



Debates

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Wednesday, 10 August 2016

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Wednesday, 10 August 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.

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo): Pursuant to standing order 246A I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety performing its legislative scrutiny role relating to consideration of the Election Commitments Costing Amendment Bill 2016.

This is a bill for an act to amend the Election Commitments Costing Act 2012 in relation to costing requests. The committee has examined the Election Commitments Costing Amendment Bill 2016 and offers no comment on it.

Transport—light rail

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

That this Assembly supports calls to cancel the \$1.78 billion tram and instead invest in better hospitals, better schools and better local services.

I rise today to talk about the future of the ACT. It is very clear to me and to our community that in October we are at a crossroads where there are two paths forward for this town. There is a vision that comes from the Labor Party and the Greens for a town where much of the available dollars in each budget for the next 20, 30, potentially 40, years will be expended on light rail. That is their proposal. They have committed to phase 1, which is \$1.78 billion. They have promised future phases, which will be hundreds of millions, billions, of dollars—we will wait to see. I note that I cannot reflect really on many major infrastructure projects this government has done that have not doubled in price—I think the dam actually tripled—the jail, GDE, hospital car park and many others. When we are talking about the \$1.78 billion and the other hundreds of millions, they are figures which will escalate.

That is in contrast with the Canberra Liberals' vision, which is a different vision. We will invest where we think the priorities of the Canberra community lie—fixing our health system, education, and better local services. I have been saying this for quite some time. This has been part of our narrative because it is what we are hearing from the Canberra community. We will have more announcements to come but, as you may have seen in the media today, the Canberra Liberals today have announced another piece of the puzzle, another part of that vision that we will realise into the future with our health announcement.

This follows other announcements we have made, and I will reflect on those I made in my budget reply speech. We announced an \$85 million package in education with

\$60 million for infrastructure following the closure of 23 schools and the failure of maintenance, \$17.5 million to support children with special needs in the non-government sector, and \$7.5 million for capital and recurrent projects in our specialised schools. I spoke about that yesterday, and I will keep speaking about that in the community. That announcement was really welcomed by so many parents and educators across both the public and the independent school systems. We were getting back slaps with people saying: “Finally, somebody is going to look after our special needs kids across the whole system. Well done.” From teachers we heard: “Well done. We need this infrastructure to be fixed up.”

The other policy announcement that was particularly significant was from Mr Coe with Canberra’s transport future for all Canberrans. There is a website. There is a brochure. It will revolutionise the bus system that has, under the current Labor government, deteriorated to such a point that we have the lowest patronage in generations, if not ever, at 6.9 per cent. It is clear that the bus system is not working under Labor. Mr Coe has put out a comprehensive plan to revolutionise public transport in this town for all Canberrans. The merit of it is clear in that the Labor Party has started copying many elements of what Mr Coe proposed. There is no better form of flattery than imitation.

We come to health, which is my number one priority: to fix the health system. I have spoken many times in this place about the problems in our health system, and they are many, from capacity, ageing infrastructure, toxic workplaces—there are so many problems that affect not just patients but also staff. But one of the fundamental problems is the Canberra Hospital, and a number of years ago a previous health minister in this place, Katy Gallagher, proposed a rebuild of the Canberra Hospital. It was then an \$800 million project. I received a number of briefings on it and talked about in on a number of occasions in estimates hearings and health hearings. An amount of \$41 million was put into the 2011 budget to start that project rolling.

Sadly, after the 2012 election that all started to fall apart. The Labor Party went into the election promising an \$800 million rebuild of the Canberra Hospital. That was the promise. That was put in the budget. They said they were doing this. I can give you all the quotes and budget releases and press statements and speeches in the Assembly and answers to questions on notice. They said they were going to do this. They made the case that this needed to be done. Ms Gallagher repeatedly made the case that this needed to be done. Very sadly and to the outrage of many who work at the Canberra Hospital, the Labor Party pulled the plug on it.

Stage 1 of this project in the design was costed at \$375 million. That is what the experts said it was going to cost to build stage 1, which is a five-storey rebuild of building 3 on that old site. I was out there this morning—it is a dilapidated old building. The decanting of that building started; they started that process. It is passing strange and quite a remarkable coincidence that the exact amount that has been put in the budget for light rail for infrastructure is \$375 million. The exact amount that this government ripped out of the Canberra Hospital rebuild is the exact amount that is being put into the tram.

That is the appalling situation we find now. The money required for the desperate need to rebuild the Canberra Hospital that not only clinicians were calling for but Katy Gallagher was calling for in this place repeatedly has been ripped out to pay for a tram—the exact same amount in the budget. We will take that money away from light rail and we will put it back to where Ms Gallagher, the clinicians and the community want it—that is, into the Canberra Hospital. I am very proud that the Canberra Liberals have announced today a rebuild. I have added \$20 million to the rebuild, the price that was costed by the ACT Health bureaucracy, and we will put \$8 million worth of staff in in the first year it opens.

This facility will provide a significant expansion for the decade. Demand is increasing well beyond projections. But, even if it meets projections, this hospital is going to be full shortly. This is just like this government with the GDE and the jail. Mr Corbell was on the radio this morning saying: “Don’t worry. We don’t need to do this for five years.” Well, I remind Mr Corbell that it takes a number of years to build these facilities.

I remind this place and I remind the community that it was Mr Corbell in 2007 in the lead-up to the jail opening who said in a committee inquiry, “No, no, no, this jail will have capacity for 25 years in its current bed configuration.” What happened was that the jail was full the day it opened. Here is Mr Corbell again saying: “Don’t worry. She’ll be right. We’ve got capacity into the future,” when this is the very same individual who opened a jail that was full the day it opened, having told the community that it had capacity for 25 years.

The reality is that there is not capacity for 25 years or 10 years or five years at the Canberra Hospital. We need to build it now for the future. There is a different paradigm between the way the Labor Party do business and the way the Liberal Party do business. The Labor Party wait till the system is busted, till it is full. Back in the days of the jail, we had people in cots at the Belconnen Remand Centre, squeezed in like sardines, because of failure in planning by this Labor government. It is the same story with the GDE and many of the infrastructure stories we hear. We keep hearing from people, “Build for the future, build with capacity,” and that is what we will do. We will build with capacity and then we will progressively open it. As I said, there will be \$8 million for staff for the first year of operation to start that growth, and it continues for a decade.

I have spoken to many people. Let me tell you that there are very senior people very close to this government in this whole bureaucracy who have come to me and said, “This decision by Labor to pull the plug on this and put the money in the tram is appalling.” They are disgusted by what this government has done, because they work in that hospital day after day. They see the effects. They know what this means for staff morale, patient safety and the future of health in this town. They understand what this means.

I will quote comments from the president of the AMA reported in the paper. He was effusive in his praise. He said it is a hospital that will just revolutionise care and make it a much improved place for patients; that it was taking a 1960s relic and bringing it

up to match what is going on in other hospitals; that much work had gone into design—and it had. That is the tragedy of this, and there was great disappointment when it did not go ahead.

The project director who was working on this project before it was cancelled when Labor took the \$41 million out of the budget said it reflects much-needed infrastructure. He said the hospital is the one and only tertiary facility in Canberra and it is relying on 40 to 50-year-old infrastructure which is at risk of failure.

Do you know what the Labor Party's plan is, Madam Speaker? We heard this in estimates when we were asking questions about what had happened to the rebuild of the Canberra Hospital. The health bureaucrats said they are going to manage high-risk and extreme-risk infrastructure. That is their plan. Our plan is to rebuild, to expand—to build capacity and infrastructure in the 21st century. The Labor Party plan is to crisis manage high-risk and extreme-risk infrastructure, and all because they are putting every available dollar they can into a tram.

The question is, of course: where did the money go? I will quote from 2014 when this was all starting to fall apart. Mrs Jones asked a question without notice in this place of Ms Gallagher about how the \$800 million project would be funded. This is when we were talking about the whole project. Ms Gallagher said:

I thank Mrs Jones for the question. I think the budget has shown the preparedness of this government to make provision for large infrastructure projects. We have made provision ...

Mr Corbell is today on the radio saying the money is not there. Ms Gallagher said two years ago the money is there:

We have made provision, and we have also made space within the budget to fund those projects. The health infrastructure project is the largest infrastructure project being run by the government and it will require continued capital investment over the next 10 years ...

We have got this government saying, "Well, the money's not there anymore." Where do you think it has gone, members? The \$375 million Ms Gallagher said was there, and more—all of a sudden it is not there. What could this money have been spent on? The \$375 million is in the budget to fund a tram!

Let me be very clear. There is a crossroads on 15 October, and the decision for the people of Canberra is this: do they want the first \$375 million, and tens and hundreds of millions more, spent on a tram—that is the Labor-Greens choice—or do they want \$375 million spent on rebuilding the Canberra Hospital? That is the choice. I think it is great that the people of Canberra have a choice, and I look forward to 15 October when the people of Canberra can have their say.

MS FITZHARRIS (Molonglo—Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research, Minister for Transport Canberra and City Services and Assistant Minister for Health) (10.17): The government will not be supporting Mr Hanson's motion today, and I would like to move an amendment in my name.

MADAM SPEAKER: Has the amendment been circulated?

MS FITZHARRIS: No.

MADAM SPEAKER: You cannot move an amendment until the amendment has been circulated.

MS FITZHARRIS: Then I circulate the amendment in my name.

MADAM SPEAKER: Can you speak and then move the amendment later in your speech when it has been circulated

MS FITZHARRIS: Certainly. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It is terrific to have another opportunity to talk today about how this government is integrating our transport network, investing in health and education and local services, and improving public transport across our city, no matter where you live.

Canberrans need, and indeed can have, an integrated public transport network. They can also have better hospitals, great schools and fantastic local services—all at the same time. This is possible, and under this government it is a reality. It is what the ACT government is delivering. It is not a question of “instead” or “one or the other”; it is a statement of “and”.

I say that because this Labor government is delivering exactly that. We are delivering an integrated transport system comprising light rail, buses and active travel options like walking and cycling. And we are investing more in health and education at the same time. Indeed, we are making record investments in health, education, and all the local services our city needs.

And while we do this, we have a clear path back to surplus.

Mr Hanson’s motion today baffles me, but it does scare me as well. It exposes the reckless approach of those opposite to our budget, the ACT economy and our reputation as a sound place to do business and it exposes their inability to generally understand how public finances work.

His speech today was mostly littered with criticism of light rail—again like most of the Canberra Liberals’ speeches are. They harp on about the cost of the light rail contract, for example. They claim we are spending some large amount of money on light rail as if it is a river of gold that they can repurpose over and over again. This claim is so incredibly misleading that even they seem to be unsure about it.

I note that their ridiculous light rail Canberra website states that the cost of light rail is \$707 million—not the \$1.7 billion figure they now try to mislead the community about. But why would they try to be consistent, Madam Speaker? In reality, the light rail contract represents less than one per cent—

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MS FITZHARRIS: The Canberra Liberals' own website states, and I will say it again, that the cost of light rail is \$707 million.

In reality, as those opposite know, the light rail contract represents less than one per cent of the ACT budget. In fact, the first stage of light rail will be running up and down Northbourne Avenue and Flemington Road before we start making payments to these operators. And for every \$1 we spend on light rail we will spend \$24 on education and \$33 on health.

Labor knows that we always spend more on health and education, because we know just how important these services are to a strong, healthy and vibrant community. As a Labor government, our focus is on growth, opportunity and fairness in our community. We are focused on health, education and jobs, and we are investing in the services our growing city needs now and into the future. We are delivering better hospitals and health care. This includes investing in the new teaching hospital at the UC campus in Belconnen and providing more funding for palliative care services, stroke services, rehabilitation, cancer services, aged care and community care, just to name a few.

The University of Canberra public hospital will be a state-of-the-art teaching and training hospital that will transform subacute services in our region and train the nurses and doctors of the future. Our investment in our nurse-led walk-in centres offers all Canberrans free access to health care and advice. These are so popular that, if re-elected, Labor has committed to building more in Gungahlin and in Weston Creek.

In addition to health, we are investing more than ever in our schools and education system—everything from bigger and better classrooms to world-class VET facilities and more funding to help fund the next big research breakthrough. We are investing \$20 million in Gungahlin schools, \$525,000 in the medical research commercialisation fund, and funds for better preschool facilities. We recently opened the state-of-the-art CIT Tuggeranong campus—all this and still delivering better transport and still balancing our budget.

The ACT government is also funding high quality local services. This budget allocates more money to mowing our suburbs, to building and resealing our roads, to the upkeep of our local shopping centres and to better playgrounds and parks—and much, much more. We are delivering green waste bins, with a pilot to start in Weston Creek and Kambah before rolling them out to the rest of the city. We are boosting our mowing budget and upgrading more than 40 playgrounds across the city in this year's budget. If re-elected, Labor will deliver a bulky waste pick-up service for all households in Canberra. We are doing this sustainably and responsibly, and we will build light rail at the same time, creating more than 3,500 jobs.

If you listen to those opposite, Madam Speaker, you would think our economy was in dire straits. Yet we have retained our AAA credit rating—under threat from the commonwealth, from the federal Liberal government. We have retained high wages and high quality local services. Unemployment in the ACT is the lowest in Australia despite significant attacks on Canberra's jobs by the federal Liberal Party. And Canberra is consistently rated as the world's most livable city, with the highest quality of life.

Do you get any of this when you listen to the Canberra Liberals? No. You get none of it. It is all negative. Unfortunately, the Canberra Liberals choose negativity over positivity every time. Everything the Canberra Liberals do and say in this Assembly is based largely on what they will not do. Again I point to Mr Hanson's speech, over half of it dedicated to light rail.

Mr Hanson and his Treasury spokesperson, Mr Coe, want to cancel the light rail contract, risking our gold star credit rating and our gold star unemployment levels. The cost of stage 1 of light rail is affordable. The cost of cancelling the light rail contract is not. Cancelling light rail in Canberra will cost up to \$300 million and contribute to a \$400 million black hole. For that money, Canberrans will get nothing. Businesses will get nothing. But the ACT's credit rating will get something; it will get a downgrade. The Canberra Liberals have created a \$400 million black hole, and cancelling light rail is a significant portion.

Where is \$400 million worth of savings coming from? We believe that the Canberra Liberals will have to slash public service jobs to find them. Sadly, this comes as no surprise. Recent form from the opposition leadership has suggested that ACT public servants are expendable. They have consistently attacked the integrity of the ACT public service and talked down the great work they do. If elected, you can be sure they will commission an audit and cut jobs—just like their counterparts Tony Abbott and Campbell Newman. Don't think it can't happen here in Canberra.

Mr Hanson and his Treasury spokesperson, Mr Coe, simply cannot be trusted. The Canberra Liberals' second-choice Treasury spokesperson is clearly out of his depth if he thinks spending \$300 million tearing up contracts will give him more money to invest in services.

Light rail will transform Canberra and boost our economy. Cancelling it would send Canberra businesses and the ACT economy into freefall and cost our city 3,500 jobs. I think that is what the Canberra Liberals want for Canberra. Last week we learned that not only do they want to cancel the contract; they also want to try to rescope it, whatever that means. Mr Coe suggested to the *Canberra Times* that this would mean asking the light rail consortium to build roads, education or health infrastructure instead of the light rail they are contracted to build. Let that sink in, Madam Speaker. The Canberra Liberals want Deutsche Bahn, the second largest transport company in the world and the largest railway operator and infrastructure owner in Europe, to build, say, a school. That plan was rightly ridiculed by experts, with University of Canberra infrastructure financing expert Professor Cameron Gordon saying that such an idea was impractical and unprecedented—in fact, that he had never seen it. This puts comments from the federal Liberals about the Canberra Liberals' position being economic lunacy in sharp focus.

Let me move to today's motion. It seems that Mr Coe's thought bubble about rescoping the contract has forced Mr Hanson to take over the reins again, since today he is moving this motion about light rail. It seems he no longer has confidence in his Treasury spokesperson or his transport spokesperson—no confidence in the man who one week wants to cost ACT taxpayers \$300 million by cancelling light rail and then

the next week suggests risking the ACT's credit rating and unemployment levels by rescoping a contract. He has no confidence in the man who likened the cost of light rail to buying an Audi for everyone.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Gentleman: Point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Point of order.

MR GENTLEMAN: Madam Speaker, the opposition are interjecting. I am having trouble hearing the minister speak on this motion.

MADAM SPEAKER: The opposition, I think, were conducting conversations between themselves. There has been a low murmur, but I got the impression it was conversation between Mrs Jones and Ms Lawder. It was not a shout across the chamber, but I will remind members—

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mrs Jones! I am making a ruling on a point of order. I will remind members to keep the volume down, because some people's voices travel more than others and some people have difficulty being heard over conversation. Not everybody projects as well as you and I do, Mrs Jones. Please be mindful of that. As I have said on a number of occasions in this place, I do not expect that debates are conducted in silence; it would be hard for us all to stay awake if that were the case. On the question that the motion be agreed to, Ms Fitzharris has the floor.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will take that as a comment as well.

It seems that the leader of the Canberra Liberals has no confidence in the man who likened the cost of light rail to buying an Audi for everyone, no confidence in the man who described the Labor introduction of rapid bus routes as absurd, no confidence in the man who admits that Canberra will need light rail in 20 years time. Now Mr Hanson is trying to take back control. Is he nervous about leading a party whose re-election platform is based entirely on an outrageous, reckless political decision taken some years ago, no matter the cost? How nervous is he that this cost is now revealed at around \$300 million? That could be, for example, the Majura Parkway, 10 new schools, public hospitals.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mrs Jones. That is interjecting.

MS FITZHARRIS: The Canberra Liberals are again flip-flopping on their transport policies. We know they cannot be trusted. For years they have flip-flopped: on light rail in 1999, light rail again in 2005, and again in 2008; in 2012, nothing for public transport. Since then, Mr Coe has shown us he would prefer a fleet of Audis. Does anyone really believe the Canberra Liberals can be trusted on public transport?

Just two months out from the election, they still do not have a real plan for delivering transport in the ACT. We are yet to see what their actual policy will be to fix congestion issues on Northbourne Avenue. There are only options to deal with half of Northbourne Avenue—half of Northbourne Avenue—with buses that will not stop on Northbourne Avenue, with a plan that is highly unlikely to be approved by the NCA and that keeps buses on the whole route, further clogging up our already most congested road. They propose nothing for the other half of Northbourne Avenue and nothing for Flemington Road.

It has been eight months since the opposition canvassed three possible options. They have still not made a decision. They miss the entire point of a rapid public transport system. They have no solution to congestion on Northbourne Avenue. At best, they want to build a one-way road halfway up Northbourne Avenue—a road where the buses will not be able to stop—and they want to keep buses on Northbourne Avenue. They are cobbling together an alternative public transport solution—a half-baked solution to half of Northbourne Avenue, no solution to Flemington Road, a rapid bus network based on Labor's public transport policy, and a city hopper that will devastate a small business and will take about an hour, the hopeless hopper. Contrast this with the ACT government's integrated public transport network.

Canberra's population is growing. This city will be home to nearly 400,000 people by the end of this year. Congestion drains our community and our economy. It costs us all. This government wants Canberra to remain the world's most livable city. New roads, better and wider footpaths, an easy to access cycling network, an integrated freight network and better public transport are all part of our plan to keep Canberra moving.

Light rail is a part of this plan. It is about a city-defining, integrated network that will allow our city to grow sustainably. It is about tackling congestion and boosting economic activity. Just like on the Gold Coast, in Adelaide, in Sydney, in Newcastle or in Dubai, cities around Australia and the world see the importance of extending light rail. Perth still has light rail on the table despite the Canberra Liberals recently jumping up and down saying that Perth was abandoning this form of transport. The WA government say light rail is still an option on a number of key routes. Their plan focuses on connecting places where the highest number of people live and work so that public transport is the preferred choice for peak period travel. I think that sounds pretty familiar, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we can afford light rail and an integrated public transport network. We can afford high quality education and health care now. Canberra deserves high quality infrastructure, an integrated transport network. We can have all this, but only under the Labor government. (*Time expired.*)

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Fitzharris, were you proposing to move an amendment?

MS FITZHARRIS: I seek leave to move the amendment circulated in my name.

Leave granted.

MS FITZHARRIS: I move:

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

“(1) notes:

- (a) calculations show the compensation of terminating the light rail contract is estimated to be between \$220-\$280 million;
- (b) the Territory would forgo \$67 million in asset recycling initiative funding to the Commonwealth if light rail is not delivered;
- (c) cancelling light rail will create a minimum \$300 million deterioration in the forward estimates;
- (d) industry has condemned tearing up the contract, which damages not only the ACT’s, but Australia’s reputation as a place to invest;
- (e) Infrastructure Partnerships Australia, the Australian Industry Group and the Business Council of Australia have all called on the Canberra Liberals to change their position to avoid sovereign risk;
- (f) the Federal Liberals have described the Canberra Liberals’ position as economic lunacy;
- (g) the Canberra Liberals’ plan to tear up the light rail contract means there will be less money available for hospitals, schools and local services over the forward estimates, unlike the financing of light rail which provides for the cost to be shared across generations that use it;
- (h) the 2016-17 ACT Budget includes a record investment in schools and hospitals; and
- (i) EY estimates that 3500 direct and indirect jobs will be supported during the construction phase of Canberra Light Rail Stage 1, and these jobs are under threat if the Canberra Liberals tear up the contract; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) reject calls to tear up contracts;
- (b) continue to deliver an integrated transport network; and
- (c) continue to ensure Canberrans have access to high quality education, health care and local services.”.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (10.33): I do welcome this opportunity this morning to talk about some of the choices that Canberrans face at the ACT election because I do not agree with the approach that Mr Hanson has outlined this morning in seeking to cancel a very significant contract for the ACT. The Canberra Liberal Party have made it very clear that they will not build light rail, whereas the Greens believe that this is an important and beneficial project for Canberra and is part of government doing a whole range of things.

If you believe Mr Hanson's narrative, the government is doing nothing but building light rail. But what I can assure the chamber and the Canberra community is that the government—the Greens and the Labor Party—have a whole range of projects that are on the go through our education system, through the health system, through TAMS and through all the directorates. There is an enormous amount of work going on in this city. The Liberal Party approach of just trying to focus on one issue really is fairly dishonest, and I think the Canberra community will see through it.

What we know is that the Liberal Party would go so far as to actively renege on the existing contract to build the first stage of light rail in our city. This cancellation would of course come at a cost of several hundred million dollars. That is money that is simply wasted. It will evaporate into absolutely nothing for Canberra taxpayers. We hear the Liberal Party in here talking about their number one concern being the taxpayers—the Liberal Party claim to represent them and care about them—but the Liberal Party are prepared to essentially set the taxpayers' money on fire. That is what the Liberal Party are proposing to do.

Certainly experts have already rebuffed the spurious claim that the Liberals can rescope the light rail contract into some other project. Every time Mr Hanson repeats his opposition to quality public transport infrastructure for Canberra and his promise to cancel the existing contract, I marvel at how it is so reckless, so short-sighted and so obviously inconsiderate about the future of Canberra and Canberrans. And that is really what this is about. This is about condemning future Canberrans to a city that is not ready for the future.

I also marvel at the fact that the Liberal Party want to run their whole campaign around this single oppositional issue. They say, "We hate light rail and we will not build it." That is all they have built their platform on. We are starting to see a few other policies come through but basically it is all about what they will not do. It is predominantly about what they will not do.

