that there are normal practices that you can use. If you think that Mr Barr has misrepresented you then you need to use those proper channels and normal processes to do that in this place, rather than using it as a debating point.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. There are points that I would like to address. I do not want to take away from the debate, which is about our senior citizens and about the people in need whose concessions are being threatened through Mr Barr’s actions. But Mr Barr made certain comments about what I said which I find totally objectionable and wrong. Mr Barr does have a record of doing this over the years, but I will leave it at that point.

Mr Barr has to take responsibility for his own actions. It is beyond the pale to blame everyone else for what is happening and for his reasons for bringing in cuts to concessions. As everybody in the community knows, including the Mr Fluffy people, members of our community who are disadvantaged cannot get any action from this government—or from the Greens, for that matter.

Mr Barr indicated in his opening comments that his Labor government was committed to looking after people in need, but we all know that is pure rhetoric. Ask the people of Oaks Estate, one of the most disadvantaged parts of the community in Canberra, how much concern has been shown by Mr Barr or Mr Rattenbury for these communities. Ask about their reliance on concessions. Of course, those in Oaks Estate cannot use the transport concessions because they do not even have buses. But that is

not of concern to Mr Barr. On these sorts of things Mr Barr has been telling us how much in control he is and how much he is looking after the needy, yet the very people in our community who need this government to take responsibility are being ignored.

We are highlighting today what was stated by Mr Barr in the headlines in the paper yesterday, regarding his intentions on something that supposedly has been given to the community to respond to. He chose to answer in such a way that it appears that he has not taken any note of the community response during the consultation period.

The amendment that Mr Barr has moved will not be supported by the Liberals. It is simply distracting from the real issue, and the real issues we are talking about relate to concessions and Mr Barr's intentions towards them.

Question put:

That **Mr Barr's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9		Noes 8	
Mr Barr	Ms Fitzharris	Mr Coe	Ms Lawder
Ms Berry	Mr Gentleman	Mr Doszpot	Mr Smyth
Dr Bourke	Ms Porter	Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall
Ms Burch	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson	
Mr Corbell		Mrs Jones	

Amendment agreed to

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question now is that the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

**MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (11.57):** In closing, I thank all those who have spoken on this motion today. I also question those who have not spoken on the motion. I would have thought this was a fairly serious issue that the former minister for ageing, Mr Gentleman, may have wanted to contribute to. The new minister for ageing, Dr Bourke, might also have wanted to speak on this issue. I am rather sorry that they have not.

It is an issue that has alarmed many in the Canberra community. As I said, many people have contacted me to relay their concerns. Once again, though, the government has not addressed the key issues here and seeks to blame the federal government for a problem of its own making.

One of the key issues I raised that was glossed over by those opposite was with respect to the consultation period for the government's discussion paper, which only ended on Friday. Less than a week later, the government has signalled which concessions will face cutbacks. That is not nearly enough time to properly consider community feedback—and Mr Rattenbury kindly highlighted this as being the very reason for the discussion paper.

The lack of consideration shown by this government when announcing changes to the concessions program shows that the government will cut funds to some of the most vulnerable members of the community in order to fund its expensive dream—a light rail dream in particular. Our seniors, young people, disabled and unemployed Canberrans will pay for a light rail line that only one per cent of people will benefit from. This community does not need it as a priority in Canberra at this point.

Lastly, the government continues to fail to recognise the difficulties that current cost of living pressures are having on older Canberrans. The government should be focused on finding ways to reduce these pressures on the people of Canberra, particularly those on low and fixed incomes. Instead they are focusing on an unaffordable light rail project which will place even further strain on the taxpayers of Canberra.

Mr Barr mentioned in his speech that the government is seeking to contain spending on the concessions program as it increases each year. However, the cost of living in Canberra is also rising every year. As the government begins to cut concessions, rates are tripling and seniors are struggling to cope with the increasing costs of everyday living.

I reiterate the indecision and lack of certainty provided to seniors by this government and the limited consideration shown for community feedback in regard to the review of the ACT concessions program. It clearly shows that this government do not care how many people are affected or what concessions are cut, as long as they fund their \$700 million light rail dream.

Question put:

That the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

Mr Barr  
Ms Berry  
Dr Bourke  
Ms Burch  
Mr Corbell

Ms Fitzharris  
Mr Gentleman  
Ms Porter  
Mr Rattenbury

Mr Coe  
Mr Doszpot  
Mrs Dunne  
Mr Hanson  
Mrs Jones

Ms Lawder  
Mr Smyth  
Mr Wall

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## Euthanasia

**MS PORTER** (Ginninderra) (12.03): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that the ACT has one of Australia's fastest growing populations of people aged 60 and over, with numbers expected to increase to almost 20% of the population by 2020;
  - (b) that there is a growing call for the community to have greater choice and greater control over their manner of dying;
  - (c) that the current Euthanasia Laws Act 1997 (Cwlth) prevents legislation relating to end-of-life issues from being proposed or debated in this place;
  - (d) that the ACT Government provides excellent palliative care services through home based and in-patient services under the Palliative Care Services Plan 2013-2017;
  - (e) that the general consensus at my End-of-Life Issues forums that the conversation covering the questions of dying continue in a positive way;
  - (f) that advance care directives are recommended, however, some find putting this in place is difficult and believe more can be done to encourage their use; and
  - (g) the importance of public education on the benefits of advanced care directives; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) continue to provide for greater choice in relation to palliative care services;
  - (b) examine the existing legislation covering the power of attorney and advance care directives with a view to simplifying the process;
  - (c) investigate whether the current My Health Record could support a personal online based advance care directive that could be accessed by health professionals who treat a critically or terminally ill person;
  - (d) offer support and education programs for the Territory on how to complete an advance care directive as well as provide facts on their importance; and
  - (e) continue to advocate for the repeal of the Euthanasia Laws Act 1997 (Cwlth), which does not allow the ACT Assembly to legislate for voluntary euthanasia.

I rise to speak on end-of-life issues, as they are a matter that many members of the ACT community raised with me when I first came into this place. The question of our manner of our dying will remain a question, but death is a reality. However, I have observed that as a society we are reluctant to discuss death and frequently use terms such as "passing" and "loss" to describe someone's death. We all know the truism that two things in life cannot be avoided: death and taxes.

Many who have experienced the death of their loved one or are concerned about the manner of their own inevitable or impending death believe that a conversation should commence in the community. My own experience some years ago was that of watching my mother die in a four-bed ward in an aged-care facility with no palliative care available and no choice. More recently, my experience was of being with my husband and his family while we sat with his dying father, thankfully afforded palliative care, and, again recently, with my daughter-in-law's mother while she went from acute hospital to Clare Holland House.

Our territory's population is ageing. The ACT has one of Australia's fastest growing populations of people aged 60 and over, with numbers expected to increase to almost 20 per cent of the population by 2020. The challenge facing the ACT government now will only increase as the years pass and we need to respond to this challenge now so that people can receive the care and dignity they deserve at the end of their life. Furthermore, it is not only our territory's population that is ageing; our world's population is ageing much faster than ever before. According to the World Health Organisation, between 2015 and 2050 the proportion of the world's population over 60 will nearly double, from 12 to 22 per cent. Furthermore, by 2020 the number of people aged 60 years and older will outnumber children younger than five years.

As many know, I undertook a study tour to research aspects of the law and practice in relation to end-of-life issues in three countries in Europe—Switzerland, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Belgium. The latter two have legislated for voluntary euthanasia, and Switzerland has amended the penal code to allow assisted suicide. I learnt about the long history of discussions and debate that had taken place in relation to these issues in these places before the penal code was changed and before legislation was introduced. I also learned about emerging debates in relation to calls to amend the legislation, particularly in Belgium. Some of these amendments have passed parliament since I left. On my return, I decided to promote a conversation about these issues in relation to end of life, having been encouraged by those I met who, no matter what side of the debate they came down on, urged that I should champion these discussions, avoiding polarisation of the debate and facing these issues with respect and courage.

As many know, I hosted two end-of-life forums to enable conversations to be all-inclusive and constructive ones. I found that if you bring people together and work with them by setting out a foundation of facts for discussion, allowing open dialogue and building on common ground, much progress can be achieved. I am pleased that well-regarded academics from here in the ACT and interstate were willing to give their time pro bono to set the legal and ethical framework for the discussions, and I thank them very much for that. Participants from a wide range of organisations and professions across the community, as well as members of the public, attended the forums and were invited to discuss three simple questions. What kind of end-of-life experience do you want for yourself and your loved ones? Faced with a growing older population, is the ACT prepared to respond to calls by many to have more choice when facing their death? What recommendations and/or statements would you have this forum make to the ACT government?

I am pleased to inform the Assembly about what participants said. In regard to the first question, the forums overwhelmingly came to the conclusion that people want autonomy over their end-of-life experience, wanting a peaceful, painless and dignified death. They emphasised their preference to die at home rather than at a hospice or in a hospital setting, choosing support from the family doctor, although one group mentioned a preference for Clare Holland House.

Addressing the second question, the participants unanimously agreed that the ACT had its hands tied behind its back in terms of introducing effective end-of-life legislation because of the commonwealth Euthanasia Laws Act 1997, also known as the Andrews bill. The participants also discussed the need for greater awareness and education about end-of-life issues in the broader community and said that health staff need to be more formally educated on these issues, including palliative care. Furthermore, participants asked that the discussion continue throughout the community and that the ACT government should foster and support such discussions.

The forums produced many recommendations in regard to the final question. The recommendations varied from legislative action and policy changes to more support programs. While there was an overall consensus that the Andrews bill needs to be challenged, there was also considerable agreement that the ACT government needs to take a broader approach that goes beyond repealing the Andrews bill and developing legislation in this area.

The forum suggested that professional research should be commissioned, with input from citizens, doctors and other health professionals, and that there should be an analysis of the current healthcare policies in relation to responding to the needs of the dying. The forums recommended more information and more education, starting as early as possible, to enable people to understand the need for healthcare directives for the end of life.

We must remember that death and dying are not the domain of older members of our society. Sadly, death comes too often to the young. The forums recommend that the ACT government provide more resourcing and support for the adoption of advance care directives, with an emphasis on making them more efficient and accessible to all.

Members of the forum reported an occasion when an advance care directive had been ignored by a healthcare professional and another occasion where paramedics were not able to access an advance care directive when they went to the attention of a person who was dying at the time or unconscious. These are just examples.

Participants suggested that an online hub or digital portal where all advance care directives are stored and can be accessed would address this issue. This would be accessed nationally by paramedics, doctors and other health staff.

Forum participants want the conversation to be more informed by finding out what is currently happening here, interstate and overseas; and the current attitude of the medical profession, paramedics, lawyers, ethicists and the general public towards the question of choice.

Whilst there was no unanimous agreement on enabling voluntary euthanasia or assisted suicide to be options, all participants recognised the need to improve the experience of dying and have a range of options open to us as we approach the end of our lives. All agreed that a peaceful death in a place of one's choosing while being surrounded by those important to us is highly desirable.

I believe that these recommendations and other comments and ideas discussed at my forums provided a firm basis for this government to continue to advocate for this territory's sovereignty to allow this Assembly to legislate for voluntary euthanasia if the desire to do so at some future time by that Assembly is its choice. I am not advocating at this point of time that this place should legislate for voluntary euthanasia, obviously, but it may be, as I said, that at some future time the Assembly would desire to do so.

Madam Speaker, this is a conversation that needs to take place in the community as part of life, not as part of death. It is a difficult conversation. When I was in Belgium, an oncologist reminded me about the Woody Allen quote "I have questions to all your answers." And as I was leaving my last interview with a leading retired cardiologist, he gripped my hand as I said goodbye and said, "Have courage." And he repeated this: "Have courage."

I believe we all need to have courage and face this debate fairly and squarely once and for all. Therefore I call on the government to continue to provide greater choice in relation to palliative care services; examine the existing legislation covering the power of attorney and advance care directives with a view to simplifying the process; investigate whether the current my health record could support a personal online-based advance care directive that could be accessed by health professionals who treat critically ill or terminally ill persons; offer support and education programs for the territory on how to complete an advance care directive as well as providing facts on their importance; and continue to advocate for the repeal of the commonwealth Euthanasia Laws Act 1997, which does not allow the ACT Assembly to legislate for voluntary euthanasia.

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (12.14): Madam Speaker, the opposition would be able to support this motion less (2)(e), and at the end of my speech I will be moving an amendment that will reflect that view.

In essence, there are two elements to what Ms Porter is putting before the Assembly today. One is a debate about end-of-life issues, advance care planning, dealing with death in an open manner and having that conversation and making sure that we are addressing all of the issues relating to palliative care and support for people who are dying in our community. Ms Porter rightly points out that this is a matter that confronts us all eventually, but it confronts us all at various stages in our life as we deal with the death of loved ones. I support Ms Porter in bringing these issues before the Assembly and the ongoing conversation in our community that can look to ease the passing for everybody.

What I do not support, however, is the desire by Ms Porter to change the federal law, the self-government act, that would allow this place to introduce euthanasia laws—in essence, the removal of subsections 23(1A) and 23(1B) of the self-government act.

These matters have all been subject to extensive debate in this place. Indeed, there was a review of the self-government act conducted by the admin and procedures committee in late 2012 in the lead-up to the last election. My position on these matters, and that of the opposition, has not changed. We do not support the removal of that section of the self-government act. There is a philosophical view perhaps that is different in terms of what should and should not be debated in this place. Perhaps it is not dissimilar to the debates on the Marriage Act, on same-sex marriage, where the High Court ruled, for good reasons, that issues that have an effect on our whole nation are best dealt with, and legally dealt with, through the federal parliament—as with issues like euthanasia, equally.

If those elements of the self-government act were repealed, I think it is likely that at some stage we would have euthanasia laws introduced in this place. It is clear that there is agitation for those laws from sections of this Assembly. I do not think that that is hidden; it is part of Mr Rattenbury's agenda for that to be implemented.

The question is whether having euthanasia laws implemented in the ACT, essentially driven by advocates across Australia who would see the ACT as a soft touch as the starting point for rolling that out, is what we want to be occurring here. My view is no, and that is the view of the opposition. This is a substantive debate that needs to be the remit of a bigger jurisdiction and, in my view, should be dealt with at a national level.

We know that that is not the position of the Greens. On a number of occasions, Bob Brown advocated for the repeal of those laws. I would make the point that that was unsuccessful—that the agitation from this place to the federal parliament was unsuccessful under the federal Labor government that had the numbers in both houses for this. Knowing that the Greens supported that repeal, it was up to the Labor Party to get that done if they so wished. That did not occur. I just put that on the record so that we do not have yet more rewriting of history and critique of the federal Liberal government despite a consistent position on this federally from the winning government. It seems that the Labor Party has a different view in government from in opposition, but there has been a consistent view on that federally between the federal Liberal and federal Labor parties. Clearly the Greens have a different view.

I have spoken at length on this in debates before, on 24 August 2012, 14 August 2013 and 18 September 2014, when we had very similar debates in this place on matters put forward by either Mr Rattenbury or, on a number of occasions, Ms Porter. I will not necessarily re-litigate all the points I have made before. They have been made; our position has not changed. Nothing in the debate has changed substantively that would cause us to change our view.

I would make a point of clarification, though. Within the Liberal Party, reflecting our diversity of views on issues, matters of euthanasia are a conscience issue—unlike the Greens, for whom it is a party platform. They do not allow choice in the Greens. They

do not allow that diversity of view in the Greens. Just as we have seen in the Labor Party, increasingly there is a singular view; it is the one view that you must all agree to.

In the Liberal Party, we welcome the fact that we are a broad church. We welcome the fact that, on a number of issues, we have diversity of opinion. Frankly, I do not know the views of all my members on these issues, whichever view they hold. I know some of them. Whichever view it is that they hold, I respect it. I personally will not support euthanasia laws. That is my personal view. But regardless, I do not think it should be down to this Assembly, for those reasons that I have articulated in this debate and others, to make that decision, which essentially would be a decision then made for the rest of Australia which would significantly change the cultural fabric of our nation.

We would support the motion if it were amended to remove section 2(e), which is about repealing the commonwealth Euthanasia Laws Act 1997, which essentially does not allow voluntary euthanasia debate laws to be passed by this place. In many ways, I would like it if, when we did have these debates in this place, we could separate those two issues—that Ms Porter brought forward motions that we could deal with unanimously with regard to our desire to improve end-of-life issues as opposed to the debate that we disagree on, which is actually debate about euthanasia laws. But so be it; we must deal with what we have before us. As such, I move:

Omit “paragraph (2)(e)”.

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

**Sitting suspended from 12.22 to 2.30 pm.**

## **Questions without notice**

### **Government—office accommodation**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Chief Minister. On 25 January this year, you announced that your government will lease a building for ACT public servants on London Circuit car park next to the Legislative Assembly. Cbus Property, controlled by the CFMEU, has already expressed interest in building a new Canberra office. Chief Minister, has the union-linked company Cbus expressed interest in building this proposed ACT government building?

**MR BARR:** I understand Cbus was one of about a dozen different parties who have put an expression of interest in for the project, yes.

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

**MR HANSON:** Chief Minister, have you, your staff or any directorate staff had discussions with Cbus or any other union-linked funding organisation concerning this building?

**MR BARR:** I have certainly attended various Infrastructure Partnerships Australia industry events right across the country, where it is possible that representatives of superannuation funds may have been in attendance, and I would have discussed forthcoming projects in the ACT infrastructure pipeline. But it has always been my intent to maximise the level of national and international investor interest in projects in the ACT. I think we have demonstrated our success in raising awareness of infrastructure development opportunities in the city with the quality of national and international firms that have participated in recent ACT government procurements, whether that is in health-related infrastructure, transport-related infrastructure or education. We continue to actively seek new capital for our city because our city does not have sufficient capital within its own sources to meet all of our infrastructure needs. So Canberra, like Australia, will be an importer of capital.

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

**MR WALL:** Chief Minister, how will you dispel the perception of a conflict of interest between your role as Labor leader and Chief Minister with regard to this project?

**MR BARR:** I have no role in the procurement process. That is a process—

*Mr Coe interjecting—*

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

**MR BARR:** I should not respond to Mr Coe's interjection.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** No, you should not.

**MR BARR:** But I will. I will quickly correct the record there. You are wrong, Mr Coe, on that point. The procurement process is at arm's length from government ministers, as it should be. A recommendation will come forth from the appropriate officials against an appropriate criterion that is set to assess the successful bidder for the procurement of the government office block.

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

**MR WALL:** Chief Minister, is the real motivation for emptying office buildings around the city and moving thousands of public servants around simply to support your union mates?

**MR BARR:** I am sorry; your colleagues were talking over you. I did not hear the first part of your question.

**MR WALL:** My question was: is the real motivation for emptying existing office buildings around the city and moving thousands of servants around simply a plan to support your union mates?

**MR BARR:** That is one of the more offensive insinuations that have been made in this place. It is borderline unparliamentary, suggesting corruption. Those opposite, and particularly Mr Wall, are skating on thin ice there. I suggest that he would not want to repeat that allegation outside of this place.

### **ACT Policing—resourcing**

**MR DOSZPOT:** My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. On 3 December 2015, the *Canberra Times* reported “ACT’s front-line police officers under pressure from spending cuts”. The article stated that the AFP federal police union has warned that officers in the ACT have been stretched as job losses and ongoing spending cuts begin to take a toll on front-line employees. The AFP Police Association warned that more than 40 positions could be lost after ACT Policing was ordered to glean more than \$15 million of savings from its budget over four years from 2013. The AFP Policing annual report 2015 stated that property crime, armed robbery and motor vehicle theft had risen. Minister, what are you doing to ensure that front-line police services are not cut from ACT Policing?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Mr Doszpot for the question. The government is very clear that in any part of government service delivery there is an expectation that we will achieve efficiencies in service delivery. When you look at the contract for ACT Policing, which has a value of over \$100 million per annum, it is reasonable to expect that a very modest level of efficiency dividend can be achieved from that organisation.

Indeed, AFP national—that is, the national arm of the Australian Federal Police—has been subject to an efficiency dividend now for well over a decade. So the ACT has taken the view that we do expect efficiencies from the delivery of policing services and it has been the consistent position of me and my predecessor, Ms Burch, that those efficiencies be achieved in back office and support areas, not on front-line operational capacity.

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

**MR DOSZPOT:** Minister, if ACT Policing is properly funded and resourced, why has property crime risen in the ACT?

**MR CORBELL:** Property crime statistics move around from quarter to quarter, and the most recent quarter does indicate an increase in some elements of some crime types. But it would be worth also observing that, if you look at the long-term trend over the past 10 years, there is less armed robbery, burglary, breaking and entering, and car theft now in the ACT than there was 10 years ago. That is despite the fact that our population has increased very, very significantly over the past decade. So there is less crime now than there was 10 years ago despite a significant increase in population. That speaks to this government’s record on reducing crime in our community.

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

**MR HANSON:** Minister, if ACT Policing is properly funded and resourced, why have armed robbery offences risen by 14.4 per cent?

**MR CORBELL:** As I said in my previous answer, crime statistics move up and down from quarter to quarter. That is a normal function of those statistics depending on activity which is highly variable. But the long-term trend is clear, and that includes crime types such as armed robbery. There is less property crime in our community now than there was 10 years ago despite a very significant increase in the population. That speaks to this government's commitment and our capacity to fund and support policing services that keep our community safe. And it is why in the most recent report on government services from the Productivity Commission Canberrans rated their city as the safest city in the country.