I will shortly come to the unfunded and reckless spending approach that we are seeing. But the Greens' attitude contrasts to that of the Liberal Party. Our vision looks to the long term. We believe in a long term-term vision for our city and its people, one that puts the community first, one that is sustainable and one that is fair. We are willing to take bold decisions now that will help achieve this vision for our community.

Light rail is certainly a part of this. More than anything, it is a project for the long-term sustainability and health of Canberra. It is a project full of benefits for Canberrans today and future generations of Canberrans. It is a project that is both proactive and reactive. Reactively, it responds to pressures such as growing population and congestion and limited space. Proactively, it will help cement a vision for our city that is based around high quality public transport spines, renewable energy and more compact development.

It is clear to me, and I think it is clear to anyone paying attention to ACT politics, that the Liberal Party have chosen to oppose light rail because their vision extends to a very short time-horizon, and that is the ACT election in October. Light rail is a big

and complicated project, so it is a prime target for a policy-free opposition to pick as an election campaign vehicle to try and stir up negativity, to run a series of misconceptions on—and they are out there. We know it.

Let us just take today's promise on the hospital. They have come out and said that \$375 million on light rail is going to cost some Dr Evil-type, finger-in-the-mouth billions of dollars approach. This is the approach that we have seen from the Liberal Party. If you want to have an apples with apples comparison, let us talk about capital cost straight up. No, we have not seen that approach from the Liberal Party. We have seen an approach where they are willing to distort stories, to mislead the community, by giving out figures that are not a fair comparison and they are not an even comparison. It is an approach that they are happy to take because it is politically expedient for them. I think that the Canberra community will see through that.

What the community will also understand is that we do need to plan for the future of this city. Look at the Northbourne corridor, for example. It is a corridor that is already at congestion capacity. This corridor will grow to about 85,000 people in just 15 years. Here we have a recipe for problems, including congestion and delays for both private and public transport. We have a plan that responds to this. Light rail is high capacity and space efficient. It catalyses denser development and urban renewal. The evidence shows that light rail encourages more people to public transport than other modes such as buses. It will ensure this corridor continues to be not only usable but much improved in its urban environment.

With a Liberal government and without light rail, where will this corridor be in just five or 10 years, let alone 15, 20 or 30 years? People will be unhappy; that is for sure. We will have to struggle somewhere down the line to try and retrofit solutions and that will be even more difficult and more expensive than doing it now. One of the most shining demonstrations of the Liberal Party's myopic and selfish focus is the Liberals' admission on numerous occasions that Canberra will need light rail in the coming decades anyway. And that is the guts of the position. Ms Fitzharris has just outlined the various previous times that the Liberal Party have outlined the necessity for light rail for Canberra, on repeated occasions at different times.

Then the conservative faction of the Liberal Party took over. Zed Seselja and Alistair Coe started to dominate the agenda of the Liberal Party here in the ACT and in 2012 we saw an agenda that was all about more car parks and more roads. It was all about the private motor vehicle, the fleet of Audis that Ms Fitzharris just reminded us of. That is what happened. The ultraconservatives, those that have got—

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members!

MR RATTENBURY: It is all about the private motor vehicle. It is not about social infrastructure. That is what we have seen dominate the Liberal Party in recent times.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones, please do not interject.

MR RATTENBURY: They have abandoned the recognition that you, Madam Speaker, have put out there that Canberra needs to invest seriously in public transport. Recently we heard Mr Coe say on ABC radio that it is okay if they tear up the contracts because they will still have the plans for light rail and when Canberra needs it in 20 or 30 years time they will just pull them out of the bottom drawer. What an extraordinary position to take. We are going to spend several hundred million dollars tearing up a contract, discarding all the work that has been done, but somehow we actually reckon these diagrams will still be all right in 20 years time. We will just crank them out of the bottom drawer and start spending on light rail again because we will actually need it then.

We will have wasted the money and we will have condemned Canberra to having to wait that long for this public transport system that the Liberal Party know this city needs. That goes to the very dishonesty of the policy position that they are taking to this ACT election. They have spent the last couple of years deceiving the Canberra community about what this city really needs.

What we know is that if stage 1 does not go ahead there definitely will not be stage 2 to other parts of the city. Again we have seen Mr Coe run the line that says: "If light rail were going from my electorate of Belconnen to the city, that would be a better project. If it went through to the airport that would be a better project."

Sure, we can have that debate; but what it again shows and underlines is the dishonesty of the position the Liberal Party are taking to the Canberra community. They know that we need this public transport investment, but they are prepared to take a short-term political strategy for their political gain and waste taxpayers' money to do it.

Part of what we know is going on here is that they are also trying to create a magic pudding of budget spending. There has been a debate around this \$400 million figure. But even the academic on radio yesterday morning pretty much acknowledged that the \$400 million figure was right.

We know that the Liberal Party have got this sort of hashtag going, "because of light rail", and on every problem in this city they are going to spend the light rail money time and time again. They are conveniently ignoring the fact that they are going to have to spend the money compensating and then they are re-spending the money time and time again. We have seen it again today with the latest proposal for the hospital.

What they are ignoring are the economic benefits that will be generated for Canberra out of light rail. We know that there are well-documented negatives that result from failing to respond to the challenges and problems that light rail helps to address and we know that, according to Infrastructure Australia, delays on major Canberra roads, of which the Northbourne corridor is right at the top of the list, are tipped to cost \$700 million by 2031. These are all things that we know.

Then there are the things that we do not know. Will the Liberal Party actually deliver their bus plan? The government has indicated that there will be 1.2 million kilometres

of additional bus capacity annually to be redistributed through the network as a result of light rail taking over the heavy lifting on Northbourne Avenue. If Mr Hanson takes light rail away he is going to have to fund that additional bus mileage. What we know is that the Liberal Party have issued a bus plan that has no time lines and no costings. Will it actually ever be delivered? I doubt it, because what we know is that the Liberal Party do not really believe in public transport.

We also know that Mr Coe has made it clear that interchanging is off the agenda. He does not believe in that when it comes to a public transport network. I think that is quite a giveaway because again that points to costings that are not in there and we have not seen anything. All we have is a long-term aspirational plan, or perhaps it is an initial proposal—no costings, no time line, no plan for delivery.

It is not unlike the education spend that Mr Hanson spoke of this morning. My comments last night indicate that real questions need to be answered on that. Here is what is happening from the Liberal Party: they are actually allocating money that is already in the national education reform agreement funding. It is actually not new money; it is money that they are actually going to dictate to the non-government schools how they have to spend it. If that is the policy change, they need to outline that. They need to be honest about it.

If it is extra money, does that mean they are now going beyond the terms of the national education reform agreement and pouring even more money into non-government schools at the expense of government schools? Is that the policy position? Which is it? Let us have some honesty about which policy decision the Liberal Party are actually putting forward. At the moment it is just: “Hey, look at us. We are going to fling this money around.” Let us hear what the actual policy proposal is. Let us hear what it is. I look forward to Mr Hanson responding to that in his reply this morning.

When it comes to the promise today on the Canberra Hospital, I will be looking very closely at this. The announcement today is not clear on the capital works that are currently underway at the hospital or have already been completed. Does the fact that the emergency department just had some works finalised, and has got other works coming, mean that this one is now going to be simply discarded again for a couple of years? Is that the approach? Are we actually going to see the cancellation of more contracts for work that is already underway at the hospital? It is no longer needed under this new proposal. They are questions that need to be worked through as well and I will take the time to look carefully at this. I also can flag to the chamber that the Greens Party will also come with a range of health policies and issues during this election.

What we know is that this budget already invests large amounts of money into both health and education spending. I think what we are seeing here are quite fluffy policies coming out. This again goes to the very dishonesty of the narrative that the Liberal Party are running through this election campaign, completely failing to recognise the significant work that has already been put into these areas and the fact that there is significant investment being put into health and education by this government. We will carefully look through this and outline to the Canberra community the true story behind some of these claims that are being made by the Liberal Party.

I will not be supporting Mr Hanson's motion today and I will be pleased to support the amendment put forward by Ms Fitzharris.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (10.47): I was not intending to speak to this amendment but I have been inspired by the debate to contribute and to respond. It is my generosity coming through in passing on a few thoughts about a few issues that were raised by Ms Fitzharris in her speech. It is interesting, of course, that she has all these prepared lines in her speech. Interesting even is the fact that she read more than half of Mr Hanson's speech, which was all negative and about light rail. That was written in her speech! It begs the question how she knew what Jeremy was going to actually say at the time, at the time of actually—

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Hanson!

MR COE: They had this prepared speech—

Mr Barr interjecting—

MR COE: Because they had this prepared speech—

MADAM SPEAKER: Sit down, Mr Coe. Sit down, Mr Coe and, Mr Barr, come to order. Mr Hanson, come to order. There have been a number of points of order from the government side about outrageous and loud interjections. But I think that the exemplar has come from the Chief Minister. I remind you that there has been some discussion about interjection across the chamber. I have given my usual ruling about interjection across the chamber. As I have said about some people in this place, their voices project a whole lot more than others. The Chief Minister comes into that category as well. I call Mr Coe on the question that the motion be agreed to.

MR COE: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is interesting that they write a speech yesterday—after the admin and procedure committee meeting no doubt. It is all negative, all negative, all negative. Then they see today's paper. Rather than actually changing the speech, they just give the speech they prepared yesterday. The truth is that the Canberra Liberals have what we think is a far better alternative for capital funding going into the future.

I want to address the important issue of Transport Canberra and City Services. We are very concerned about what we are hearing about the morale at that agency. We are also very concerned about what we are hearing about the priorities of that agency. Of course, it has been a capital metro takeover. I think everybody in TAMS knows exactly that. I think there are many people in that agency that are sick of being told that they are second rate to a tram. It is not a pleasant place to go to work when you are not valued and when you are told that what you are doing is, in effect, second rate to a tram.

There are all sorts of proposals being put forward by people in that agency but they are told, “No, there are not the resources; no, there is not the funding; no, there are not enough staff.” Yet pretty much every single request regarding capital metro gets the tick of approval. That has to be pretty demoralising, because that is exactly what is happening.

We have a situation whereby we have appointments to operational roles that are very questionable in terms of whether the appointees have actually had operational transport experience. We have situations whereby they have re-jigged this agency and put units and sub-units in illogical positions, which again goes to show just how much people are valued or, in fact, devalued. We have, of course, a situation whereby we are getting orders given from the minister’s office but, more bizarrely, we are getting transport orders being given from the Chief Minister’s office and also from the Chief Minister’s directorate.

The fact that the Chief Minister’s directorate undertook the recent survey I think shows just how problematic all this really is. Then you have the Chief Minister’s directorate in effect telling the transport experts in Transport Canberra and City Services how they should be conducting their operational matters. We think that is most unfortunate. We think we should be valuing the staff in that agency rather than telling them that they are second rate.

Of course, I also feel for the people working on ACTION, the people that have diligently been working there and trying to make improvements. They are seeing all the new money, all the new resources, be squandered by way of capital metro. Then, of course, we have a situation whereby the government pours money into the city loop service. Yet we all know that there are other options for those resources—far better options as well.

Of course, we had a situation that was not dissimilar to today’s. We put out a policy on Canberra’s transport future. The government come out and say that it is terrible; it is shocking; it cannot be done. Then inch by inch they start to implement it. We do note that this is a minister and a government that are very sensitive when it comes to the issue of light rail, when it comes to the issue of rates, when it comes to the issue of their history. They are desperately trying to rewrite this history and trying to re-sculpt exactly how they go about packaging what they have already committed to.

But one thing that is absolutely for sure is that a Liberal government will value the people in Transport Canberra and City Services. We will actually have evidence-based approaches to making decisions rather than ad hoc decision-making that comes from the minister’s office or from the Chief Minister’s office. We will not have an obsession with a tram which dictates everything that happens in that agency.

We will value the people in ACTION, the people in municipal services, the people in all the other areas of TAMS that have been told, in effect, that they are second rate to a tram. We think it is very important that we get the priorities right at the macro level in terms of the whole-of-government priorities but also on an agency by agency approach. That is why we will restore confidence to Transport Canberra and City Services.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Urban Renewal) (10.54): I am very pleased to support Ms Fitzharris's amendment this morning, because Canberra can and should have great hospitals, schools, local services and public transport. Under this government, it will, because we will invest in health, we will invest in education and we will invest in transport. It is possible to do all of that and that is what good governments should be doing. Cancelling light rail is not a blank cheque. It is a black hole, Madam Speaker.

The light rail contract, of course, allows us to spread the cost across decades and have that cost be shared by generations of Canberrans who will utilise better public transport services. Ripping up a contract means that those costs fall immediately in the forward estimates period. That means we have less to spend in the next few years on schools and hospitals. Let us be clear: ripping up a contract is not a small or easy thing to do.

There is, of course, the immediate cost, which we know is hundreds of millions of dollars. There is also the longer-term cost of the significant reputational damage and higher costs for every piece of infrastructure that any future ACT government would build, because once you have ripped up one contract, everyone will price that sovereign risk into their bids for any future infrastructure work in this city. It will bid up the price of every single piece of infrastructure into the future because, once it is done once, the market will price it in. The market will expect, if there is any political contest over an infrastructure project, that they should price in the fact that it could be ripped up. That is the path that we are going down through the approach of those opposite.

We entered into a contract made in good faith, based on negotiations in good faith, that met our 2012 election commitment, a commitment that we are delivering. So the first fallacy in the motion put forward by the Leader of the Opposition is that it is an either/or decision—you either have transport investment or health investment. You can have both and we deliver both. We are going to deliver light rail and we are going to deliver new health infrastructure. We have met our 2012 election commitment to start light rail construction. We have met our 2012 election commitments to invest in new health infrastructure. Light rail and world-class health care; you can have transport investment and health investment. This government and only the Labor Party will deliver both, Madam Speaker.

In July we were part of the sod turning to mark the start of construction of light rail. A fortnight later we officially opened a new school in Coombs. So you can have transport infrastructure investment and investment in new schools and education. We have just opened a new CIT facility in Tuggeranong. Again, you can invest in transport, you can invest in education and you can invest in health.

In May we announced the green bin rollout to Canberra homes. We have reached financial close on light rail. Again, you can deliver excellent municipal services and you can deliver transport services. You can do more than one thing at once and a good government should be focused on health, on education, on transport and on municipal services.

The second fallacy in the opposition leader's motion is that there is some river of gold from cancelling the light rail contract. Mr Hanson loves to throw out a big number and pretend that he has some sort of personal election war chest. He does not, Madam Speaker. He does not. He cannot continue to spend the same money over and over again on expensive projects that he cannot afford to deliver. That is a fact. You cannot spend the money you would save from not going ahead with light rail, as small as that would be once you take out the contract cancellation costs, and you cannot bring forward 20 years of expenditure into a four-year fiscal period. That is a very important point to note.

The impact in the forward estimates of cancelling the contract is a \$400 million black hole. That is the position that those opposite have to confront. You cannot draw 20 years of expenditure forward into four years and think that that will not have an impact on the territory budget in the forward estimates period. The contract over 20 years represents less than one per cent of the ACT budget because we are spreading the costs over a generation.

As Minister Fitzharris has pointed out, for every dollar that we spend on the transport element there in light rail we will spend \$33 on health and \$24 on education. That gives a sense of the relativities in the territory budget. Of course, health and education combined represent more than half of the territory budget. They will always be the majority of outlays for the ACT government.

We are hearing a lot from those opposite. Promises are being made left, right and centre—actually, mostly promises being made right, hard right and even further right, I should say. The Liberals lose track of the fact that they have already made many, many commitments. Again, one need only go back and look through the last four years of *Hansard* and the public commitments already made by the Leader of the Opposition to understand just how big a fiscal hole they have dug for themselves by the commitments that they have already made. Today we add another \$400 million on top of that.

Let me repeat: if you cancel the light rail contract, you bring forward a big compensation cost into the next few fiscal years. You cannot bring forward 20 years of expenditure into a four-year period but you certainly can bring forward the costs. That is exactly what the Leader of the Opposition is going to do.

Their plan to rip up the contract and to implement other uncosted promises already announced, already committed, is a \$400 million black hole, confirmed yesterday by Professor Lewis from the University of Canberra. Ripping up the light rail contract simply means less money for schools and hospitals now. It does not mean more money. It means less, Madam Speaker. And there has still been no explanation from the Leader of the Opposition on how he will fill the \$400 million black hole. How will he do it? He cannot argue lower taxes, more spending and an improved budgetary position. That does not work. When was the last time the Liberal Party tried that ahead of an election? It was 2013—Tony Abbott and Joe Hockey—and look at the fiasco that that was. Both lost their jobs inside the first term of that government because they made promises that they could not possibly achieve.

You cannot come into this place, like those opposite do, and argue that you can reduce taxes, then argue on the other hand that you need to spend more money on a range of things—one need only look at their contributions in the budget debate so far as to where they think they should spend more money or where less money should be raised—and then think that you can improve the territory’s fiscal position. It is simply not possible.

We have heard it all before from the Liberal Party—from Tony Abbott and Joe Hockey; from Campbell Newman and Tim Nicholls in Queensland; from Mike Baird and Barry O’Farrell in New South Wales; from Denis Napthine and Ted Baillieu in Victoria; from Will Hodgman and Peter Gutwein in Tasmania; from Adam Giles in the Northern Territory; and from Colin Barnett and Mike Nahan in WA. We have seen it across the country and we have seen it in the last three years.

Make no mistake, Madam Deputy Speaker: the policy recipe from those opposite is a \$400 million black hole and no solution to traffic congestion. So Canberra will end up looking more and more like Sydney. The damage is clear. We will have a huge black hole in the budget, traffic congestion like Sydney and if you live in Gungahlin it will take you an hour to get to work in Civic.

Hundreds of jobs will be lost. It is not just the public servants who will lose their jobs but also the construction workers, the engineers and all of the people who are supporting the light rail project. These are Canberrans who spend their money in our economy, who have kids to feed and mortgages to pay. They will all lose their jobs if Mr Hanson is elected.

The Liberals cannot keep spending the light rail budget over and over again. They cannot do that, Madam Speaker. It is dishonest. They have already racked up hundreds of millions of dollars in commitments and they are making more and more as we get closer to polling day. But we know what will happen. Just as we saw federally and just as we have seen in every state and territory where the Liberals have come to government, there will be public sector job losses, breaches of promises, and premiers, treasurers and others losing their jobs. (*Time expired.*)

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.04): I thank members for their contributions. I would have to say that it sounds a little bit like a group of people preparing for opposition with those very negative speeches. Mr Barr is prone to talk about opposition for opposition’s sake and I think that is what we heard today. They sound like a future opposition. Mr Coe made the point that they had their speeches written yesterday and they were all full of negativity and based on the fact that I was going to be just talking about light rail. They had not prepared for the fact that we have made a significant announcement today about our future. We will back our nurses and we will back our public servants across the board. We will back our nurses and we will back our doctors, who have been calling for this for a long time.

This is a long-term solution. Mr Rattenbury was talking about the need for long-term solutions, and I agree with him. In health, this is the solution that the once-proud Labor government was calling for—not anymore—and it is about the long-term future

of our health system. When you look at the long-term transport future, there are many technological solutions coming on line, such as autonomous vehicles. Last week, the chief scientist of Telstra talked about all vehicles being driverless by 2030. There are technological changes ahead, but Mr Rattenbury wants to lock in an old, outdated, unsuitable transport system for Canberra. We are truly looking to the future in transport, in health and in education.

Mr Barr—and quite rightly, as the Treasurer—is concerned about the fiscal aspects. He missed a quote that I made when I started my speech. We were told by this government that the money was there. This is back when the government wanted to rebuild the Canberra Hospital. This is back when Ms Gallagher wanted to rebuild the Canberra Hospital and said it needed to be done, so much so that she put \$41 million into the budget. This was not just an election promise. This went a step beyond it. This is money put in the budget with a promise to do this before the last election, before the light rail came along. It is money that was then ripped out of the budget. Mrs Jones asked a question, and I will say it again: how will this \$800 million project be funded? It is a fair question to ask, I would say. Ms Gallagher responded:

I think the budget has shown the preparedness of this government to make provision for large infrastructure projects. We have made provision, and we have also made space within the budget to fund those projects.

Mr Barr is saying that this is some sort of black hole or is asking: where can the money come from? Ms Gallagher made it very clear that the money had been put aside for this project in the budget. Ms Gallagher said that—it is in the *Hansard*—just before she left this place. She said the money was in the budget, that provision had been made. There are two scenarios: that money is still there—the provision has been made and it is still there—or, as I said before, it has been moved somewhere. It just so happens that the amount that has been put in the budget for light rail—\$375 million—is exactly the same amount that was costed by ACT Health for stage 1 of a rebuild and expansion of the Canberra Hospital.

Ms Lawder: What a coincidence.

MR HANSON: What a bizarre coincidence indeed, Ms Lawder. Two scenarios are at play: we either take the money back from light rail or the provision is still there in the budget, unless Ms Gallagher was misleading us. I am sure she was not, because she used to be passionate about health. I remember those days. She and I had many barneys over the years—there is no doubt about it—but what I would say is that she was a believer. As Paul Keating would say, she was a true believer—in health and in education. When she was Chief Minister she would not have given education to the Greens; that is for sure. She was a true believer in Labor values, but she has gone now. She has gone, and with her absence goes the plan to rebuild the Canberra Hospital. What we have now are Mr Barr's rates changes and Mr Rattenbury's tram.

As much as we hear that we have got nothing positive to say—and this is what Mr Rattenbury said—let me be very clear that we have an enormous number of positive policies. Mr Coe's transport plan is so good that Ms Fitzharris is photocopying it and releasing elements of it. Our education plan—for Mr Rattenbury's edification—is new money. We are prepared to put money towards

our disabled kids, towards special needs kids. We think that is important; we think that is a priority. We are prepared to invest in that area because we think that there is a need, just as we think that there is a need to invest in the maintenance of our schools. Our kids are in substandard facilities in many schools that are over capacity. We are prepared to invest in those areas.

It is a bizarre world we have when we are being attacked by the Greens and the Labor Party for wanting to put money into hospitals and into supporting disabled kids. What a bizarre world. Their only answer to that seems to be, “We’re worried about a budget black hole.” I have just told you where the money comes from—from the tram; \$375 million of it. So there is no black hole. That is a myth; that is not true. I can point to the budget line item where that money is. Once, as we know, it was going to go to the Canberra Hospital, because Ms Gallagher told us. She is up on the hill now. She is probably looking at this—but I am sure she will stay loyal to her party—and I imagine in her heart of hearts she is glad to see that this announcement has been made today, as I know many clinicians are.

I was down at the Canberra Hospital today and I greeted and met many dozens of hospital workers as they came to work. We gave them a copy of our plan. Let me tell you: they were delighted. Their response was: “Get on with it, because we’ve been promised this by the Labor Party and they cancelled it. We want this to happen.” They are the people at the front line that know that this needs to be done and that this is a priority. Long enough we have heard the promises—the on again, the off again; it is in the budget, it is out of the budget. The plan now from Labor, as they said in estimates, is to crisis manage extreme and high-risk infrastructure. That is the short-sighted nature of this government and the way that they are running this health system, which is to crisis manage extreme and high-risk infrastructure. That is not the Liberal way.

This plan has been received well, as I said. A number of us were down near the Canberra Hospital greeting workers. It was received by many of them very enthusiastically. Their comment was not: “Should you do it? Shouldn’t you do it?” Their only comment was: “It’s time. Let’s get on with it. Let’s do this.” These people care passionately. Our doctors, our nurses, our allied health professionals, our wardsmen and our people working in that hospital system care passionately about what they do. Let us make sure that they are working in world-class facilities so they can do what they do best, and that is to deliver world-class health services. As the President of the ACT AMA has said:

It’s a bloody fantastic initiative, it is just really a great piece of policy and we would really like to support this.

He said:

There’s a very rapidly closing window of opportunity. The current facilities are only just holding on and if you delay this sort of infrastructure any longer it may well mean the wheels will come off the cart and the hospital won’t cope ... The hospital is at breaking point.

That is our doctors’ representative that is saying that. Our clinicians, our nurses, our workers and our patients deserve this. They are the people that turn up and work hard every day on the front line and they deserve this.

There are choices to be made. Let me tell you that when I was down at the Canberra Hospital this morning many people made it very clear to me that if the choice is between a tram and rebuilding the Canberra Hospital—and that seems to be the choice that this government has made—they think that a tram is the wrong choice. They want a hospital that is expanded, that is world class, and not the tram. We will not be supporting the amendment.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7

Noes 6

Mr Barr
Ms Berry
Ms Burch
Mr Corbell

Ms Fitzharris
Mr Gentleman
Mr Rattenbury

Mr Doszpot
Mrs Dunne
Mr Hanson
Mrs Jones

Ms Lawder
Mr Wall

Question so resolved in the affirmative

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Glebe Park land acquisition

MR COE (Ginninderra) (11.18): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

(a) regarding a block of land adjacent to Glebe Park (City Block 24, Section 65), that:

(i) in response to a question by then MLA, Ms Le Couteur, on 22 June 2011, the then Minister for Planning, Mr Corbell, said “It is not permitted to be used for residential development. The government does not support its use for residential development. The government will not consider any change to the Territory Plan that permits residential development or indeed any other development beyond that which has already been granted under the lease ... The lease sets out very clearly what can and cannot occur on that land. The fact is that, in relation to this particular site, there are very limited uses available for the leaseholder. They were aware of that when they purchased the lease, and they now have obligations under that lease to maintain the land in such a way, including in relation to its landscape, so it can continue to be enjoyed by those who also enjoy the formal designated Glebe Park area”;

- (ii) the previous leaseholders had a development condition (Clause 3a) within the Crown Lease requiring commencement of the erection of a parkland within the lease at a cost of not less than the sum of one million dollars within 12 months of the lease commencement and completion of the said development within 36 months of lease commencement;
- (iii) Mr Barr signed the Planning and Development (Land Acquisition Policy Framework) Direction 2014 (No. 1) on 14 June 2014 which stated “The Land Acquisition Policy Framework provides the principles that are to govern the exercise of the Land Development Agency (LDA) functions under the *Planning and Development Act 1997* ... The framework is to enable the LDA to pursue business opportunities for the acquisition of land available on the market ... All proposed acquisitions are to be assessed against the principles and associated tests provided in this Land Acquisition Policy Framework. All tests must be followed for an acquisition ... [acquisitions] below \$5 million—agreement by the LDA Board with advice to the Minister for Economic Development or the Minister responsible for administering Chapter 4 of the *Planning and Development Act 1997*”;
- (iv) the ACT Government received an “Amended Valuation Report”, dated August 2014, that valued the block at \$950 000 to \$1 050 000;
- (v) the ACT Government subsequently received a “Valuation Advice” dated May 2015 that gave a valuation recommendation of \$3 600 000 to \$3 800 000;
- (vi) the LDA Board meeting of 27 August 2015 had an agenda item “Land Acquisition Policy Framework Interpretation” and resolved that “Land acquisitions constituting new land development opportunities outside the LDA’s core business of delivering the Indicative Land Release Program to be subject to the Land Acquisition Policy Framework”;
- (vii) the ACT Government acquired the 12 335m² block in September 2015;
- (viii) the Chief Minister, Mr Barr, told the Assembly on 24 September 2015 that “My understanding is that the Land Development Agency, through its strategic acquisitions capability, has entered into negotiations. I am not certain yet as to whether those have been finalised; I will take that part of the question on notice”;
- (ix) an LDA official told a committee hearing on 5 November 2015 regarding property acquisitions “With Glebe Park, again, that was classified as a strategic acquisition for a number of different reasons”;
- (x) later in the same hearing, an LDA official stated that rather than being a strategic acquisition, the Glebe Park purchase was a project based acquisition;

- (xi) in a response to a question on notice to the Standing Committee on Planning, Environment and Territory and Municipal Services (Question No. 1), Mr Barr said on 23 November 2015 that the purchase was a “business as usual” purchase;
 - (xii) on 4 August 2016, Mr Barr said regarding the authority for the purchase “The board provided a delegation to the Chief Executive Officer of the Land Development Agency in relation to the city to the lake project”;
 - (xiii) on 3 August 2016, Mr Barr said that he is not aware of Aquis having any rights or options to City Block 24, Section 65;
 - (xiv) on 4 August 2016, Mr Barr said “No, the government purchased the block primarily for the purpose of stormwater management”;
 - (xv) the price paid for the block was \$4 180 235.31 and was calculated on the basis that 122 units would be built; and
 - (xvi) the Government has stated that the LDA Board was only informed of the purchase after the purchase was made;
- (2) further notes:
- (a) the Land Acquisition Policy Framework makes no mention of any other provision to purchase land;
 - (b) until the LDA Board Meeting of 27 August 2015, it appears that the only document governing acquisitions was the Land Acquisition Policy Framework; and
 - (c) it appears the LDA has developed their own mechanism to purchase land without adhering to the Land Acquisition Policy Framework direction; and
- (3) calls on the Government to provide to the Assembly by the last sitting day of this Assembly:
- (a) the reason the higher of the two valuations was accepted;
 - (b) the reason why a third valuation was not sought, given the large variance in the first two valuations;
 - (c) the reason why a valuation based on residential development was accepted despite the fact that the Government has stated that the site would not be used for such a purpose;
 - (d) the reason why the Government did not pursue a compulsory acquisition through the *Lands Acquisition Act 1994*;
 - (e) the details of the stated delegation allowing for the acquisition;
 - (f) whether the former leaseholder had complied with their previous investment requirements;

- (g) the date the Minister or his office was first informed of the intention to purchase the block and the date the Minister or his office was advised that the purchase had been made;
- (h) the rights or options that Aquis have on the block;
- (i) the meeting dates where Aquis and the ACT Government or their representatives discussed development potential on this block;
- (j) the current policy document which is being used to determine when the Land Acquisition Policy Framework applies and when business as usual acquisitions can be made;
- (k) the policy document in place at the time of the acquisition used to determine when the Land Acquisition Policy Framework applies and when business as usual acquisitions can be made;
- (l) the dates the LDA Board approved the policies listed in parts (3)(j) and (k);
- (m) the evidence to support that the LDA can purchase land separate to the Land Acquisition Policy Framework;
- (n) the plans or concept design for the stormwater infrastructure;
- (o) the intended date to start construction of the stormwater infrastructure;
- (p) the original City to the Lake Project Plan and the date it was approved by the LDA Board;
- (q) the original or revised City to the Lake Project Plan which included City Block 24, Section 65 and the date it was approved by the LDA Board;
- (r) was a probity adviser used in conjunction to purchase of the acquisition;
- (s) were there any conflicts of interest perceived or real by staff or board members relating to the acquisition that were declared or undeclared;
- (t) the date the LDA Board was presented with the two valuations for the block;
- (u) when did the Chief Financial Officer sign off on the purchase; and
- (v) information detailing the alignment of the purchase with ACT Planning Strategy or any other relevant Government strategic spatial planning documents.

I bring forward today a very important issue that goes to the integrity of this government. For too long it seems the LDA has been driving the government. For too long the LDA has had the ability to make or break seemingly any project and any plan. I believe that the LDA is overstepping the mark and that the scope of its operations has become too broad. Of course, there are many talented and committed people who work there. However, I believe many of them are being asked to do things that they simply should not be asked to do.

I am very concerned about the processes used to purchase land in and around Canberra. There are concerns about the government's acquisition of land adjacent to Glebe Park, which is the substance of today's motion.

The story is as follows. The land in question, city block 24 section 65, was on a market lease from May of 2007. The lease is 12,335 square metres and it was quite restrictive. Only a small hospitality venue was allowed to be constructed on the site, to a maximum GFA of 650 metres. It is important to note that the lease did not allow for residential development. There was also a development condition, 3a, within the crown lease requiring commencement of the erection of a parkland within the lease at a cost of not less than the sum of \$1 million within 12 months of the lease commencement and completion of the said development within 36 months of lease commencement.

This was an issue a few years ago. The Greens raised it in the Assembly in 2011. In response, Minister Corbell, who was at the time the planning minister, said:

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

Importantly, the then planning minister, Mr Corbell, said:

The government will not consider any change to the territory plan that permits residential development or indeed any development beyond that which has already been granted under the lease.

He would not approve residential at the site, Madam Deputy Speaker. Fast forward a few years and the government sought a valuation. A thorough document was provided on 25 August 2014 valuing the property at \$950,000 to \$1,050,000. It was based on the market value. The government chose not to accept this valuation and, perhaps wisely, sought a second opinion. It was received in the form of a valuation advice of May 2015. This time, the format of the valuation was quite different. The text included:

The proponents of the land wish to develop part of the land with a residential apartment complex which occupies 2,500 square metres of the footprint of the site with the balance being public open space and interface. The current scheme provides for an eight (8) level building above basement car parking and is to yield some 122 units.

It goes on:

The market value of the site will represent the existing value of the site plus a percentage of the development rights resulting from a lease variation and payment of LVC.

So, despite the fact that Minister Corbell had said that residential would not be allowed on the site, the government was told that if 122 apartments were allowed to be built on this site it would be worth \$3.6 to \$3.8 million. That is wildly different from the 47-page valuation which was provided to the government in the previous year.

You would think that when the LDA received a valuation for \$1 million and then another for \$3.8 million they would have preferred the first. You would think they would have at least asked for a third valuation. However, they ignored the first valuation and went with the valuation based on 122 units being built on the site, despite the fact that the government had stated, and I quote Mr Corbell from 2011:

It is not permitted to be used for residential development. The government does not support its use for residential development.

Sure enough, on 8 September last year, \$4.1 million—I believe that amount includes GST—was paid for the block by the LDA.

There is the first issue for us to consider—the amount that was paid. Now let me go to the second issue: under what authority was the block actually purchased?

Under the Planning and Development Act 2007 the LDA has its authority. However, on 14 June 2014, the Minister for Economic Development, Mr Andrew Barr, issued a notifiable instrument stating:

I direct the Land Development Agency to act in accordance with the principles of the Land Development Agency—Land Acquisition Policy Framework, attached as a Schedule to this Instrument, when exercising the Agency’s functions under the *Planning and Development Act 1997*.

It goes on. Paragraph 1.1 in the schedule says:

The Land Acquisition Policy Framework provides the principles that are to govern the exercise of the Land Development Agency ... functions under the *Planning and Development Act 1997*. The framework also supports the ACT Government’s *Statement of Governance Arrangements* for the Land Development Agency.

Paragraph 2.1 says:

All proposed acquisitions are to be assessed against the principles and associated tests provided in this Land Acquisition Policy Framework. All tests must be followed for an acquisition.

Paragraph 2.2.1 says:

The following thresholds and decision makers apply to all LDA land acquisitions:

- a. below \$5 million—agreement by the LDA Board with advice to the Minister for Economic Development or the Minister responsible for administering Chapter 4 of the *Planning and Development Act 1997* ...

Madam Speaker, there is no other framework; there is no other option. The planning and development land acquisition policy framework direction of 2014 is the LDA's guiding document.

However, it seems the LDA did not like this policy, and the LDA established a way to determine when this direction from the minister applies and when it does not. Over a year after the direction was issued, the LDA board, on 27 August 2015, endorsed a new policy or guideline, which somehow overrides the minister's direction, which was notified to the Assembly. Conveniently, the acquisition of this particular block occurred a couple of weeks later.

However, in September and November, after the acquisition had been made, an LDA official and the Chief Minister were claiming that the block was purchased by strategic acquisition and therefore in accordance with the direction that Mr Barr had issued. However, another LDA official then changed the explanation and said it was a project-based acquisition. This is the story that the government has run with ever since.

How the LDA can delegate away the minister's direction is beyond me. The direction states that the LDA board must approve acquisitions under \$5 million, but that seems to have been ignored. We know that, because the head of the LDA has advised us that he informed the board after the acquisition was made. Of course, this is a very serious governance issue. The board appears to have been sidestepped by the agency, and the responsibilities of board members seem to have been compromised.

The first valuation was a year before the block was acquired, and the second valuation advice was about three months before. There was plenty of time to take that acquisition to the LDA board. There was plenty of time to show those valuations to the LDA board. However, we just do not know, and I suggest that the LDA board was never shown those valuations.

The second issue is the fact that the authority backing up the purchases seems to be lacking.

To add to this, even if we do accept that the board could issue a guideline to get around the minister's direction—that is, the land acquisition policy framework—that does not explain how the government claims to have made three other purchases of land outside that framework in the first half of 2015. Let me reiterate this. The board apparently agreed a way to buy land by not complying with the minister's direction on 27 August 2015, yet land was acquired in December of 2014, January of 2015 and June of 2015 without complying.

Even if you accept that this particular block in question was given authority by this new guideline of 27 August 2015, it does not explain why the previous three

acquisitions earlier in the year were able to occur. Not only is the delegation from the LDA board of 27 August questionable, but three land purchases were made months before this board meeting apparently used the delegated power. At best, this is sloppy governance; at worst, it is a very serious matter.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is much that can be said about this situation. The first problem is that the wildly higher two-page valuation advice was accepted over the comprehensive 47-page valuation which was millions less. Secondly, the LDA did not comply with the minister's land acquisition policy framework and instead, I think, used a questionable delegation put in place two weeks before the settlement. Thirdly, this questionable delegation, which was put in place two or three weeks before this purchase, does not cover the fact that there were three other purchases earlier in the year which did not comply with the minister's direction, according to an answer which was provided by the agency.

Of course, given the government's dealings and desires to expand the casino project, it does not take much of an imagination to consider that perhaps this block was purchased to enable a casino expansion. Whilst the government says that it was purchased for stormwater reasons, we all know that actually doing any work with regard to this stormwater seems like many years away.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the opposition have been prudent in dealing with this issue cautiously and respectfully. We have gathered the facts despite many roadblocks, not the least of which was an FOI which took many months to be delivered and came back heavily redacted.

The opposition will continue to push for transparency on this issue. I am concerned about how many other issues there are in the LDA, and perhaps other agencies, that we do not know about. It is important that we as an Assembly make a stand against such poor processes and seek an explanation as to how this happened. I ask members to support what I believe is a reasonable request for information about this very serious matter.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Urban Renewal) (11.31): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all words after "That this Assembly", substitute:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the Land Development Agency (LDA) purchased Block 24 Section 65 City to relocate the Coranderrk Street water control pond as part of the City to the Lake project;
- (b) improvements to stormwater capacity in the inner north are crucial as population in the catchment grows;
- (c) early studies informing the City to the Lake project first identified Glebe Park as the preferred option for a relocated pond in 2013;

- (d) the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the LDA authorised payment for the land on 5 September 2015;
 - (e) the CEO of the LDA authorised this payment under the financial delegations delegated to the CEO by the LDA Board under the *Financial Management Act 1996*;
 - (f) this delegation was established by the LDA Board on 4 July 2003 under the then *Planning and Land Act 2002*;
 - (g) under these delegations, the Chief Financial Officer is not required to sign off on transactions;
 - (h) the CEO of the LDA has assured the Government and the Assembly this transaction was conducted in accordance with his financial delegation, which requires LDA funds to be used efficiently, ethically and effectively;
 - (i) the LDA acts commercially and negotiates on a commercial basis, using valuations as a guide to inform negotiations;
 - (j) the CEO of the LDA judged two valuations on the land were sufficient as the negotiated price for the land fell within the range of the valuations;
 - (k) where possible, the LDA pursues commercial negotiations in good faith before exploring compulsory acquisition, reducing legal risks and keeping legal costs low;
 - (l) no other entity, including the casino operator, has any right or option over this land, and the LDA has made no offer to sell the land to any party;
 - (m) none of the LDA Board members nor any LDA staff have declared a conflict of interest over this transaction;
 - (n) the Project Control Board—made up of the Directors-General from Transport Canberra and City Services, Economic Development, and the Environment and Planning Directorate, the Deputy Chief Executive of the LDA, the Under Treasurer, an LDA Board representative, and an external specialist on development and project finance, James Cain—and the Government Solicitor provide advice on probity for the project;
 - (o) the City to the Lake project has been subject to scrutiny and oversight by the Assembly and its committees; and
 - (p) the Auditor-General has informed the Assembly she is conducting a performance audit on this transaction, and will report her findings to the Assembly; and
- (2) looks forward to receiving the Auditor-General’s performance audit of this transaction in due course.”.

The government will not be supporting Mr Coe’s motion in its current form, but I have moved an amendment this morning that addresses the issues he has raised in his motion.

Speaking more broadly about the city to the lake project, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is one of the largest urban renewal projects underway in this country. It was born through the National Capital Authority amending the national capital plan under the Howard Liberal government in 2006, making way for changes at West Basin that will see it become a waterfront for all Canberrans—one that we can be proud of.

The objective of the city to the lake project is to knit the centre of our city together, to connect residents and people to one of our city's great assets, to change the face of the city and to bring more Canberrans and visitors to actually interact with our man-made lake. It is a game changer for Canberra, just as the establishment of the respective south banks in Brisbane and Melbourne were for those cities.

This project enhances Canberra as a city for its residents and its visitors and provides additional opportunities for business and for future generations. Importantly, the project provides a new public waterfront and 5½ hectares of new public parks, promenades, public squares and cafes, a 650-metre new boardwalk along the lake's edge, alongside a 55-metre wide promenade. Importantly, it connects our city centre to Lake Burley Griffin and to Commonwealth Park.

As the eminent Canadian planner Larry Beasley said on a recent visit to Canberra:

The lake is extraordinary—it gives a focal point, it gives a centre for a community to grow around and grow towards. The city needs to come to the lake, the city needs to be engaged with the lake and the lake with the city.

The city will bring energy to the lake and the lake brings enticement to the city ... it's what cities all over the world are searching for.

There is no wonder that Canberrans support this project. It is worth reminding Assembly members and the broader community that in 2013 when consultation began on this project we talked to 15,000 Canberrans. I repeat that: 15,000 Canberrans participated in the consultation, and 94 per cent agreed:

... the objectives and principles for City to the Lake fit well with their idea of a liveable Canberra and the city they want for the future.

That is the view of 94 per cent of the 15,000 Canberrans who participated. I am not sure that there have been many consultations in this city in the history of self-government that have had that many people participate—15,000. Let us put some perspective on this. I am aware there was a public meeting that about 200 people attended, 200 people who have a different view. But 94 per cent of those 15,000 who expressed a view in 2013 thought the project was the right way forward for Canberra. The same number—94 per cent of the 15,000—supported creating the new public waterfront and reconstructing Parkes Way so that we could extend streets from the city to this new lakefront.

That is not surprising, because a large part of this project is, of course, correcting the horrendous mistakes of the past. I do not think anyone today would suggest that putting a freeway—Parkes Way—between the city and the lake was a good planning

decision. The community has said loudly and clearly that they want us to correct this bad, bad planning decision of the past. The only way we can fix this grand error in the middle of our city is by redesigning Parkes Way to link the city to the lake so people can move seamlessly between the centre of our city and Lake Burley Griffin.

Some of the earlier studies on the city to the lake project identified that the Coranderrk Pond would need to be relocated and identified Glebe Park as the best place for a new water quality control pond. Relocating a pond is not in itself the sexiest, big city-shaping move, but in this case it serves multiple purposes. It is about improving water quality that flows into Lake Burley Griffin, but it also unlocks three important parts of the larger city to the lake project.

It means a better development outcome on the Parkes 3 site—section 3 opposite the CIT—and ensures there is more land available for that land release; it means we can improve that intersection and reduce congestion for Canberrans who travel through that area; and it means better water quality for Lake Burley Griffin because the current pond is not functioning as it should and, of course, we know we are going to see more people living in this catchment area.

We have, it would appear, a bipartisan policy position in favour of more people living in the CBD and more people living along the Northbourne Avenue corridor. So this water quality work needs to be done, and moving this pond is a good outcome for the community on many fronts.

The decision to purchase this block was made by the CEO of the LDA to realise the vision outlined in the city to the lake project. The mechanism used to acquire this land as part of the city to the lake project was in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2007, which outlines the functions of the LDA, including developing land, carrying out works for that development, enhancement of land, and carrying out strategic or complex urban development projects. This is the LDA exercising its functions in accordance with its statement of intent that is tabled in this place each year. The purchase was made in accordance with the CEO's delegations as established by the LDA board under the Financial Management Act 1996.

Before purchasing the land, the LDA commissioned two valuations: the first in August 2014 indicated a valuation of between \$950,000 and \$1.05 million excluding GST at an as-is market value and subject to all present lease conditions; the second valuation in September 2015 was provided by Colliers and recommended a \$3.6 million to \$3.8 million purchase price based on the suggested range to settle the matter in the order of \$2.8 million to \$4.6 million.

The LDA sought the second valuation to inform negotiations after agreement could not be reached with the land owner on a purchase price. It was considered reasonable by the LDA for its purposes, deeming it unnecessary to seek a further third valuation. The final purchase price of \$3.8 million excluding GST was consistent with the purchase price recommended by the second valuation and well within the total valuation range of \$2.8 million to \$4.6 million.

As members of this place are aware, ministers do not undertake commercial negotiations for land. We do not receive the valuations during negotiation processes and, rightly, we are not involved in the commercial decisions of the LDA. I was informed of the purchase by the CEO of the LDA. He has assured me and he has assured the Assembly that he did so within his delegation from the LDA board. The LDA board was also formally briefed on the purchase and noted at its September 2015 meeting that the CEO had agreed to purchase the block for \$4.18 million including GST, in accordance with authority delegated by them.

The Auditor-General is conducting a performance audit of this purchase. I will say again that I will not pre-empt her findings, and nor should anyone in this place. But let me conclude this morning by reiterating how important the project is to our city to change the way we interact with our lake and enliven our CBD. As the eminent Canadian planner Gordon Harris said on his recent visit to Canberra:

The opportunity for Canberra is to make it simply more liveable.

That is an opportunity we intend to pursue over time with our investment in this project. I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (11.44): I welcome Mr Coe bringing this motion to the Assembly in relation to the block of land adjacent to Glebe Park. It has been a topic of some public discussion and public speculation, and I think it is worth airing that in this place today. This is an interesting case. The relocation of the Coranderrk Street water control pond is a well-known project. Of itself it is not especially contentious. People recognise that the current water treatment pond in the middle of Parkes Way has its problems. From an engineering point of view it is not delivering what it is supposed to. Frankly, it is a bit stinky on occasions and we need to fix up our water quality issues in the urbanised inner north catchment.

Block 24 section 65 of the city has been identified as an appropriate and the preferred site for a pond, and this is the basis on which it was purchased. That part of it is not the contentious part of the story. It points to a sensible engineering approach, as best I can understand these things. Where it gets to then is the purchase process. I think that is the nub of what Mr Coe is raising today. His motion calls for a large amount of detailed information about this purchase, and that is the essence of it.