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

**MR HANSON:** Minister, do you support the jobs in ACT Policing that were cut by the former minister, Ms Burch?

**MR CORBELL:** The government's position is very clear. We expect efficiency savings in back-of-house operations.

**Mr Hanson:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** You have a point of order?

**Mr Hanson:** It is on relevance. The question was whether he supported the job cuts or not. It is very simple; a yes or no answer. Does he support the jobs that were cut by Ms Burch or not?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Minister, do you have anything more to say in answer to the question?

**MR CORBELL:** I have concluded my answer.

### **Disability services—Therapy ACT**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Questions without notice.

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, Mr Hanson, I want to hear the question. Mr Wall.

**MR WALL:** My question is to the Minister for Disability. Minister, I have received correspondence from a constituent whose child has been accessing the services of Therapy ACT. The correspondence, dated yesterday, informed the constituent that the services that had been provided at Therapy ACT were no longer available and, in fact, that the entire service would be closed completely from December this year. Minister, given that the decision to close Therapy ACT at the end of this year was taken back in

2013, why is it that families who are relying on these services are only now being informed?

**DR BOURKE:** I thank Mr Wall for his question and his interest in disability matters. Of course, as Mr Wall knows, as a result of the NDIS, a process which has been going on for some time, Therapy ACT services are being transitioned into the NDIS. I would have presumed that parents would have received clear and concise instructions over the last period of time about that transition.

As you will appreciate, after a couple of weeks in, I have been doing a lot of reading, talking to a lot of people, including stakeholders, and receiving briefings from the directorate. If you would like to forward me that particular complaint from that constituent, which I do not believe has happened as yet, although I will check with my office that that is the case, I will be happy to provide a more detailed response to the constituent.

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

**MR WALL:** Minister, why does the information being provided to families fail to provide details on alternative services that will be available once Therapy ACT ceases?

**DR BOURKE:** Without further information about the case or further advice, I am not able to comment further on this particular matter. However, I would say that, of some 3,000 out of some 5,000 people who are eligible for the NDIS in the ACT who are being transitioned, most of them would have been, I would have thought, or should have been, properly informed of what services are available and where they would be available. This is an evolving space. As you will appreciate, Mr Wall, this is a trial site for the NDIS which is occurring right across the country.

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

**MR DOSZPOT:** Minister, what alternative services will be available after the closure of Therapy ACT for families who do not qualify for funding under NDIS?

**DR BOURKE:** There are a range of services available within the community regardless of whether you qualify for the NDIS or not but, of course, they would be something you would have to pay for. Within the NDIS program there is a—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

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

**DR BOURKE:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. But as you know, the child assessment service will be continuing, and that will provide assessment and advice for parents. That will be available to people who are seeking to qualify for the NDIS or to provide short-term advice for parents.

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

**MR DOSZPOT:** Minister, can you guarantee that no families will be worse off or out of pocket as result of the closure of Therapy ACT at the end of the year?

**DR BOURKE:** There are only two things I have learned in life to guarantee. One is that the sun will come up tomorrow and the second is that one day I will turn up my toes. What I can say, Mr Doszpot, is that the advantages that will come to our community from the NDIS are very significant. The change in—

*Members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr Wall:** Point of order on relevance, Madam Speaker. The question is quite straightforward: could the minister guarantee that no families would be worse off as a result of these services being closed? I ask him to be directly relevant.

**Mr Hanson:** Yes, it's a bit flippant.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Flippancy is not out of order according to the standing orders. And if you want to make a point of order, you stand.

On the point of order, it is lineball. Stop the clock, please. It is lineball. The minister was answering the question at least in a preamble and I am sure that he will get to the answer.

**DR BOURKE:** I have answered the question.

### **Sport—participation**

**MS PORTER:** My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, what are some of the major opportunities for local sports here in the ACT in 2016 and into the future?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Porter for her interest in and support for local sporting groups in the ACT. It has been a constant during her time here in Canberra. I know that Canberra United in particular is sad to lose her as their number one supporter. Nonetheless, as the new sports minister, I come into the portfolio at a very exciting time. Our local sporting community has developed into a highly diverse and inclusive part of life here in Canberra. Our government has worked closely with many sports over the years to give them the infrastructure and organisational support so that, in turn, they can offer the benefits of sport right across our community.

The result of this is the highest sports participation rate in Australia. Three out of every four Canberrans participate in sport or some form of physical activity, and the benefits of this are far-reaching—building communities, kids in teams, parents on the sidelines, club volunteers, referees and umpires, building friendships and friendly rivalries, and building confidence so that many of the skills learned in sport can carry on through other parts of their life.

Of course, the government's goal, and mine as minister, is to keep working with this community to make sure that these benefits remain. Some of our recent infrastructure investments show what great opportunities still lie ahead: the Woden park complex, the Canberra tennis centre, additions to the Lakeside Leisure Centre in Tuggeranong, and rejuvenated mountain bike trails at Majura.

Last week I announced an array of successful recipients under the 2016 sport and recreation grants program, all local clubs doing really great things: the Skateboarding Association, which is running a learn to skate session in our great skate parks; mentoring and development for young coaches in calisthenics; funding to Tennis ACT to further support the rollout of the electronic gate access system to make access that little bit easier; and support for Pedal Power for a community-based bike rides program aimed at school-age children.

These are a few of the opportunities that I have outlined that are on the horizon. There is also, of course, still a strong afterglow from the huge year of sport last year, with the World Cup Cricket and Asian Cup football. These events have a lasting effect, particularly on young people. It is great to see junior sport thriving alongside these major events. The true breadth of local sport is reflected in how many people are involved, in so many different ways. I have enjoyed connecting and reconnecting with so many in the community since being appointed as minister and I look forward to working closely with these groups moving ahead.

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

**MS PORTER:** Minister, how important is the connection between elite teams and local clubs?

**MS BERRY:** I have mentioned the connection between major elite level events and junior sport. For the size of our city, we probably enjoy better access to elite athletes more than others. Of course, elite athletes all started their careers somewhere and there are plenty of local examples of high profile sportspeople giving back at the grassroots level: the Canberra Raiders engaging with young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through our growing healthy families program; the Canberra Meteors and their work with junior girls playing cricket; Alan Tongue showing fine leadership around football culture and behaviour; and the Brumbies in their work with Menslink.

Our elite sportspeople are role models in the community but, beyond them, coaches, sponsors and officials are all part of the scene. Again, growing this side of local sport is an opportunity we can continue to pursue. Our elite teams show what is possible, particularly for junior sportspeople, and what they can aim for, and they can also encourage us to keep participating into our teenage years and adulthood.

I would like to mention two legends of women's basketball that the Caps are farewelling on Saturday night, and I encourage members to attend if they can. Carrie Graf and Jess Bibby have both made enormous contributions to the club over many

years. I am personally sad to see them go but wish them well for plenty more achievements in future.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Supplementary question, Ms Burch

**MS BURCH:** Can the minister inform us how the government is reviewing the indoor sports facilities and how that will contribute to realising Canberra's potential in all sports?

**MS BERRY:** As I said, our goal is to work across the community with a myriad of different sports and associations to make sure that people have the chance to play all sports. These include indoor sports, whether it is squash, futsal, table tennis, gymnastics or any number of others. It is a thorough review, and I thank the former sports minister for kicking it off—excuse the pun—informed by extensive community input and with a practical set of recommendations that the government is going about implementing.

Key to these recommendations is the possibility of exploring greater use of school facilities after hours for community sporting clubs. We know some schools are more readily accessible than others. Some have facilities that are far better suited than others. But our schools are community hubs. We have invested heavily in school infrastructure and I look forward to working with Mr Rattenbury, as education minister, to pursue this opportunity. The government has already announced an investment of \$50,000 to address some of the access issues which will improve access to school facilities across the ACT.

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

**MR DOSZPOT:** Minister, you are new in your portfolio, but I am wondering whether—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** No preamble, please.

**Ms Berry:** Sorry, what was that?

**MR DOSZPOT:** Can you tell us what the latest costings are of the beach volleyball out at Lyneham?

**MS BERRY:** Yes, I can. I might have to come back quickly to the Assembly and inform the chamber about that question, but, importantly, part of this review that we have been talking about and which I have just mentioned will help us extend the reach of local sport across Canberra. Throughout this whole portfolio the government has been delivering specific initiatives aiming at boosting participation and helping people get the most out of sport, just like the outdoor beach volleyball will provide to people in the ACT community. This inclusive participation funding program has also reached out to particular groups of people to encourage them to get involved with sport. These might be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, older Canberrans, culturally diverse groups or those with a disability. Funding provides for the support of a range of areas to encourage participation—

**Mr Hanson:** Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Have you got a point of order, Mr Hanson?

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

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

**Mr Hanson:** I think the question was specific to costs, if the minister could be directly relevant. It is not the rationale for funding; it is the actual amount.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** On the point of order, I think I heard the minister say that she could get that figure but she might have to get back. I think that means that I would consider that that part of the question has been answered. I think the minister is free to go on and speak about the rationale having directly answered the question as best she can at the moment.

**MS BERRY:** This funding provides for the support of a range of areas to encourage participation, including education and training awareness workshops and equipment. In 2015 this included the purchase of para rowing sculls, the delivery of the workshop for deaf sport awareness and training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander coaches and referees in touch football. Funding for the healthy weight initiative has also provided for gym classes for numerous different groups—often those doing it tougher than the rest of us—and supporting healthy behaviours through participation in education.

I am very happy to take on the leadership of the government's work in sport, including the clear focus on our related priorities of inclusion, diversity and fairness.

### **Tuggeranong—offensive odours**

**MS LAWDER:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, last week in the Assembly I moved a motion about the foul smell in Tuggeranong that numerous residents have reported to me. In response to the motion, Ms Fitzharris said:

The Environment Protection Authority and ACT NOWaste are engaging with affected residents ...

Since then, several other residents have contacted me, saying that the foul smell yesterday, 16 February, was one of the worst it has been to date. Minister, what progress have the EPA and other government agencies made in the investigation of the foul smell in Tuggeranong since Wednesday last week?

**MR BARR:** Minister Fitzharris is leading the government's work on this.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Ms Fitzharris, in your capacity as the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Ms Lawder for the question and also for following up on this issue. As I indicated in our discussions last week and have done so publicly on a number of occasions since, I would appreciate any of those complaints being forwarded to my office. I can forward them on to directorates if they have not been already. We will certainly follow up on them.

My understanding is that agencies continue to talk to affected residents. If we are not hearing directly from those residents and complaints are only being raised in question time it can be difficult for us to follow up. Again, I encourage Ms Lawder to contact me directly.

**Ms Lawder:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker, I asked specifically what progress have government agencies made in the investigation, not about getting complaints.

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order! I will make the ruling, Mr Hanson. The question was clearly about what progress has been made since last Wednesday. I ask the minister to be directly relevant under standing order 118(a).

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. My understanding is that progress remains underway, that the agencies continue to engage with local residents, that they continue to work with both the officials in NOWaste and also through the EPA. As I said also, progress is helped enormously if constituents can come directly to us and tell us when and where the problems are that they are experiencing. Again I reiterate that progress can only occur if we know directly. I urge them again to also contact me directly to provide us, as I also mentioned last week, with information about the time of day that they are noticing these smells. That enables us and the officials to follow up on these reports.

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

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, how many complaints have been received by all ACT government agencies since 1 November 2015 about that smell in Tuggeranong?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** My understanding is that there have been around 24 complaints received by the Environment Protection Authority and around 15 received by NOWaste but I will take further advice on that and report back to the chamber when I have the updated figures.

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

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, you have mentioned that the government was making progress. What progress has the government made since last week, and how has the government communicated that progress to Tuggeranong residents?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Mr Smyth for the supplementary. My understanding is that investigations are still underway. Unfortunately, we have not yet got to the

bottom of the smell; we do not yet know what the cause is. But we continue to investigate. As I indicated last week, and my understanding is that it continues, we are talking to local residents; we are also monitoring operations at the Mugga Lane Resource Management Centre. I have personally communicated with Tuggeranong residents. I have not yet received anything directly into my office as far as I am aware. Certainly, if I do, I will respond to those complaints. I would again encourage people to contact me; and also if any members in this place have those complaints directly, forward them on to me so that I can respond.

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

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, is the ACT government investigating the flushing of sewerage pipes in case that is the cause of the odour? When was the last time the sewerage pipes were flushed out in the Tuggeranong area?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Yes, I understand that that has been looked at and work has been underway with Icon Water. But, again, I will take further advice on the specifics of the questions and report back to the chamber.

### **Crime—domestic violence**

**MRS JONES:** My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, on 16 June 2015 the *Canberra Times* reported:

Creating a specialised domestic violence court focusing on victim welfare could help address the “most important social issue in Australia.

On 17 June 2015 a key ACT legal support service said that magistrates without an understanding of domestic violence put women at risk as they are unable to treat cases appropriately. What steps have been taken towards establishing a specialised domestic violence court?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Mrs Jones for the question. It is not the government’s policy to establish such a court at this time.

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

**MRS JONES:** Minister, what has the government done to reduce the risk of women who have experienced domestic violence coming before our courts?

**Mr Corbell:** Coming from where?

**MRS JONES:** What has been done to reduce possibility of women being put at risk by being seen by inexperienced judiciary officers in this area, as these issues are coming before our courts?

**MR CORBELL:** I do not believe women suffering domestic violence are at risk from our magistrates.

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

**MS LAWDER:** Attorney, when will Canberrans have a specialised domestic violence court that only deals with domestic violence cases on a weekly basis?

**MR CORBELL:** We already have a specialised program, called the family violence intervention program, which is a coordinated and linked up service involving our magistrates, domestic violence crisis services, the police, the DPP and other support services designed to provide an integrated response to domestic violence matters as they proceed through our courts. In relation to the establishment of a dedicated court, I refer Ms Lawder to my earlier answer.

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

**MS LAWDER:** Attorney, what is the average length of time to have a domestic violence matter heard before the Magistrates Court?

**MR CORBELL:** That would depend on the complexity and nature of the matter. I do not have any specific statistics immediately to hand, but I am happy to take that element of the question on notice and see whether such statistics can be made available.

I remind Ms Lawder and those opposite that the Assembly has before it a bill right now to deal with urgent applications for domestic violence protection orders and that last year this place unanimously agreed other reforms proposed by the government to strengthen the protection orders regime and, in particular, to ensure that women—or, indeed, victims in general of family violence—who have an interim protection order in place associated with charges against an alleged perpetrator do not now have to go back to the court to seek a permanent order. Instead, that interim order is enduring for the period of the pending trial into those matters. What that means, of course, is that victims of domestic violence do not have to be revictimised by having to come face to face with their alleged offender in the court simply for the purposes of having an interim protection order extended and maintained.

The government is acting in a very strong way in relation to these and a range of other matters. I am grateful for the support of the Assembly to date to see the passage of those laws unanimously, and that will continue to be the approach the government adopts on this very important matter.

### **Ministerial office—investigation**

**MR COE:** My question is to the Chief Minister. In reference to connections with the CFMEU, on 6 February the *Canberra Times* reported that Ms Burch's office knew that police had concerns on Thursday, 10 December. It is on the public record that the Chief Minister only discussed these matters with the CPO five days later on 15 February. Chief Minister, were you aware of these concerns prior to your police briefing on 15 December?

**MR BARR:** I do not believe so, but there was obviously some media reporting in relation to issues surrounding the royal commission at that time. The Chief Police Officer sought a meeting with me and that was granted as soon as was possible. That, as I recall, was inside 24 hours.

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

**MR COE:** Chief Minister, who informed you of the issues that arose; and did you instigate the meeting with the CPO or did the Chief Police Officer contact you?

**MR BARR:** The Chief Police Officer sought a meeting with me.

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

**MR WALL:** Chief Minister, are you aware of any other ministerial office or directorate that was aware of the incident or the issues prior to your briefing?

**MR BARR:** No.

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

**MR WALL:** Chief Minister, are you aware of any action taken on this matter by any other ministerial office or directorate prior to your briefing on the 15th?

**MR BARR:** No.

### **Trade unions—royal commission**

**MR SMYTH:** My question is to the Minister for Racing and Gaming. Minister, it was reported in the *Canberra Times* of 31 December 2015 that the trade union royal commission had referred Creative Safety Initiatives and Construction Charitable Works, two associated entities of the ACT CFMEU, to the gaming and racing commission. The royal commissioner asked for a joint investigation with the AFP to investigate the commission of possible criminal offences in relation to the Gaming Machine Act. Minister, has the ACT gaming and racing commission received this reference?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Smyth for his question. The royal commission of course handed in its report, as we all know. I am aware that the federal government has introduced legislation, as I have mentioned before. We have a view that it is important that any illegal activity in any industry is dealt with appropriately. I am not convinced the re-establishment of the ABCC is the best way to do that. But, as I have said, if we receive information of improper actions then we will action that. At this time I have not received a brief in regard to the gaming and racing commission and those matters.

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

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, does the reference also mention the Tradies clubs of the ACT?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I will have to take that on notice. I do not have that before me.

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

**MR WALL:** Minister, is it possible that the reference was made whilst Ms Burch was still the Minister for Gaming and Racing? If so, what part would she have played in the handling of that reference from the royal commission?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I think that is a hypothetical question. I do not have any of that information.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** No, it is not hypothetical. It is asking about times.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I do not have any information of that nature in front of me.

### **Health—elective surgery**

**MS BURCH:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the government's strategy to reduce the waiting list for long-wait patients on the elective surgery list?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Ms Burch for her question. On becoming Minister for Health I indicated that one of my key priorities was to improve timeliness of access to acute care services, and one of those, clearly, is access to elective surgery. The elective surgery long-wait list had grown to an unacceptable level. By working closely with my directorate we have put in place a very comprehensive strategy to eliminate, or largely eliminate, the number of people waiting for surgery longer than the clinically indicated time frames.

I announced late last year that the government would make provision for a further thousand elective surgery operations, directly targeting patients who were on the long-wait surgery list, at a cost of \$11.8 million. When I made that announcement there were more than 1,200 people currently waiting for elective surgery longer than the clinically indicated time frames, the majority of whom were waiting for orthopaedic, urology and ear, nose and throat surgery.

I am delighted to inform the Assembly that, as a result of the initiative the government has put in place, 444 people have been removed from that list of 1,200 people who had been waiting for long-wait elective surgery procedures. This is an excellent result. It means there are 444 more Canberrans and people from the surrounding region who have got the surgery that they need and have been removed from that long-wait list.

This is a result of the hard work of our surgeons, our anaesthetists, surgical nurses, the ACT health surgical task force and many, many others. This is a great outcome. We have been able to achieve this outcome by engaging more locum doctors where there

are gaps in certain specialities such as ear, nose and throat surgery. We have extended operating theatre hours. We have made more sessions available to surgeons on weekends.

The government has appointed an experienced nurse from territory-wide surgical services who is acting as the program manager. We are increasing the auditing of the waiting list to make sure it is accurate and up to date and we are identifying and procuring additional equipment needed as part of the funding boost.

As a result, we have seen 444 more people get the surgery they need out of that 1,200 people waiting longer than clinically indicated. We are well and truly remaining on track to complete 1,000 surgeries for this category of long-wait patient by the middle of this year.

This is a very, very important outcome. It means more people getting the surgery they need. It means fewer people waiting longer than clinically indicated and it is part of my commitment, as health minister, to improve access to timely care and to make sure that people get the care when they need it in the time frames that they should receive it.

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

**MS BURCH:** Minister, can you please outline how the government processes and partnerships have been playing and will continue to play a role in addressing elective surgery waiting lists?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Ms Burch for her supplementary. Yes, it is the case that there are a broad range of government processes and partnerships that have been put in place to make sure that this is not just a one-off and that we are not going to see growth occur again in the list. Instead it is about fundamental reforms to the way we manage and deliver surgery, in the way we manage the waiting list, to make sure that people get timely access to the care they need.

For example, we are working closely with both Calvary public and the Canberra Hospital. We are ensuring greater alignment so that unallocated theatre sessions are now allocated wherever possible to provide additional surgery services across both hospitals. We are making sure that we also engage our private hospital capacity much better, because we have a health system in the city as a whole, public and private. The private system has capacity as well. It should all be being utilised to improve access to care for Canberrans.

I am grateful for the support, for example, of hospitals like Calvary John James, which are already performing public surgeries on behalf of ACT Health. That is a great outcome. We are seeing considerable throughput at Calvary John James. Those doctors and surgeons are delivering those surgeries at Medicare rates. So it is the same cost as it would be for performing the surgery in the public hospitals, but it is being delivered in that private hospital. That means we are able to see more people get the surgery they need.

We will also continue to build partnerships with hospitals in the surrounding region, particularly at Bega and Queanbeyan hospitals, because they both have had significant upgrades in recent years and there is far greater capacity for some surgery to occur there that is not occurring there at the moment.

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

**MS PORTER:** Minister, can you outline the other measures the government is focusing on to deliver sustainable change for patients requiring surgery in the ACT?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Ms Porter for her supplementary. Yes, we are very focused on other measures to deliver sustainable change for patients requiring elective surgery in the ACT. The first is in the area of recruitment. We are making sure we are strengthening our capacity around workforce planning to anticipate the staff we need to maintain services into the future. That includes, in particular, clinical specialty areas where there are demand and challenges in maintaining the appropriate number of specialists. For example, orthopaedic surgery and ear, nose and throat surgery are two clinical areas that have been growing at a faster rate than other types of elective surgery. Equally, we are seeing significant increases in relation to urology. We need to continue to target the recruitment of additional permanent specialist staff but also locum staff so that we can help meet surges in demand as they come through, particularly in these specialty areas.

The other is in relation to technology. There is significant capacity for managing more conditions with medical rather than surgical options.

**Mr Hanson:** Do what Katy did—just fabricate the results. That was Katy’s approach, wasn’t it? Fabricate the numbers.

**MR CORBELL:** That means deferring the need for surgery at all because the better health outcome can be achieved through medical options. That is being done, for example, in relation to orthopaedics where we have physiotherapists working with people—

**Mr Hanson:** Are you fabricating the numbers as well, Simon?

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

**MR CORBELL:** Could I ask you to stop the clock, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A point of order. Stop the clock.

**Mr Gentleman:** Mr Hanson interjected across the chamber that Mr Corbell was fabricating numbers, Madam Speaker. That is completely inappropriate, and I ask that he withdraw.

**Mr Hanson:** Madam Speaker, that is not what I said. I said, “Are you fabricating numbers, as your predecessor did?”

**Mr Corbell:** It's still an imputation, though.

**Mr Hanson:** It's a question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** It can still be—

**MR HANSON:** No-one thought she would fabricate numbers either—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, Mr Hanson! I am making a ruling. It can still be an imputation. I do not think there was a case that Mr Corbell's predecessor personally fabricated numbers. I think on the basis of that you should withdraw.

**Mr Hanson:** I withdraw, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Corbell, the Minister for Health.

**MR CORBELL:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Very sloppy, I thought, Madam Speaker. This is the man who says that he is concerned about waiting lists for elective surgery but when the government delivers improvements in elective surgery he accuses us of making it up. Well, Madam Speaker, go and tell the 444 people who have got the surgery they needed because of this measure whether that has been made up. Why does he not go and tell them that?

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

**MS PORTER:** Minister, what are the challenges that ACT Health faces in the long term in terms of keeping elective surgery waiting lists down?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Sorry, Ms Porter. Could you repeat that? I just did not hear most of it. I only heard snippets.

**MS PORTER:** What are the challenges that ACT Health faces in the long term in terms of keeping elective surgery waiting lists down?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Ms Porter for the question. The most significant challenge we face when it comes to the delivery of elective surgery services is the \$600 million funding cut being delivered by the federal Liberal government for hospitals in the ACT. That is the most significant cut and challenge that we are facing. This is a federal budget position from the federal Liberal government that is ripping \$57 billion out of the health system nationally over the next decade; \$57 billion less funding for health and hospital services across the nation.

Here in the ACT that is \$600 million less for health and hospital services from the federal government over the next decade. That is the equivalent of 58,000 additional elective surgeries.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR CORBELL:** It is the equivalent of 58,000 additional elective surgeries. Those opposite can laugh at the impact that this will have on elective surgery rates, but the facts speak for themselves. We have \$600 million less over the next decade for our hospitals as a result of the Abbott-Turnbull government budget cuts. So we are going to continue to focus as a government on improving service delivery. We are going to continue to see more people get the elective surgery they need in the time that they need it. But those opposite should—

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

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

**MR CORBELL:** if they are seriously concerned about elective surgery, be saying to their federal counterparts, “Reverse the cuts.”

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order!

**MR CORBELL:** Mr Hanson should be out there telling the Prime Minister to stop the cuts on ACT hospitals. *(Time expired.)*

**Ms Barr:** Madam Speaker, now that the Leader of the Opposition has calmed down, I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

### **Supplementary answers to questions without notice Disability services—Therapy ACT**

**DR BOURKE:** I rise to provide some more clarification to Mr Doszpot’s supplementary regarding disability services. From 2016 this year ACT government services for children at risk of developmental delays will be delivered through a new service that coordinates services from the Health, Education and Training, and Community Services directorates. The child development service will have a focus on early identification, screening and assessment of children nought to six years, children seven to eight years with complex needs who have not had a previous diagnosis, and autism assessment to age 12 years.

Some time-limited intervention will be available for children not eligible for the NDIS. This includes developing kids playgroups, therapy programs and referral to mainstream services such as child and family services. Families concerned about their child’s development can be reassured that they will continue to have access to advice and expertise through attending a speech pathology or physiotherapy drop-in clinic or through ringing the intake line at the child development service.

### **Trade unions—royal commission**

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I have some information in regards to the question Mr Smyth put to me earlier about the royal commission on trade unions. There were two matters

sent to the ACT Gaming and Racing Commission—one in regard to community contributions, another in regard to the Canberra Woden Tradesmen's Union Club. The advice is that the body of evidence considered by the royal commission in making their findings was only very recently provided to government. The Gaming and Racing Commission board is reviewing all available information and will make recommendations to the government on the referred matters following consideration of the information. If breaches of the criminal code are identified, these will be referred to ACT Policing. In November 2015 the Gaming and Racing Commission board commissioned a review to commence early this year on the effectiveness and efficiency of the community contributions process.

## **Planning and Development (Land Rent Payout) Policy Direction—Disallowable Instrument DI2015-308**

### **Statement by minister**

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Minister for Planning and Land Management, Minister for Racing and Gaming and Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations): Madam Speaker, while I am on my feet, I have a statement of correction. In regard to the debate on 11 February on the disallowance motion on the Planning and Development (Land Rent Payout) Policy Direction, Mr Coe raised the circumstances of a former owner of an affected property in Ainslie. My response was:

I will speak once again to the individual that Mr Coe raised during his conversation in respect of the buildings left on the block. It was a request of that owner to leave those buildings on the block.

I had previously been briefed that the former owner had made that request—that a shed and a garage remain on the block—but the asbestos task force has since advised this information was incorrect. The decision not to demolish the shed and garage was made by the asbestos response task force. The goal of the demolition program is to eradicate loose-fill asbestos by removing affected houses.

I am advised that in the majority of cases the demolition instructions will encompass the affected house, structures attached to the house and soil from the works zone only with a view to containing costs and retaining, so far as possible, the established gardens and landscaping that are features of these blocks in established Canberra suburbs. Where possible, structures that are shown to have no evidence of fluffy contamination are left on the block. The task force has informed the individual of this position and why it was the case that the structures would remain on her site at the end of 2015 prior to her receiving the resale offer.

It is also worth noting that the shed on the block in which commentary referred to as contaminated is actually made from bonded asbestos sheeting. That shed was tested by a licensed asbestos assessor engaged for the demolition and treated in accordance with the relevant recommendations. As we all know, bonded asbestos is a ubiquitous building material in Canberra's older suburbs. Provided it is maintained and is worked on safely, it poses a low level of risk.

Madam Speaker, we have all been touched by the individual stories that form part of the history of this issue for our city. Examples like this one perhaps demonstrate why it is better for us to ensure our debates in this place do not traverse into the detail and the circumstances of individuals.

## **Euthanasia**

Debate resumed.

**MR CORBELL** (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Capital Metro, Minister for Health, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for the Environment and Climate Change) (3.24): I thank Ms Porter for her motion and her ongoing commitment to issues associated with end-of-life care. She has been, and I am sure she will remain, a very passionate advocate in this space.

In our most recent budget there was funding to supplement existing palliative care services within the ACT and the surrounding region. This funding builds the non-hospital capacity of palliative care services in consultation with specialist palliative care community services, local GPs and our community nurses. This includes in-home services designed to keep people in their own homes for longer and in many cases supports end-of-life care at home.

It was only a relatively short time ago that people considered palliative care a speciality that enabled people to die comfortably. Contemporary palliative and end-of-life care is now very much focused on helping people live as full a life as possible by managing medical symptoms and controlling pain issues. People are living longer, partially because of social factors but also because of medical research. The health industry has become so very good at treating and managing conditions that in the past caused a rapid death or a protracted period of illness leading to death.

We recognise that treating people with respect and in a manner that protects their dignity is an equally important role for health services at all stages of a person's life. However, treatment and management advances are not cures, so people often experience a number of conditions that need to be managed. Palliative and end-of-life care is increasingly becoming a field of medical expertise that considers the multiple needs of patients and plans the best multidisciplinary care options in the most appropriate setting for a patient's ongoing treatment.

The ACT offers a number of palliative care services across the region that are continually reviewed and improved over time. At Canberra Hospital there are expert practitioners and a nurse-led consultative service. From March this year a palliative care staff specialist will commence and be based at Canberra Hospital together with a registrar employed through Clare Holland House. This service is a consultative and supportive service and will provide care across the Canberra Hospital to both inpatients as well as outpatients. The service also provides a collaborative conduit between the acute care facility of the hospital and the hospice and home-based care.

The Calvary Specialist Community Palliative Care Service, headquartered at Clare Holland House, has a significant range of services being delivered for people needing palliation. The ACT hospice at Clare Holland House provides both inpatient accommodation and also respite care for patients. It is a calm and restful place. Patient rooms open to the outdoors and it has flexible access hours for patients to be supported by close family and friends. The team of specialist palliative care nurses and doctors contribute to the peaceful environment at Clare Holland House. In addition to providing the highest quality clinical care, those experienced practitioners guide and support family and patients through the physical and emotional challenges preceding end-of-life circumstances. The ACT hospice is a place where life is celebrated, and the later stages of life are treasured as much as any other moment on a person's life journey.

The specialist palliative care outpatient clinics also enable patients who are mobile and independent to attend regular clinical reviews or seek treatment for a specific symptom or condition. Many patients enjoy the sense of independence, mobility and flexibility of the clinical service because it dispels the sense of being grounded or totally reliant on someone else coming to them. As you can see, Madam Speaker, we have a very comprehensive range of services when it comes to palliative care, and we are going to need to continue to build this capacity as our population grows and as it ages.

Another element of Ms Porter's motion is in relation to recognising the importance of advance care planning. This is a process whereby a patient who is of adult age, in consultation with healthcare providers, family members and significant others, makes decisions about their future healthcare should they become incapable of participating in medical treatment decisions either temporarily or potentially permanently. This is an important framework to ensure that patients' wishes are respected through the care and health treatment process.

There are three ways an advance care plan and people's choices can be recorded: firstly, through an enduring power of attorney; secondly, by completing a statement of choices; and thirdly, by completing a health direction under the Medical Treatment (Health Directions) Act. The enduring power of attorney and health direction are legal documents which comply with the Medical Treatment (Health Directions) Act 2006. The statement of choices provides specific information relating to a person's wishes and values. If choices about future care are known, they can be respected.

The government provided funding in the 2013-14 budget to support the respecting patient choices program and a tender to non-government organisations to develop and implement an advance care planning community education and awareness program. Healthcare Consumers ACT was the successful NGO and is in the second year of their delivery agreement with ACT Health.

When it comes to decisions about end-of-life care the ACT Law Reform Advisory Council is also playing a role. As Attorney-General I have made a referral to the council dealing with the terms and operation of the Guardianship and Management of Property Act 1991. This inquiry includes examination of current policy trends in the

area of guardianship and substitute decision making in the ACT. It is anticipated the inquiry will be giving consideration to some of the legislative framework in the Powers of Attorneys Act 2006. When that report is received from the council the government will be in a better position to consider if any legislative reforms are necessary in relation to the operation of powers of attorneys.

I advise that there are a range of deeply held views in our community both in favour of and opposition to the question of whether a person should be permitted to choose how and when to end their life. Under the self-government act the Assembly does not have the constitutional capacity to permit euthanasia or the assisting of a person to terminate his or her life. The amendments to that act made by the so-called Andrews bill removed the power for this place to make laws permitting or having the effect of permitting assisted death or suicide.

In 2014 my Labor colleagues and I supported a motion calling for the Speaker of this place to write to the Prime Minister requesting that the commonwealth limitation on the lawmaking ability of the ACT should be repealed. This is exactly the same question as that around whether a law of this place can be disallowed by an executive veto of the federal cabinet. It is an undemocratic and unnecessary prohibition on the decision-making capacity of this place. If laws can be enacted and considered by the parliaments of the states in the federation, there is no reason why the territory should not equally be permitted to debate and potentially legislate on this important question. That is reflected in opinion polling. For example, an opinion poll conducted in 2012 by the Australia Institute of 1,400 people showed that 71 per cent agreed with the proposition that if a person is experiencing unbelievable and incurable suffering a doctor should be allowed to help them end their life.

I think it is the case that important questions need to be debated around the way we manage end-of-life decision making. My own view is that I continue to support in principle the capacity for someone at the terminal stage of a terminal illness to end their life with dignity and respect. But I also believe there needs to be significant work undertaken to ensure a model that protects against abuse, that protects the vulnerable and that protects those who perhaps are less capable or legally incapable of making decisions for themselves from being impacted adversely by such a legislative framework. That is why we should be able to have the debate. That is why we should communicate to the federal parliament that they should remove the prohibition on this place and the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly to be able to legislate and debate these questions.

I thank Ms Porter for her motion. It is an important one; it is a debate that will loom larger and larger in our society as more people age and live longer and they become a larger proportion of our population. (*Time expired.*)

**MS FITZHARRIS** (Molonglo—Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research, Minister for Transport and Municipal Services and Assistant Minister for Health) (3.34): I thank Ms Porter for moving this very important motion today. Ms Porter, as has been recognised, has been an incredible advocate for end-of-life issues and the health care that people receive in their final years, months and weeks. I thank her enormously for the work she has done, particularly with her community

forums on this issue, which are always very well received. I hope we can continue to progress this important work in the Assembly on her behalf.

Anything we can do to improve the lives of people and minimise the distress and grief associated with death and dying, not only for the individual but for their family, friends and carers as well, is important. Debate is also important when it comes to this issue—debate, and talking the issues through. We perhaps do not often talk enough with our family and friends about what will happen when the time comes that we have to say goodbye. Just having those conversations can be an incredibly important and even positive experience and can help to ensure our loved ones have dignity and peace in their final days.

The ACT government knows that palliative care is an increasingly important area of health care for our community and consequently worthy of continued and increasing government attention. We have great palliative care services throughout Canberra and ACT Health works collaboratively with a range of partners, including residential aged-care facilities, specialist palliative care services, GPs and non-government organisations, to give people the opportunity to be cared for and die in their preferred place.

Effective communication and coordination of care with community care providers are critical considerations when planning and implementing systems to address end-of-life and palliative care processes. As a result, as mentioned, the ACT palliative care services plan 2013–17 was released in October 2013 to provide direction for palliative care within the ACT and surrounding region. One of the identified strategies of the plan was the development of an integrated and coordinated ACT palliative care clinical network. To ensure the network's relevance and success, it maintains a membership representing all of the key organisations responsible for or with an interest in the coordination and provision of palliative care services in the ACT and region. The network has been successfully running since May 2014 advising government on the strategic direction of palliative care.

In last year's ACT budget \$2.5 million was made available to ACT Health for end-of-life care at home to increase the government's support for end-of-life care by providing home-based palliative care packages and more staff and education for healthcare professionals. The government is also committed to raising awareness of advance care plans and palliative care services within the ACT and surrounding region.

In order to further advance the implementation of the plan and to better assist the direction of the network, the development of a model of palliative care was commissioned and is now nearing completion. This model will clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of each of the palliative care services in the system. It will provide a basis for identifying current and future resourcing gaps and a structure for clear communication across the sector. It will be a patient-centred model, providing patients with clear direction on how to enter, journey through and exit palliative care services across our region. In addition, a proof of concept study is currently being undertaken by the Centre for Palliative Care Research investigating the efficacy of providing palliative care at home.

Three-quarters of palliative care patients have a family carer. These carers would benefit greatly from practical education that would increase their skills, improve care-giving competence and address information needs. It is not known, however, which educational methods are acceptable and how high-quality tailored information can be delivered at a national level. Under the study, a pilot will endeavour to design and evaluate an innovative distance-learning educational package that will increase the effectiveness of the carer to provide better support to their family member. The findings of this research will help inform healthcare providers, the ACT Palliative Care Clinical Network and government on future investment priorities in the field of palliative care service delivery.

Funding support has also been extended to Clare Holland House for its community specialist palliative care service to increase its workforce and its capacity to handle more patients and services. I would like to just mention the good work Clare Holland House does to support people in palliative care, including sometimes, rarely but sadly, children. I have had an opportunity over the past year to get to know a couple of local families who have lost children to brain tumours. It is certainly a tragedy no-one would ever want to experience and any way we can improve palliative care for children in the ACT is a good thing I will continue to work on.

The community specialist palliative care service provides access to specialist palliative care for patients, incorporating services provided by Clare Holland House, and provides care to patients with a terminal illness who wish to be cared for and/or die in a community setting. Admission to the service requires referral from a primary practitioner, GP, specialist doctor or allied health worker and is based on individual patient needs as defined by Palliative Care Australia. Fundamental to the service is the partnership between service deliverers and care providers to enable and strengthen the skills of primary care providers. Referral to the service is not exclusively for the management of physical issues, such as pain and symptom management, but may also be for the management of psychological, emotional, social and spiritual support needs so crucial at this time.

Care of the dying is important care. Our dedicated staff who work within this sector understand that every patient, family and carer has unique needs that must be identified and met during and after the dying process. Successfully meeting these needs is and will continue to be an important focus of the health sector in the ACT.

On the matter of the commonwealth's law that prevents the ACT from legislating for voluntary euthanasia in our community, I support this call from Ms Porter today. As Minister Corbell noted, the views of many are heartfelt and divergent in our community but, as representatives in this place, we should be free to debate such laws. I thank Ms Porter for her work on this. It has been careful, considered and, in her unique style, very respectful of the community. It is this long, hard, gentle, sensible work that has enabled us to bring this debate to a constructive point. I congratulate her enormously on this work and am happy to support the motion today.

**MS BURCH** (Brindabella) (3.40): I, like others in this place, thank Ms Porter for bringing this matter of great importance here and for her efforts in being a champion

to a cause that she believes in so passionately. I too believe, as Ms Porter has stated, that it is time for the conversation on end-of-life issues. The time for that conversation is now. The way we care for people who are dying is indeed important. It affords them dignity that in some circumstances they may feel they have lost. It allows for individuals to be at the front and centre of the decisions that they are making and to have a sense of control over a situation in which they would otherwise feel completely powerless.

Following the end-of-life forums Ms Porter hosted last year, it is very clear from the conversations that took place that people certainly do have a view on the end-of-life experience. Whilst I recognise that this subject can be polarising for some, it is important to recognise the voices of those who shared their experiences on the issue, indeed some of whom are facing their own end-of-life concerns.

As Ms Porter has said, the forum had three key questions. Some of the strong themes that came through during the discussions around these questions were that people do want to die peacefully, painlessly and with dignity. They want the ability to do this without the risk of prosecution and without the interference of technology. They want there to be greater education and awareness of end-of-life issues. There is a desire to see legislation that provides protections for individual liberty and autonomy.

The World Health Organisation has defined palliative care as an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing problems associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and assessment and treatment of pain and other problems. Good care that encompasses the cultural, spiritual and psychosocial needs of patients, their families and carers in the last days, weeks and months of life can assist in minimising the distress and grief associated with death and dying. It can indeed provide a level of comfort not only to the individual but also to their loved ones in knowing they are not needlessly suffering.

Presently, hospitals and hospices provide end-of-life care to the majority of people who die in Australia but, as we know, and particularly here in the ACT, the population is ageing. As the proportion of older Australians grows, it is likely that the number of people requiring end-of-life care in hospitals will continue to rise. But it is also possible that the interest in having palliative care in the family home will also increase.

The safety and quality of end-of-life care has important implications for the people who receive care, those involved in providing that care, and for society as a whole. Potentially preventable physical, emotional and spiritual distress can occur if the care provided is less than optimal, and there are significant cost implications for society if unwanted or inappropriate medical treatments are continued. The ACT government aims to ensure that processes are in place so that people receive safe and high-quality end-of-life care that aligns with best practice and nationally agreed standards, and is available for all.

The ACT palliative care services plan 2013-17 was released in October 2013 and sets the direction for palliative care in this region. Under the 2015-16 budget, as has been

said, \$2.5 million was made available for end-of-life care at home to increase government support for end-of-life care by providing home-based palliative care options, more staff, and better education for healthcare professionals. To date, three projects have been funded under this; they are: a model of palliative care, a pilot study into home-based palliative care, and additional funding for the community specialist palliative care service.

Further to these, the ACT offers a number of palliative care services across the region. The Canberra Hospital has a nurse-led consultative service. The hospice at Clare Holland House provides inpatient accommodation for patients in the end stages of their life. Canberrans can access the palliative care education service. Community nursing also provides services. We have the support of great organisations like the Eden Monaro cancer support group and Palliative Care ACT. In addition, the respecting patient choices program commenced in 2006 and provides advance care planning across both Canberra and Calvary care sectors. The primary objective of that program is to provide a quality assured system of discussing, recording and documenting a person's healthcare wishes.

The person and the interdisciplinary team are all essential participants in these discussions. Substitute decision makers, family and carers are included according to the patient's express wishes and in accordance with the ACT's legislative frameworks. In many, but not all, cases it is necessary to have a series of conversations so we get the goals right and the values and wishes of the patients are reached sensibly and with sensitivity.

End-of-life and palliative care processes require sensitivity and compassion. As the number of people seeking end-of-life support continues to increase, the ACT government will continue to inform and support clinical, organisational and strategic efforts to improve the quality of this care and ensure it aligns with national and international best practice.

Ms Porter is quite right to say that we need to have the courage to continue this conversation. We need to be prepared to hear the views of others and continue this important community discussion to ensure that we afford our community, our families and our loved ones the dignity and the choice that they deserve at the end of their life. Whilst Mary is reaching the end of her time in this place, I for one will continue in the shadow of Ms Porter's efforts on this to make sure that we continue to have these conversations across the community. They are hard conversations. They are difficult at many times. Perhaps there is no more important time than now to discuss how someone chooses to end their life and to die with dignity with regard to themselves and their families. That is a conversation that we in this place should not shy away from.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (3.47): I thank Ms Porter for bringing forward this motion today. As she said, it is unfortunate that issues around end of life are not discussed perhaps as much as they should be. There is a certain discomfort for people in discussing these issues; therefore in that context I think it is good that they are brought to this place for discussion. I have been pleased that in the community in recent years we have been seeing a more active discussion of these issues. That can

only be a good thing because it helps to address some of that discomfort and it helps us to develop policy to more accurately reflect community desires.