The Chief Minister's amendment has gone some way to providing that information. As a matter of principle, I agree this information should be made available, noting, of course, that there are probably some issues with commercial in-confidence in there somewhere. But the Chief Minister has in his amendment provided the answers to quite a number of the questions that Mr Coe has posed today.

The important part of this story is that the Auditor-General is currently undertaking a performance audit into this transaction in due course. Specifically, the performance audit will consider how the LDA conducted the purchase and whether or not this was in accordance with relevant legislation, policies, procedures and any other requirements. The audit will look into this in an enormous level of detail, as audits are wont to do, and much more thoroughly than we can in this place today. That audit report will come back to the Assembly and will be publicly released.

I believe in transparency not only around this transaction but also, of course, all government transactions and that the information can and should be made available. I think the Auditor-General's process is a good one to go through. I welcome the fact the Auditor-General is having a look at this, because it will clear up any questions that exist over this transaction.

Mr Barr has indicated in his amendment that the CEO of the LDA has assured the government and the Assembly that this transaction was conducted in accordance with his financial delegation, which requires the LDA funds to be used efficiently, ethically and effectively. That is the very question the Auditor-General is having a look at.

I do not propose to prejudge that matter today. I will wait for the Auditor-General's report. The information provided today goes some way to addressing that and I think the Auditor-General now plays a role there. I will be supporting Mr Barr's amendment today.

Mr Coe: I am shocked.

MR RATTENBURY: Mr Coe interjects across the chamber saying he is shocked. What is it, Mr Coe, you want here? We have the Auditor-General conducting an investigation, and I think that is the appropriate channel. The Auditor-General has all the powers to seek all of the documentation and provide a view to this place that will be an objective, thorough and complete review of the circumstances of this matter. I am satisfied that that is an appropriate way to proceed.

I do not accept the premise of the interjection, which is that we should do this in some limited way in the chamber today. That is exactly why we have these processes. As I talked about last week with the Greens' commitment at the election campaign to set up an integrity commission for the ACT, we believe it is about having the right mechanisms that can inform this place and this place can then decide what steps need to be taken.

I have some sympathy for Mr Coe's view that we need to look at the role of the LDA. That is the policy discussion we can have, and they are the policy discussions this place should have. But I am satisfied the Auditor-General is undertaking this investigation, and I look forward to seeing the results of that investigation. That is why I can support this amendment today, because it also notes that the Auditor-General's performance audit is taking place. That is the appropriate way to investigate the sorts of questions that have been posed here.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (11.49): I will speak to the amendment and close the debate. I am very disappointed that what I think are reasonable questions are not going to be supported by the Assembly today. I have, of course, already outlined the important issues underpinning my motion. They are: why was the higher valuation, \$3.8 million plus GST, accepted rather than the \$1 million figure? Why was a third valuation not sought? That is not answered here, either. Why did they adhere to the minister's directions in the land acquisition policy framework? Why did the LDA board find out after the purchase had been made, despite the fact that the valuations were in LDA's

possession for months and could easily have been shown to the board? What authority did the LDA have to delegate away the minister's direction and under what authority were the three other purchases made, given that they were acquired months before the LDA board approved the alternative purchasing method? We believe these are serious issues.

Paragraph 3 of my motion calls for information and documents that should readily be in the government's possession. We should get information about why they paid millions more than one of the valuations. We should know why they did not get another valuation. Why did they accept a valuation based on 122 apartments being built at the site, despite the fact that the government said there will never be apartments at the site?

Given the government is using the Land Acquisition Act in respect of land on Northbourne Avenue, which was a more pressing need, why is it that that option was not used here if they were not able to get a lower price? Under what delegation was the head of the LDA authorised to spend \$4.1 million on this purchase and, indeed, other land purchases given that the Planning and Development (Land Acquisition Policy Framework) Direction 2014 very clearly says:

All proposed acquisitions are to be assessed against the principles and associated tests provided in this Land Acquisition Policy Framework.

It is all very well to have another delegation. But, if you have actually got a specific direction from the minister, this comes first. This specific direction overrides a general delegation. The policy framework goes on to state:

The following thresholds and decision makers apply to all LDA land acquisitions

It states, "all LDA land acquisitions". So how can they use another delegation when this recent 2014 policy framework clearly states:

The following thresholds and decision makers apply to all LDA land acquisitions:

a. below \$5 million—agreement by the LDA Board with advice to the Minister for Economic Development ...

It is a very simple issue; a very, very simple one. Not only that; it is all very well for the minister to claim that they should not have anything to do with the LDA's activities, but in actual fact his own guidelines state that agreement by the Chief Minister and Treasurer is required for LDA acquisitions between \$5 million and \$20 million. He has to get involved. He cannot wash his hands of it. If it is over \$5 million, he has to get involved and, if it is over \$20 million, cabinet has to get involved.

What is more, just when Mr Barr said that he should not be getting involved, his own document, which he signed in June 2014, says:

The LDA Board may refer any acquisition below \$5 million to the government should it consider it is appropriate.

This is his own acquisition document which, as it says here, applies to “all LDA land acquisitions”. There is no option of it applying to some land acquisitions. There is no option to say, “Oh, but you can just bypass this and use a general delegation.” It states, “all land acquisitions”. That is why, of course, the Chief Minister’s amendment has a bit of wriggle room in paragraph 1(h), which states:

the CEO of the LDA has assured the Government and the Assembly this transaction was conducted in accordance with his financial delegation ...

There is a bit of wriggle room there. As for this amendment moved by Mr Barr, this is pretty much all in the public realm already. What we are looking for is information that is not in the public realm, such as: when was the minister told about this saga? What rights does the casino actually have for this block, because there are real doubts about that? When was development on this block first discussed with the casino? What is the policy for bypassing the notifiable instrument? What was the policy at the time that the other three acquisitions were made, which was before the LDA board approved this alternative strategy?

Of course, if the stormwater project is so important, when is it going to start and where are the plans? There are no plans for this stormwater project. There are a couple of concept drawings from a few years ago. But not only that; the government has already said that the focus of city to the lake is now West Basin. The focus of city to the lake is stated very clearly in LDA board meeting minutes. They are working on west of Commonwealth Avenue—not east of Commonwealth Avenue; not near the Coranderrk Pond. That is going to be years and years away. They are focusing on West Basin, which begs the question: why did they desperately need to buy this block of land?

If this block was part of the city to the lake project, when was this block incorporated into the plan and approved by the LDA board? We think this is a reasonable question. Did the government actually use a probity adviser? It is all very well for the Chief Minister to mention the Government Solicitor. Perhaps he could advise if the LDA consulted the Government Solicitor before purchasing this land and what the advice was.

It is also interesting that paragraph 1(m) of Mr Barr’s amendment states:

none of the LDA Board members nor any LDA staff have declared a conflict of interest over this transaction;

But that is not what I asked for. What I asked for was: were there any conflicts of interest, declared or otherwise? Were there any undeclared conflicts of interest? When, if ever, was the LDA board presented with the two valuations? When did the CFO approve the purchase? There are, of course, a lot of questions regarding this situation. I think we desperately need to get to the bottom of it. Further to this is: what information is there to suggest that this block actually does indeed rest with a broader planning strategy for the government?

I believe that these are reasonable requests for the Assembly to make. That is why I think it is very disappointing that, in effect, Mr Rattenbury wants to hide behind an Auditor-General's report which may or may not touch on these questions. Yes, it is going to touch on the subject. Of course it is, but is it going to actually bring all these answers into public? Maybe it will; maybe it will not. But we would be negligent as an Assembly if we knowingly have governance concerns but do not do anything about them.

All the questions that are raised in paragraph 3 of my motion I think should be asked by the Assembly. If we were doing our job, that is exactly what we would be doing. At its core, there was a very thorough 47-page valuation which went into great detail about this block, canvassed the fact that \$1 million was needed to be spent, canvassed the fact that you cannot do residential on it, canvassed the fact that it pretty much had virtually no property rights and, accordingly, said that it was worth \$950,000 to \$1,050,000.

Then you have a two-page document—a two-page document in contrast to the 47-page valuation—which says

The proponents of the land wish to develop part of the land with a residential apartment complex which occupies 2,500 square metres of the footprint ...

It goes on to state:

... an eight (8) level building above basement car parking and is to yield some 122 units.

That is the basis for the valuation, despite the fact that the lease does not allow residential, despite the fact that the government said there will not be residential, despite the fact that the government said it was going to be used for stormwater. This is a very serious question. It is a question that it seems Mr Rattenbury does not want to ask.

Ms Le Couteur was very interested in this when she was in the Assembly. But it seems that Mr Rattenbury is not. The government has seemingly paid \$3 million more than it had to. In addition, it does not have a clear delegation or authority to actually purchase it. Mr Rattenbury is siding with the government that has actually created this problem. I think that is very telling of just how close or how tight this coalition really is.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8		Noes 7	
Mr Barr	Ms Fitzharris	Mr Coe	Mrs Jones
Ms Berry	Mr Gentleman	Mr Doszpot	Ms Lawder
Ms Burch	Mr Hinder	Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall
Mr Corbell	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Question put:

That the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

Ayes 8		Noes 7	
Mr Barr	Ms Fitzharris	Mr Coe	Mrs Jones
Ms Berry	Mr Gentleman	Mr Doszpot	Ms Lawder
Ms Burch	Mr Hinder	Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall
Mr Corbell	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Emergency Services Agency

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (12.04): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of the emergency services to the ACT;
- (b) importance of the reliability of the 000 call centre and the importance of public confidence in the service;
- (c) the importance of staff morale in these life-saving fields;
- (d) the importance of local knowledge in bushfire preparedness and capability planning; and
- (e) the importance of the Government having the confidence of employees in this vital service; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) create a culture of confidence in the Emergency Services Agency (ESA);
- (b) take action to ensure ESA employees know they are equipped to undertake their role; and

(c) ensure ESA employees feel fully supported by the Government.

I am pleased to stand to speak today to the motion in my name on the notice paper. Just about every Canberra has experienced the need for one of our four emergency services bodies at one time or another, and everybody I know is incredibly grateful for the work that these hardworking men and women put in 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to ensure that our community is as safe as it can be—from Fire and Rescue, including the community fire units, to the ambulance officers and the Rural Fire Brigade and the SES. It is absolutely vital to the people of Canberra that they have complete confidence, when faced with an emergency and a need to ring 000, that they are guaranteed the very best response and the very best service we can possibly provide.

The minister's intention is to change the operational comm centre from being manned by experienced firefighters to being manned purely by call centre workers without the same level of experience of our operations on the ground. Many of our fires have expressed serious concern over this change, and there is potential for this approach to result in delays of service or the misdirection of services reaching those in need in the most timely manner possible. This could result in a greater loss of property or, in a worst-case scenario, loss of life.

These questions have to be asked: what is the purpose of changing the comm centre from being manned partly by firefighters to one manned purely without them? What is the benefit of the change? What is the problem, exactly, that the government are trying to solve with the change? They have not been clear. Or is it an attempt to save money or to take more operational work away from the men and women in uniform in our fire and rescue service?

We have trained firefighters who innately understand the operational process when responding to a structure fire or a range of other types of rescue operations. In the call centre at present there is one senior and three lower ranked firefighters working as a unit together to dispatch the correct appliance when there is a fire. There are clearly concerns as to whether or not call operators will have the ability to determine that a rescue requires one truck or many trucks, aerial firefighter capacity, specialised breathing apparatus, hazmat, compressed air foam systems or all such operations.

Is it the intention that a call centre manned by public servants will merely triage calls and forward them to an available fire station? If so, does this not just create an additional delay which could result in greater loss of property, greater distress or, as I said, in a worst-case scenario a delayed result that could cause loss of life? I am concerned that these proposed changes are not necessarily focused on getting better outcomes for our community or having a better response time but rather are cost-cutting measures.

Last year when the budget showed an increase in the emergency services levy for each ratepayer of \$66 per year, up from \$130 to \$196 per year—another massive increase to the government's rates and charges, as we have come to expect from the Barr Labor government—with expected increases of \$40 a year each year after that across the forward estimates, I note the Chief Minister said:

I guess the very simple proposition I would put to people is a member of your family is having a heart attack and you want an ambulance to be there as quickly as possible.

This is, of course, true. We do want the services to be able to respond as quickly as possible and with the right help. But it again begs the question about the plan to change the comm centre from an operational hub manned with and including firefighters who innately understand the crisis as it is unfolding to having the call centre manned with operators only who do not have that operational experience.

Mr Barr went on to say:

If you've been in a road accident, if something terrible has happened and you need our emergency services—

and in the case of a road accident those who operate the jaws of life in this city are the Fire and Rescue—

are you quibbling over a few dollars?

Again this shows the Chief Minister's lack of understanding not only of the pressures on families across Canberra but the cost cutting that seems to be going on in the ESA which is, at this point, focused in some ways on the call centre. This government continues to gouge money out of the family budget. As some say, it is using the family home as an ATM to continually withdraw greater and greater volumes of money. It then attempts to cut costs within the comm centre and ESA by removing staff with the most expertise.

I understand that Minister Corbell has been known to remind the firies that he has a long memory. As a result of the United Firefighters Union dissociating from the ALP, it is perceived that the minister is intentionally making life difficult for our hardworking firies. I note he is not even in the chamber when this important debate is going on. Maybe he is working on his valedictory speech for tomorrow. Maybe that is more important to him.

As for the ambos, many ambulance officers have told me of the serious growing pains they have experienced as their workforce has increased from 60 on-road officers some years ago to nearly 240. And I applaud this change. With the growth and change comes a range of challenges. Getting management structures right, developing cohesive teams, ensuring the right mix of skills and experience and capability have, at times, been a challenge. This rapid increase in staff over such a relatively short period implies that perhaps workforce planning before that point had been significantly lacking and, as in so many areas of government, we find the government being reactive once a great problem has occurred.

Cultural change is something many in the Ambulance Service have worked on and have grappled with, and I applaud their efforts. The minister has some questions to answer around this issue and how change is tracking for our hardworking, vital ambulance staff.

As for the Rural Fire Service, Val Jeffery MLA spoke in his maiden speech in this place just recently about the increased red tape and bureaucratic nature that has been overlaid onto our Rural Fire Service and how this bureaucratic approach has hamstrung those who live in rural regions, who have the most to lose and who understand innately the challenges and the dangers as well as the methods and operational requirements of their unique environment. Sometimes those on our rural properties have intergenerational knowledge of the way our land behaves and our weather interacts with it; of the unique challenges of the landscapes that they have lived with, farmed or lived around, operate and respond to. The wealth of local knowledge and understanding of bushfire preparedness seems to have been eroded. It is a classic case of the left of politics believing that only governments and advisers know best and have all the answers.

The reason I have called on the government to create a culture of confidence in our emergency service men and women is to ensure that those on the front line know that they are not only equipped but supported by their government to undertake their roles. They put their bodies and their hearts on the line. Their families let them go and do that for our benefit. The feedback I have had from so many on the front line of the ESA is that they do not feel backed, they do not feel supported, they do not feel they have the confidence that the minister is behind them; that every time they turn around there is another attack on morale or on a knowledge base that they have built up, and they do not believe that the government is backing them up. They feel as though their hard work goes unrecognised and is never enough and that the government is always looking for more ways to cut costs in this area.

In March last year a report was handed to government, a report commissioned from an apparent expert. This expert is now on an executive contract and is referred to by some as a toe cutter. It seems a medieval kind of term. The report was a peer review of ACT Fire and Rescue Service management and command structures. Interestingly enough the reputation of the expert asked to prepare this report and to do the analysis is someone who cuts most savagely. He was described in the *Canberra Times* as “Former Buckinghamshire fire chief ... is set to [head] the ... structural reform agenda ... to drive efficiency in the ambulance, fire, and state emergency services”. He was also expected to solve cultural tensions in the call centre.

I would like to suggest to the minister that cultural tension is not always a negative. My husband served this country for many years in the military and for the last few years has been successfully deployed inside the public service as a person in uniform. The cultural tension that is created to some extent by putting uniformed and non-uniformed people together is a creative one. It is a productive one. It means that those who are not front-line operational receive advice, thoughts, information and cultural experience from those who have been in uniform, and vice versa. It allows there not to be a breakdown between different areas, those who are working predominantly as public servants versus those who are in uniform. It is a good tension, and civil and uniformed people working together can get the best outcomes and very many times can stave off problems before they occur.

The UFU head in the ACT, Greg McConville, said at the time that this report was being handed to the government:

We now have a dangerous development where a toecutter from the UK has been announced as overseeing the reform agenda.

If anybody questions the nature of this type of report and how it, in and of itself, could have had and may well have had a significantly chilling effect on the morale of those in uniform in our fire service, the actual review begins with a quote:

It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out nor more doubtful of success nor more dangerous to handle than to initiate a new order of things, for the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order, this lukewarmness arising partly from the incredulity of mankind who do not truly believe in anything new until they have had actual experience of it.

It is not a quote from a great firefighting operative but a quote from Machiavelli. Who would commission someone to bring in a report to bring change or benefit for ACT residents who has such a low idea of human ability to change or to grapple with some new ideas? I find this astounding from a left-wing government that is constantly talking about change. No wonder this report had a chilling effect on the morale of the people in our ESA when it began with a quote from Machiavelli of all people.

I note that the main experience of this person is in the physical domain of Buckinghamshire in the UK, which only a cursory look at Google maps tells you is a very green area all year round and not the type of bush capital that we deal with in the ACT. Having said that, there may have been some advice in the report that was of use on management issues; but I think the way it was gone about was very unhelpful. The report also recommended things which have put some sort of fear into the uniformed firefighters on the ground of the possibility of stations not being crewed at night time which also would, I presume, affect response times.

Fire and Rescue are a first responder to incidents that include not just fire but also rescue. In the last week firefighters resuscitated a four-week old baby. They attended the tragic case of the crane rollover at the University of Canberra. Some years ago ACT Fire and Rescue saved the life of a teenage girl, whom I happen to know, whose father was attempting to kill her. They are highly respected. Contrary to what the government is putting around, although the number of structure fires may be down, it seems that the number of heads getting stuck, fingers getting stuck, animals getting stuck, workplace incidents and other incidents has been rising and that the uses that we are putting our fire service to is growing.

The government, in backing up this report to suggest cuts to some of the ways that we deliver these services on the ground, is using a selective figure that the number of fires that Fire and Rescue are responding to has reduced. I believe that is the case. However, if you look overall at the number of events that are being responded to, the report and the figures backing it suggest that the numbers overall have not reduced but have increased by over 20 per cent.

I respect our firies, our CFUs, our Rural Fire Service and our ambos. I respect the work they do. I work with our ESA personnel and respect their morale, their work and the fact that they put themselves on the line every day of the year, day and night, to be with us at our time of most need. I take my hat off to them and I do not think that the government's method of going about change has been a particularly helpful one.

I know that the minister is known for saying that he has a long memory and that he remembers that the UFU is not affiliated with the ALP anymore. The distinct impression that is being given on the ground is that that means that the uniformed firies and some other members of our ESA are up for being cut as a first point of call, whereas the people of Canberra would expect quite differently.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for the Environment and Climate Change) (12.20): I move the amendment circulated in my name to Mrs Jones's motion:

Omit paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) calls on the ACT Government to continue to:

- (a) create a culture of confidence in the Emergency Services Agency (ESA);
- (b) take action to ensure ESA employees know they are equipped to undertake their role; and
- (c) ensure ESA employees feel fully supported by the Government.”.

Canberra's status as the bush capital makes us uniquely vulnerable to natural disasters such as bushfire and extreme heat events. This necessitates that our emergency arrangements remain of the highest order. The government have always recognised the importance of our emergency services and we have significantly invested in the delivery of emergency services. The Auditor-General's report into bushfire preparedness released last year noted that the government had increased the ESA's funding since 2004-05 from \$44.8 million to over \$104.3 million, or a 133 per cent increase in resourcing for our emergency services. The government will continue to invest in our emergency services capability to support our career and volunteer staff and make sure that our services are contemporary to meet the needs of our growing city.

I will turn now to the importance of the reliability of the 000 call centre and its importance in the delivery of emergency services. It is accepted that the role of the comm cen, or 000 call centre, is often a difficult one. Our call-takers deal with callers who are often very distraught. I am confident that our comm cen staff are well trained, highly skilled and supported to initiate the most appropriate response to each incident. As minister, I also have complete confidence in the procedures, processes and systems of improvement that are in place which are designed to assist our comm cen staff in continuing to provide this very high level of service to the community.

In June this year the government announced reforms to the operations of the comm cen. That announcement did not come overnight or out of the blue. It was the result of a number of years of consultation with staff, volunteers, unions and other stakeholders and it included feedback from groups, such as the rural fire brigade captains group, who supported reforms to the comm cen because it would allow for better integration between the comm cen and incident management teams during bushfires.

Our announcement signals the government's intention for a one communication centre model where, regardless of whether the emergency is a medical one, a bushfire, a house fire, a motor vehicle accident, a storm or another emergency, a call-taker in the comm cen will have the ability to action the call. The reforms will enhance the ESA's ability to scale up its capacity, particularly during major emergencies, and it means we will not be taking extra firefighters away from the front line where they are needed most.

The one comm cen model will also allow the ESA to explore options to better use technology to provide better services to our community. This includes integrating systems to facilitate the provision of information between emergency services and the public with the faster release of media alerts and updates, as well as the update of relevant websites. The announcement will also boost front-line firefighting capacity across the ACT. It will mean more firefighters available to respond to incidents and to continue important prevention initiatives to keep our community safe.

The latest reforms to the ESA comm cen continue the transition to a model that commenced in 2010 when our Ambulance Service moved to its highly effective call-taker dispatch system. This allowed more paramedics to get back on the road, to get back into ambulances, to treat patients out in the community. We are now looking at how this can be applied in relation to the firefighting services, and the aim is to have changes implemented from 1 July 2017.

Staff morale is, of course, important in any workplace and the ESA, through its strategic reform agenda and associated strategies, such as the blueprint for change and our women in emergency services strategy, has a number of key actions and measures already publicly identified. Madam Deputy Speaker, you as my predecessor in this portfolio launched the blueprint for change in March last year. The blueprint provides the framework for ACTAS staff to address workforce concerns around trust, conflict resolution and leadership, and its broad objective is to support and foster a culture of professionalism throughout the ACTAS workforce.

Equally, our focus in the women in emergency services strategy is to promote the greater representation of women in the rank and file of our emergency services and to provide a pathway for our services to better reflect the community they serve by increasing the service's gender diversity. The most recent ACT Fire and Rescue firefighter recruitment process specifically targeted women as part of this strategy. As a result, we saw that 25 per cent of successful applicants in the Fire and Rescue recruit college for June this year were women. A key focus of the women in emergency services strategy is to ensure, at least in the future, that at least 50 per cent of places are obtained by women.

In relation to bushfire preparedness and capability planning, the ESA has prepared a strategic bushfire capability framework that identifies our bushfire response capability. This government has invested heavily in that physical capability. As of August this year, the ACT has 28 heavy tankers, 10 compressed air foam tankers, 15 medium tankers, 15 light units, 15 pumpers, two contracted helicopters for the bushfire season, and heavy plant and support vehicles. We have over 350 paid career firefighters, over 530 Rural Fire Service volunteers and 150 trained firefighters in the parks and conservation parks brigade as part of the Environment and Planning Directorate.