Certainly, as members of this place know, I have taken a great interest in this issue, and my party, the Greens, have also taken a great interest in the issue. I moved a motion in the Assembly last year, which was supported by members of the Labor Party, which resulted in us writing to the federal government calling on it to repeal the so-called Andrews bill, which prevents the ACT from making its own laws on the issue of voluntary euthanasia. I note for the interest of members that my party is also gathering signatures on a petition asking for the same thing. If anybody wants to drop by my office and sign that petition, they would be more than welcome. I am more than happy to add names to the list. Mr Hanson, I do not know whether you have been up to my office. You have been; you know where it is. Feel free to drop by.

On a serious note, I think it is quite appropriate for the Assembly to discuss this matter, and that members of this place as well as members of the community agitate on this issue. I do not accept Mr Hanson's view that this is a federal issue and that we should not talk about it in the Assembly. It affects members of our constituencies, citizens of the ACT, and it is quite important that we discuss it in this place because it is an issue of importance to many Canberrans.

The call is for the federal government to restore rights to the territory—rights that were taken away in an unprecedented political manoeuvre. If it had happened to any of the states of this commonwealth, there would have been absolute outrage but, because it was done to the territory, somehow it is seen as acceptable to treat our citizens as second-class citizens. We are supposed to be a territory with full rights to make laws for the peace, order and good government of our citizens. We have democratic elections and an Assembly. We have been given the power to change the size of our Assembly. The power of the executive government to veto our laws has been removed, yet there is a bizarre, out-of-place restriction on us that says we cannot make laws on euthanasia. This law has to go. Clearly, in light of that comment and my earlier position as stated in this chamber, I will not be in a position to support Mr Hanson's amendment today.

I am, however, genuinely supportive of Ms Porter's motion today. I am very interested in her suggestion that we investigate whether my health record could support a personal online-based advance care directive that could be accessed by health professionals who treat a critically or terminally ill person. This and other practical steps to better support the dignity of those dying or facing certain death due to suffering terminal illness are important while we wait for the commonwealth government either to change its patronising view of the ACT's legislative powers or perhaps for it just to be changed through the upcoming election to better reflect the views of a large proportion of modern Australia.

As the motion says, as Ms Porter has to her credit asked us to consider, and as I and members of all progressive parties have been saying, there is a growing call for the community to have greater choice and greater control over their manner of dying. It is a call for careful planning, for inclusion of personal wishes, and ultimately a call for

our society to provide dignity to those who deserve it at a time when they need it the most.

Even having a debate of this nature would have been taboo once upon a time or quashed as being fringe and ghoulish, as some sort of sacrilege. Thankfully, we have evolved to a point, as I touched on earlier, where it is becoming more accepted to have these conversations, for people to canvass these issues in a way that is mature. It is not always easy but it is important that we have these conversations.

Individuals should have a right to have input into the care and services we receive at the end of our lives, and we need to make sure that our legislative and legal frameworks are progressing to reflect that increasing community willingness to have these conversations. It is particularly pertinent, in the case of reduced capacity that may result from certain terminal illnesses or the treatments provided for some conditions, that people are making these plans while they are still considered to be able to.

I am certainly thankful that this government of which I am a part has been taking a long, hard look at advance care directives in a range of areas. Significant improvements have been made in this area due to the advance care directive initiatives that were included in the parliamentary agreement. The respecting patient choices program to help people make advance care plans has been around since 2006. However, not many people knew about it. When I was the Minister for Ageing in 2014 I was pleased to be able to launch an ACT government funded campaign in partnership with Medicare Local to inform the ACT community about the importance of advance care planning.

Developing an advance care plan will ensure that an individual can make decisions regarding their future health care while they still have the capacity to do so and allows them to communicate those wishes to family, friends and healthcare professionals. Advance care planning ensures that all of us as adults, no matter what our stage in life, make decisions regarding our future health care while we still have the capacity to do so. People in the ACT should be aware that their spouse or next of kin has no legal entitlement to make formal substitute decisions on their behalf in circumstances where they cannot make their own decisions unless there is an enduring power of attorney in place. Most people do not have that; so those restrictions would apply to most people in our community.

That is why having conversations about values and wishes relating to future health care are crucial at all stages in our adult lives. Anyone over the age of 18 years can complete an advance care plan, and I would encourage people to look at that closely and consider taking up that option. The ACT government-funded respecting patient choices program also provides information and advance care plan documents. Residents can also complete their advance care plans free of charge with a trained respecting patient choices facilitator.

I would like to touch briefly on palliative care. Ms Porter mentioned this in her motion, in paragraphs(1)(d) and (2)(a), noting that there are excellent services available in the ACT and calling on the government to continue to provide for greater

choice in regard to palliative care services. This is very important as well. This is about people having a range of choices at the end of their life, and being able to access palliative care services is definitely part of that. We have all heard stories from the facility here in the ACT about the quality of care and the level of respect that people receive. I think it is reassuring for people as they enter that phase of life to know there are facilities such as our palliative care centre here in the ACT available to them.

I also want to touch on the issue of the medical use of cannabis, because it is something that is relevant at the end of life as well, particularly for people facing cancer and other issues around terminal illness. We will debate that on another day. I do not want to prosecute the matter too much here but I encourage members to continue to look at the evidence on this matter. This is part of the spectrum of providing people with a range of care options. There is clear evidence that people find it beneficial, particularly, although not exclusively, for pain management when they are dealing with difficult cancer treatments. Certainly, in terms of thinking about end of life and issues such as palliative care, we need to continue to look at how we can make it possible for people to access cannabis as a product that can benefit some people when traditional medical approaches do not necessarily benefit them. I will leave my remarks on that because we will continue to discuss it at other times in other motions.

I conclude by thanking Ms Porter for her contribution to this and similar debates over the years. I know that she has taken these issues up and that she has provided a forum for other people to express their views. That has been a valuable thing. Today she has provided us with both some practical short-term strategies to continue to enhance the ACT's response to end of-life issues and she has also flagged some of the bigger, longer term issues that we need to continue to work on.

I hope we reach a day when we are far more advanced than we are now in the way we deal with end-of-life issues. But we are on a journey, and I thank Ms Porter for bringing forward this motion today because it helps us to progress along that journey. I look forward to offering my support for the motion when we come to a vote.

**MS PORTER** (Ginninderra) (3.57): I thank members for their contributions to the debate. I am concerned that Mr Hanson seems to be saying that this Assembly is still to be treated as a virtual child, not to be trusted to consider debating some issues that, obviously, according to Mr Hanson, will be left to the grown-ups. It is high time that this impediment to our sovereignty was removed and the government was allowed to govern without this handicap. The Assembly should be properly empowered to do its job.

On the question of any vote on voluntary euthanasia that could at some later date, and in another Assembly, no doubt, be put forward by members in this place, I do not think those on the other side of the chamber have some exclusivity when it comes to conscience votes. I am not sure about his presumption. Is he suggesting that there are not different views by members on this side? Is he suggesting that these members will be somehow gagged in this debate or forced to vote in a bloc? In fact it is not party

policy to do that in relation to voluntary euthanasia. In regard to end-of-life issues there would be a conscience vote.

However, this motion is not about introducing voluntary euthanasia or assisted suicide; it is about reporting to members on the healthy conversations that Mr Rattenbury referred to that I was able to achieve through my forums with people who held many and varied views on issues surrounding dying and on what they believe they need in the way of support and resources. It is about informing this place of what these people, who represent a broad section of our community, wanted this place to hear.

I thank those people who gave their time and shared in the process, and also worked together to make recommendations. It is not about what I want, Mr Hanson—through you, Madam Assistant Speaker—or what other members on this side might want; it is about people calling on us to continue to extend and improve palliative care services. At the moment they are excellent services, but we know that demand will grow. It is about making advance care directives easier to use, better understood and more accessible to health professionals. Also, people asked for research to be commissioned so that the community is better informed about services for the dying and what is available to support the dying here.

People who participated in the forums also wanted to know what this place can do in relation to the Andrews bill and its impediment to pursuing options such as voluntary euthanasia or assisted suicide in the ACT. As can be seen, it is not about me—and I am sure the opposition really does not think that.

I thank Mr Corbell for his comments and his commitment to the continued improvement of appropriate palliative care services in particular settings for persons, their families and their health professionals. I would also like to record my thanks to all the health professionals who work in our acute healthcare and chronic healthcare settings for their care and support of those on their life journey as they reach the end of that journey.

I would like to thank the staff of Clare Holland House and all volunteers in whatever settings, in whichever medical facility or non-medical facility they work, where they support people on this journey. I thank the attorney for his work on advance care directives and on power of attorney. I would also like to thank Ms Burch for her support and for her offer to continue to foster these conversations.

I thank Mr Rattenbury for his support, particularly the call that he has made to allow this place to be able to vote on end-of-life issues, and to remove the impediment of the Andrews bill. I agree with Mr Corbell in relation to debating choices about the manner of dying. People should be able to discuss and debate this matter in this place, and we do need to be properly informed. Any legislation that is introduced in this area does need to be given careful consideration, and all the implications and safeguards need to be examined. It is particularly important that those with diminished ability of any nature are assured that any such legislation will protect them at all times, as I have observed is the case with voluntary euthanasia legislation in the Netherlands and Belgium.

I am pleased to have been able to bring this motion to this place today. I will not be supporting Mr Hanson's amendment, and I urge members to vote for the motion as it stands.

Question put:

That **Mr Hanson's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8		Noes 9	
Mr Coe	Ms Lawder	Mr Barr	Ms Fitzharris
Mr Doszpot	Mr Smyth	Ms Berry	Mr Gentleman
Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall	Dr Bourke	Ms Porter
Mr Hanson		Ms Burch	Mr Rattenbury
Mrs Jones		Mr Corbell	

Amendment negatived.

Motion agreed to.

## Graffiti vandalism

**MRS JONES** (Molonglo) (4.06): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) there is an ongoing problem with suburban graffiti vandalism on residential fences that face unleased Territory land all across Canberra, particularly along Hindmarsh Drive in Weston Creek;
- (b) the suburban graffiti vandalism is an eyesore and negatively impacts the experience of place and confidence in the community;
- (c) the suburban graffiti vandalism affects the perceived value and pride of an area; and
- (d) fences which face onto a main road, lane ways, reserves and unleased Territory land are in fact a shared amenity between the house owner and the community; and

(2) calls on the Government to address the growing issue of suburban graffiti vandalism.

I am pleased today, as member for Molonglo, to speak to the motion on the notice paper in my name regarding this important matter of addressing suburban graffiti vandalism in our city. In March 2014 the then Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister Rattenbury, told Mr Wall in a letter that the ACT government

recognised that minimising the impact of graffiti was important to maintain the amenity of commercial and residential neighbourhoods. The minister was correct.

It is very important to minimise this graffiti, as it does impact on Canberra suburbs. However, it is clear that the Labor-Greens government has failed to address and minimise suburban graffiti vandalism on residential fences facing onto territory land all across Canberra. You only have to drive along Hindmarsh Drive in my area to see the impact that this graffiti vandalism has on the look and feel of an area.

The Labor Party have now been in power for nearly 15 years and it has become clear that in this time they do not care about solving this problem. The then minister kept assuring Canberrans that they took unwanted graffiti seriously. However, it just is not true. For too long now in Canberra the government have been ignoring suburban graffiti vandalism and have instead tried to twist and change the focus into urban art and graffiti artists. I would not be surprised if the minister stands up today to say that I just do not understand graffiti art and attempt to hijack the motion and turn it into a discussion about graffiti art. I need to help the minister understand that I have a great respect for talented artists who use their skills in legal spaces to beautify our city. However, no-one thinks that the suburban graffiti vandalism along Hindmarsh Drive and other major roads falls into the category of legal street art. It is vandalism, pure and simple.

Great inner city art spaces are being focused on at the expense of our suburbs, and residents know. They see it, and they are unhappy, and they report it to me when I do my regular shopping centre visits. While many suburbs inside and outside my electorate fall victim to vandals with a spray can, the Chief Minister is announcing \$250,000 in additional funding, most of which will go towards coordinating new sites for legal graffiti and street art, not to solving the crime of vandalism.

The then Minister for Territory and Municipal Services in a media release on 27 May 2015, in the out-of-touch approach that the Labor Party and the Greens have towards this suburban graffiti vandalism, said that graffiti management forms part of the ACT budget and that the focus of such graffiti management was on street art and legal graffiti sites rather than addressing vandalism all across our suburbs.

In this media release it is stated that legal street art sites are a valuable alternative approach as they provide artists with an opportunity to develop their skills and to reduce unwanted graffiti. The trouble is that it does not reduce the graffiti on Hindmarsh Drive. It does not reduce the graffiti in Tuggeranong. It does not reduce the graffiti in Belconnen. They are totally separate people who are vandalising versus those who are skilled and engaging in art.

But the link is flawed and simplistic. If providing these artists with the opportunity to graffiti legally reduced unwanted graffiti elsewhere, then we would have seen a decrease as the arts spaces were increased. But we have not. So I do not think it is responsible for the government to link the two as if one is directly impacting on the other.

Alternatively the ACT government might believe that these artists are not responsible for the graffiti in our suburbs, which I think is most likely. The fact is that government has a \$750,000 anti-graffiti program, which is my understanding, but it is not achieving what it is meant to. I will be keen to hear what the minister has to say.

Many residents whose homes back onto Hindmarsh Drive have seen their rates increase hugely over the term of the government. Lyons has had an increase 41.5 per cent; Stirling, 43.5 per cent; Chifley, 44.5 per cent; Weston 45.7, per cent; Waramanga, 46.6 per cent; and Fisher has had an increase of 51 per cent in their rates. But they still drive along a road where fences are covered in graffiti vandalism. You would think, with all the extra money government is extracting from people's homes through the rates increases, the proper maintenance of suburbs would be a priority. But, sadly, the government is using the family homes and family households of Canberra as an asset, as an ATM to withdraw more and more money to prop up tram services that are going to support one per cent of the population

The Labor-Greens government are failing to address the social, physical and psychological stress that can be caused by suburban graffiti vandalism. We all know about the broken window theory which was popularised by the former Mayor of New York City, Rudy Giuliani. It is a well-known and well-respected concept that the appearance of urban decay and disrepair encourages further vandalism, break-ins and other crimes.

The broken window theory holds that a broken window left in a building unfixed encourages the congregation of lawbreaking individuals who see the physical deterioration of the area as a sign that their activities and misbehaviour will go unnoticed. Once this occurs other citizens begin avoiding the area, leaving it to those individuals who are perpetrating the crimes. Eventually the persistence spreads outward into otherwise clean and tidy, well-maintained areas.

In New York City, Mayor Giuliani sought to address the graffiti and other forms of vandalism quickly and effectively. Any vandalism that popped up was immediately removed or covered up. By having a tirelessly effective campaign against graffiti, New York City saw its streets cleaned up and areas which previously felt unsafe were once again busy public domains.

The ACT government's graffiti contract manager, I believe, in May 2015 acknowledged that this was the best approach to addressing graffiti. He said in a letter to residents whose back fences faced onto Hindmarsh Drive that rapid removal continues to be the main defence against graffiti vandalism and has proven over time to be a key deterrent. However, in the same letter it was outlined that graffiti removal from fences which face onto public land was not the responsibility of TAMS. It was advised that illegal graffiti should be removed by the private property owner as soon as it appears.

However, if a burglar decides to commit a crime and break into my house—let us say they kick down the front door and get a spray can and go at my lounge room—I then call the police. They come and investigate the crime, take photos and dust for

fingerprints, write a report and open an investigation. Then on the back of that they will attempt to bring to justice the person who committed the crime. And it is a crime. Then I can claim damages to my front door, for the repair of the spray painting to my lounge room walls, on my home and contents insurance. Yet when it comes to the crime of graffiti vandalism on people's back fences the home owner is left completely on their own to foot the bill.

Here in our democratic society we have a type of social contract in place. Citizens pay their taxes to the government and in return the government provides services that the citizen is unable to provide for themselves such as roads, hospitals, schools, police and, preferably, a relatively safe society. Here in Canberra people are paying more and more in their taxes by way of ever-increasing rates; yet the government is not keeping up its end of the bargain. This government is happy to blame the residents for the crime of vandalism, or to make them take responsibility for something that they have no ability to control, against their property and forces them to foot a bill with no assistance.

There needs to be more focus not only on stopping the vandalism but on quick removal. The balance is not right. The home owners along Hindmarsh Drive are regularly having criminals come along and intentionally damage their property and inflicting costs on them. However, unlike in the scenario I mentioned earlier about a criminal doing this in my lounge room, there is absolutely no desire by the government to stop these criminals or even to try to prevent the activity. The home owner has no power over what happens on territory land onto which these fences face and the government is turning a blind eye to the crimes that are being committed on that government land.

Canberra ratepayers are paying for a safe and well-maintained city. They have an expectation of a safe and well-maintained city but under this government some basic municipal services are not being provided and every cent is being stripped out of services to fund the tram along Northbourne Avenue.

I spoke with one mother whose home backs onto Hindmarsh Drive who was at her wits end about the constant graffiti vandalism that they are subjected to. She and her husband saved for years to be able to buy a family home. They have got their ailing parents living over the road. They have one child with special needs and a couple of other kids. Their special needs child requires specialist appointments which cost hundreds of dollars each time. The mum gets up each morning to go to work from 4 am till 8 am so that she can be home to take kids to school and be there when they come home.

She tells me that every dollar they earn is allocated to paying their mortgage and ensuring their family is provided for. Now that they have higher rates to pay, things are tougher for them. The cost of having to repair their back fence regularly due to the constant vandalism is just too much for her now. She has lost the heart that government will even bother holding up their end of the bargain and work to stop the criminal activity.

We see the start of the decline in the sense of pride in the community. It is overwhelming for home owners when they see no end to the late night graffiti vandalism night after night. As I spoke about earlier with the broken window theory, we start to see people stop trying. The areas become more neglected and uncomfortable, and it is happening here in our own city.

Under the Labor-Greens government, addressing suburban graffiti vandalism has not been done properly. I am afraid many residents will have to continue to put up with areas of untidiness, roughness and potential unsafeness. The government's approach to street art and legal graffiti is a totally separate matter, it is used as an excuse and it distracts from proper solutions. Until the government recognises this, changes the approach to its \$750,000 graffiti management program, which I have been led to believe exists, and realises it is ineffective, ratepayers will continue to suffer damage to their sense of place and to their hope.

**MS FITZHARRIS** (Molonglo—Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research, Minister for Transport and Municipal Services and Assistant Minister for Health) (4.18): I thank Mrs Jones for putting forward this motion about graffiti on public and privately owned assets today, including, in particular, residential fences such as those along Hindmarsh Drive. I hope this motion today provides an opportunity to inform those opposite and those in the community about the work that we undertake. I am happy to prove Mrs Jones wrong on this account; we are certainly not ignoring this problem. I hope over the next couple of minutes to go through the range of actions and programs that the government has in place to ensure that we both prevent graffiti and encourage street art in our city.

Grffiti is a serious concern across our city, as it is across cities all over the world. It does detract from amenity and enjoyment in our public spaces and does do serious damage, costing thousands of dollars each year, to public and private property. In fact, illegal graffiti costs our community, through the ACT government's budget, over \$500,000 a year to remove; and that is not including both private businesses and private home owners who also have to remove illegal graffiti. This is a problem we recognise, and we are taking active measures to prevent graffiti in our city and to ensure that it is removed when it occurs.

I am pleased to let Mrs Jones know that we are implementing a range of measures to provide a solution to this problem and manage graffiti vandalism across all assets in the ACT, both public and private. To capture this activity and to recognise the work that has been done by our hardworking TAMS officers and others, I will be moving an amendment to the motion to highlight the actions the ACT government is taking to deal with this problem.

As I said, the government spends half a million dollars annually on removing graffiti from the public realm. This financial year, the government has allocated an additional \$250,000 to focus on prevention and removal measures aimed at providing a sustainable response to reducing the incidence of graffiti, particularly on private assets.

It is important that graffiti is proactively managed. To this end, the government is implementing more preventative and removal measures to manage graffiti across Canberra. This is best illustrated by the appointment of a graffiti coordinator as a dedicated resource to assist in delivering graffiti reduction measures across our city. Ms Emberson was appointed as our new graffiti coordinator less than two weeks ago and will work with the community—artists, residents, businesses, property owners and the broader community—to help manage our graffiti problem.

In accordance with the ACT graffiti management strategy, TAMS takes a holistic approach to the management of graffiti by focusing on five key strategies: prevention, removal, diversion, community awareness and education, and legislation. A major focus this year is to increase the regular inspections of TAMS assets and the rapid removal of graffiti from public property. High visitation places such as town centres, bus routes and toilet blocks are inspected weekly and graffiti is removed within five days—within 24 hours if it is offensive. All other public assets are inspected monthly. You will be pleased to know that graffiti is generally removed from public assets at the time of inspection, or shortly afterwards in instances where the graffiti covers a large area and more specialised equipment is needed.

The statistics we have collected on graffiti incidents on public assets over the past three years indicate a downward trend in graffiti, with an average of 4,600 square metres removed each month in 2013-14, reducing by half to 2,000 square metres each month in 2014-15 and 2015-16. We expect that the level of graffiti will decrease once the new graffiti prevention and management measures are fully implemented.

While TAMS actively removes graffiti from public assets, removal from privately owned property, such as residential fences adjoining public land, is the responsibility of the asset owner. This is consistent with the Common Boundaries Act 1981 and needs to be applied, and is applied, consistently across the ACT. Where graffiti is reported on private assets, TAMS endeavours to contact the building owners and land owners and encourage them to remove the graffiti from their property as soon as it appears. However, the government recognises that this removal is a burden for residents and business owners, and there are often lengthy delays before graffiti is removed, which does detract from the look and feel of our suburbs, particularly on major arterial routes.

To deter graffiti vandalism on residential fences, such as along Hindmarsh Drive in Weston Creek, which Mrs Jones notes, the government has planted shrubs to screen some fences from the roadway in order to improve the public amenity and minimise the public exposure which is often the aim of the vandal. While this was effective in large sections along Hindmarsh Drive, there were a number of areas that could not be screened by shrubs due to the location of underground services and limited planting space. A trial was previously undertaken along Hindmarsh Drive and Kingsford Smith Drive in Belconnen to deter illegal graffiti by painting the residential fences en masse using stencils of palm leaves.

Madame Assistant Speaker, I do hope that people in this place will understand that graffiti vandalism is not something that can be addressed by government alone. It

requires a whole-of-community response. I am very pleased to say that a group of south Canberra residents are working with TAMS to form a volunteer group to remove graffiti from private assets such as residential fences. They will be provided with funding to assist with the purchase of insurance and removal materials.

To progress these matters, the former minister, Minister Rattenbury, held a roundtable discussion with representatives of Canberra's street art community, Gungahlin Community Council, CBD Limited and TAMS last year in May. It was well attended, and a large number of ideas were floated about how better to manage urban art through the involvement of the street art community. Ideas included the provision of more legal practice walls and mural sites to encourage legal, higher quality urban art that will add vitality and colour to our public places and deter annoying and unsightly tagging. I hope members have had a chance to see some of the street art on display around Canberra. Tocomwal Lane in Civic, Braddon and Dickson in particular are great examples of how we can encourage people to put their talents to better use than mindless tagging. A second roundtable is scheduled for later this month to guide and build on new ideas to create legal opportunities for street art and to prevent illegal graffiti.

TAMS has approached other agencies to include murals on public assets that have a recurring problem with graffiti. TAMS is currently working with Domestic Animal Services, the Land Development Agency, the Forensic Medical Centre, sport and rec and several sports clubs to install murals on walls. TAMS is also working with the commissioner for children and young people and CBD Limited to implement programs to divert graffiti offenders. Indeed, CBD Limited welcomed the announcement of the graffiti coordinator.

An extensive area of wall is being made into a practice wall at Yerrabi Ponds and we are working with the Gungahlin Community Council to install a large mural within that site. The government provides legal graffiti sites and community mural art sites as a diversion for illegal graffiti. TAMS is currently in the process of placing maps on the TAMS website to identify the locations of legal practice walls, and new sites for practice walls are being investigated in consultation with the street art and broader community. These sites must comply with a range of requirements to minimise the impact on the amenity of the area and residents. TAMS will also reopen the Callam Street drains at Woden once works are implemented to ensure the safety of users. The Callam Street drain has the largest and oldest legal art walls in Canberra. TAMS is also currently working with artists to open more mural sites in the area, in positions where the resource is otherwise not utilised.

To help in the reporting of graffiti, an app is being developed to allow members of the public to report graffiti on public assets straight to TAMS. The app will assist in the reporting of graffiti on private assets as well, such as residential fences, and will assist in identifying longer term management measures for high target areas.

TAMS data collected on graffiti incidents indicates that there is an increase in graffiti during the school holidays. To better inform the community and to target our youth, TAMS will be working with schools to raise awareness of legal art sites and inform

students of the implications of being caught participating in illegal graffiti. This education with young Canberrans is important.

The ACT government recognises that minimising the impact of graffiti is important to maintaining the amenity of commercial and residential neighbourhoods. In addition to preventative and removal methods, TAMS is working closely—and successfully, I might add—with ACT Policing to identify and prosecute graffiti offenders. TAMS is also actively participating in the restorative justice process to address graffiti vandalism committed by young offenders, which has resulted in positive outcomes for both the offenders and TAMS and subsequently for our community.

I would like to finish by saying that the government is committed to addressing suburban graffiti vandalism on public and private assets as evidenced by the strategies I have just outlined. We expect that over the next months and years, with the implementation of preventative measures and removal programs, including volunteer groups assisting with graffiti removal on private assets and our education programs, illegal graffiti will be significantly reduced, which will improve the look and feel of our city.

Let me go to some of Mrs Jones's comments. We do live in a safe city. We do not live in New York city of the 1980s, with the broken windows approach by the mayor at the time there, Mayor Guiliani, although successful. It is a vast stretch to compare the Canberra of 2016 to New York city of the 1980s—a vast stretch. I hope that Mrs Jones can agree to the amendments today, which outline the significant work the government is undertaking to prevent graffiti, work with people to prevent graffiti vandalism, and encourage our street art community.

I move:

Omit all words after “notes that”, substitute:

- “(a) the ACT Government recognises the concerns of members of the community about nuisance graffiti;
- (b) the ACT Government recently appointed a Graffiti Coordinator who will liaise with artists, students, business, property owners and the broader community on how graffiti is managed;
- (c) street artists make a valuable contribution to the Canberra community and acknowledges their work in creating a vibrant community;
- (d) the ACT has 23 legal street art sites across the ACT which support street artists;
- (e) illegal graffiti is a serious matter and attracts a \$1000 fine for individuals caught;
- (f) the ACT Government invests over \$500 000 a year to remove graffiti from property in the ACT;

- (g) it is the responsibility of private owners to remove graffiti from their property; and
- (h) that monthly complaints have been decreasing over time;
- (2) commends the ACT Government on the creation of a Graffiti Coordinator; and
- (3) calls on the Government to continue to:
  - (a) work with street artists to drive a positive culture of street art in the community; and
  - (b) monitor incidents of illegal graffiti and action its removal as appropriate.”.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (4.29): I welcome the opportunity to discuss the issue of graffiti vandalism this afternoon. It is certainly an issue I have taken some considerable interest in, particularly in my former role as the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, where I received constituent feedback on this issue. I know some people in the community find it very frustrating and, in some cases, quite distressing.

Ms Fitzharris has gone into some detail with the TAMS response. I guess I would like to talk more about some of the thinking around the approach the government is taking and my own views on this. Certainly in relation to the specific areas that Mrs Jones has raised, Hindmarsh Drive in particular, I do agree that this is a genuine issue for local residents.

The particular tags or names being sprayed on fences, bridges and local buildings in the Woden region have become a talking point amongst even members of my own office who regularly travel that route along Hindmarsh Drive. Frankly, these two tags have created the unfortunate potential to damage the broader community’s respect for genuine artists, and their prolific nuisance vandalism is costing more money than anything so egotistical or petty should deserve.

Illegal graffiti is an ongoing concern and the government is committed to managing unwanted graffiti across the city, costing the ACT government about \$500,000 a year to remove. Graffiti and the way it is managed certainly polarize people. While many complaints are received by residents about illegal graffiti, there are also calls from street artists for access to more sites and complaints that their art is sometimes painted over. There are certainly many in the community who welcome the colour and the vibrancy that comes from an interesting, well done and creative piece of street art.

Certainly graffiti or street art covers a wide spectrum of activities, from high-quality commissioned murals such as the Erindale bus station, which has just been revamped on the south side, through to sites in the city’s laneways such as Tocumwal Lane, through to illegal tagging on public or private assets, which many people view as being visually unattractive and which can even be dangerous particularly, for example, if it is covering street signs and the like.

While police try to take action, these people are notoriously difficult to catch, often operating under the cover of darkness and able to flee the site quickly. Even when the graffiti is covered over it can reappear overnight. The government is committed to managing graffiti. The last budget provided an additional \$250,000 towards key measures in the ACT government's graffiti management strategy. This strategy focuses on five key elements for addressing graffiti vandalism, namely, prevention, removal, diversion, community awareness, and education and legislation.

The funding boost from the last budget will allow TAMS staff to respond to graffiti removal in key areas across the city. It will also allow the government to work with artists to provide more opportunities to develop their skills at the right locations. That is an important point that I think was lost in the remarks that Mrs Jones made. I will come back to that. While graffiti and urban art can be divisive issues, we need to strike the right balance to preserve the look and feel of the city while at the same time support new and emerging talent. Our aim is to improve communication between the ACT government, artists, businesses and the community.

I have certainly seen how effective legal graffiti art sites can be in allowing artists to display their talents while breathing life into areas of the city that are traditionally disused. There are certainly some great examples of this. These legal street art sites are a valuable alternative approach as they provide artists with an opportunity to develop their skills, promote street art, bring colour to our city and aim to reduce unwanted graffiti.

There are currently more than 20 legal graffiti art sites across Canberra, mainly located under bridges and underpasses, showcasing the talents of street-based artists, some of whom now have work in the National Gallery of Australia. Art is art and people will have subjective views on it, but it is interesting that the National Gallery contains the works of some of the people who originally did their work on the streets of Canberra.

I am really keen for the government to work with businesses and local residents to identify other suitable sites which could brighten up public spaces and provide artists with an outlet for creative expression. Certainly my staff and I have put considerable effort into this issue, meeting with artists and TAMS staff at a graffiti site at Yerrabi Pond, which led to the idea of a larger roundtable.

In July last year I held a ministerial urban art and graffiti roundtable, which Ms Fitzharris mentioned. We brought together a range of stakeholders that she mentioned—local street artists, designers, government representatives, CBD Limited and community council representatives. This was the first time that such a meeting had been held and it was very valuable in exchanging views on these things.

I think the government and business representatives heard some interesting feedback from the street artists. At the same time, we were very clear in putting our case of how destructive and costly some of the more unwelcome graffiti was across our city. I think that was taken on board as well. We took the opportunity to really have a discussion about how, in particular, we can minimise tagging.

I go back to the comments Mrs Jones made in her earlier remarks. She said that to try and link urban art and tagging is a false connection. That is essentially the argument she was making. She said that it was an unwelcome connection. The point that was put to us by the street artists was that it is often the young, the new graffiti artists, who are doing this sort of thing. They are trying to prove themselves. They are trying to express themselves. They are trying to find a space to put out there.

Their observation was that if you could create legal spaces, some of the older artists can then seek to mentor or rein in the younger ones and actually channel their energies. The point there is that they then will not be doing street signs on people's fences and the like. That is the connection. It is actually a little bit sophisticated, but that is actually the reality and that is the feedback we got from people who actually know what they are talking about; the people who are actually involved in this and who know others that are doing this sort of behaviour.

We can rant all we like in this place, but it is actually about coming up with effective strategies that work. That is what we are trying to do here and that was the point of having that sort of a discussion.

**Mrs Jones:** Well, they are not effective. That is the problem; not effective.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Mrs Jones, you will get a chance when I finish speaking. You do not need to interject all through my remarks.

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Mr Rattenbury, sit down, please. Stop the clock, please. Mr Rattenbury, I was just about to ask you to sit down. Mrs Jones, I was going to say exactly that: you will have an opportunity to speak in reply when this debate is finished.

**Mrs Jones:** A point of order.

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Yes, Mrs Jones.

**Mrs Jones:** Is there not allowed to be any interjecting whatsoever in this debate? Is that the general rule about the place? My understanding is that normally in these kinds of debates there are allowed to be one or two words thrown across the chamber, and it is normal and it is acceptable. Is that now changing?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Tetchy.

**Mrs Jones:** Thank you very much for that. Thank you so much, minister. That is very kind.

**MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Please sit down, Mrs Jones. Mr Rattenbury, that is not helpful. Just keep your comments to yourself. I do not want any exchanges across the chamber. Mrs Jones, it is my understanding and it is my habit—it is what I do when I am in the chair—to try to assist members by letting them be heard in silence. That is what I like because I think it is not respectful for people to interject. I do not

care if they interject once or twice but it was more than once that you interjected. I know that you did it in a soft way and you were not yelling; I respect that. But I still do not want people interjecting, especially when I know they are going to have a chance to speak in reply.

All the kinds of things you were saying just now you can say to Mr Rattenbury when you stand up and speak in reply. You can make your points very clearly then. There is absolutely no need for you to interject across the chamber in order to make the points now. I would much prefer Mr Rattenbury be given the opportunity to speak without interruption. Thank you. Mr Rattenbury.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I was saying, this was the first time that such a meeting was held. It did allow, I think, a very constructive exchange of views. It certainly highlighted that property damage and illegal graffiti are major sources of complaints from some sections of the community. I made this point very clearly in the discussion. I was interested to hear how we may be able to direct urban art to legal sites in a way that allows creativity to flourish while at the same time reduce illegal graffiti.

This roundtable gave me a chance to hear from local artists about the issues around urban art and for the government to discuss some new initiatives. Artists suggested, for example, having some form of education measures to stop artists from tagging, particularly fences and street signs, by pointing out both how costly it was and some of the safety issues. Lower profile areas such as underpasses could be identified as beginner sites and higher visitation or higher use areas could be used for commissioned art or allocated to more experienced artists.

Together with local artists, we agreed to appoint a graffiti coordinator, and I was pleased to see that that position was recently filled by TAMS. There is now somebody undertaking that role. Part of their role is to implement and review the ACT government's graffiti management strategy to make sure we have the right framework. It involves a two-pronged approach: to remove unwanted graffiti at highly visible locations while also providing dedicated resources to work with the community to coordinate new sites for legal graffiti or street art.

The role we saw for the graffiti coordinator would include assisting in coordinating removal of graffiti on public assets by working closely with the government's contractors. The coordinator would also assist private landholders to address graffiti issues on their properties through contacts with graffiti removal contractors who have skills in this area. The role will also include reviewing current legal graffiti sites and identifying potential new legal graffiti sites across the territory, including private landowners who may be interested in hosting or commissioning urban art, and finally developing relationships with the street art community, businesses and promoting legal graffiti and street art sites. This would include peer group pressure to redirect illegal graffiti activities to legal sites or sites on private property.

We need to engage the art sector in the development of the revised strategy and find a way forward that allows artists to create some really dynamic work in pockets of

Canberra whilst really minimising as much as we can the unwanted tagging and vandalism.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank those who attended that roundtable. With the graffiti coordinator now engaged and with the assistance of urban artists and the broader community, I look forward under the leadership of Minister Fitzharris to seeing progress on the implementation of the graffiti strategy in the coming months.

In my new role as Minister for Education, I would also like to encourage the graffiti coordinator to engage with our school system. I understand that illegal graffiti activity tends to increase during school holidays. I would like to look at the possibility of a school holiday program where respected urban artists could mentor young potential artists and again channel that energy into something that is much better than the things that the community dislikes.

This may have benefits in potentially reducing illegal nuisance graffiti, but it may also be able to offer an alternative outlet for those small numbers of young people who may be at risk of undertaking other acts of vandalism. Urban art could well provide a pathway for this energy that could otherwise not only be a nuisance to society but ultimately be costly and harmful to the individual.

We have already found that having young offenders involved in the ACT restorative justice program has produced a positive outcome over the past year. The ACT restorative justice program gives young offenders the opportunity to meet with community members, accept responsibility for their own actions and consider the impact of their behaviour on the community.

We are committed to better managing graffiti. I welcome the fact that Mrs Jones has brought the motion forward today and has provided the Assembly with an opportunity to discuss this issue that I know is of interest to many members of the community. I will be supporting the amendment moved by Ms Fitzharris, which recognises the work that is underway and which I think gives a good account of the current situation.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (4.42): I have a few brief comments on graffiti vandalism as it relates to my electorate of Brindabella. I thank Mrs Jones for bringing this motion today. I would like to reiterate some of the comments that we have heard from Ms Fitzharris and Mr Rattenbury that this is not street art that we are talking about here. The Erindale bus shelter is a good example of street art, and the graffiti wall done down at Richardson is another example. Whilst everyone has a different view of what constitutes art and whether they like it or not, I think these are really good examples and should be encouraged. But that is not what the substance of this motion is about.

This motion is about what can be offensive and distressing to other members of the community as they drive or walk or cycle past or even live nearby. One issue from the examples I have had from my constituents in Tuggeranong is that often the home owner does not even know that the graffiti exists on their back or side fence which may back onto a walkway or a road or unleased land out the back. They do not know it is there until someone tells them it is there. The other problem they have is that

often their back fence or side fence is graffitied—vandalised—time after time after time. They may start off with the very best intentions of removing that graffiti. We all know that the quicker graffiti or vandalism is removed and tidied, the greater the deterrent for the perpetrators of that vandalism. But home owners start to get weary of having to do this over and over again, so surely there can be a better solution.

It is not just back fences and fences facing unleased crown land; I often hear examples of toilet blocks, for example, at the Fadden Pines park, and the backs of houses in Monash, Gowrie, Wanniassa, Greenway, Isabella Plains and Chisholm being vandalised, but there are also things like the little electricity substations that you see around the place. Some of them have been artistically painted, and that is great to see, but the ones that remain plain are often defaced with graffiti vandalism, and it does take a bit of effort to get them cleaned up.

When I pointed out these things on behalf of my constituents to the minister at the time, Minister Rattenbury—hopefully that will continue with the new minister—they were addressed quite quickly, and I would like to express my appreciation to directorate staff for doing that. I understand it is a constant battle for them. But for home owners who are either unaware of graffiti on their back or side fences or are getting a bit tired of having to clean it up again and again, there should be another way of addressing it. That is why I commend Mrs Jones's motion to the Assembly today.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Minister for Housing, Community Services and Social Inclusion, Minister for Multicultural and Youth Affairs, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (4.45): I want to make a few brief comments about Mrs Jones's motion and Ms Fitzharris's amendment to that motion and some of the comments that Mr Rattenbury made as well as Ms Fitzharris. I particularly want to refer to Mrs Jones's comments around the connection between taggers and street art and the diversionary kind of work that the coordinator would be doing in trying to redirect people, particularly young people, and moving their tagging work into providing some really beautiful art for the rest of the community to enjoy.

Mrs Jones has a view that this is not the case and that it will never work and that we cannot divert people from doing this tagging and being disengaged from the community. I would prefer to see a more inclusive position from the government, which is the role the graffiti coordinator will be taking on as well as with the street art community, including street artists like Geoff Filmer. He has been really great at mentoring some of the younger people in our community and bringing them into the fold and giving them a chance to display their talent.

It has been mentioned a couple of times, but Tocumwal Lane in Canberra's CBD is where the commercial street art community and CBD Limited work together to open up that space for people to be able to display their art. That is really quite a success. I went down there while some of the artists were showing their talents and doing all that beautiful art on the walls and I met a young artist who had previously been a tagger and who had realised that that was not a way that she was going to get her art recognised or acknowledged in any significant way. Her family put her in touch with the street art community through Geoff Filmer, and on that day her parents and her

grandmother were there with her while she was painting her street art mural in that laneway.

That is a perfect example of how we are giving kids a chance to turn themselves around and use their talent in a way that makes a difference to our city rather than treating them like the criminals that Mrs Jones has been describing some of them as. I think it is a great way of turning a divisive and disengaged young person into a more inclusive and respected community member. I just wanted to put those points forward, and I thank Ms Fitzharris for her amendment to the motion.

**MRS JONES** (Molonglo) (4.49): The Canberra Liberals will not be supporting the amendment. It is good to see we are all in absolute furious agreement around this place about the benefits of getting young people involved in programs which will divert them. However, that is not the point that this motion goes to; it is not what we are discussing here. What we are discussing is how we deal with what is currently on fences. The amendment the minister has put up is just a pat on the back for what is, in fact, a complete failure. The failure is that in four years of my being in this place there has been absolutely no change on Hindmarsh Drive. People who live in Lyneham, people who live in Stirling, people who live in Weston still drive to work with graffiti all over Hindmarsh Drive. There has not been an improvement and it has not fixed the problem. It is a shame that Minister Rattenbury is still defending this failure.

I also find it quite disappointing that words were put in my mouth in this debate. The idea that I have come in here and discussed a theory and that, therefore, I am saying that is what Canberra is is a complete nonsense. It is a bit embarrassing to come into this place and have words put in my mouth. There are theories about all sorts of things that are discussed; it does not mean that I am making a literal pointing from one experience to the other. The broken windows theory is a well-accepted argument for why it is worthwhile to clean off graffiti and to do other things around our city to keep it looking good. Patronising statements that suggest I have made a comparison between Canberra and New York at its worst time are a nonsense and should never have been made.

Some people are dealing with graffiti that, as Ms Lawder said, they do not even know is there. The first indication that they get is a threatening letter from ACT government saying, "Remove it. It's your problem." They have no ability to police their back fences. They cannot put up lights on their back fences. They cannot put up cameras, can they, to catch the perpetrators, because anything that protruded outside of their property would not be legal. What I am suggesting is that in regard to fences that back on to territory land the government's policies have been a complete failure. To say that that therefore means I somehow do not believe in programs that target young people is such a stretch and such a nonsense that it should not even be brought into this place.

In my 3.5 years in this place there has been no improvement on Hindmarsh Drive. Residents are unfairly expected to pay for something they cannot stop from happening. It is abusive of the taxpayer and it should be resolved. We will not support the amendments and the false pat on the back they give to the government for a failed policy.