In support of our crews and vehicles, we have also invested in our fire tower capability, fire weather analysis, media liaison, mapping specialists, communications specialists and wider logistical and support capability. This is supported by a whole-of-government response to major disasters through the ACT emergency coordination centre, which coordinates with our hospitals, our schools and our evacuation centres and manages road closures, utilities, and liaises with national institutions such as the Department of Defence.

I am very pleased to put it on the record that we have a comprehensive investment in new capability. This government has gone further: we have new fleet acquisitions and station upgrades for ACT Fire and Rescue and the Rural Fire Service; we have extra personnel in Fire and Rescue; we have improved communications and personal protective equipment; we have built a new ESA headquarters; we have built a new training centre and helibase; and we have the contracted helicopters we need for bushfire fighting during the fire season.

We have also invested in education. The Canberra bushfire ready community education campaign will continue to be used to raise the community's awareness of bushfire risk and encourage them to plan and prepare for bushfire. We have, of course, updated our strategic bushfire management plan, version 3 of which was tabled in the Assembly in September 2014. We also continue to invest in critical services, such as the community fire unit program, which plays a key role in building the capability of ordinary citizens who live on the bushfire risk interface in our suburbs—capabilities which they need to help protect their homes in the event of fire.

Mrs Jones talks about the importance of creating a culture of confidence in our emergency services and about supporting our ESA employees and volunteers in their role and making sure they feel fully supported. My amendment today talks about the importance of continuing to do that. That is what our ESA management team and the government seek to do each and every day by investing in capability, by making sure we have the consultative frameworks right, by making sure that we grow our ability to respond to fires and by making sure we continue to focus on the best possible service delivery to our community. I look forward to members' support of the amendment.

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 12.30 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice
Government—clubs policy

MR HANSON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, I refer to an article in the *CityNews* today by the CEO of ClubsACT. Minister, if clubs do close down or become unviable because of your government's policies will you be taking over the funding of all the community groups that are currently supported by our community clubs?

MR BARR: The question is hypothetical, in the first instance, and the government of course does provide considerable support to community organisations of a magnitude way greater than that provided by clubs.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Chief Minister, if your policies do force clubs to close, will you be employing all the staff who are currently employed by community clubs?

MR BARR: The question is hypothetical. One would anticipate, given the rapid growth in the tourism and hospitality sector in this city where, in the past 12 months, we have seen a near 20 per cent increase in employment, that there will be plenty of additional activity in tourism and hospitality in Canberra, particularly with our record levels of domestic and international tourism and, with the direct international flights starting next month, an expectation of considerable growth in the tourism and hospitality sector in Canberra, and employment will flow from that.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Chief Minister, will the government take over the maintenance of community sporting ovals currently maintained by the clubs?

MR BARR: That is again a hypothetical question and presupposes certain outcomes that I do not think there is any basis in fact to assert.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Chief Minister, will all clubs be granted free lease variations just like the Labor Club in Braddon?

MR BARR: Apparently, that is Liberal Party policy. Whilst it is not the preferred position of the Labor Party, we believe these things should be assessed on the basis of community benefit—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Wall interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Wall!

MR BARR: rather than just granting a blanket exemption for any form of lease variation. I would point out to any resident who lives anywhere near a club site that it is open slather if the Liberals win this election. Any form of redevelopment could occur because they have given a blank cheque—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Mr Hanson!

MR BARR: for planning variations and they will apply no tax. That was the position that the Liberal Party put, that there would be complete open slather. So if you live next-door to a club in this city, you should expect that there will be dramatic change in what is allowed to be developed on that club site if those opposite are elected. That is what they have said: no lease variation charge at all, no application of the current law. And I remind Mr Doszpot that the law was applied, as it should have been, to that variation, just as it has been to other club lease variation requests.

Water—Tharwa supply

MR JEFFERY: Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Minister, in *Hansard* of 26 November 2014, you stated you had given some direction to EPD to have a look at what could be done with the water supply system in Tharwa. Further on you indicated that you had given instructions to EPD to act even before the Tharwa master plan stage 1 is completed and that those studies were underway. Minister, what directions were given to EPD at that time?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Jeffery for his question and, of course, his hard work in the Tharwa region for many years. He is right; I had given direction to EPD to look at the water supply for Tharwa after visiting with Mr Jeffery. We had a look at the opportunities for improving the water supply for Tharwa. We had a look at the current water supply, which is taking water from the Murrumbidgee River and pumping it up to a very old tank at the top of the water supply area for the Tharwa area. It supplies water for the town, but it is not potable water; it is water from the river and looks at water application for urban open space as well as firefighting.

I asked EPD to have a look at it. They have given me some results so far advising that we need to improve that water supply. I took a brief to cabinet and got support in this budget for improving the water supply for Tharwa. We have allocated funding in the budget for renewing the water supply for Tharwa and also requesting from the commonwealth government equal funding for that water supply.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Jeffery.

MR JEFFERY: What studies or assessments were undertaken or made by EPD in response to your instructions?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Jeffery for the supplementary. EPD and the engineers had a look at the opportunity to take water from the river in a more, if you like, modern system and also looked at his request for taking water from the ACT city system, from the nearest suburb which is, of course, in the Lanyon valley—the Lanyon suburbs of Banks and Conder. The pricing for that, on the early indications, was quite large, so it was decided that to supply that water it would be better if we took it from the river. I can give him some more detail, on notice, on the actual studies taken during that process.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, when can the residents of Tharwa expect to have the water supply renewed?

MR GENTLEMAN: The renewed water supply? When the federal funding comes through as well, and we will work with the residents of Tharwa—with Mr Jeffery as well, and of course the Rural Fire Service—to ensure that we can put the best—

Mrs Jones: When?

MR GENTLEMAN: As soon as we possibly can.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, have all the studies surrounding the development and further planning for Tharwa been made public and could the Minister provide the studies and recommendations to the Assembly?

MR GENTLEMAN: Studies and plans in regard to the water system? No I do not believe we have made them public at this stage but I will get as much detail as I can and bring it back to the Assembly.

Canberra Hospital—upgrading

MRS JONES: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, I refer to the words of Professor Robson in the *Canberra Times* of 10 August about the Canberra Hospital when he said:

The current facilities are only just holding and if you delay this sort of infrastructure any longer it may well mean the wheels will come off the cart and the hospital won't cope ... The hospital is at breaking point.

Minister, why is the government delaying making major improvements at the Canberra Hospital when it is at breaking point?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mrs Jones for her question. The government is not doing that. Indeed, in the current budget the government has set aside over \$100 million for investment in upgrades to health infrastructure, predominantly at the Canberra Hospital. That is the commitment we have made. I note the Liberal Party's

announcement this morning about what they want to do at the Canberra Hospital and I note the highly unrealistic time frame that they have attached to that commitment. If it is so urgent that they believe this work needs to be done now, they should have done more work on analysing when that infrastructure should be delivered, because the very clear advice to me from Health is that whilst Mr Hanson is saying that that project will be completed in 2019, the earliest advice I have from ACT Health on that matter is 2021, nearly three years later.

What is critically important is the delivery of an efficient public hospital system for our city. This facility that the Liberals have committed to delivers a net increase of approximately 30 beds. We are delivering, through our hospital utilisation plan, the equivalent of an additional 50 beds through better bed utilisation.

Mr Hanson cannot have it both ways. He cannot stand up in this place and criticise the government for the cost of running the public health system and then not do anything to improve efficiency in the delivery of public health services. What he is doing is building more infrastructure without addressing the efficiency question. The facts are that we can deliver the equivalent of an extra 50 beds into our public hospital system right now through better bed utilisation rather than spending nearly \$400 million, which is what Mr Hanson is proposing, for a net gain of only 30 beds. Those are the real dilemmas that we have—aside, of course, from how they are going to pay for it—in terms of the Liberals' plan.

In contrast, and in response to the question from Mrs Jones, what I would say is that we are investing over \$100 million in upgrades to the Canberra Hospital and we are achieving better bed utilisation to the equivalent of 50 additional beds in the public hospital system. That means more people are getting the care they need in facilities that are contemporary and modern to meet their needs.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, what will be the impact of the government's continued delays to making significant improvements to the hospital—improvements that were promised by Katy Gallagher—on the many thousands of patients in the Canberra region who use the hospital?

MR CORBELL: The impact we are having now is on improving access and timeliness to public health services. That is what Canberrans expect. As I have outlined in my previous answer, we are increasing the number of beds available in the public hospital system by 50 through better bed utilisation, by more efficient practice. In contrast, the Liberals are going to spend nearly \$400 million for an increase of only 30 additional hospital beds. That is the contrast between the two sides of this place.

We will continue to make investments in infrastructure that are based on detailed assessments of need and demand and at the same time we will focus very strongly on improving the utilisation of our public health system. One of the reasons we rank in the higher level for cost of our public health system compared to other jurisdictions is because we do not achieve the efficiencies that other public health systems deliver. To address that, we need to first and foremost use our existing resources more efficiently so more people get access to the care they need.

Mr Wall: Who's been responsible for that over for the past 15 years? Too little, too late.

MR CORBELL: That is why we are doing exactly what we are doing now, Mr Wall, through you, Madam Speaker. We are increasing the number of beds available by 50 right now—

Mr Wall: Band-aid fix on a terminally ill hospital system.

MR CORBELL: and we are not doing it, Mr Wall—through you, Madam Speaker—at a cost of \$400 million for 30 extra beds; that is the Liberal Party's plan.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: I would like to hear Mr Hanson, Mrs Jones.

MR HANSON: Minister, why is it then that your hospital is the most inefficient in the country after 15 years of Labor government?

MR CORBELL: My focus as health minister has been on improving efficiency and timeliness in the public health system and during that time we have slashed elective surgery waiting lists. We have slashed them by over 70 per cent.

We have improved access to our emergency department. Emergency department wait times are now much better than they were even six months ago. We are expanding the emergency department by 30 per cent and we are improving bed utilisation so that more people can get a hospital bed when they need it, through smarter efficiencies and work practice in our hospitals. That is what my focus is.

But Mr Hanson has decided, it would appear to me, and the Liberal Party have decided, to walk away from having a more efficient hospital system and, it would seem, just spend hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars for a net gain of 30 beds when we are achieving 50 extra beds through better efficiency and utilisation in our public health system.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Burch.

MS BURCH: Minister, you spoke about—

MADAM SPEAKER: Preamble.

MS BURCH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Can you tell the Assembly more about the efficiencies and the changes within the health system over the past six to 12 months?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Burch for her supplementary. There are a broad range of reforms that are driving better efficiencies in our public health system. First of all,

there are the very significant reforms that we have delivered through the emergency department, the introduction of new work practices and new positions, such as the ED navigator, and a range of other important new positions that are improving work flow and improving patient flow and timeliness in our emergency department.

We have also significantly reformed the work practice and allocation of tasks for imaging services. Imaging services are a very important part of delivering hospital services. When you arrive in the ED, if you need an X-ray or a CT scan, how long it takes to get those scans dictates how long you stay in the emergency department. So we have slashed waiting times for CT scans, we have slashed waiting times for X-rays and we have slashed waiting times for MRI. That is dramatically improving performance across the hospital system.

We have also introduced very important reforms in access to elective surgery. We are using our existing infrastructure smarter. We are working across both the public and private sectors to utilise their surgery facilities, their operating theatre facilities, to make sure that we are making every effort to get people through elective surgery. The number of people on the elective surgery waiting list waiting longer than necessary has been slashed by over 70 per cent.

Those are the outcomes, the efficiencies, that we are achieving in our public hospital system. That means that our hospital system is becoming less expensive because more people are being seen with the same amount of resources. That is the difference between this side of the house and the other. (*Time expired.*)

Sport—ACTSport

MR HINDER: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, could you explain the significance of the CBR sport awards you recently announced?

MS BERRY: Thank you for the question, Mr Hinder. I know that Mr Hinder has a long involvement with the rugby community here in the ACT and we—

Mr Gentleman: Just look at his nose.

MS BERRY: certainly expect rugby—

MADAM SPEAKER: I think that is probably a personal reflection, Mr Gentleman, and you might need to withdraw it.

Members interjecting—

MS BERRY: I will continue, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: If you can.

MS BERRY: I know, of course, that he has a long involvement with the rugby community in Canberra and we can certainly expect rugby to feature in the new awards in the years ahead. It was great to be able to bring the Canberra sporting

community together for this announcement two weeks ago. It is fair to say that there was shared excitement about the government reshaping and relaunching this important Canberra sporting tradition.

We launched the event down at the Hockey Centre in Lyneham. There were a number of sporting groups and athletes represented there. I certainly felt that with the Canberra sport awards—when we talked about that with those representatives that were there from our community sports and our more elite level sports—there was an emphasis on building upon those previous sports star and hall of fame awards delivered over many years by ACTSport.

Since I was appointed sports minister I have made clear my intention of carrying on this tradition and of acknowledging the legacy of ACTSport's work. That is what has happened today and a couple of weeks ago. I also want to acknowledge the former ACTSport executives who attended the launch and who have written to me since pleased with what the government has done.

Previously held as two separate events, the new CBR sport awards will bring the former sports star and hall of fame awards together on one big night to celebrate Canberra's sporting heroes. For the new CBR sport awards there is a reduced number of categories, a simplified online nomination process and scope for the community to directly nominate a people's champion.

We will debate a motion this afternoon, called on by Mr Doszpot, where I will be able to talk more about the government's support for sport and recreation here in the ACT. This new awards process is a further demonstration of our commitment to every sport and every participant, supporter, administrator, official and spectator. All are vital to the success of sport in the ACT and all deserve recognition under the new CBR sport awards.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hinder.

MR HINDER: Minister, how has the local sporting community had input into the design and eventual relaunch of the awards?

MS BERRY: This has been an important part of this process. The ACT government has sought to work with the local sporting community around the continuation of these awards, under both the previous minister and me. As part of that process, local sports have been closely involved in redesigning and developing the new awards. I have had numerous conversations around the best format for the new awards to take.

The government also undertook a systematic consultation and review process, an industry survey, a direct stakeholder consultation through interviews of local sporting representatives and a detailed review of almost 20 other sporting awards which exist around Australia. This review looked at all categories, criteria, assessment, timing and event delivery. As well as talking with sporting bodies and athletes we also consulted the media and local communities who sponsor local sport.

The consultations were a really valuable way to gauge community and industry interest as well as shape the event for the future. Throughout the consultations everyone has conveyed enthusiasm and passion for the awards and we saw a very strong desire to see a quality process continue in the ACT.

The ACT government will continue to work with the sporting community to create a celebration of sport which honours people who uphold the qualities that Canberrans love to see in sport: sporting excellence, inclusion, fair play and service to the community. The new awards are a great vehicle to showcase these qualities.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Burch.

MS BURCH: Minister, what new categories have been added and what local achievements are they celebrating?

MS BERRY: The reinvigorated format for the Canberra sport awards will include nine award categories, with the annual ACT Sport Hall of Fame also included. The nine award categories are: athlete of the year—men’s sport; athlete of the year—women’s sport; athlete of the year—para-sport; team of the year; outstanding service to sport; and people’s sporting champion. There are also three minister’s awards: for inclusion; for innovation; and for event excellence.

The awards will celebrate all the outstanding achievements of Canberra’s top athletes and teams, while also recognising those behind-the-scenes special contributors that make our local sporting community so great. The new categories are particularly designed to recognise not only excellence at an individual and team level but also innovative and inclusive achievements in our community clubs, as well as outstanding event management.

As minister, I have made participation and inclusion the heart of the agenda for local sport and it is great to have the awards pushing in this same positive direction. The people’s sporting champion will be decided by popular vote—it has already been dubbed the “Gold Logie” of Canberra sport—while grassroots in particular will be a focus under the new categories of innovation, event delivery and inclusion.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Burch.

MS BURCH: Minister, how has the announcement been received?

MS BERRY: We have been inundated by positive feedback following the announcement of the new awards. On the morning of the announcement, I was joined by athletes from a wide spectrum of sports. To name a few, we had Jack Steele, a former Belconnen local, from the GWS; Alice Coddington from the Caps; Scott Cone from the Cavalry; Erin Osborne, who is from the Meteors and the Southern Stars; Allister Peek, who was proudly showing off medals that he had won when he represented Australia in sailing in the Special Olympics; and Luke Philps and Josh Olsen from the CBR Brave.

Following the announcement I was also pleased to receive congratulations from Robin Poke, president of the ACT Olympic Council, who played a major role in creating and then developing the ACT sports awards back in 1984. He noted that “it makes eminent sense to combine the two” and said, “I congratulate you on a great outcome.”

Additionally, many sporting bodies and athletes in Canberra took to social media to share their excitement about the new awards, including Cricket ACT, Special Olympics Australia, Volleyball ACT, Netball ACT, CBR Brave and Triathlon ACT.

Nominations for the CBR sport awards open this Friday, 12 August and the awards will take place on Friday, 9 December. The CBR sport awards night promises to be a fantastic celebration of our city’s proud sporting culture, its champions and quiet achievers and the passion Canberrans bring as players and supporters to their favourite sports.

Canberra Hospital—infrastructure planning

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Health. In June, minister, you said in relation to the Canberra Hospital that “the assessment is that over the next five to 10 years’ utilisation of the existing infrastructure, with a modest level of improvement, will actually give us the capacity we need to meet demand over that period.” Minister, why will a modest level of improvement give the Canberra Hospital capacity to meet demand over the next five to 10 years when the statistics show that the hospital is not able to meet demand now?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Lawder for the question. There is this thing called “bed utilisation”. The facts are that other public hospital systems deliver a better level of bed utilisation—that is, more people utilising the same amount of bed stock—than we achieve in our public hospital system. We have to turn that around and we have to change that because that means getting better value for money for the taxpayer with the money that is being spent now in our public hospital system.

What we have from those opposite is that they are walking away from a more efficient public hospital system. They are walking away from any commitment around reform of how services are delivered so that more people get access sooner. Instead, they are trying to do the cash splash and spend \$400 million on a project that delivers a net gain of 30 hospital beds. By comparison, we are delivering a net gain of 50 public hospital beds through better utilisation of existing infrastructure.

Those opposite cannot any longer criticise this government on the cost of running the public health system when they walk away from any interest in efficiency or bed utilisation. That is the difference between this side and the other side of this chamber: \$400 million for 30 extra beds or the equivalent of 50 extra beds through more efficiency in our public hospital system and more people getting treatment sooner through smarter use of the resources we have already made an investment in.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, why did the government not follow previous advice that major upgrades to existing infrastructure were needed at the Canberra Hospital?

MR CORBELL: The government has commissioned a series of reports into these matters. The most recent advice to government, which was provided last year, confirmed that bed utilisation would give us the capacity we need to meet growth over the next five to 10 years. I have spelt those figures out very clearly in a number of answers today. The equivalent of 50 extra beds can be delivered through better bed utilisation. In comparison, the Liberals' plan is \$400 million in new expenditure and you only get 30 extra beds.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, when you said in 2007 that the ACT jail would have capacity for 25 years with its current bed configuration, was that actually true?

MR CORBELL: I am not the Minister for Corrections.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Burch.

MS BURCH: Minister, can you explain the benefits of the current approach to the health system for the Canberra community?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Burch for the supplementary. The Liberals have been caught out well and truly on this issue. Not only can they not explain the enormous deficit that they are creating around this project—the \$600 million worth of expenditure that they cannot pay for from light rail—but they also cannot explain why spending \$400 million for just 30 extra beds is a better plan than achieving better efficiencies in the public hospital system and delivering 50 extra beds.

University of Canberra—procurement process

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the minister for higher education. Minister, what safeguards are in place in the University of Canberra procurement system to guard against conflict of interest?

MS FITZHARRIS: I believe that is a question for the University of Canberra.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, have any contracts been awarded by the University of Canberra to Montage Services or Dowse Projects without a competitive process in the past 10 years? As minister for higher education we are asking you this.

MS FITZHARRIS: I refer to my previous answer. Again that is a question for the University of Canberra.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Wall, a supplementary question.

MR WALL: Minister, have any contracts been awarded for projects of more than \$50,000 without a competitive process at the University of Canberra?

MS FITZHARRIS: That is a matter for the University of Canberra.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, what rules are there relating to publishing contracts entered into by the University of Canberra?

MS FITZHARRIS: That is a matter for the University of Canberra.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

Light rail—employment

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Wall.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order! I want to hear Mr Wall, Mr Hanson.

MR WALL: My question is to the Minister for Transport Canberra and City Services. Minister, what are the requirements on the light rail consortium to employ Canberrans?

MS FITZHARRIS: If I could clarify, the directorate's name is Transport Canberra and City Services; I am the minister for transport and city services. Certainly the Canberra Metro consortium that is building the world-class stage 1 of light rail for the whole of Canberra has a requirement to employ Canberrans. It is already employing dozens of Canberrans on this city-shaping project. Indeed, the consortium is due to provide a local industry participation plan to the government in the very near future. I very much look forward to that and look forward to celebrating further successes of this light rail project.

In addition, the Canberra Business Chamber, as the opposition know, have partnered with the ACT government to work with local businesses. They have already held a number of seminars attended, I am told, by dozens of local business to provide them with the opportunity to be involved in this city-shaping light rail project, many of whom have already taken up this opportunity.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, what are the requirements on the light rail consortium to engage Canberra contractors?

MS FITZHARRIS: I refer to my previous answer and also note that it was a significant requirement of the government in seeking tenders for the light rail project

that there be a significant component of employment and participation by local businesses. That is certainly being achieved and I look forward to receiving a local industry participation plan and am very happy to share that with the community at large.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, are any potential staff or subcontractors who are Canberrans given a weighting or preference by the consortium?

MS FITZHARRIS: That will be a matter for the consortium but again I refer to my previous answer. There were high requirements put on the consortium through the tender process to employ local Canberrans. That is exactly what they are doing now and that is exactly what they will continue to do over the course of the construction, maintenance and operation of this significant project.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, what reporting takes place to advise you and the community about what proportion of employees, contractors and subcontractors are from the Canberra region?

MS FITZHARRIS: I look forward to sharing further with the Canberra community the additional local Canberrans and local Canberra businesses that are engaged on the light rail project, and it will be significant.

Light rail—intergovernment relations

MR COE: My question is to the Minister for Transport Canberra and City Services, as per the administrative arrangements. If you would care to have a look at them in schedule 1 you will note that you are the Minister for Transport Canberra and City Services. Are there any restrictions on members of the consortium, contractors or subcontractors meeting or contacting MLAs?

MS FITZHARRIS: Not that I am aware of, no.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, have you or the government given any directions to light rail contractors or subcontractors not to meet with members of the opposition?

MS FITZHARRIS: No.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, is there any legal basis upon which the government may tell representatives or employees of non-government organisations that they are not allowed to meet with members of the Assembly?

MS FITZHARRIS: No, and that has not occurred, to my knowledge.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, do you categorically deny that any public servant, including you and your office, has told people associated with the consortium that requests for meetings must be approved by the minister?

MS FITZHARRIS: I do. Certainly, if the request were to come through me—I am not aware of any request coming through me or my office—I would consider that and facilitate that meeting, as we do on a weekly, sometimes daily, basis for members of the opposition with directorates, but this is a—

Mr Coe: Point of order, Madam Speaker—

MADAM SPEAKER: Point of order—

Mr Coe: on relevance.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe on a point of order.

Mr Coe: The question was: do you categorically deny that people associated with the consortium have been told that meetings must be approved by the minister?

Mr Corbell: On the point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Corbell on the point of order.