Question put:

That **Ms Fitzharris's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9		Noes 8	
Mr Barr	Ms Fitzharris	Mr Coe	Ms Lawder
Ms Berry	Mr Gentleman	Mr Doszpot	Mr Smyth
Dr Bourke	Ms Porter	Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall
Ms Burch	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson	
Mr Corbell		Mrs Jones	

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## Public housing

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (4.56): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the National Partnership Agreement on Asset Recycling between the Commonwealth and the ACT states that “the Australian Capital Territory must ensure... [that] the total stock of public housing in the Australian Capital Territory does not fall below the level as at 30 June 2014 of 10 848 dwellings”;
- (b) the 2016 Report on Government Services Housing chapter shows the number of public housing dwellings in the ACT has decreased from 11 063 in 2011 to 10 833 as at 30 June 2015, which is lower than the number stipulated in the National Partnership Agreement on Asset Recycling;
- (c) the 2016 Report on Government Services Homelessness Services chapter shows that in 2014-15 the ACT had the highest percentage of clients with unmet need for accommodation services in Australia;
- (d) the 2016 Report on Government Services Homelessness Services chapter also shows that in 2014-15 the ACT had the lowest percentage of clients who were provided with accommodation or accommodation related assistance in Australia;
- (e) according to the 2016 Report on Government Services Homelessness Services chapter, the ACT had the highest recurrent cost per client accessing homelessness services in 2014-15 in Australia;

- (f) as at 1 February 2016 there were 2106 applications on the ACT public housing waiting list and 799 applications on the ACT public housing transfer list;
  - (g) Phase III of the ACT Government's Affordable Housing Action Plan was released in June 2012 and outlines actions to make housing more affordable in the ACT;
  - (h) it is reported that the ACT is experiencing a housing affordability crisis; and
  - (i) a lack of affordable housing is said to be both a cause of homelessness and a reason for people being unable to exit homelessness; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) develop and implement a realistic framework by June 2016 to address Canberra's long public housing waiting list and transfer list;
  - (b) develop and implement a realistic framework by June 2016 to address Canberra's affordable housing crisis and to increase the supply of affordable housing in the ACT;
  - (c) provide detailed information, by the last sitting day in March, of what action it is taking in relation to:
    - (i) addressing Canberra's long public housing waiting list and transfer list;
    - (ii) providing exits from ACT homelessness services; and
    - (iii) providing housing for refugees moving to Canberra; and
  - (d) report back to the Assembly in March 2016 on progress.

I have spoken in this Assembly on numerous occasions before about the ACT's long public housing waiting list and long public housing waiting times and about the lack of affordable housing in our territory. Unfortunately, the waiting lists and waiting times are still very long. My motion today highlights some of those salient points about the waiting lists, and I hope the government will step up and take some much-needed action.

The national partnership agreement on asset recycling between the commonwealth and the ACT states that the ACT must ensure that the total stock of public housing in the ACT does not fall below the level at 30 June 2014 of 10,848 dwellings. But the 2016 report on government services housing chapter shows that the number of public housing dwellings in the ACT has, indeed, dipped below that level. It was 11,063 in 2011; it was 10,833 at 30 June 2015, which is lower than the 10,848 dwellings stipulated in the national partnership agreement on asset recycling.

The impact that this has on vulnerable Canberrans who are waiting for public housing, who are on the waiting list or the transfer list, is that it is harder and harder for them to

be able to get a public housing property or to transfer. As we also know and we have discussed in this place, those public housing waiting lists and transfer lists do not tell the full story because there is another list that exists. It is about the out-of-turn transfers or the management-initiated transfers, which is where the government is hiding away those tenants in the Northbourne Avenue corridor that they need to move out in order to demolish those dwellings. What that means once more is that those people who may have been on the public housing waiting list for years will be waiting even longer because there are thousands of residents who need to vacate the Northbourne Avenue corridor.

There are some other important statistics in the 2016 report on government services that was released in January. For example, it shows that in 2014-15 the ACT had the highest percentage of clients with unmet need for accommodation services in Australia. We all know that the ACT has a large number of public housing properties. No-one disputes that, and I do not think anyone disputes the historical reasons why that is the case. Given that we have such a high level of public housing, it is disturbing to me, and hopefully to other members of this place, that we also have the highest level of unmet need for accommodation services. The chapter also shows that in 2014-15 the ACT had the lowest percentage of clients who were provided with accommodation or accommodation-related assistance.

On top of that, the homelessness services chapter also shows the ACT had the highest recurrent cost per client accessing homelessness services in 2014-15 in Australia. Let us try to unpick that a little. What that means is that we spend quite a lot on those clients, and that is a good thing. No-one is disputing that. But when we are spending the most per client and the second highest per head of population on our homelessness services, why then do we have the lowest percentage of clients provided with accommodation or accommodation-related assistance? Why then do we have the highest percentage of clients with unmet need?

We are spending a lot of money—in itself, not a bad thing—but where are the results? We are spending money and we are getting the worst results in Australia. It simply does not stack up. It is perplexing; it is disturbing; and for many ACT residents it is their day-to-day life which is impacted. It is not just statistics; it is not just talking about the budget and waiting lists in this place; it is about people's lives out there every day. That is what we need to be focusing on. Are we getting the best result for the money that we are spending? The report on government services 2016 would imply that we are not.

As at 1 February this year there were 2,106 applications on the ACT public housing waiting list and 799 applications on the ACT public housing transfer list. I have had letters from people who want to downsize, for example, and have been unable to be downsized. I have had letters from people in desperate situations wanting to transfer, to go back to their community, and their transfer applications cannot be fulfilled. What this means, if you add these numbers up, is that there are going to be more than 2,106 people on the public housing waiting list and more than 799 applications on the public housing transfer list because we also have that out-of-turn or management-initiated transfer list, which people are put on pretty much only on the day a house is made available.

So it is not just the hundreds or thousands of people who need to move out of the Northbourne Avenue corridor; they are just putting people on the list on the day and then moving them out. No wonder that list looks like it is in pretty good shape. Because the focus is on the Northbourne Avenue corridor, it is severely disadvantaging those people already on the list who have been waiting a very, very long time. There is nothing going on that is helping to reduce the long waiting times.

Another point in my motion today is about housing refugees. We have heard the Chief Minister talk about taking children who may be sent back. I am all for compassion. I feel I am a compassionate person. I would like to read to you from a letter that I found on social media the other day. It is something that I think reflects some other people's attitudes. I quote:

One can become cynical when we look at political decisions, or should I say politicians grabbing political opportunities to promote themselves. We as a nation stride the world's stage with a moral superiority that is not matched in the domestic scene. Recently some Premiers called on the Prime Minister to abstain from sending refugee children back to detention. They promised to find suitable accommodation and facilities for them.

While it is important to find adequate support for these kids, we must also consider our own homeless population, the thousands of people who are trying to survive PTSD with no support and many people with mental health issues who wallow in jails.

These are some of the figures we need to take into account: 40,844 children are abused or neglected annually. These figures are conservative as many never enter reports and remain victims. Reportable child deaths in New South Wales reached 41 over a two-year period from 2013-14 and a separate review documented 83 deaths of children who died at the hands of their carers.

From 2010-14 the rate of children in out-of-home care increased from 7.1 to 8.1 per 1,000. There were over 51,539 children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2014, and research has shown that many of the young people are leaving these facilities worse off than when they came in. The rate for sexual abuse has risen from 0.8 in 2009-10 to 1.1 in 2013-14.

I would be the first person to support the young refugee people not going back, but I can't ignore the plight of the large number of people in our own country who need support. When will their political opportunity come?

That is the end of the quote from the letter that I saw the other day. It raises some good points. Is it a political opportunity to say we will take these refugees when we do not have the housing for the people we already have here? We cannot house thousands of people on our waiting lists.

Earlier this month Mission Australia released a child and youth homelessness report. That report highlights some very salient points as well. I quote from that report:

Mission Australia's experience ... highlights the following as key in the prevention of and response to child and youth homelessness ... Intervening quickly with help from specialist homelessness services ... Ensuring suitable

housing, with support as needed through supportive accommodation for children and young people who can't live at home but need ongoing support ... social or affordable private rental housing for young people who can live independently.

That is from the Mission Australia child and youth homelessness report.

The flipside of homelessness is providing housing. You cannot solve homelessness without housing specifically and, most specifically, most importantly, affordable housing. I remind members here—I have spoken about it before but I am most happy to remind them again—that in June last year former Chief Minister Jon Stanhope said that the lack of progress on affordable housing was the single biggest regret of his time as Chief Minister. The single biggest regret in his time as Chief Minister was the lack of progress on affordable housing. I agree with him; it is a disgrace. This government has failed to adequately implement measures to address the lack of affordable housing in the ACT.

There are many actions in that affordable housing action plan aimed at making housing more affordable in the ACT, but I guess it is common for this government to make plans and release strategies and have all sorts of lovely documents which never go anywhere, which never do anything. But whenever anyone asks for something to be done, they say, “Oh, we’re working on a strategy,” or, “We’re having a plan,” or, “We’re having a consultation.” What we actually need is for something to be done.

There are women and children sleeping in cars. There are young people couch surfing—thousands of them—in the ACT. This is not just about talk, this is not about writing documents, it is about actually doing something to address the issues. What is the government actually doing to implement their affordable housing action plan? It is great to have an affordable housing action plan but it is only useful if you are actually going to do something about it.

I am hoping today the government will listen and give really thoughtful consideration to the problems we are facing here in the ACT. We do not have an enormous problem with rough sleepers, thank goodness, here in the ACT, partly because rough sleeping is dangerous, it is very bad for your health, it leads to higher mortality rates and the weather is not good for rough sleepers. But we have more than our fair share of people who are stuck in the homelessness service system and for whom there are no exits. They are churning through homelessness services.

I know there are some in the homelessness sector who hate the use of that term “churning through homelessness services” but I tell you where I borrowed that term from. I borrowed that from the federal Minister for Homelessness at the time, Brendan O’Connor, who talked about churning through homelessness services, moving from one to another, because there are no exit points. That is what is happening here in the ACT.

We need to stop talking about it and actually do something. That is why I brought this motion today calling on the government to develop and implement a realistic framework to address Canberra’s long public housing waiting lists and transfer lists, calling on the government to develop and implement a realistic framework by June

2016 to address Canberra's affordable housing crisis and increase the supply of affordable housing in the ACT and to provide detailed information of what they are actually doing—putting something into action, not just talking about it, addressing the public housing waiting list, the transfer list, providing exits from the homelessness services and how they are going to provide housing for refugees moving to Canberra. And I have asked them to report back to the Assembly in March 2016 on their progress.

The time for talk, we have had that for many, many years from this government. What we need to see is movement, reduction in those numbers of people on the waiting list, improvement in affordable housing in the ACT. I hope that members here will support my motion today.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Minister for Housing, Community Services and Social Inclusion, Minister for Multicultural and Youth Affairs, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (5.11): I thank Ms Lawder for bringing this motion to the Assembly. I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all words after paragraph (1)(g), substitute:

- “(h) the ACT has the highest proportion of social housing in Australia with approximately 30 dwellings per 1000 people compared to a national average of 17 dwellings per 1000 people;
- (i) the 2016 Report on Government Services shows that the ACT public housing waiting list, as a proportion of public housing stock, is the lowest in Australia at 21%;
- (j) the Report on Government Services shows that the ACT has the most highly targeted social housing system in Australia, with 96.7% of public housing allocations and 97.9% of community housing allocations made to households in greatest need;
- (k) the 2016 Report on Government Services shows that, of homelessness service clients requiring employment and/or training support, 23.7% were employed after support, which was the highest in Australia;
- (l) some homelessness service providers in the ACT report that between 20% and 30% of their clients have come from interstate;
- (m) the ACT has the lowest rate of people who are rough sleeping in Australia, with 0.8 per 10 000 compared to a national average of 3.8 per 10 000;
- (n) the ACT Government is replacing 1288 public housing dwellings under the Public Housing Renewal Program with modern, efficient homes which better meet the needs of public housing tenants;
- (o) the ACT is leading efforts among jurisdictions for greater certainty around future Commonwealth funding for homelessness services under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness;

- (p) the ACT Government has consulted widely, including with refugee settlement services, the Canberra Business Chamber and the Real Estate Institute of the ACT around the sustainable settlement of additional refugees in Canberra;
  - (q) the Asset Recycling Initiative will see the ACT receive an estimated contribution of \$59 million from the Australian Government towards the Capital Metro project; and
  - (r) housing affordability is a national issue confronting federal, state/territory and local governments across Australia; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) make a formal submission to the recently established Commonwealth Affordable Housing Working Group, giving consideration to:
    - (i) the ACT's social housing portfolio in comparison to other jurisdictions;
    - (ii) the performance of the ACT's social housing sector in comparison to other jurisdictions;
    - (iii) factors affecting housing affordability in the ACT;
    - (iv) the ACT Government's actions to improve housing affordability in the ACT; and
    - (v) policy options at federal and state/territory levels which address housing affordability; and
  - (b) table this submission in the Assembly by the last sitting day in May 2016."

I am very happy to have this conversation about housing in the ACT and to talk about the vital services that local workers provide each and every day. My concern with the motion as it stands is that, again, the opposition wants to talk this great work down. My amendment therefore puts some balance back into the motion, because the story of housing in Canberra and its value today is something that we should be celebrating and, of course, building on. That is what our government is doing: the largest renewal of public housing in the territory's history, with around 11 per cent of our stock; the highest rate of funding for homelessness services in Australia; and the largest portfolio of social housing in Australia: almost twice the national average.

I am concerned, though, that these commitments do not seem to be shared with the opposition—although I acknowledge some of the positive comments that Ms Lawder has made today in her speech to her motion—though I would welcome some more bipartisanship to offer certainty to those delivering important local services here in the ACT.

I am pleased to lay out the approach and values of our government and our actions to give people who are doing it tougher than we are a decent go. I think all members agree on the importance of safe and secure housing. It is critical to being part of our community: holding down a job, providing for the needs of kids and feeling part of our city.

For some, keeping up with the rent or mortgage payments is a daily challenge. I recognise this goes for people right here in Canberra, particularly casual workers in hospitality and retail. I spent 15 years working to help them get better wages and conditions and ease some of the pressure that they face when renting in an affluent city like ours. We have talked about wages and penalty rates here in the Assembly recently and, while I understand that it is not in the jurisdiction of this government, wages policy is just one area where the position of the commonwealth flows directly to the lives of people in our own community. I know the housing and homelessness policy consortium, which has been funded by the ACT government, has also been collecting new data on those who struggle with housing costs, and I look forward to feeding that into our policy considerations.

Turning to the report on government services—and remember this is data collected from a point in time in June last year—if you look at the report in total, it paints a very positive picture of the way our housing and homelessness services are performing. In a number of areas we are outperforming other jurisdictions. The report shows positive results for the ACT government's continued focus of targeting social housing assistance to the people who need it most—that is, people who are homeless, escaping domestic violence, in unhealthy living situations, or experiencing housing stress in the private market.

Ninety-seven per cent of new allocations in public housing and 98 per cent of allocations in community housing were made to households in greatest need. These are the most targeted allocations in the country. On waiting lists, the motion reflects a fairly stable picture and a moderate improvement in recent months. We all want to see the waiting list reduced, and this is a constant goal of the work of government. But I would like to put into perspective how the ACT performs relative to other jurisdictions.

Our public housing list represents about 20 per cent of our public housing portfolio. In New South Wales, to clear their waiting list would require a 50 per cent increase in their stock. In Western Australia, that would require a 70 per cent increase. In proportion to the size of our city, the ACT government maintains the highest proportion of public and community housing stock in Australia, with about 30 dwellings per 1,000 people against a national average of just 17. In relation to stock numbers under the asset recycling initiative, I can assure the Assembly the government is maintaining stock to meet the requirements of the agreement.

The temporary reduction in housing stock numbers reported in ROGS was a point-in-time variation resulting from the timing of property sales required to fund the development of new properties. Property numbers will rise and fall for short periods depending on the timing of property sales and new purchases and construction works.

We will meet the baseline number, as we have stated. I would like to remind the Assembly of what housing renewal means for tenants moving out of old, outdated homes. It means more comfortable and modern homes, better suited to ageing in place, and in smaller developments where community safety is built into the design.

On a couple of other criticisms of the original motion: firstly, the reference to unmet accommodation needs neglects the fact that the ACT has the highest rate of people in supported accommodation—31 per 10,000 against a national average of 10 per 10,000. It also overlooks a specific caution in the report that central intake services like First Point often give a picture of higher unmet need and may not be comparable to other jurisdictions. Our central intake service is, indeed, one of the reasons why we have such a good picture of the homelessness challenge here in the ACT.

Secondly, the reference to recurrent costs of homelessness services overlooks the fact that our daily support cost is actually the second lowest at \$25.48. What separates the ACT is our longer periods of support, which typically result in better outcomes. For example, the ACT performs nearly 10 per cent better than average on getting young people access to education and training. These services are of great value in our community. Housing ministers around the country are looking to shore up future funding under the national partnership on homelessness, and this is a focus that I will be taking to an upcoming meeting of ministers next month.

Of course, we also need to think about different levels of government when we are talking about housing affordability. There are steps all governments can take, and we have responded locally over a number of years, particularly through land supply under the affordable housing action plan. The government has released nearly double the number of dwelling sites in the five years to 2013-14 compared to the previous five years, and we have a 20 per cent affordable housing commitment in new estate developments.

However, tackling housing supply is only part of the solution and considerable work is now underway to address the demand-side issues. A range of possible housing policy options has been identified and focus on three key challenges: increasing affordable home ownership; increasing affordable rental housing; and better targeting housing assistance. As my amendment makes clear, these are issues facing every state and territory. More so, they are issues with national policy implications. They need to be addressed at the national level, and I have welcomed the engagement by both sides of federal politics in the housing affordability debate.

The need for coordinated action across all tiers of government has been recognised through the COAG forum and the commonwealth-led affordable housing working group has resulted from this. While all jurisdictions are affected by housing affordability, it is important that the views and experience of the ACT are considered by the working group. Therefore, the amended motion points to the need for a submission by the ACT to this group. It will capture the key aspects of housing affordability, both locally and nationally, and the government will be happy to table this submission for all members to read.

I have consistently said that our efforts to improve housing affordability will be far more effective with both levels of government pulling in the same direction. I have welcomed the way in which federal Labor has brought on a national conversation around negative gearing and capital gains tax discounts. I look forward to the coalition putting forward its alternative.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the ACT government will continue to represent our city's interests in this national reform discussion. I will continue to do so among housing ministers and the Chief Minister will continue to do so in COAG. Again, I welcome the chance to have this wide-ranging discussion today. I encourage all members to engage constructively with policy debates about housing affordability and homelessness. We are always looking for ways to improve our housing system, working closely with those who provide such important services to Canberrans every day.

I just wanted to just touch on one point that Ms Lawder referred to in her speech—and I am not sure if she was referring to the ACT—where she knew of a person or people who were sleeping in their car. I would ask her to please direct that person to my office so that we can provide that person with the support that she would need and get her into some accommodation, rather than just to raise it as a general comment in this place. I commend my amendment to the motion to the Assembly.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo) (5.20): I will be supporting the amendment put forward by Minister Berry, and I would like to thank her for her approach to today's debate. Housing, like health, like education and like corrections all figure prominently in the annual report on government services. There is something in there for everybody to consider, as it paints a picture of what is or is not working compared to other jurisdictions. There can always be difficulties in the data for a small jurisdiction like the ACT but, beyond that, ROGS can also serve as a good helicopter view of the national picture and national trends.

Housing affordability is a good example of that. It is an issue that is being discussed in every state and territory and by the federal government in federal politics as well. Combine homelessness into the mix, as it should be considering the interrelationship between the issues, and we have a very complex discussion on our hands.

That is why I was pleased to see Minister Berry's amendment did not seek to whitewash the original motion with just the more positive indicators, and will also see the government table its submission to the affordable housing working group which has been formed by request from treasurers at the Council on Federal Financial Relations meeting in October 2015 for further work on housing affordability.

I would like to reflect on that. Minister Berry, in amending this motion, has not sought to strike out all of the negative indicators that are in there. This is probably one of the better amendments I have seen in my time in this place. Ms Lawder put only the negative indicators in. There are some indicators in there as well that paint some useful pictures about where things are going well. I think it is worth having the whole story in the motion. That is why I am happy to support Ms Berry's amendment,

because it actually goes to that point, that there are some good things and there are some bad things in there and that is the complete story.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is a classic wicked problem that requires a whole-of-government response. I have confidence that Minister Berry not only recognises this but is also taking it up more broadly in a range of fora. We know there is indeed more work that can be done at both ends of the housing and homeless continuum, and this is work that involves commonwealth levers as much as ACT government land releases and funding opportunities.

As both local and national Labor and Greens parties agree, this country needs to have a serious conversation about negative gearing and other tax issues that can impact on housing affordability. I have been pleased to see a serious discussion about negative gearing nationally taking place. I must note that the Greens have been talking about this for some time.

In May 2015 the Australian Greens announced a fully Parliamentary Budget Office costed proposal to reform negative gearing and use the proceeds to boost affordable housing supply and provide accommodation for people experiencing homelessness. My federal colleague Scott Ludlam has also similarly released fully costed policies on capital gains tax reform proposals, and there will be more to come in the near future, because it is quite clear that we need to make changes in this space.

I think that for too long it has been seen as too politically hard to tackle these issues. I welcome the fact that across all the main political parties—the Greens, the Labor Party and even the coalition—at a national level there does appear to be a serious discussion going on about tax reform in this space. I hope that we can get to a point where we get agreement through the federal parliament on an amendment to tax legislation that actually puts downward pressure on the housing market in a way that takes away some of those bubbles that are driven by some of the current policies. Of course, this is always a tricky area, because people have got so much equity in their homes. There needs to be an orderly and careful transition. I think there are levers that can be pulled through the tax system and in other spaces to help address some of the issues that we have seen in national tax policy.

I certainly would echo my Greens colleagues in calling on Mr Turnbull not to let the ultra-conservatives in his party bully him into ruling out reforms they do not like. I would be interested—I might have missed it in her earlier remarks—to hear Ms Lawder's views on these proposed reforms given her background working in this area and the tax and policy reforms that the Liberal Party might put on the table. In the ACT the local Liberals have been very critical of government attempts here to reform tax policy. I would be interested to hear where the Canberra Liberals are on these issues.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as a former minister for housing, I know that the portfolio is a challenging mix of bricks and mortar and social work, with regular landlord duties over the top of both of these components. Housing affordability includes multiple government agencies and functions, and responding to homelessness requires strong partnerships with a broad range of community sector service providers. I believe we

can coordinate these moving parts well in the ACT, perhaps more so than any other jurisdiction due to our small size and strong partnerships across the sector, but of course I acknowledge that we can and are in the process of doing better. It must be a space of constant improvement because there are still people who on occasions perhaps do not get the service response they need or might fall through the cracks, and they are the places where we must seek continuous improvement.

One of the issues raised in Ms Lawder's motion is the federal Liberal government's asset recycling program. The way she has framed it around the number of properties and the way that they are currently being counted is clearly an attempt at a "gotcha" moment. But, as Minister Berry has said, there will of course be some fluctuations in total housing stock numbers over the life of the much-needed renewal program. I will reinforce a comment I made earlier today—and I know Minister Berry just made it—that this renewal program is a very positive one for the tenants of Housing ACT. It means they will no longer need to live in what I consider to be substandard housing in some cases. They will move to places that are better constructed, better insulated and therefore require lower costs for heating and potentially cooling. They provide a better quality of life and a more comfortable life. I think that the big picture needs to be kept in mind here, that this is actually about improving the outcomes for public housing tenants.

I will be concerned if these numbers drop much further or stay below that line for a long time. As of today, I think we can accept that in the pursuit of reducing concentrations of disadvantage and providing new, more appropriate and more sustainable accommodation, there will be some movement in the overall numbers. There is a clear commitment from the government, and a requirement under the asset recycling initiative, that the numbers do not fall. That is a commitment that I expect this government, the Labor Party and the Greens, to stick to. Certainly I am committed to it, and I know my colleagues are committed to it. That does not mean there will not be fluctuation as we go through this program. I think that to pick a moment in time, as Ms Lawder has sought to do, and go for a "gotcha" moment, is not a true reflection of what is actually being done here.

Of course, it provides me with an opportunity to reflect on a point that I made this morning. It was the Liberal Party in the ACT who sold off record numbers of public housing stock in the ACT. I gave the figures this morning. It dropped the proportion of ACT Housing properties from 13 per cent to nine per cent of our housing stock. Probably Mr Smyth was here at the time of that sell-off. Ms Lawder might like to talk to him about the rationale behind that, and the consequences that it has had down the line.

The motion as amended has a lot of the relevant material needed to inform this debate. I will leave my comments at that, other than to say that I look forward to the ACT's contribution to the commonwealth affordable housing working group and to the working group's recommendations and suggestions to improve housing affordability for all Australians.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (5.29): I would like to thank Ms Berry and Mr Rattenbury for their contribution to the discussion on this very important issue. I genuinely believe that every single one of us here in this place is interested in

addressing homelessness. It is an issue that we all take very seriously, and there is absolutely support for reducing the numbers of Canberrans who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. It is not a partisan issue.

Workers in the homelessness sector do a fantastic job. As we have spoken about, I used to pretty much advocate on their behalf in a previous life, but that is not what we are talking about here. I am not talking down the people who work in that sector; I am trying to talk about exits from homelessness and ways to reduce, firstly, the numbers of people entering into homelessness and, secondly, those people who continue to experience homelessness or have repeat experiences of homelessness. That is what we are about here.

My colleagues have spoken a bit about renewal. That is not addressing the waiting lists; that is decanting people from one area into another area. It is giving them better housing. That is great, and I have not disagreed with that. They are in substandard housing. They do deserve better. But this government is desperately trying to brand it as urban renewal and giving people a better place to live. We all know that it is actually code for freeing up the Northbourne Avenue corridor for this desperate attempt at light rail. I did not speak much about that in my motion because I am genuinely trying to focus on the issue of homelessness and affordable housing. But those opposite have brought it up.

People are often in substandard housing. Whose fault is that? It is the fault of this government, which has been in power for a number of years. Why are they in substandard housing? There was an instance recently, you may recall, where ACT Housing purchased a block in, I think, O'Connor, a block of units about 50 years old, the same age as the units ACT Housing is moving people out of. Why? Because they have been maintained in better condition. Whose fault is that? The ACT government's. That is what I am talking about here. It is not about the age of the housing. It is not about urban renewal. It is about getting people out of that corridor. It is not helping people already on the waiting list to move people out of those units: people with genuine, complex needs who need somewhere to live. That is what I have been trying to focus on today. Anyway, I think we all know that there is more that can be done.

The other problem we have is about potentially "decanting" people. That is a terrible term, because it is people that you are talking about. In moving people out of the Northbourne Avenue corridor, potentially we are moving them into areas where they may become socially excluded. Sometimes they may experience transport disadvantage. We have spoken about that here in this place as well. Chisholm is one example that we have spoken about, which was specifically mentioned in the *Dropping off the edge* report. Bonython was another. And my colleague Mr Doszpot has spoken several times about Oaks Estate and the transport disadvantage that people in Oaks Estate experience.

One thing I should mention is that Mr Rattenbury talked as if I picked a moment in time for some kind of gotcha moment. Actually, no. What I did was look at ROGS. If you would like to mention that they picked a moment in time, that is perhaps what they did. That is what I was quoting. You were trying to put your own spin on that,

Mr Rattenbury, and put words in my mouth. Perhaps it was not quite correct. But I guess that is what it is all about for you.

Let us not forget, when we talk about this, the fact that we have fantastic homelessness services here in the ACT. I have visited very many of them. I am sure that Ms Berry and Mr Rattenbury, in their roles, have also done so. It is not only me. They do a great job. There is more that can be done, but what we need is exits from homelessness. We have the highest rate of people receiving services from homelessness services in the ACT. That is a good thing. I have said that in the past and I will say it again here today. But when I spoke to my motion, I also talked about churn, people going through the homelessness service who might have three months in this service and then have to leave. They might have two weeks in another service. There are no exits from homelessness, and that was the whole point of my motion today.

I remind you—I did not mention it earlier—that according to the census, which is currently the 2011 census, the ACT had the second worst rate of homelessness in Australia, second only to the Northern Territory. According to that 2011 census, the highest single reason for people seeking assistance from a homelessness service—involved 37 per cent of those who seek assistance from a service—was housing crisis. The second highest was domestic violence and relationship breakdown. The third highest was financial difficulty—17 per cent. If you add housing crisis and financial difficulties together, you have over half of the people in the ACT seeking assistance from homelessness services experiencing financial difficulties or housing crisis. That is the thrust of my motion today. It is about those exits from homelessness and working on affordable housing.

In the ACT government's current desperation to talk about urban renewal, they are actually derailing our efforts to fix homelessness and address affordable housing. They are stopping people who have been on the waiting list for years from finding housing. That is what the concern is. We need to provide support to people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. They often have very complex needs. Without addressing the reasons why they are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness, they may simply go back to homelessness once they are provided with housing. But without housing, you will never fix homelessness. That is the approach, if you like, that is taken through models like Common Ground and the housing first models. That is what we need to think about.

One thing we did not really touch on—the minister and Mr Rattenbury avoided it for some reason I am not really sure of—was refugees. I have talked to providers who tell me that they are starting to see people who came here as refugees having to leave the home that was provided to them because they cannot afford to maintain their housing. What they are doing there is adding to the demand for homelessness services. So we are not providing a long-term sustainable solution for people. Sure, they might have housing for a couple of months when they first arrive, but are we going to keep doing that to people? That is quite damaging. It is not a good solution in order to get some political mileage about saying that we will accept refugees.

I should have mentioned that the letter that I read out talking about the need to address those people here said, “I can’t ignore the plight of a large number of people in our own country who need support.” That letter was from Father Chris Riley from Youth off the Streets, who was the New South Wales Australian of the Year in 2003 and 2012 and an Australian of the Year finalist in 2003 and 2012 as well as having many other strings to his bow. He does fantastic work with disadvantaged youth, especially young people experiencing homelessness.

Adding to the demand and adding to already stretched services are not the solution. I will make a final point that comparing us to other states and territories is something that you resort to when you do not have much else to say. There are a lot of areas where we are not very comparable to other states and territories: size, geography, rural and remote areas, the Indigenous population. We are talking about the fact that we have the second highest rate of homelessness in Australia, second only to the Northern Territory. We have the highest proportion of people receiving a service, in effect. We should note that we have one urban area, if you like, so we should be providing service. But what we should be doing, what we have to be doing, is providing exits from homelessness, not more strategies, more talking. We need to provide people with very real options as to how to exit from homelessness services in a long-term, safe, secure, sustainable way. Therefore, we will be opposing the amendment today.

Question put:

That **Ms Berry’s** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

Mr Barr  
Ms Berry  
Dr Bourke  
Ms Burch  
Mr Corbell

Ms Fitzharris  
Mr Gentleman  
Ms Porter  
Mr Rattenbury

Mr Coe  
Mr Doszpot  
Mrs Dunne  
Mr Hanson  
Mrs Jones

Ms Lawder  
Mr Smyth  
Mr Wall

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## Light rail

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (5.43): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) an Annual Availability Payment will be made by the ACT Government as part of a contract to design, build and operate Capital Metro;

- (b) public statements from the ACT Government indicate that the value of the Annual Availability Payment will not be known until the ACT Government signs a contract to build Capital Metro; and
  - (c) the public have a right to know the extent of the light rail liability before any agreement is entered into by the Government; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to disclose by the last sitting day of March the estimated value of the Annual Availability Payment.

Today I again call for the release of financial details of the ACT government's capital metro program. The availability payment comprises the total cost of constructing, operating and financing capital metro over a 20-year period. It is an annual payment made by the ACT government to Canberra Metro.

As you would be aware, Madam Speaker, light rail is the largest infrastructure project ever considered by an ACT government. It is right, proper and transparent that Canberrans should know the cost of light rail before this government enters into an intergenerational agreement. That is something I hope to achieve with my motion today.

The value of this payment is, for the most part, the total cost to the ACT taxpayer of the capital metro project. It is this figure that will ultimately determine the cost of constructing capital metro, with included or embedded financing costs. For this reason it is necessary for the government to release the estimated value of the availability payment by the last sitting day in March. I believe that is a reasonable request. There should be no more denial to the people of Canberra. It is time to be honest with the people of Canberra. Do the decent thing and let taxpayers know how much they will be paying for this government's commitment.

It is, of course, prudent to point out that the availability payment does not capture all the costs associated with this government's project. Funding for the Capital Metro Agency is not included in these payments. The government will also do a lot of associated works, such as funding a new interchange at Dickson, park-and-ride stations along the route, as well as parking changes in the city to accommodate construction workers working on the project. Also, there are additional infrastructure or utility upgrades which may not be directly related to the route but will absolutely be necessary in order for the project to attain genuine operability.

The Canberra Liberals continue to oppose this government's plan for light rail. We do not believe it is sensible to spend \$700 million on the construction of a transport project that will carry less than one per cent of Canberrans to work or school every morning, as well as increase congestion along the route. Instead the opposition recognises the competing priorities for the ACT government, and future ACT governments; therefore we believe we have to respect BCRs and other alternatives as achieving a better outcome for all Canberrans.

This should, of course, be a motion that Mr Rattenbury supports. It is not a motion that says, "Stop doing light rail." This is not a motion that says, "Light rail is a bad

idea.” This motion simply calls on the government to publish the annual availability payment before signing contracts. I find it interesting that Mr Rattenbury would advocate for FOI reform but may not be able to support this motion today. I do hope he does so.

Mr Rattenbury said that “a healthy democracy requires frank, transparent and accountable practices in all aspects of government”. Are we a healthy democracy if the government signs the most expensive contract in the jurisdiction’s history without first disclosing that value to the voters? Is this the hallmark of a frank and transparent government? Will Mr Rattenbury and those opposite stand by this principle, a principle of their parties, or are they just determined to ram this through?

Recently Mr Rattenbury also said:

The Greens are committed to improving the transparency of government, and I have no doubt it is in the government’s best interest to provide more information to the community.

Will Mr Rattenbury practice what he preaches and support this motion?

In previous debates on this issue the Minister for Capital Metro stated that, for commercial-in-confidence reasons, the estimated availability payment figure could not be released. He cannot hide behind this excuse today. We know that the ACT government has locked in an estimate of the annual availability payment. It was submitted with the tenders. We know this because recent advertising from the government has also implied this fact. The government are happy to go out with spin providing information when it suits them but not when it supposedly does not. We think this is pretty poor form. This is not a sign of a transparent government. Again, we are not asking for the exact dollar figure because I expect that may well change. But we are asking for an approximate figure. We think it is a very reasonable request.

The failure of the ACT government to release the availability payment only goes to weaken their argument that they have a mandate to build light rail. If in February 2016 the government have not released the contract price, how is it that Canberrans could have voted to accept such a contract several years ago? Even an approximate value seemingly cannot be released by this government. Surely, a mandate for this project requires the government to put all the financial implications to the voters?

We call on the government to be transparent, to put the contract details on the table and to let Canberrans decide if they want to go ahead with it. Sadly, I do not believe the government will take this reasonable course of action today. This government, in particular the Chief Minister, seems to believe that signing this contract is more important than the project itself. That is, of course, evidenced by the fact that if the government thought that light rail was such a winner, if the government was so confident about Canberrans’ view on light rail, why aren’t they deliberately holding it off until after the election, so that people can then choose the party that is going to support light rail?

Of course, they obviously think, and their polling obviously tells them, that light rail is not a strong issue for them, but that executing a termination for convenience clause is a stronger negative against us than light rail is a positive for them. That is obviously what their polling suggests, because that is the course of action that they are taking right now.

I will briefly touch on recent media statements regarding light rail. It was reported today that improvements to Northbourne Avenue have been placed on Infrastructure Australia's priority list. As reported, Infrastructure Australia does not endorse light rail. The report only notes that improvements should be made along Northbourne Avenue in the near future. This is something which Infrastructure Australia has said since 2013, when Northbourne Avenue improvements were actually first put on the priority list in its early stage. It actually has not progressed at all in the past three years; it is still in the early stages, as it was three years ago, with Infrastructure Australia. Of course, it was Infrastructure Australia that also wrote to the government and said, "I don't know why you're pursuing light rail when bus rapid transit has double the economic return."

Last year the opposition was pleased to release our Northbourne Avenue options paper. The paper looked for and identified three options to improve transport on Northbourne Avenue. These options provide the potential to improve public transport times on Northbourne Avenue over and above the estimated time savings of light rail. The options also discussed how cyclists could indeed travel more safely on Northbourne Avenue, as well as providing a way for first responders to improve travel times in an emergency. Notably, the options were all vastly cheaper than light rail.

The opposition has been very pleased with the level of feedback we have received on our options paper both for certain proposals and against certain proposals, and with certain ideas that were not included in any of the proposals. We look forward to further promoting these ideas in the future.

Infrastructure Australia has previously noted that the level of congestion in Canberra is increasing. Of course, this has become a bit of a catchcry for the ACT government as they promote light rail. However, contrary to the government's spin, light rail will actually make congestion worse. A traffic and transport assessment study found that introducing light rail between Gungahlin and the city would "slightly increase" congestion in the morning peak and lead to "significant congestion" in the afternoon peak. This is the government's own report. The government's own report, the traffic and transport assessment study, said congestion will slightly increase in the morning peak and that there will be significant congestion in the afternoon peak. The study also found that the level of service, a measure of the quality of an intersection, declined with the introduction and operation of light rail.

Furthermore, a study of the proposed Civic to Russell leg noted:

The introduction of the Project within the City extent of the network generally leads to further impacts to general traffic ... in several locations, predominantly along Northbourne Avenue and Constitution Avenue, delays and queues could compromise the performance of the wider road network.

As a result of light rail, we are going to see significant increases in congestion and we will see a compromised performance of the wider road network. And all this for the same number of people that are riding ACTION buses on the same route at present.

The reason for the congestion under light rail is evident: new traffic lights will be installed along the light rail route. More traffic lights mean more red lights. Light rail vehicles will also receive priority, making it harder for cars to cross both Flemington Road and Northbourne Avenue. Building light rail from the city to Russell also involves the removal of a general lane of traffic on London Circuit.

The options paper released by the opposition notes these flaws and looks at ways to improve public transport travel times without increasing congestion. We have done this by proposing more express buses on Northbourne Avenue. This is something that trams cannot do. Of course, a tram is only as fast as the tram in front. Indeed some buses travelling now between Gungahlin and the city are quicker than the proposed light rail route, and that is pretty much without any priority, with a couple of exceptions on Flemington Road. With sensible infrastructure improvements, we can make these travel times even faster. The government cannot cry out about the levels of congestion because it is their poor management which has increased congestion across Canberra.

Of course, under this government, we have seen public transport usage go down. We have seen a significant decrease in the number of people riding on ACTION since 2012. We think that is extremely disappointing. It is a government that claim to be the champions of public transport, yet they have done the opposite. In effect, they are not only treating ACTION buses as a second-class public transport system but also they are attracting fewer people to public transport than prior to the last election.

The opposition firmly believes that this is a reasonable motion. It is a motion that the government should be able to support. If this government refuse to give an approximate figure for the annual payment for the light rail contract, it goes to show exactly how desperate they are to hide the truth from Canberrans. We firmly believe the right thing to do is for the government to come clean with all the information about this 20 or 25-year project.

**MR CORBELL** (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Capital Metro, Minister for Health, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for the Environment and Climate Change) (5.57): The government does not dispute the fact that the people of Canberra have a right to know the value of the annual availability payment for the provision of the capital metro light rail contract. In fact, we have always said that this information will be released after contracts have been signed between the ACT government and the preferred bidder, now known as Canberra Metro. I think it is important to point out that there is nothing new in what the government has said in this respect, and I want to remind those opposite of the importance of a binding contract and the function of a public-private partnership.

First of all, let me be very clear that there is already a policy that governs the release of information associated with the public-private partnership. The ACT government's

*Partnerships framework: guidelines for public private partnerships* was developed to provide guidance on the procurement of public infrastructure. This is a publicly available policy document, and it adheres to the national public-private partnerships guidelines and links to existing ACT policy on capital procurement and funding.

The partnerships framework is about encouraging private sector investment in social and economic infrastructure where value for money for the ACT government can be clearly demonstrated by way of efficient and innovative delivery approaches. Further to this, it ensures that accountability and fairness are maintained through the procurement and delivery process while maximising value for money to the ACT and staying within the government's affordability envelopes.

A long-term contract with a PPP means two parties entering negotiations and contractual arrangements without third-party influence to deliver a project that is efficient, cost-effective and completed within a stated time frame. The cost of a PPP is only incurred by the government through the availability payment once the project is complete.

*At 6 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.*

**MR CORBELL:** The journey of the past two years in the development of capital metro has seen intensive planning and preparation. Recently announcing the chosen consortium should not be wasted by the tactics posed by those opposite.

It is interesting that Mr Coe seeks to frame all of the decision-making in the context of the election process. He says that the government should wait for the election to proceed with light rail because we should be confident that it is an election winner. That speaks volumes as to how he views this whole process. He views it through the prism of an election. But government is about governing. Parties are elected to government to do things they said they would do before the last election. Governments are elected to get things done, and that is exactly what this government will do.

To release information before the finalisation of contractual discussions under the PPP framework could have far-reaching consequences and could sabotage the reputation of the territory as a place to do business. The point of a public-private partnership is that it creates efficient and productive working relationships between the public and private sectors. It provides a greater return of investment compared to traditional methods, due to innovative design and financing approaches, a faster project completion, and reduced delays on infrastructure projects.

That is demonstrated by the outcomes the government has been able to deliver through the PPP bidding process for Canberra Metro. Firstly, the capital delivery cost is less—significantly less—than that stated in the prudent and conservative assessments made in the government's own business case. But secondly, it is also going to be able to be delivered sooner. The construction period is shorter than that stated in the government's estimate in its business case. This speaks to the success of

the PPP framework—cheaper and faster than that anticipated in the government’s business case.

We will release the detail of the availability payment. We said we would, and we will. Our policy framework states when that will occur: at the conclusion of the contractual negotiations, and well before the next election. The people of Canberra can have no doubt about the financial implications of this contract ahead of the next election.

The current partnership is supported by key stakeholders like Australia’s peak infrastructure body, Infrastructure Partnerships Australia. We share the views of the IPA’s chief executive in his most recent statement. He stated:

... Canberra Light Rail will fundamentally change the face of public transport in the ACT ... commuters and taxpayers will see real benefits from the international experience of the winning consortium, in terms of innovation, quality and costs.

So this is a very important outcome for the people of Canberra.

Let me be very clear. We need to make sure that we finalise the contractual negotiations comprehensively and thoroughly. We need to ensure that planning approvals have been secured, because that locks in cheaper prices. We need to make sure the key land acquisition steps have been finalised. We need to ensure the outstanding technical design issues have been clarified; any remaining key project and financing documents have been finalised and approved; all the necessary funding and financing arrangements with the banks and equity providers are secured; and proper registration of the security for the loans has been confirmed.