Mr Corbell: The first part of Ms Fitzharris's answer was, "I do." She is now elaborating on her answer. So I think that she is remaining directly relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think that Ms Fitzharris may have said that but I am sure members can check the record. I do not think I will uphold the point of order in relation to relevance. Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: As I said, I and my office frequently facilitate meetings by members of the opposition with public officials. In this case, of course, the opposition are free to contact the consortium directly. I have been aware of previous occasions where this has happened. If they were to ask me, through my office, to facilitate a meeting I would be happy to facilitate that request. I am not aware of any official who has said that members of the Canberra Metro consortium should not meet with the opposition.

Budget—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives

MS BURCH: My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Can the minister outline the 2016-17 budget initiatives and how they relate to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement for 2015-18.

DR BOURKE: I thank Ms Burch for her question and her ongoing interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. The ACT government will be investing an additional \$2.3 million over the next four years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the ACT as part of the 2016-17 ACT budget. The ACT budget includes new initiatives that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and addresses disadvantage through strong connections to culture through supporting people through the justice system, through health care and by ensuring career opportunities.

The ACT government made a commitment to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage at the signing of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement for 2015-18 on 23 April 2015. The ACT budget initiatives respond to the agreement's strong key focus areas.

To improve the agreement's key focus area of feeling safe, the ACT government is funding a \$1.99 million package, which includes \$1.3 million from the confiscated assets trust fund, which will support the Indigenous guidance partner for adults undertaking restorative justice; the justice reinvestment trial; a pilot bail support service; a life skills program supporting sentencing options at the Galambany court; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience reports to inform courts' sentencing decisions.

To improve the agreement's key focus of connecting the community, the ACT government is currently advertising to employ a communications and engagement coordinator to forge stronger connections with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Additional funding of \$149,000 has been provided for this initiative.

To improve the agreement's key focus on leadership, the ACT government will be funding a new position for an Aboriginal staff member to manage the recently created ACT parks Aboriginal advisory group. The occupant of this position will provide leadership and mentoring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff; conduct high-level stakeholder engagement; and oversee operational, cultural interpretation and visitor service programs.

To improve the agreement's key focus area of education, the ACT government will fund the strengthening Ngunnawal culture and history in schools initiative. This will provide \$300,000 for a new two-year pilot to increase opportunities for local youth to build their connection and engagement with Ngunnawal culture and history. Educational programs involving guided nature tours with local youth in schools will be undertaken during the school term.

To improve the agreement's key focus area on employment and economic independence, the ACT government will invest \$107,000 in additional mentoring and training for ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public servants to improve their career development outcomes.

To improve the agreement's key focus area of cultural identity, the ACT government has funded support for the arts and culture sector that will support, develop and build the capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community within the ACT. Funding of \$100,000 has been provided to support local artists and cultural organisations.

Funding of \$100,000 for grants and programs will also be available to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and has been provided in the ACT budget.

To improve the agreement's key focus on healthy mind, healthy body, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services in the ACT will receive \$1.06 million in additional funding. This funding will extend the services to support additional specialist outreach programs and extend selected existing programs.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Burch.

MS BURCH: Minister, can you provide more details on the adult Indigenous guidance partnership program for restorative justice that was outlined in this year's budget?

DR BOURKE: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are imprisoned at a rate 13 times higher than non-Indigenous adults Australia-wide and 14½ times higher for the ACT. The overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system and specifically in terms of incarceration is well known and documented. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system have complex legal needs arising from issues around language, cultural barriers and social disadvantage. The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement 2015-18 identified feeling safe as a key focus area for the community. The ACT government has committed to reducing incarceration rates as an objective of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice partnership 2015-18.

Specific and focused measures are required to improve this outcome. An Indigenous guidance partner budget initiative is one such measure. A \$1.99 million package, which includes \$1.3 million for the confiscated assets trust fund, will support the Indigenous guidance partner for adults undertaking restorative justice. An Indigenous guidance partner will help to spread awareness of restorative practice in the community, raise Indigenous participation rates in restorative justice at every point of the criminal justice process and provide Indigenous restorative justice participants with opportunities to have deeper conversations with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people about their relevant issues and needs.

The Indigenous guidance partner will also support successful achievement of restorative justice agreements amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders and/or victims who are referred to restorative justice. The Indigenous guidance partner will be providing a vital outreach service that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander client engagement in restorative justice conferences and agreement activities.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Hinder.

MR HINDER: Minister, can you provide more details on the kick start my career through culture program outlined in this year's budget?

DR BOURKE: The kick start my career through culture program is a joint initiative between the Community Services, Environment and Planning, and Education directorates. Kick start my career will support improvements in the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement's key focus on education, cultural identity and employment and economic independence. The initiative will expand opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth by providing additional learning opportunities in culture and land management and career support tailored to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through two programs.

Firstly, the culture and country in schools program will see the development of a new culturally appropriate, flexible learning opportunity to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in nationally accredited and vocational training in culture and land management. Secondly, the kick start my career program will strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' skills and linkages with potential employers across a range of workplaces.

The ACT government recognises the need to expand opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth. The kick start my career program will support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth at risk of leaving school. This initiative will contribute to enhancing student engagement with learning and improving school attendance and retention rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The initiative also contributes to whole-of-government efforts to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth entering the youth justice system. The total cost of \$651,000 will be met from the existing resources of the directorates involved.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hinder.

MR HINDER: Can the minister inform the Assembly how the ACT government would transition reporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outcomes from the *Closing the gap* report to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement 2015-18?

MADAM SPEAKER: Is there money in the budget for that? I am sorry, I know that it is about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs but the original question was about budget initiatives.

Ms Burch: Madam Speaker, if I may, my original question was around the budget initiatives and how they relate to the agreement 2015-18.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I will allow the question. Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Thank you Madam Speaker. The sheer vision of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement 2015-18 is to pursue equitable outcomes for members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the ACT by developing and supporting strong families. The empowerment and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the ACT is the key outcome identified by the community during the agreement's consultation process.

The outcomes reporting framework achieves the ACT government's whole-of-government commitment to bring all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific initiatives and mainstream programs and services, where applicable, into the one outcome reporting framework. The ACT *Closing the gap* report will continue as the reporting mechanism for reporting annual progress of initiatives and financial performance but the format will transition to the format of the outcomes reporting framework.

Reporting the impact of outcomes is not an easy task but one that is absolutely necessary to do if we are to measure the true impact of the results of the agreement. Building this capacity across government will take time to embed as we work to align and integrate new and existing initiatives and reporting mechanisms into an agreed outcome reporting framework.

In order to succeed, the ACT government realises that engagement of the community, service providers and community leaders is necessary to co-design how we measure the effectiveness of the agreement. This commitment will ensure that outcomes not only reflect government priorities but also capture the voice of service providers in reporting back to the ACT government.

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

Questions without notice

Statement by Speaker

MADAM SPEAKER: Before I call the Clerk, I want to go to a matter that arose during question time. I have asked the Clerk to check for me because my listing has Ms Fitzharris listed as the Minister for Transport Canberra and City Services and I wanted to make sure that I had not been making an ongoing mistake. Page 10 of *Administrative arrangements 2016 (No 3)* has the ministerial title listed as the Minister for Transport Canberra and City Services. I hope that makes things clear.

Emergency Services Agency

Debate resumed.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (3.21): I welcome Mrs Jones raising this motion about the ACT Emergency Services Agency, about the importance of that agency and the importance of ensuring that it is well managed and supported. I am happy to agree with the text of Mrs Jones's motion. The Greens also agree that the ESA performs a difficult and vital role in the community, and they have our great respect and support.

All of the aspects of Mrs Jones's motion relating to the importance of the 000 call centre, the importance of bushfire preparedness and capability planning and the importance of staff morale—I support all of these sentiments and I am happy to again put this on the record.

I understand that Mr Corbell is making a minor amendment, which is to add the word “continues” to the motion. The effect of this amendment is to say that the government is already doing the things in part (2) of the motion, creating a culture of confidence and supporting ESA employees, and it needs to continue to do this. I do not think it makes a great deal of difference either way. Mrs Jones's motion essentially says that the ESA is really important and we need to look after them. Mr Corbell's motion essentially says that the ESA is very important and we need to continue to look after them. Either way, I agree with both sentiments. I am happy to support the amendment because I think it is a subtle difference that, frankly, does not matter too much. If the government wants to put the word ‘continues’ in there, I support it, because I do not think they have been doing a bad job in emergency services; I think there are a lot of positive things happening.

The source of some of the contention seems to be that the government has been conducting a strategic review of the ESA involving independent advice. There is nothing wrong with that. In fact, it is an important thing to do to ensure that the service is serving the community properly and is cost-effective.

The agency has been implementing a series of reforms based on these recommendations since last year. This is always, of course, a challenging time in an agency, as it is a time of change. After some follow-up with the government, I understand that the reform process has progressed through considerable consultation with staff and that work is underway to progress reforms, including in relation to the comm cen and revised priorities for the station upgrade and relocation program.

I note also that ESA's strategic plan for the next five years includes revised and new strategic priorities, including things such as increasing the number of women in our emergency services, delivering new stations and facility upgrades, and improved organisational structures, internal communications and governance in ESA. These are all good issues to focus on, I believe. I acknowledge that there will be differences along the way about how that might work out and I know, based on the conversations I have had and the debates that have taken place in this place, that there are different views on how that should roll out. They are strongly held views. That said, I think it does not change the content of his motion.

Members will also have noted that the 2015-16 budget announced an additional \$3.9 million in recurrent base funding for the ESA each year to help meet the challenges faced in emergency services. I understand that one of the issues of concern is the ESA comm cen transitioning to emergency 000 call takers. This will extend from ambulance across to fire and other emergency-related incidents. The intent of this is to allow more firefighters to be available to respond to incidents and undertake other prevention initiatives. This move parallels reforms in 2009 which transitioned the ACT Ambulance Service to its call-taker dispatch system and which have allowed paramedics to return to treating patients.

This seems like a sensible approach. I do not think this is a case of simply slotting any old person into the comm cen. Clearly, it is people with considerable training. I think that if somebody has the skills to work on the ground, that is the best place for them, but there are subtleties with these processes so I think that these are issues the government needs to keep working through. Consultation needs to continue, but we need to move through these issues at some point.

I will continue to watch how these reforms progress. I am sure we will be back again in this place at a future time. I simply observe that I thank those who work in our emergency services and wish them all the best out there. It is not an easy job, and they should rest assured that they have the support of all members in this place even if there are disagreements on exactly what that looks like.

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (3.26): I will speak to the amendment and close. We will not support the amendment. As Mr Rattenbury pointed out, it does go in some ways to a slight difference in semantics but such a slight difference makes all the difference to my motion. The very purpose of the motion is to highlight that there is a difference of opinion on this side of the chamber compared to the government's side of the chamber about how the services in the ESA, and in particular in Fire & Rescue, feel or have experienced the minister's actions in the reform process and how there is a deep difference of opinion about the best way not just to run the comm cen but to support our troops, our men and women in uniform, on the ground.

I do not support the amendment because the amendment stipulates that the government has, in fact, been creating a culture of confidence within the Emergency Services Agency. The amendment asserts that action has been taken to ensure that ESA employees know that they are equipped to undertake their role and to feel that government will always do that. And it asserts that the ESA employees feel fully supported by the government. That is the very point to which my motion goes. I believe that, in particular in Fire & Rescue, that is not the case, and that has been the consistent feedback that I have had on the ground from the firies as well as through organisations representing them. So we will not be supporting the amendment.

In conclusion, I want to reflect a little on the debate from before we went to lunch. The minister claimed that changes to the comm cen mean that there can be better media and so on. I think that these are all great outcomes but, at the end of the day, the opinion of those who respond to emergencies and fight fires in the ACT is that we will actually be losing something if we lose uniformed, practised firefighting-capable people from the comm cen. They truly understand with deep experience what the different appliances are capable of, which appliances are where and how they can best be deployed. There is an element of professionalism and judgement in how those appliances are deployed.

I accept that, yes, comm cen operators currently understand part of the comm cen and are an important part of what we do, and I am sure that they are very highly trained. But it does not replace experience on the ground. I know that in other parts of our uniformed services in the national sphere, in our federal military and so on, the complementarity of having people with experience of the operational side of an

organisation embedded with those who are on the public service side is well understood. That avoids danger, avoids confusion and makes for a better outcome in the long term even if it does cost a little more.

It is not just about the reform process that has been done. Obviously, I have nothing against reform processes and assessing whether we do things in the best way that we can. It is more about how the reform process that has been undertaken and the types of characters who have been involved have produced an intimidatory outcome on the ground. I do not think that 2(c) as per the amendment, which claims that people are feeling supported, has been achieved. I am sure Minister Corbell believes that they are supported but culture is a funny thing and staff morale is a funny thing. If trust is lost that a government or a minister has the best interests of a group at heart, it can be difficult to restore.

That is why I want to make it clear in the chamber today that we have a strong support focus for our ESA and for all our people who put their bodies and their lives on the line to support us in our hour of need in the community. I hope that, should we come to government later on this year, we will be able to implement change that is well respected by those who serve us.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 7

Mr Barr	Mr Corbell	Mr Coe	Mrs Jones
Ms Berry	Mr Gentleman	Mr Doszpot	Ms Lawder
Dr Bourke	Mr Hinder	Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall
Ms Burch	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Marriage equality

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (3.34): I move:

That:

(1) this Assembly:

(a) reaffirms its support for marriage equality;

(b) supports a free, positive and respectful discussion on marriage equality in the Canberra community;

- (c) confirms its position that marriage equality is best achieved through a free vote of all Federal members and senators; and
 - (d) notes that a national plebiscite on marriage equality remains the current policy of the Liberal National Party Coalition, and consequently may be the only way to achieve marriage equality in this Federal parliamentary term;
- (2) this Assembly further calls on the Australian Parliament to:
- (a) consider the issue of marriage equality as a priority when sittings resume; and
 - (b) resolve the issue through a free vote of all Members of Parliament; and
- (3) if the Federal Parliament determines to hold a marriage equality plebiscite, the Assembly calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) demonstrate that the ACT is Australia's most lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning (LGBTIQ) friendly jurisdiction by supporting the case for marriage equality;
 - (b) actively engage in the local and national plebiscite debate;
 - (c) support ACT Government employees participating in constructive, respectful and informed discussions on the issue; and
 - (d) support local LGBTIQ communities throughout the plebiscite process, particularly during the SpringOut Pride Festival in October and November 2016.

This is an important motion. I believe it is fitting that on this, the last private members' day of this Assembly, the ACT Labor government again brings to the table the issue of marriage equality and support for same-sex marriage. Marriage equality is an issue that this government has never shied away from. We will continue to fight for what we believe is a fundamental right, a right that we will continue to fight for now and into the next term of government. Whilst we understand that it is the federal government's policy to have a plebiscite on the issue of marriage equality, this is not our preferred method. But let me be clear: if it is pursued, the ACT will do everything we can do to support a yes to marriage equality outcome. Today is an opportunity to again put on record the support that we on this side of the chamber have for marriage equality and our desire to see the issue resolved in a way that is respectful to all those in the community who wish to have this issue dealt with and who are directly or indirectly impacted.

I, among others, do not believe that a plebiscite is the way to bring about this equality. I believe it is a failing on the part of the Turnbull government that it considers it an appropriate avenue to resolve a matter that the federal parliament can resolve right now without creating a divisive and costly public debate. Complex and sensitive issues are better decided after debate in parliament, not in the heat of what could be public division and emotional campaigns run across the community. There is genuine concern that a plebiscite campaign could, unfortunately, bring about ill feeling,

ill-informed comments, hostility and division across our community and across our country. It has the very real potential to harm individuals and could be particularly damaging for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members of our community in particular.

Whilst I am confident that the ACT is a progressive and supportive community that has shown a maturity when it comes to the issue of marriage equality, I am very conscious of wanting to continue to be part of a community that does not support negative commentary which makes already vulnerable people feel that they may be unsupported by those around them. A plebiscite is by no means the optimum way to address the issue of marriage equality. Rather, it could be considered a stalling tactic to inevitable reform.

The ACT continues to be the most welcoming city in Australia for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. We are committed to providing support and services to Canberra's LGBTIQ community as part of our broader social inclusion and equity agenda. We are committed to ensuring that all Canberrans have the ability to express their love and commitment in the eyes of the law. We are committed to ensuring that all individuals in our community feel valued and accepted and that they are engaged and able to contribute without having their gender, sexual preference or orientation form any part of public opinion or dialogue about how they are included in our community.

We have a strong record in supporting marriage equality and we will continue this record, even if the federal government persists with its plans for a plebiscite. We will continue to champion for those in our community who may not feel they have a voice, or who are still deciding what that voice is. We will do all we can to make certain that there is no place for words or actions that create a divide or encourage negative speech.

This ACT Labor government will continue to make it known that we support and are ready for marriage equality in our city and in this country. We were ready three years ago. We were ready even before then. The ACT has an excellent track record in supporting our LGBTIQ communities. We have done this through a number of legislative changes, including recognising same-sex relationships through the domestic partnerships act in 1994 and commencing law reform processes to clear our statute books of discrimination against the LGBTIQ community regarding property rights, adoption laws and so on. We have passed laws that updated the definition of "intersex" in the ACT, including removing the requisite of reassignment surgery for a person to change their legal status.

In November 2013 in this place we passed the Marriage Equality (Same Sex) Act 2013. We knew then that we were on the right side of history. This was landmark law reform. In the short period before the federal government intervened, 31 marriages were registered under the act between its commencement and when the High Court found the act invalid in December. Three years later it is extremely disappointing that, rather than celebrating wedding anniversaries, we are here again in this place defending what many in our community and our country know is right for the federal parliament and parliaments across this country to do, and that is to recognise same-sex marriage and marriage equality and have that right enshrined in legislation.

Each of us in this place has been elected by the community we represent to be a voice for change, to bring forward legislation that is the betterment of our city and our citizens. Our federal counterparts have also gained the support of their electorates to do the same. It is incumbent upon those in parliament to follow the will of the people. The will of the people overwhelmingly is in support of marriage equality. The Leader of the Opposition, Mr Hanson, himself said in June this year, “I think that it’s time that there should be national consensus. I would join that consensus and I would be saying yes to same-sex marriage.” Mr Hanson has the opportunity here today to stand by those words and support this motion as it stands. I would therefore call on the Canberra Liberals to support this motion and support the ACT government in calling on the Australian parliament to allow its members to have a free vote on marriage equality.

Let us be clear that since same-sex laws came into being in 2001 in the Netherlands a number of other countries have followed. We are being left behind in this law reform by Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, France, Ireland, Iceland, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uruguay—and a similar law in Finland yet not in force.

This is an important motion. We need to get on with this. The federal parliament has it within its power now to bring this change on. It may persist with a plebiscite. We need to be very mindful of that. We need to show respect for and maturity about our LGBTI community and for them to be respected and regarded through that public debate. As I have said, same-sex marriage is legal in 21 countries. Sixteen years ago the Netherlands brought this law into place. For 16 years I would say Australia has been behind the eight ball. For 16 years we have not given due regard, dignity and respect to many in our community. Now is the time to make up for those lost years.

The motion has many parts. It reaffirms this Assembly’s support for marriage equality. It confirms its position that marriage equality is best achieved through a free vote of all federal members and senators. The motion asks that this Assembly call on the Australian parliament to consider the issue of marriage equality as a priority when sitting resumes and to resolve the issue through a free vote of all members of parliament. The motion I have before the Assembly today says that:

- (1) if the Federal Parliament determines to hold a marriage equality plebiscite, the Assembly calls on the ACT Government to:
 - (a) demonstrate that the ACT is Australia’s most lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning (LGBTIQ) friendly jurisdiction by supporting the case for marriage equality;
 - (b) actively engage in the local and national plebiscite debate;
 - (c) support ACT Government employees participating in constructive, respectful and informed discussions on the issue; and

- (d) support local LGBTIQ communities throughout the plebiscite process, particularly during the SpringOut Pride Festival in October and November 2016.

No-one should be made to feel different or lesser because of who they love. We will do everything that we can do to ensure a supportive environment through this process. I note that there is an amendment now being circulated. Its aim is to gut the motion. It states that a national plebiscite is due to be conducted and just notes “supports a free and respectful discussion”. It makes no commitment. It does not ask this Assembly to step up in any way, shape or form and that this government, this community, be absolutely active in promoting a positive outcome and environment for this discussion to be had with respect and regard to all involved and their families.

Mr Hanson said back in June this year, when it suited his purpose, that he would be saying yes. A very clear demonstration of his commitment, rather than the quick offside grab to the *Canberra Times* when it suited his purpose, would be to back this motion as it is, in full, without amendment. Mr Hanson may be being told behind the scenes that he has to pull back on his support for marriage equality and support for those in the community that need this parliament to stand up. Everyone in here should be showing the leadership that this community ought to have by their elected representatives. That leadership is around supporting marriage equality. We brought the law into this place. It was in place for a number of weeks. We had 31 marriages.

Mr Hanson and others fought against that law. They supported the federal push to have those 31 marriages annulled. Think of the celebrations that we could have had now if they were upstanding. But no, 31 marriages were annulled because the conservatives on that side of this chamber and those in federal parliament cannot simply get behind this law reform that has been 16 years in the coming. We cannot wait any longer. It must progress. As I said, no-one in this community ought to be made to feel different or lesser because of the person they love. They have the right to stand and be married and have that recognised by society and all citizens of this community.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (3.48): I will correct a couple of factual things. Firstly, the statement that I made quite publicly that Ms Burch is referring to was in June last year, not June this year. That might be a little academic. But I would say that my personal support for gay people, lesbians and intersex in this community has been pretty strong over a long period. Indeed, in my maiden speech I made the point that I support the advancement of rights for gay and lesbian people.

The Canberra Liberals have done that in this chamber. I will get to the issue of same-sex marriage in a minute, but in terms of spent convictions, in terms of issues with regard to birth certificates and so on, it is my recollection that over the past four years we have supported all that legislation that has been brought forward by the government. I recall being thanked by the Chief Minister on a couple of occasions when we provided that support.

I hope this does not turn into an acrimonious debate today. Part of the motion talks about having a good debate, whatever form that takes—be it a plebiscite or so on—and we want to keep this a measured respectful debate. And perhaps a couple of comments in Ms Burch's motion directed at me and other members of my team are not reflective of the intent of the motion. If the intent of the motion from Ms Burch is to have a thoughtful, considerate debate—and I have said we support that aspect of it—then let us set the tone here today. Let us not be sniping at each other and abusing each other and then saying out there in the community, “Oh, but you've all got to be nice to each other.” We have got to show the leadership from the outset, because regardless of what we do in this chamber today, this debate is going to ensue in the form of a plebiscite in our community. Let us just recognise that.

With regard to the annulment of marriages, the decision that the legislation was not constitutional was the unanimous view of the High Court. That is going back in history a bit and when we had that debate in the Assembly—I think in late 2014 but it might have been a bit before that—we made the point in the Canberra Liberals that there was a range of views within the party about the issue of same-sex marriage but our consistent view was that the legislation was not constitutionally valid. That was based on advice from the Solicitor-General of the commonwealth.

We said that until the High Court had made a decision it would make sense not to enact the legislation so those marriages did not occur. That is all a bit historical, but I make the point to Ms Burch that the decision was one of the High Court; I had no effect on that. As it was we said we did not support the legislation. We did not win that vote; that legislation was passed but then was struck down, essentially, by the High Court.