Those are the practical and detailed steps that we are now at. None of this can be achieved overnight. In fact, the effort needed to finalise these key actions should not be underestimated. The government is fully committed to ensuring that a rigorous and robust process is followed to ensure that light rail is delivered at the right price and in the right time frame.

But let us be very clear about the level of transparency that the government has already brought to this project. We are one of the few state or territory governments in the country that has ever released a business case for a large-scale PPP project like this. It did not happen in Victoria. It does not happen in New South Wales. The most you get is a project summary document. That is the most you get. We released the full business case that was presented to the cabinet, and we did it in advance of the procurement. When Mr Coe stands up in this place and says, “This government is not interested in transparency,” he conveniently overlooks that central fact: that this business case was released—released in full—as it was presented to the cabinet.

We have heard the assertion that the government is not being transparent about how other elements of the capital metro project will be paid for. On the contrary, Madam Assistant Speaker; we have been very clear. We have been clear about making a capital contribution to the project, which is being financed from both the contribution

from the Australian government's asset recycling scheme and the government's own asset sales.

We have also been very clear that the cost of light rail compared to the cost of service delivery in other parts of ACT government services is modest and affordable. Let us look at how much the government will spend on other elements of government service delivery just in the current financial year. In the current financial year, this government will spend \$2.6 billion on health and education services. It will spend over \$500 million on economic growth and diversification. It will spend \$660 million on suburban renewal and other transport projects. And it will spend \$933 million on livability and social inclusion projects and programs. In the context of total government outlays, the light rail project will account for less than one per cent—less than one per cent—of ACT government expenditure over the life of the PPP term. It is less than one per cent of total government expenditure.

Those opposite can try to scare people with big figures, but they never put it in context. They never put it in the context of how much the government will spend on health, education, housing, community services, municipal services or the whole broad range of other matters that the territory government is responsible for.

I will say it one more time. In the context of total government outlays, over the full project term of this light rail contract, expenditure on light rail is less than one per cent of ACT government expenditure over that period. Affordable? Yes. Achievable? Yes. And the best transport solution for this corridor.

Finally, let me be very clear about the outcomes of the most recent Infrastructure Australia national priority list that was released today. This is very pleasing confirmation as to the importance of public transport improvements on the north Canberra corridor—that is, the Federal Highway and Northbourne Avenue. Infrastructure Australia, through its own economic modelling, has confirmed that this is the most costly area of congestion in our city when it comes to lost economic productivity—the most costly. It has confirmed that there is a need for dedicated right-of-way long-term public transport improvement on this corridor.

The government has made clear to Infrastructure Australia that we are proceeding with the light rail project on this corridor, and they have acknowledged that in their report. Mr Coe can continue to litigate all the arguments about bus rapid transit as much as he likes, but all he has got, after nearly four years of debate on this issue in this place, is an options paper. That is all he has got: an options paper. He is not even prepared to commit to an option, Madam Assistant Speaker. He is not even prepared to commit to an option, and he still has not addressed the key question. Does he seriously think he is going to get planning approval to build a road in the middle of the median strip of Northbourne Avenue? He knows it will not work; he knows he will not get that; he knows it is not going to fly. Yet he persists with his half-baked ill-thought-out schemes which have not yet even reached the stage of a specific policy proposal endorsed by his own party.

This government was elected to do things. This government was elected to get things built, to improve services, to improve infrastructure and to meet the needs of a

growing city and a growing community. We have a clear policy position which sets out when disclosure occurs in relation to the availability payment regime, and we will adhere to that policy. The policy was released long before this contract was contemplated. It has been on the public record, and it will be followed.

I note that Mr Rattenbury has foreshadowed that he will be moving an amendment in the amendment that he has circulated. The government does not support the motion as put forward by Mr Coe, but we will support an amended motion in the terms set out by Mr Rattenbury when he moves that amendment, because it makes clear what the government's policy is and what the actions and approach of the government were—to disclose the full cost of this contract in the time period set out in our policy framework.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Molonglo—Minister for Corrections, Minister for Education, Minister for Justice and Consumer Affairs and Minister for Road Safety) (6.11): I start my discussion by moving the amendment that I have circulated in my name:

Omit all words after paragraph (1)(b), substitute:

“(c) the ACT Government will release details of the availability payment after financial close of the contract negotiations with the preferred bidder.”.

I expect that this is an amendment that all members of the Assembly can support as it reflects the government's commitment to transparency around this project. It notes that the government will make public the details of the availability payment after financial close of the contract negotiations with the preferred bidder and when there is an actual number to release.

I am quite intrigued by the idea we should release an approximate number—some number, “give us the number you think it is going to be”—when in fact in just a few short months time the government is committed to releasing the actual number. I think that is what the community wants to know. I think it is a much better approach. I think this amendment keeps the substance of Mr Coe's motion, which is a call to make the availability payments public, but it does reflect the reality that the government will reveal availability payments at the appropriate time. That is when financial close occurs and there is an actual number to give to the community.

We are in important and detailed contractual negotiations with Canberra Metro, the preferred consortium, and I am sure the Liberals realise it would be inappropriate and may, in fact, be detrimental to table speculative availability payment figures. Of course the business case, which the government also made public, already outlines a great deal of information about costs and financing of the capital metro project.

On the issue of transparency, I emphasise that through my capacity as a Greens member of the government I have always emphasised the importance of transparency on this important project and the government as a whole shares this commitment.

Members will recall we voted in this Assembly for capital metro to have a special additional appearance at estimates hearings and an additional public hearing of the

Standing Committee on Planning, Environment and Territory and Municipal Services so that the committee could ask questions about the project. We also agreed that if required officials from the Capital Metro Agency and relevant ministers would be available for an additional time at a public hearing during the annual reports process, an extra 3½ hours.

I must say that I am not sure that the Liberal Party has really made appropriate use of those increased opportunities for scrutiny, which makes me wonder perhaps if they are more focused on the headline that can be generated than actually drilling through the information.

In addition to the extra committee scrutiny, the government has released a full business case for public scrutiny. As Mr Corbell touched on in his remarks today, that is something that you will not find other governments doing on projects like this. Naturally that decision, of course, has given additional opportunities to opponents to seek to criticise the project. It even gave academics a nice case study that they can use when they do not agree with a project. That is a price for being transparent but nobody can doubt that the releasing of the business case in full is the mark of an open and honest government that is quite comfortable in putting all the information on the table.

In line with this commitment to transparency we will release the availability payment information. I expect that this will also become a campaigning tool for the opposition. Nevertheless I believe in releasing information and in government transparency. The government can be proud when it completes its light rail project, proving that a large government project can be achieved in a highly open and transparent fashion.

Last week I spoke at length about the foolishness of renegeing on the light rail contract or of stalling progress on important sustainable infrastructure because of the base political wishes of the Canberra Liberal Party and I will not go over that again today. I will, however, note that this motion from Mr Coe appears to just be another version on that same theme. The logic appears to be that if we will not announce pre-contract availability payments—which is, of course, not how proper financial negotiations work—then somehow this is not a valid project and we should not sign any contracts.

It is, of course, all part of the ongoing and political attack by the Liberal Party on light rail. It is founded on their dislike of public transport, their dislike of sustainable transport and other sustainability initiatives and their failure to care about the long-term prospects of our city. Never have they been so motivated, except to oppose this project, and it is because it ticks all the wrong boxes for them: public transport, renewable energy, long-term planning for a sustainable city. Why would they be interested in any of these things when their only focus at this point is October 2016?

We have talked before about just how out of step this view has become, not only with Canberrans but also with the federal government, with the business community, with planners and academics and others who are interested in where our city is going over a number of decades. I am sure members have seen the news announced just today—and it has had some discussion in this debate—that Infrastructure has listed Canberra public transport improvements on its priority infrastructure list. This is to help address the congestion and population problems that are growing in our city. That is right. Just

to reiterate that, Canberra's public transport infrastructure is a priority list for Infrastructure Australia.

I am sure that members have heard Mr Coe's constant refrain that Infrastructure Australia has rejected Canberra's light rail project. That is another of the furrphies that we keep hearing repeated by the Assembly's biggest opponents of public transport. Let us flashback for a minute to March last year. In one of my replies to Mr Coe's many motions I decided to address this issue. What I said at the time was:

I also hear Mr Coe say that apparently Infrastructure Australia rejected the light rail project. It is probably time to correct that. It did not reject it. It did not agree to provide funding at this point in time ... which is what it does in respect of numerous projects that remain on its list for future consideration. Look at the infrastructure priorities list and you will see that Canberra's transit corridor is still listed on Infrastructure Australia's early stage initiatives list. The description of this category is:

Initiatives in this category address a nationally significant issue or problem, but the identification or development of the right solution is at an early stage.

The same thing happened with the Majura parkway. It spent many years on Infrastructure Australia's list without receiving funding. As we know, it was eventually funded.

That was what I said then. Now, with the release of Infrastructure Australia's infrastructure plan, lo and behold, the project is there on its infrastructure priority list. And why would it be on its infrastructure priority list if Infrastructure Australia apparently rejected it? The answer is that Infrastructure Australia did not reject it. Despite what Mr Coe has said time and again, it has never been rejected by Infrastructure Australia.

That is only one of the many arguments that the Canberra Liberals put that do not actually stack up when you analyse them. The challenge is: the inaccuracies come so thick and fast it takes time to break them down and reveal the truth, and that is the challenge that the government continues to face—the one that we are up for because all of these furrphies have clear answers, clear rationale for the reason that decisions have been taken and absolute transparency when it comes to the information that the government is prepared to put on the table.

I conclude my remarks there, except to reiterate, as I have done many times before, the excellence and importance of this light rail project. I am confident that Canberrans' pride in their city will extend even further as it embraces quality public transport infrastructure. I commend my amendment to the Assembly. I believe it delivers what Mr Coe is asking for in that the government will make public the annual availability payment, not at the arbitrary time that he has chosen but at the time when the information is actually available with an actual and accurate number that the community can then form its view on.

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (6.19): In conclusion, there are numerous things that need to be said in response to Mr Corbell's and Mr Rattenbury's one-eyed support of this

project. It is interesting that Mr Rattenbury would claim to be the champion of evidence-based policy; yet when you have the Productivity Commission, Infrastructure Australia and your own documentation saying, “Go ahead with bus rapid transit,” and you just ignore it and go ahead with light rail, that is a clear example of not having evidence-based policy. In fact, that is the absolute opposite of evidence-based policy.

Mr Rattenbury goes on to say that Infrastructure Australia did not reject it. “Not recommended” are the very words in the assessment brief of the Office of the Infrastructure Coordinator as of January 2013. “Not recommended. It is instead recommended that a Canberra transit corridor strategy be included on the early priority list at early stage.” So it was rejected and they said, “Put it on the early stage instead.” It got rejected for a study. They said, “We’re not even going to give you money to study it. It doesn’t stack up.” What does their very sound analysis say? This is from Infrastructure Australia:

The extent of the problem identified seems unlikely to justify significant capital investment in the short term. The case for favouring light rail over bus rapid transit has not been strongly made, especially when the submission itself points to the stronger economic performance of a bus rapid transit option.

You have the government writing to Infrastructure Australia saying, “Please give us money for light rail, despite the fact that buses are better,” and Mr Rattenbury does not think that was rejected? This document clearly says, “Don’t go ahead.”

**Mrs Dunne:** It was only not recommended.

**MR COE:** “Not recommended. It is instead recommended that a Canberra transit corridor strategy be included on the priority list at an early stage.” That is pretty much what happens to any government project that gets submitted to Infrastructure Australia. “Put it on the early stage.” And then from that early stage they then assess when it is warranted and promote the ones that are worthy of additional attention and expenditure. But when the commonwealth government under Julia Gillard at the time looked at this project, they said no.

It is interesting that Mr Corbell should say today’s report is in support of light rail. Today’s report does not support light rail; today’s report simply says that you have got to do something on that corridor. It is very deliberate in not saying light rail. It is very deliberate in saying there needs to be public transport improvements on the Gungahlin to city corridor. If you want evidence-based policy, you have got to go through all the facts, and the facts clearly show that this project is marginal at best.

We also heard Mr Corbell say that this is going to be delivered more cheaply than what the business case said. What the business case actually said was \$610 million plus contingency. That was what Mr Corbell said at the time of releasing the business case in October 2014. “This is a \$610 million project plus contingency.” Now we have got a situation whereby the government—

*Mr Corbell interjecting—*

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Order! Mr Corbell, please stop speaking loudly across the room.

*Mrs Dunne interjecting—*

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Mrs Dunne! Order! I would like to listen to Mr Coe. Mr Coe.

**MR COE:** Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. So you have the government here saying, on one hand, “It is cheaper than expected,” and, on the other hand, “We have still got to do the park and ride, we have still got to do the land acquisitions, we have still got to do the intersection upgrades, we have still got to do the utility upgrades, we have still got the agency costs, we have still got the diversions of ACTION, we have still got the diversions of all the other intersections and road works; yet it is a steal.” In addition, they still refuse to say what is the embedded finance rate and they still refuse to say what the operating and maintenance costs are going to be.

If you add 20 or 25 years of operations, finance and construction, you are going to get up to a pretty big figure. That is why this is an intergenerational liability that this government is landing on Canberrans. That is the real tragedy of this. This is not a folly confined to this administration; it is a folly they want to impose on future generations of Canberrans. It is a 20 or 25-year deal, yet they will not wait four months to get the mandate they should be seeking. It is wrong. It is absolutely wrong.

We firmly believe that the project should be put on hold until after the election. Mr Corbell and Mr Rattenbury seem to think there is some impurity in asking voters what they think, asking taxpayers whether they want to pay for it. They seem to think it is actually immoral or unethical to actually put an issue to the voters. We firmly believe that the people of Canberra should be the determiners of policy in this place.

We will not be supporting Mr Rattenbury’s amendment. We think, once again, it is another Labor lite amendment from a very tight coalition government. It simply goes to more hiding of this government’s project. Therefore, we will be voting against it, and we call on the government to finally come clean with what the final costs to taxpayers will be for this project.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

Mr Barr  
Ms Berry  
Dr Bourke  
Ms Burch  
Mr Corbell

Ms Fitzharris  
Mr Gentleman  
Ms Porter  
Mr Rattenbury

Mr Coe  
Mr Doszpot  
Mrs Dunne  
Mr Hanson  
Mrs Jones

Ms Lawder  
Mr Smyth  
Mr Wall

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## Adjournment

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## Kingsford Smith Drive

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (6.30): In the last few months my office has received complaints from constituents regarding the level of noise and the lack of noise buffers on Kingsford Smith Drive. One notable complaint was made by a man responding to one of the leaflets I hand out inviting the public to make known any issues or problems they are experiencing. This man had attempted previously to make his complaints known but had not received any response from the government.

The constituent mentioned specifically the noise that emanates from the increasing number of trucks, semi-trailers and B-doubles that use Kingsford Smith Drive. I wrote about this complaint to the then Minister for Roads and Parking; in response he said that Kingsford Smith Drive is an arterial road and, as such, “was designed to carry large volumes of traffic with a relatively high percentage of heavy vehicles”. It was also stated that “the level of traffic noise falls below the desirable maximum level of 65 decibels”.

That may well be so, but I remind the minister that Kingsford Smith Drive, as it runs through Spence and past Melba and Flynn, as well as being an arterial road also runs past many dwellings. The occupants of those dwellings, whilst needing to recognise the role of the road, are also entitled to some quiet enjoyment of their properties. Noisy traffic, particularly if it occurs at night, impinges on that quiet enjoyment.

The minister could have instructed his directorate to undertake further noise and traffic studies in response to my constituents’ concerns, but he did not, even though the traffic on the road is increasing.

Like Kingsford Smith Drive, Copland Drive is experiencing an increase in traffic due to the expansion of Gungahlin. A traffic study was done last year on Copland Drive. I ask: why did the minister not think to study both roads together with a view to finding a holistic solution to the problem?

The constituent also claimed that B-doubles have been using the road. I understand that B-doubles are not permitted to use Kingsford Smith Drive between Kuringa Drive and Ginninderra Drive. The minister gave no undertaking to investigate this matter. In short, the minister and this government have left the residents along Kingsford Smith Drive high and dry in their arrogant attitude of no care and no responsibility.

I sent my constituent a copy of the minister's response. To say he was unhappy is an understatement, and I cannot necessarily repeat all of the things that he said. But he did go on to say that it was a load of waffle, that there are B-doubles on the road, that this was a quiet residential area and that there are no barriers or trees planted in any way to attempt to reduce the noise or to beautify this area.

Kingsford Smith is used heavily by commuters going from Gungahlin to Belconnen and the city, and the use will only increase as Gungahlin expands. An attitude of prevention rather than cure should be applied to this situation, and it should be applied now. A drive along Kingsford Smith shows only one sign asking drivers to reduce noise and to "please limit compression braking". That is one sign for the whole 4.2 kilometre stretch of downhill road between Kuringa Drive and Ginninderra Drive.

I call on the minister to investigate the traffic using Kingsford Smith Drive. Further I call upon him to review the traffic policy for Kingsford Smith Drive now and identify a strategy to reduce noise both now and into the future.

### **Sri Lankan food fairs**

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (6.34): I rise this evening to talk about the ongoing food fairs organised by Canberra's Sri Lankan community. On the third Saturday of each month the Sri Lankan Buddhist community in Canberra organise two food fairs around Canberra. The fairs are held in the north of Canberra, usually at the Gungahlin community centre, as well as at the Sri Lankan Buddhist temple in Kambah.

All foods sold at these fairs are Sri Lankan delicacies, and cooked and provided by members of the Sri Lankan community. The food fairs are very popular. Indeed some foods are so popular that they are available in take-home packs to store and eat during the week. They are very popular. Revenue collected from these fairs is currently being directed towards the upkeep of the temple in Kambah, as well as fundraising for the construction of a new temple in Canberra's north.

A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of attending the Sri Lankan food fair at the Gungahlin community centre. There was a variety of Sri Lankan foods on offer. I was introduced to hoppers, a type of crepe with a crusty edge and a soft centre. Hoppers are usually made from fermented rice flour and coconut milk, and come in a number of variants, including plain hoppers, egg hoppers, and string hoppers.

Other foods on offer included thosai, which is a form of fermented crepe, and Sri Lankan fish cutlets, which is a type of fish ball which goes well as a side dish to most rice and curry dishes. A variety of different hot and spicy curries were available, all cooked by volunteers.

As well as hosting food fairs once a month, the Sri Lankan community had a couple of stalls at last weekend's National Multicultural Festival. Unsurprisingly, the food was a big hit.

I would like to acknowledge all those who organise the food fairs, as well as those who donate their time to cook and sell the cuisine. All involved do a wonderful job of promoting their culture and working towards the betterment of the Sri Lankan community here in the ACT. I encourage all members to attend a Sri Lankan food fair in the coming months. I congratulate the Sri Lankan community on hosting these ongoing events. I wish them all the best for their fundraising efforts.

### **Communities@Work**

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (6.36): On Tuesday, 16 February 2016 I was pleased to be able to attend the opening of the new Communities@Work Best Dressed store at Tuggeranong Hyperdome. They already had a store downstairs, but they have moved to a new, bigger store in probably a better location upstairs in the Tuggeranong Hyperdome.

I would also like to congratulate Lorcan Murphy, who has been announced as the new Chief Executive Officer of Communities@Work. He has a career that spans over 23 years in executive leadership and senior management positions. Lorcan has worked in numerous sectors, including multinational organisations across Europe, America, Asia and Australia. No doubt he will bring a wealth of knowledge to Communities@Work, who are an organisation that have done fantastic work for over 40 years for the benefit of vulnerable members of our community.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognise Lee Maiden, who is an outstanding deputy CEO, and who I am sure will be of tremendous assistance to Lorcan as he settles into his new role, just as she was a fantastic deputy CEO to Lynne Harwood.

The Communities@Work Best Dressed store celebrated its first year of helping local Canberrans, especially those in Tuggeranong, to look and feel fabulous at bargain prices. Their Best Dressed store also creates sustainable and ongoing funding for food and essential items for Communities@Work's social programs. The income generated over the past year has provided the means for sustainable services to our local community.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Tuggeranong Hyperdome in enabling them to move to this new, fantastic location and the wonderful corporate, government and individual donors who provide the beautiful clothes. If you are looking to clean out your wardrobe, they accept men's and women's business and casual wear. They would be very happy to take some of your ties, for example, or business wear.

They use a lot of volunteers to run the store. I volunteered there myself during Volunteer Week last year, and it was great to meet some people that I have not seen for years and who are working as volunteers there in Tuggeranong.

Customers frequent the store to do good-purpose shopping. They give pre-loved clothes a new, loving home. I bought some items there myself. They have some very lovely clothes. The money raised there goes to the people who most need it in our

community. Their prices start from just \$5, so it is very affordable for those who most need it.

The Best Dressed store focuses on selling pre-loved and dressy, special occasion, designer, executive and business wear. One of their focuses is to provide work-ready clothing for people who need clothes to go to interviews, for example, and who are starting work for the first time. They have accessories, they have shoes, they have scarves—they have everything you could possibly want. They have a range of designer brands and international clothing labels. So it is an opportunity to look a million dollars at a bargain basement price and support a fantastic local organisation who are helping those most in need in our community. I hope you can all get down there to the new Communities@ Work Best Dressed store in the Tuggeranong Hyperdome.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.41 pm.**