To put it on the record, although the Canberra Liberals did not support same-sex marriage in this place—principally because, as was proved correct, the legislation was not part of our jurisdiction—there is a range of views within the Canberra Liberals, just as there is a range of views within the community on the issue of same-sex marriage. And, just as it is in the community, some people hold those views passionately. I know, Madam Assistant Speaker, that you are a passionate advocate for same sex-marriage. You are clear with those views and you have been consistent in that position. I have expressed that in this chamber a number of times.

There are those who hold religious convictions in our community—members of the Christian faith, Muslims—who support traditional marriage. Mrs Dunne, for example, is a devout Catholic and I respect that she has views that support the existing law when it comes to marriage. We should respect that view.

Personally, as Ms Burch has pointed out, I support same-sex marriage but from the Canberra Liberals' point of view in opposition, there is going to be a plebiscite and it needs to be respectful in terms of the debate if we are engaging in it. But the members of the Canberra Liberals are free to vote with their conscience on this; they are free to vote which way they wish to. They are individuals, just like any other member of this community.

Every member of this community is free in a plebiscite to vote as they wish. That is the very point of a plebiscite; it is the bottom-up process. You give a chance to our community to have its say, to make its point, to have a view as individuals. I think you will find that, a little bit like the republic debate, this is not on party lines. It should not be decided that if you are Labor you have to vote this way or if you are Liberal you have to vote that way. The point of the plebiscite is we are free to vote as we wish, as occurred in the republic referendum.

I do not think this place should dictate which way we are to vote one way or the other. I would not support it if it were taking it the other way either, I will make it very clear. If it were a different government saying, "No, we should be supporting a no case," I would equally say, "No, I do not think so. I do not think that is right." If you are having the plebiscite you have to let the people make their decision.

One part of the motion talks about government employees participating in constructive, respectful and informed decisions. The problem is that the earlier part of the motion says the ACT government has to take one side of the debate. So on one hand it is saying that the ACT government is taking one side of the debate but you are all out there able to engage in the debate. I do not think having this top-down view of the plebiscite meets the intent of where we are going.

Concerns have been raised about a plebiscite. It is being characterised as a terrible process, but I remind members that this is the process the federal Labor leader, Bill Shorten, supported up until a couple of years ago. So until a couple of years ago this was Labor Party policy federally. The federal leader of the Labor Party said a plebiscite was the way to go. So it is difficult for me to believe it is credible that it was all good a couple of years ago and the right way to go but now it is all damnation if we go down this route. That is not credible. It reeks of politicking, and I do not think that is helpful. I personally want this to go through and politicking on this is not helpful.

The motion also talks about a free vote in the parliament. I assume there will be a free vote in the parliament after the plebiscite. I am not sure whether it will be on party lines or not, but ultimately that is a matter for the federal parliament and we should not be trying to run the federal parliament from the ACT Assembly. I do not think we would appreciate it if the Tasmanian House of Assembly were trying to tell us how to vote and conduct our business. I hear regularly from those on the other side, including the Greens, that we need to stand more independently from the federal government, so I do not think it is helpful that we are trying to tell them how to conduct their business when we would not want them telling us how to conduct ours. It is very much for individuals to make that decision.

As to the debate on whether the plebiscite is the way to go, I think it is. I make the point that it is a matter of giving people their chance. The Labor Party and the Greens are saying we should not have the plebiscite and it should be a free vote. I remind members that not only was a plebiscite Bill Shorten's position a couple of years ago but when Labor was last in office federally they had six years to do just that, and they had the numbers. They had the numbers in both the lower and upper houses and they

had six years and did not do anything. The federal Labor Party—this is a federal issue—did not do anything on this issue when it was in government and is now criticising the Liberals for not doing anything. It has said there should be a plebiscite and is now saying there should not be. You cannot go from that position to then say this is some sort of an abomination.

In terms of the debate, as I said, I think it should be respectful. I am not at this stage intending to take any sort of leading role in it. As I said, I think this should be a bottom-up process and I do not think the Leader of the Opposition or the Chief Minister should be dictating to members of their party, “You must vote this way.” I know there is at least one candidate for the Labor Party who does not support same-sex marriage, so there has to be a free position.

I noted that Ms Burch made some sniping comments—that is the best way to characterise them—and I have said let us not have that derogatory language from either side. I have heard Mr Barr characterise conservatives as Neanderthals. If we are going to have a respectful debate, which we all want, it has to be measured, it has to be equal. We cannot say one side is allowed to say what they want and call their opponents Neanderthals. That is very demeaning and derogatory and is not helpful at all. Equally, we must make sure that people are respectful on the no side as well.

In light of what I have just said and the Canberra Liberals’ position on the best way to go, that is, to let the people of Canberra exercise their free will—which is the intention of the plebiscite—I have circulated an amendment which I will move shortly. It notes that the plebiscite is due to be conducted either later this year or early next year—that is the reality—and that we support a respectful discussion on marriage in the Canberra community on both sides. Let us have no mudslinging and rock throwing and let us respect all individuals in our community. That includes MLAs and it includes ACT government employees. They should be free to exercise their own free vote in the plebiscite, and good luck to them.

I will be voting yes, as I said. I am talking in this respect as Jeremy Hanson. As I have said before and as has been made clear by the High Court, this is no longer a matter for us as MLAs legislatively. It is not in our jurisdiction legislatively, so we are dealing with this as individuals. And I am saying that Jeremy Hanson will be voting yes, and I hope it comes to fruition. But if it does not and if there are those who feel differently, I fundamentally respect that. I respect that there are people with a different view from mine and it does not mean that their view is in any way less legitimate than my own.

I hope we can lead by example in this place with this debate and make sure we show that, regardless of our difference of opinions either on the actual issue itself or the process, we debate the issue respectfully, we do it collegiately and we say, “Look, let’s show some leadership to our community about how this debate should be conducted henceforth.” I move the amendment circulated in my name:

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

“(1) notes that a national plebiscite on same sex marriage is due to be conducted by the Federal Government later this year or in early 2017;

- (2) supports a free and respectful discussion on marriage in the Canberra community; and
- (3) respects that all individuals, including MLAs and ACT Government employees, should be free to exercise their own free vote in the plebiscite.”.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Urban Renewal) (4.02): I thank Ms Burch for raising this motion today and the Leader of the Opposition for his comments. I regret I am not in a position to support the Leader of the Opposition’s amendment as it significantly waters down the intent of Ms Burch’s motion. I think it is time to make some very clear statements of values, to make some very clear commitments to the people of Canberra about the values this place holds and their government holds and to be active participants in the process from here on in.

I will outline why I believe that is the case and why I believe it is appropriate that the ACT Assembly follows other state and territory parliaments and, indeed, the Brisbane City Council, in expressing support for marriage equality. I note from your publicly stated positions, Madam Assistant Speaker, and that of the Leader of the Opposition, together with what I know are the public positions of all of my Labor colleagues and Minister Rattenbury, that the majority of members in this place support marriage equality. I do not believe it is particularly controversial for this Assembly to reaffirm its support for marriage equality given that is the position of the majority of members.

I also understand and respect the need for a free, positive and respectful discussion on the issue in the community. But there is a role for us as elected representatives to be involved in that discussion and to provide support and assistance for those who wish to participate.

The important point to note here—and Mr Hanson is wrong on this matter of fact—is that a plebiscite is not inevitable. A plebiscite requires the support of both houses of parliament and there is not a majority for a plebiscite at this stage from both houses of federal parliament. In fact, there would appear to be, given the stated position of members of the House of Representatives, a majority in favour of marriage equality in the House of Representatives and the Senate, if only a free vote were granted.

Mr Hanson has given a free vote to his members. If Prime Minister Turnbull gave a free vote to his colleagues, we could save the country \$160 million and a lot of grief and get on with passing an important social reform for this country. There is majority support now in the House of Representatives and in the Senate and from members across all political parties who would vote yes for marriage equality if given a free vote. That is what should happen in the federal parliament now, and that is what this motion calls for today.

We call on the Australian parliament to consider the issue as a priority when sittings resume and we call on the Australian parliament to resolve the issue through a free vote of all members. If that is not the case and if the federal parliament resolves to go down the path of a plebiscite, I think it is appropriate for this place to take a position

and to give guidance to the ACT government, particularly to our employees and our LGBTIQ fellow Canberrans, what our position is and how we would approach that particular plebiscite.

Some statements of values: we believe that Canberra should be the most welcoming city in Australia for LGBTI people. We believe we have led the nation—our legislative record demonstrates this—in removing discriminatory laws and in championing a broader social inclusion agenda. We fundamentally are committed to ensuring that all Canberrans have the ability to express their love and their commitment in the eyes of the law and nothing less than full marriage equality will do. As Ms Burch said, we have been through more than a decade of stop-gap measures, of concessions, of stalling tactics. The time to vote for marriage equality is now. It is well and truly time. Canberra knows it. Australia knows it.

My government's support for marriage equality is very clear and we will continue this support if the federal government continues with its plans for a plebiscite. We do so for a very basic reason: no-one should be made to feel different or lesser because of who they love, and we will do everything that we can to ensure a supportive environment for Canberrans through this process.

But there is another clear point of difference: I will be, and I pledge it today as Leader of the Labor Party and as Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory, a leading voice in the local campaign and nationally for marriage equality. That is my pledge and commitment to my fellow Canberrans. No-one will be in any doubt about where I stand on the issue, although I do not think anyone would be given everything that I have stood for in my public life. But my pledge today is to not be a passive voice but to be an active voice for marriage equality and that the party I lead and the government I lead will be an active campaigner for marriage equality.

We have an excellent track record in Canberra of supporting our LGBTI communities. We have done this through numerous legislative changes. Over my time in this place it has been pleasing to see that in the past few years at least there has been some degree of bipartisan support for those changes. But I well recall in my earlier time in this place when the Liberal Party opposed every single measure to achieve equality for LGBTI Canberrans. It was too much for the Liberal Party of 10 years ago to even support equality in relation to motor vehicle registrations. It was too hard then, so it is pleasing to see that social change is possible and that if you continue to advocate you will see change even in the most conservative of corners.

We have led this nation in reforms for LGBTI people and will continue to do so. We are proud to work alongside the Safe Schools Coalition to provide our young people with safe learning environments, even when this program has been under the most vicious of attacks from the conservative elements of the Liberal-National parties. We will continue to support our LGBTI students in our schools through the Safe Schools Coalition program. It is an unequivocal commitment from my government because it saves lives and it makes a difference, and that is what we are in this place to do.

We will continue our passionate commitment towards that program, and I will not be deterred from my support and this government will not be deterred from its support for that program by any far right Liberal-National MPs, be they South Australian

Senators or far north Queensland lower house members. We will stand firm in our support for that program.

A plebiscite is not the best way to achieve this outcome and many people have gone on the public record in recent times to express concern. But if there is to be a plebiscite, then it is critically important that this government support our community through that process. The motion Ms Burch has moved today will provide guidance to the ACT government and to the ACT public service on how this should be managed. We will support our LGBTI communities; we will campaign strongly for a yes vote for marriage equality. And we will particularly be supportive during this year's SpringOUT Pride Festival, which will be held in October and November.

We will support ACT government employees participating in constructive and informed discussions on the issue, and we will ensure that through our government we will support this community. We will advocate for marriage equality and we will do so in a way that is respectful and recognises that there are other opinions, but that we are prepared to be leaders to support a fairer and more inclusive society, because that is a real value and advantage for Canberra over other parts of this country. That is what sets us apart; that is what makes this the best city in Australia to live in, and it is the sort of leadership that you expect from the national capital. I urge members to support Ms Burch's motion. (*Time expired.*)

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (4.12): I thank Ms Burch for bringing on this motion today and for her passionate speech in favour of marriage equality in Australia. It is my pleasure to be able to speak in response to this motion on behalf of the ACT Greens. Marriage equality would give individuals one of the most important rights that exist: the right for each person to choose whom they love and to ensure that they have that love recognised by each and every one of us.

Let me say up-front that the Greens, both nationally and here in the ACT, strongly support moves to reform the Marriage Act in order to achieve marriage equality. Here in the ACT we have been campaigning and legislating against laws which discriminate against LGBTIQ people for some considerable period of time. Across the country the Greens have been doing this since the 1980s. Globally, our society has come a long way in terms of improving the rights of people in these groups. We have seen marriage equality achieved in many places around the world.

Australia is often a world leader when it comes to achieving a fairer and more progressive outcome for vulnerable groups, but on this issue we are still waiting and we are too far behind. I am sad and I am sorry that people have been left waiting to marry the people they love for such a long time. But there is no doubt in my mind that the time will come when we do achieve equality for LGBTIQ Australians. That road might seem long, but with every day we get a little bit closer to making that dream a reality.

In 2015 the ACT saw the early beginnings of the joy that this legislation can bring to a community. When we deny people the same legal standing or the same recognition as other people, we send the message that somehow they or their relationships are worth less than others. This message is wrong; it is outdated; and, frankly, it is cruel. We must change it for all Australians and we will change it for all Australians.

I have spoken to many Canberrans about marriage equality. Many people have reflected on the love and commitment of their own heterosexual marriages. They have spoken of the deep injustice they have felt that same-sex relationships are not offered the same sanctity or recognition in Australia. Others have stated more simply that they feel their marriages are in no way threatened or diminished by others being afforded the same basic right to marry. I note that some people in the community do hold that view and I feel saddened for them that they see that their relationship could be diminished by two other people being able to celebrate their own relationship.

The Greens have always stood up for, and will continue to stand up for, marriage equality. Every Green MP in Australia has voted for marriage equality every time it has come before a parliament. It was more than 20 years ago that former Greens leader Bob Brown became the first openly gay member of the Parliament of Australia. It was not long afterwards that Christine Milne led reform in Tasmania by decriminalising homosexuality. The Greens are confident and we know that we are on the right side of history. We are absolutely sure of that and time will prove that to be the case.

We are talking about an issue that is about love, that gives rights to people without taking rights away from anyone else, that does not cost anything and, at the end of the day, that simply makes people happier. So I am confident this fight will be won. It is right; it is simple; it is fair; and it is decent.

But before we get there, I do want to name what I think is at the heart of the resistance to this reform. It is simply prejudice. That prejudice is based on an ultraconservative view about what a man and a woman should be, which belongs back in the 1950s, back when a woman's place was in the kitchen, when Aboriginal people could not vote, and when blacks and whites could not marry.

Marriage has never been a static institution. It has changed. There have been big changes to the institution of marriage, and this is one more change along that journey. By legislating for marriage equality we can send a positive message to young people who are coming out and coming to terms with their sexuality: that your community accepts you; that your relationships are equal and valid; and that your community loves you just as they love every other member of that community.

We do hear conservative members talk about the issues of kids being brought up with homosexual couples and the outcomes that they experience. Frankly, this is all discredited. The science has been very clear that children who are raised by same-sex couples have the same psychological, social and academic outcomes as children who are raised by opposite sex couples. But, unfortunately, we do see the junk signs trotted out by people with the very prejudices that I was speaking of earlier.

The health impacts associated with people's sexuality are a consequence of discrimination and stigma by not being made feel as if they are accepted as equals in our society. They have nothing at all to do with the choices that people make. We know, for example, that if you are same-sex attracted, you are more likely to smoke, more likely to have had a chronic condition, much more likely to have experienced high levels of psychological distress, more likely to have had suicidal thoughts and plans and more likely to have attempted suicide.

Those statistics, as shocking as they are, have nothing to do with being gay or lesbian or any of the other points on the sexuality spectrum and have everything to do with the social prejudice, discrimination and violence that is perpetrated against lesbians, gay men and bisexual people simply for being themselves.

While we do support the case for marriage equality, I also have to say that the ACT Greens believe that the federal government's proposal for a plebiscite is a completely unnecessary one. We know that the Australian public is ready for equality. You only have to look at the opinion polls to know that Australians overwhelmingly support this reform. We believe that the plebiscite, at an estimated \$160 million, is an expensive exercise that we do not need, particularly when we do not even know if it will be binding on members. We have seen some members indicate that.

I believe that if a free vote were held on the floor of federal parliament on its first sitting day later this month, marriage equality would undoubtedly be written into law. The plebiscite seems as though it serves no purpose other than to appease certain conservative forces on the backbench of the federal government.

If a prolonged and drawn-out popular vote on this issue is something that the federal government does choose to proceed with, the Greens would ask that the Prime Minister show leadership, ensure that the plebiscite is written and that the process is conducted in such a way that it does not result in members of the LGBTIQ community being vilified simply for being who they are.

If a national conversation is to take place, it should be a respectful one. The journey towards equality has involved many hundreds of thousands of activists, community members, families, mums and dads and parliamentarians. Should this plebiscite come to fruition, I have no doubt that the push for equality will see many hundreds of thousands more get involved to make history.

I know that Australians value a fair go and they value the notion of equality before the law. They are values that are completely compromised by marriage discrimination. That is what it is. It is a form of discrimination and that is why the Greens do not accept the position that marriage is a fixed thing. It is why we believe we do not need a plebiscite. It is because we believe it is a form of discrimination that parliament should simply do away with.

I will be supporting Ms Burch's motion today. I listened to Mr Hanson's words while I was upstairs and I have looked at his amendment. Whilst the sentiment of Mr Hanson's motion is fine, I actually support the stronger motion that has been put by Ms Burch. Mr Hanson's amendment removes many of the stronger elements—in fact, all the elements—of Ms Burch's motion. I actually agree with the comments that Ms Burch has made that we do actually call on the Australian parliament to simply resolve the issue through a free vote of all members of parliament.

I do not believe that a plebiscite is necessary or is warranted for the reasons that I have stated earlier today. I am quite happy with paragraph 3 that says that if the federal parliament determines to hold a marriage equality plebiscite, the

ACT government actively engage in that and actively make the case in support. I am prepared to support that today because I believe it is the right and decent thing to do. I will be supporting Ms Burch's motion as it is and without the amendment.

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) (4.21): In 2013 when this parliament legislated for marriage equality I asked local couples to let me read their stories into *Hansard* as recognition of the impact that discrimination has on people's lives. One of those couples was Jess and Amy who, at the time, were six-months pregnant with their first child. They said that marriage equality mattered to them because "when our child asks us if we are married, we would like to be able to say we chose not to and not to have to say that we could not".

It makes me personally angry that their child is now old enough to ask that question and his mums still cannot give the answer his family deserves. From people who support a plebiscite, there has been a call for respectful debate on marriage equality. Sadly, I do not know that that is possible. Even if we put aside the hurtful statements that have been made by the likes of Lyle Shelton and Chris Miles that I refuse to amplify by repeating in this place, I still fail to see how it is possible to have this debate in a way that is respectful to families like those of Jess and Amy.

I fail to see how it is possible to respectfully say that someone should not be equal under law. I do not know how you can say with any kind of respect for a person that they are not worthy of an institution that for many people represents stability and family. I fail to see how someone can respectfully say that their own beliefs or faith should be recognised to the exclusion of faiths that choose to recognise same-sex relationships. And I genuinely do not know what a respectful version of the message that the gender of people in a relationship determines their value as parents could ever look like.

What I do know is that the attitudes of our laws endorse the divisive language that has been used when the LGBTIQ community has pushed for recognition and it has a lasting impact on people's lives. We have come so far it is so easy to forget that a 50-year-old today was 10 when the debate about the decriminalisation of homosexuality raged in South Australia, 18-years-old when it passed in New South Wales, 24 when Queensland amended their laws and 31-years-old when a High Court challenge finally delivered change in Tasmania in 1997.

There is a generation of working-age LGBTIQ Australians who have spent their lives hearing from the state, from their elected representatives and from very loud voices in their community that it was they who were illegal and immoral. When I speak to gay and lesbian people of that generation who survived those messages—I do not know how they did—I am struck by the way that they defined their own self-worth, changed attitudes in our community and forever broadened the definition of family.

Their courage has led to the place where we are now, trying to protect another generation of young people from damaging messages and legal discrimination. It is my deepest hope that we do not have a plebiscite on marriage equality. It requires no constitutional change and it can and should be passed by a vote of parliament.

However, I support Ms Burch's motion because if the Liberal Party federally force this matter to a plebiscite, I want every LGBTIQ Canberran and their family to know that the ACT government under the leadership of our Chief Minister, Andrew Barr, is unequivocally on their side, that they are a valued part of our community and that, contrary to any messages that they may hear from our opponents, they have our respect.

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (4.26): I want to thank those supporting the motion I have moved today. Mr Hanson's amendment is disappointing. Whilst he has come here and spoken quite calm words about respectful discussion, the clear way to be respectful in this discussion was just to allow the motion to go through. If you read it, it simply makes a statement of fact about where the federal dialogue is up to in relation to its plebiscite. It simply says that this government will support respectful and free debate and stand alongside our LGBTIQ community making sure that they are safe, regarded and respected in this debate.

It has been said that both sides of politics over the years have not addressed this issue, but that is not the reason to let another 16 years—or 16 days or 16 months—pass without both sides of politics finally standing as one and saying, "This matter will be resolved"; that the LGBTIQ members of our community—the mums and dads, the brothers and sisters—have as much right to marriage equality as anyone else in our community has. As Ms Berry mentioned, the adults of today were 10 when serious laws were passed. Let us not wait for another generation to pass before this law is passed.

Mr Hanson has said that he will vote yes should there be a plebiscite, but he said that he will be a passive player. He is the Leader of the Opposition. He aspires to be a leader of the ACT. If we come to this place with aspirations to be leaders, we cannot be passive in such a fundamental debate. There is no room to be passive. The aspiration of the leader is to lead, not to sit back, be quiet and just hope the world will pass him by. This is his chance to stand up and make that call.

Just today Mr Hanson was quite prepared to stand up and show leadership in support of the community clubs. There is no shyness about where he stands on light rail and health. But on this matter, on such a fundamental right as marriage equality in our community, he wants to show no leadership. But on other matters he is not bashful in any way about showing leadership.

On the issue of school chaplaincies, he was not bashful in showing his leadership in supporting the school chaplains. But for allowing marriage and fairness and respect—the fundamental right of law for people to be married—he does not have the gumption to show leadership on that. Just quietly, privately, vote yes, but not show the leadership that his aspirations should show.

Yes, I did get your quote wrong. It was back in 2015, as I understand. I will quote an ABC news article:

Mr Hanson said he was not concerned that there were different views within the Canberra Liberals.

All of my members are free to express their views because this is a federal issue. This is Jeremy Hanson's view and every Australian I'm sure has their view and they'd be entitled to express it.

Mr Hanson made mention of the fact that people are free to express positions. He has declared his position on this. He has spoken for you, Madam Assistant Speaker. So I would say that on this day, the very last private members' business day of this parliamentary term, Mr Hanson should allow that free vote. Mr Hanson should allow the members of the Canberra Liberals to express their own view on the motion that is in front of them today and his amendment.

I call on Mr Hanson to allow you, Madam Assistant Speaker, and the others over there to actually say yes when the division is called—and it will come—and support the motion that is before us. But Mr Hanson will not let you do that. Mr Hanson will demand that all those on that side, all those in the Canberra Liberals, support his amendment, which is a gutless amendment with no leadership, no respect and no regard.

He is going to say to you that you are not allowed to support this government's being very clear in its leadership to support this discussion. He will not let you. I would say, "Let's cut loose on the last private members' day in this parliament and say everyone is allowed to have a free vote. Vote for my motion as it is in the notice paper or vote for Mr Hanson's amendment."

There is a challenge of leadership, Mr Hanson. There is a challenge for you, given that you have spent some time in your remarks today, as have others, saying that this is a matter of free choice. Then you, Madam Assistant Speaker, would have the opportunity today to express your free choice.

Let us go to the motion that is actually before us. It states:

That:

(1) this Assembly:

- (a) reaffirms its support for marriage equality;
- (b) supports a free, positive and respectful discussion on marriage equality in the Canberra community;
- (c) confirms its position that marriage equality is best achieved through a free vote of all Federal members and senators; and
- (d) notes that a national plebiscite on marriage equality remains the currently policy of the Liberal National Party Coalition, and consequently may be the only way to achieve marriage equality in this Federal parliamentary term ...

Perhaps that is what Mr Hanson does not like. It notes that:

a national plebiscite on marriage equality remains the currently policy of the Liberal National Party Coalition

The motion in front of us, which with a free vote we have the chance to say yes to, goes on to state:

(2) this Assembly further calls on the Australian Parliament to:

(a) consider the issue of marriage equality as a priority when sittings resume;
and

(b) resolve the issue through a free vote of all Members of Parliament ...

It is a statement. Either you support a plebiscite or you say to the Australian parliament, "It is within your powers to get on and just do this."

The third part of the motion before us today that we all have a free vote on—Mr Hanson has made quite a point about that—calls on this government, calls on us as leaders in this community, to demonstrate that the ACT is the most lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex-friendly state there is and calls for strong support for marriage equality. It calls on us to engage in local and national debate. It calls on us to support government employees to be free and open in their participation and calls on us to declare and show our support for the LGBTIQ community.

In the context of being respectful, not to have a division called on this would be the most sensible way to go. In closing in the few minutes I have remaining, I note that there are many stories in sport and coming out of the Olympics. But I will just probably end on this headline:

Sealed with a kiss: Girlfriend proposes to Brazilian player after rugby final.

This is a demonstration of love where two came together on a most public playing field and a marriage proposal was put, and accepted, I am very pleased to say. In that country they can get married but if someone went on to any of our playing fields and put a proposal of marriage to their loved one, this community would not permit it. I think times have changed. Things must change. This motion should be supported as it is and we will not be supporting the amendment from Mr Hanson.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7

Mr Coe
Mr Doszpot
Mrs Dunne
Mr Hanson

Mrs Jones
Ms Lawder
Mr Wall

Noes 8

Mr Barr
Ms Berry
Dr Bourke
Ms Burch

Mr Corbell
Mr Gentleman
Mr Hinder
Mr Rattenbury

Question so resolved in the negative.

Motion agreed to.

Hearing Awareness Week

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (4.40): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) Hearing Awareness Week is hosted by the members of the Deafness Forum of Australia and is an annual event to raise awareness in the community of hearing impairment and how to protect our hearing;
- (b) Hearing Awareness Week runs each year in the last full week of August and it runs this year from 20 to 27 August;
- (c) one in six Australians have a hearing health issue;
- (d) hearing loss is projected to increase to one in every four Australians by 2050 with an ageing population; and
- (e) people over the age of 65 do not have access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) improve communication accessibility for Canberrans especially with respect to ACT Government material;
- (b) improve employment opportunities for people with disability in the ACT Public Service, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing or have a chronic disorder of the ear; and
- (c) consider methods to raise community awareness of hearing loss and ways to avoid it.

I am happy to talk today about Hearing Awareness Week, which is coming up at the end of August. It is an important week that raises awareness of hearing health issues in our community. I am very pleased to bring it to the attention of the Assembly today and welcome our interpreter, Mandy. The Canberra Liberals hope that those on the other side will support the motion today.

Hearing Awareness Week is hosted by members of the Deafness Forum of Australia. It is an annual event which raises awareness in the community of hearing loss and how to protect your hearing. It runs each year in the last full week of August, so this year it runs from 20 to 27 August.

In the ACT a lot of work relating to Hearing Awareness Week is organised by the ACT Deafness Resource Centre, a community organisation that does great work in

providing information, linkages and capacity building for the hard of hearing, the deaf and those with chronic disorders of the ear in our community. Each year for as long as I can remember, the ACT Deafness Resource Centre has held an expo during Hearing Awareness Week which helps draw attention to the growing range of services and products available to help people with hearing loss in our community.

There are, by some estimates, millions of people in Australia who are affected by hearing loss. Some facts provided by the Australian Network on Disability show that one in six Australians are affected by hearing loss and that there are approximately 30,000 deaf people who use Auslan in Australia. Projections for the year 2050 indicate that one in every four Australians may have a hearing loss by that time. That is one in four Australians. It may be partly to do with our ageing population, because hearing loss can be associated with ageing, but it can also be associated with illness or injury. Noise injury is one of those forms of injury which can impact on people and cause them to lose their hearing.

It is interesting to note that 90 per cent of children born with hearing loss are born into hearing families.

In Australia generally, there are over four million people who have some form of disability. Hearing is something that we all take very much for granted but it is vital to our everyday communication and vital to our quality of life. Individuals who have hearing and then lose it later in life can suffer the effects of that very keenly. They may no longer be able to enjoy music the way they used to. They might struggle in the workplace to understand what is going on. They might struggle to use a telephone. They might struggle to hear the voices of their children or grandchildren.

Whilst the onset of hearing loss might be gradual with age, every individual's hearing needs are unique. As I have already said, exposure to loud noise can be a significant factor in hearing loss but is one of the most obvious preventable causes of hearing loss.

There is a wide range of services and technologies available to assist people who have lost their hearing. However, some people struggle to afford them. Whilst you may get hearing aids through the federal government program as a child, as an adult access to assistance might be much more limited. I have heard instances of mothers who have chosen not to buy batteries for their hearing aids in order to put food on the table for their children. While some young people in their 20s might be saving up for an overseas trip, other people in their 20s are saving up for their next lot of hearing aids.

These days we have newborn hearing screening, which generally takes place in the hospital very soon after the birth of a baby. This can identify hearing loss in a baby and assist with the identification of a hearing loss so that parents can be offered options as to what they would like done or what they feel is the best pathway for their child. For some, it might be becoming Auslan-using children; for others it might be a cochlear implant, hearing aids or a combination of a number of different solutions.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing face many barriers every day. Access to Auslan interpreters is another area where there can be difficulties. Also, there is a lack of awareness in the community about how hearing loss affects a person's life. Just

recently I was reading on Facebook a friend's example of when they went to Sydney for work and arrived at the front desk of their hotel. They are in quite an influential position. The person at the front desk of the hotel, despite the fact that when the booking was made they were advised that the person was deaf, apparently persisted in turning away from the customer and speaking. A lot of communication difficulty ensued despite my friend's continued efforts to tell the person on the front desk of the hotel that they were deaf and they needed to face them. Later, as I recall, they had a note slipped under their door about a phone call in the morning as a wake-up call, once again, despite the fact that my friend was deaf and would not hear the telephone ring. Many people just do not think through the implications of dealing with someone who is deaf. When you encounter someone who is deaf or hard of hearing, it is really not that difficult to implement some basic communication techniques.

Greater community awareness about hearing health and wellbeing is an important stepping stone. It is a good starting point. A number of organisations in the deafness sector have got together for what has been called the break the sound barrier campaign. That is a national campaign that aims to put hearing health and wellbeing on the national political agenda.

There are currently nine national health priorities. The break the sound barrier campaign is advocating that, with one in six Australians affected, hearing health and wellbeing should be made the 10th national health priority. The campaign advocates that making hearing health and wellbeing a national health priority could lead to more funding for services, more investment in research and better community education and understanding. Prioritising hearing health and wellbeing can assist those who are deaf or hard of hearing to live life to the fullest, to actively participate and be involved in all aspects of their community, whether it is schools, the workplace, local sporting clubs, being a volunteer, or being able to go to the cinema or to the theatre. It is a very worthwhile campaign, and I look forward to hearing more about it. I have already met with the proponents of the campaign and offered my personal support to the campaign.

One of the changing factors for us in the deafness sector, and disability more generally, is the introduction of the national disability insurance scheme. I am sure my colleague Dr Bourke will speak more about that. I would like to see into the future more ACT government material being more accessible, to improve communication accessibility so that no Canberran is excluded and everyone can participate fully in a socially inclusive city.

Some of you, I am sure, will have noticed, because you would be avid watchers of my Facebook page, that the videos I put on my Facebook page have captions on them and, where possible, an Auslan interpreter. That is my own personal effort to improve communication accessibility for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

I would also like to see the ACT government improving employment opportunities for people with disability in the ACT public service. My motion calls upon the ACT government to do that.

It has recently been brought to my attention that the Disability Information Service will cease operation from 30 September of this year. For the past 10 years, the Disability Information Service has provided a centralised point of contact for people

with disability, their families and carers and other members of the ACT community seeking information about disability matters in the ACT. The ACT government has made a decision to gradually withdraw over a three-year period from the provision of specialist disability and therapy services provided by the Community Services Directorate and early intervention services provided by the education and training directorate. Those in the deaf community in the ACT are looking to find more information about how that is going to affect them and whether this is something that they would need to incorporate into their own NDIS packages.

Generally, my motion today calls on the ACT government to improve communication accessibility for Canberrans, especially with respect to ACT government material; to improve employment opportunities for people with disability in the ACT public service, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing or have a chronic disorder of the ear; and to consider methods to raise community awareness of hearing loss and ways to avoid it.

In concluding, I would like to reiterate that Hearing Awareness Week is an important week in our calendar that raises awareness of hearing health issues in our community. I would like to encourage everyone to consider communication accessibility, improving employment opportunities any way that they can, and considering those people who are deaf or hard of hearing or have a chronic disorder of the ear and how they can improve their own personal communication with them on a day-to-day basis.

I commend my motion to the Assembly.

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Disability, Minister for Small Business and the Arts and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (4.53): I shall pause for a moment whilst the Auslan interpreter joins me. I thank Ms Lawder for bringing forward this motion, which the government will be supporting, and highlighting some of the important messages around Hearing Awareness Week.

Hearing Awareness Week presents an important opportunity to bring together experts from the industry, community organisations and people affected by hearing loss to provide advice and raise awareness of all the supports and services which can provide assistance to those people.

Hearing impairment is common. We know that an estimated 3.5 million Australians, or approximately one in six people, are affected by varying degrees of hearing loss, with that number expected to increase to one in four people by 2050. This includes some 60,000 Canberrans who are affected by hearing loss. Preventative action is vital and unless it is taken, especially in young people and people in the workforce, avoidable hearing loss will increase.

This is an important component of screening programs in the health sector. In the ACT, for example, the ACT newborn hearing screening program, delivered by ACT Health, aims to identify babies born with significant hearing loss and introduce them to appropriate services as soon as possible. About three babies out of every thousand born will have a significant hearing loss. Babies are offered hearing screening as soon as possible after birth.

At the other end of the age spectrum, while people over the age of 65 years are not eligible for the NDIS, older Australians in receipt of a pensioner concession card and with a hearing loss may be eligible to receive hearing services funded through the hearing services program. The supports provided through this program include a comprehensive hearing assessment performed by a qualified hearing services provider, access to a wide range of fully subsidised quality hearing devices made by leading manufacturers and advice on how to achieve maximum benefit from hearing devices.

Workplaces, through workplace safety practices, also play a critical role in preventing hearing loss. According to Safe Work Australia, occupational noise-induced hearing loss is a significant health and economic problem. Between July 2002 and June 2007, there were approximately 16,500 successful workers compensation claims for industrial deafness involving permanent impairment due to noise across Australia. Access Canberra WorkSafe inspectors constantly engage and educate business owners and those in control of construction site noise to protect employees and contractors from industrial and construction noise alike by ensuring compliance with the Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011.

As Minister for Disability, I am proud that Canberra is already setting the benchmark for supporting choice and control for people with a disability, including those individuals with hearing impairments or hearing loss, with the ACT being the first state or territory to fully roll out the NDIS.

The desire for a truly inclusive and participative community was one of the main drivers behind Involve, Canberra's disability commitment, which represents the ACT's government's continued commitment to the implementation of the national disability strategy for 2010-20. In 2015-16, one of Involve's key focus areas was developing meaningful and valued employment options for people with disability.

We know that a job is essential to a person's economic security and is important to connecting with others. A job contributes to personal wellbeing and a sense of identity and belonging. By acquiring new skills and knowledge throughout our lives we have the capacity to contribute to Canberra's prosperity and enable it to continue to be a place of great opportunity.

We want to continue to improve opportunities for people with disability to develop skills and get meaningful jobs. The ACT public service inclusion traineeship is specifically for people with disability. Upon successful completion of the program, trainees are placed into ongoing positions across the ACT public service in various directorates.

The first traineeship program started in July 2016, and was an ICT traineeship in Shared Services specifically for people identifying with autism spectrum disorder. The second program is scheduled to commence in November 2016 and will be a larger program open to candidates identified as having a disability across all disability areas.

To assist with raising awareness and further employment inclusion initiatives across the ACT public service, the ACT government will coordinate the establishment of ACT public service inclusion practitioners. As part of current employment inclusion programs and initiatives, support, education and training for directorates has been provided to assist NDIS and job access involvement, leading to funding and development opportunities such as Auslan interpreter services, equipment and training for both individuals and the work area. To promote the ACT public service commitment to increasing the number of employees with disability in the workforce across the ACT public service, employment inclusion targets have been set for each directorate by the head of service, with targets of 3.4 per cent to be met by June 2019.

The ACT government is firmly committed to making sure that all Canberrans can access government information. Improving accessibility, especially in the area of communicating with the community, is really about better engagement and making sure that no-one is disadvantaged by the way that we provide information.

We understand that accessibility is essential to ensure that we provide equal access and equal opportunity to people with disabilities. One of the ACT government's main information opportunities is through our online channels. A well-structured online presence offers many people with disabilities unprecedented access to information and ways to interact with the government. Web accessibility means that people with disabilities can effectively use the web. Specifically, web accessibility means that people with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate and interact with our content. One of the ways we demonstrate this commitment is through our mandate to adhere to the web content accessibility guidelines to the AA standard. For example, last week we launched our new community consultation and engagement website, your say. The your say website has been specifically designed with both accessibility and usability in mind. Examples of our accessible design include minimum font sizes, descriptive text images, colour contrast and transcripts for all video content.

We are continually evolving our processes and looking for better ways to communicate with the Canberra community. The ACT deaf community advises that there are around 60 people in the ACT who use Australian sign language, Auslan, as their primary communication mode. The supply of Auslan interpreters is to be considered by the National Disability Insurance Agency as it rolls out the NDIS in the ACT. The NDIS will provide people with disability, including those with hearing impairments, with the opportunity to access a wider range of services and supports whilst allowing individuals to choose the supports they want when they want them.

The number of Australians who are experiencing hearing loss to any degree and the expectation that this number will rise as the population ages highlights the importance of raising awareness of hearing impairment and ear disorders. The ACT government is pleased to support the ACT Deafness Resource Centre to provide information, referral and advocacy services to people with deafness, hearing impairment and chronic disorders of the ear. The ACT Deafness Resource Centre supports people with hearing loss and also seeks to raise awareness of hearing loss in the general community.

An awareness program is held each year during Hearing Awareness Week. This expo has been well attended in past years and provides information on the range of hearing supports or aids that can assist people to improve their hearing in different settings. Last weekend I was in my electorate speaking with the chief executive of the ACT Deafness Resource Centre about some of the issues experienced by people affected by deafness and hearing loss. Later this month I will be meeting with the Deafness Resource Centre as well as the Shepherd Centre.

During Hearing Awareness Week I will be honoured to officially open the Deafness Resource Centre's annual expo on 24 August. I will be speaking to the attendees about hearing awareness issues and looking forward to catching up and talking with exhibitors from the hearing industry, community organisations exhibiting at the event and attendees who are keen to find out more.

I wish everyone involved with Hearing Awareness Week every success and once again thank Ms Lawder for bringing this motion, which I am delighted to support.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo—Minister for Corrections, Minister for Education, Minister for Justice and Consumer Affairs and Minister for Road Safety) (4.12): Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this motion today. Hearing Awareness Week starts on 24 August, and it is an important time to stop and reflect on what it means to be hearing impaired or deaf and how people who are hearing impaired can be better integrated into our community, including, importantly, our workplaces. We must not reduce people's capacity to engage in their workplace and their community by having barriers that prevent full engagement.

Hearing loss affects people right across our community, for example, children born with hearing loss; children who suffer from middle ear infections during their early years, sometimes leading to long-term hearing and developmental issues; teenagers and young adults who increase their risk of hearing loss by exposing themselves to loud music and also music through headphones; people working in industrial work sites using noisy equipment; and hearing loss associated with ageing.

The impacts of hearing loss are wide and varied. Obviously, for those who have severe or profound loss, there are life-long impacts on communication, learning and socialisation. For young children who have middle ear issues, there are impacts on their learning in classrooms and their attention skills as well as speech and language issues. In the Education Directorate, our specially trained hearing team works across schools to build their capacities to support the needs of children within the classroom.

Noise-induced hearing loss affects people from across the community. With only a mild hearing loss, people can find it difficult to participate in social conversations, sometimes causing them to withdraw from larger gatherings. In work situations it can also be very difficult, as conversations can be fast moving and difficult for someone with a hearing impairment to follow. Formal work events do not always cater effectively for people with a hearing impairment, providing a further barrier.

Technological responses to hearing impairment have continued to improve over the years, but the day-to-day reality of managing can be challenging. Hearing aids have gotten smaller as technology has improved, yet the manual dexterity of an older person does not necessarily make it easier to manage those hearing impairment devices. Computer technology and the increasing reliance on email and social media have probably assisted those who are deaf but it remains the case that verbal communication is a primary mode of workplace communication.

The disability of hearing impairment is often an invisible one and those who are affected might feel that they always have to remind people so they can communicate better. The example Ms Lawder related of the hotel in Sydney where her friend attempted to stay and the challenges there is perhaps a perfect example of that very point.

Yet if the community has a higher awareness of how a hearing loss impacts someone, there are many simple things that they can do to make it easier for a person with a hearing impairment. Speaking to someone face on and not from behind improves the sound quality and enables the possibility of lip reading. Speaking just a bit louder and more slowly can help, and that is not much to ask if it can make a positive difference. Facilitating meetings so there is a speaking list and people are not speaking over each other is another practical consideration. Hearing loss is one of the things that is likely to impact all of us as we get older and as our families get older. As Ms Lawder's motion highlights, more and more of us will be affected as our population ages.

In thinking about the role of government, the ACT government does have a number of steps in place, and no doubt there is more that can be done as more consideration is given to this issue. The ACT government provides a free nurse audiometry service for children over 18 months and adults for hearing screening tests. I am pleased to hear about the initiative to install special smoke alarms for hearing impaired and deaf people in the community who are identified as being at risk given that normal alarms simply emit a noise.

Having had the discussion about employment opportunities, the ACT government needs to keep thinking about this. The government has had the employment strategy for people with a disability in place over the past five years. Now it has set a target for increasing employment inclusion, a target that is being managed by the directors-general, of 3.4 per cent of the workforce by 2019. That is a very practical and focused strategy that really looks at the outcomes we are trying to achieve.

I thank Ms Lawder for bringing the motion today and for the opportunity to reflect on the issues and discuss them here in the chamber. I thank my interpreter for today, and I hope that Hearing Awareness Week is a great success in further raising these issues in the community's consciousness.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank Ms Dolejsi for being part of this activity. I think it is one of the earliest occasions when we have utilised an interpreter and it has worked exceptionally well. Thank you and I am glad there were only three speakers—perhaps.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (5.09), in reply: Thank you to Dr Bourke and Mr Rattenbury for their support of my motion today. There are some things in this place that are not partisan, that are not subject to politics, and I think this is a good example of that.

There are things we can all do on a personal level, as well as in our careers here in this place, to increase awareness of the need for better communication access and take steps to try to apply social inclusion more broadly to ensure education, employment and other involvement for people with disability, to make sure that they are not disadvantaged and they are not discriminated against in any way.

When you give it a try, you find it is not really that hard after all. Many of you will know that I employ a deaf person in my office. It has been a great experience for people who might otherwise not have had a lot to do with a deaf person to understand that there are little communication tips that you can use to make sure that you can communicate just as well.

I wish the ACT Deafness Resource Centre, the Deafness Forum of Australia and all of their partner organisations all the best with the break the sound barrier campaign, with the rollout of Hearing Awareness Week at the end of August of this year and for future years. I look forward to taking part again this year and in the future. Let us hope that we improve communication access all the time here in the Assembly, in the ACT government overall and in our community more generally.

I thank members once again for their support today. I also thank interpreter Mandy for her assistance.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Sport and recreation facilities—maintenance

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (5.13): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the 2016-2017 Budget shows that funding for sport and recreation continues to decline in real terms; and
- (b) that this is in spite of ground hire charges being increased significantly, the condition of ovals deteriorating and grounds often closed at critical times of the season; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) address the deteriorating conditions at a number of our local ovals;
- (b) work with local sporting clubs to better understand their needs including timing of grounds shutdowns and playing surfaces; and

(c) commit to delivering real support to local clubs and local teams.

I have moved this motion today, the last private members' business day of this parliament, on the appalling state of sports facilities in the territory because I believe it is an important and ongoing issue for all of us and for the community that we represent. Sport looms large in the Canberra psyche and for many years the government has proudly talked up the number of people involved in sport. But in recent times the reality has become somewhat different.

In June this year the ACT Chief Health Officer published his annual report and it shows that Canberra appears to be losing the battle of the bulge, with one in four adults now obese. And the problem seems to be escalating. Rates of obesity have ballooned over the past two decades with the number of overweight and obese adults skyrocketing from 40 per cent in 1995 to 63 per cent in 2014. The report goes on to say that although obesity and overweight rates for children have remained relatively stable in recent years, eight out of 10 primary school and 88 per cent of high school students are not doing enough exercise. Sport is something that people talk to me about a lot and the cost, standard and accessibility of sport facilities have been brought to my attention on many occasions.

As I referred to yesterday in my remarks in the Sport and Recreation appropriations debate, over the past four years we have seen increase after substantial increase in the cost of hiring sporting facilities. These costs have become a burden on many local clubs in Canberra and, strangely—or perhaps not so strangely when you know how this government tweaks the figures and squeezes the rate-paying consumer—despite the ever higher costs and the unchanged or deteriorating state of some facilities, the total budget for Sport and Recreation has declined.

Recently, in the estimates debate, I asked the minister for sport why the sports budget has been declining in recent years. Her response—which I will quote here in full—is somewhat concerning given that she represents the government in this area. Ms Berry said:

Thank you for that question. I asked the same question when we were looking at these papers leading up to this. This is about some of the initiatives that Sport and Recreation funded previously ceasing. I might get Mr Dawes to explain a bit more to the committee about what happened there.

Mr Dawes said:

This may fall into a couple of other categories that we have discussed earlier as well with some of the programs that are ceasing. I am more than happy to take that on notice and provide you with a breakdown of where that movement is. It is just that a number of programs are coming to completion and are not funded.

I asked why the sports budget had been declining. Yes, obviously if programs are no longer being funded that would reduce the budget but I am not sure whether Ms Berry then went on to inquire of her directorate why the programs that were in place were no longer funded or why the money was not allocated to other sports. Maybe the directive for sport, just as it is for every other area, is to help pay for capital metro, the tram, the people and the propaganda that go with it.

Why has the directorate budget been cut and why have the costs of ground hire gone up so much? It has become a common story for a number of local clubs all over Canberra that the most significant part of their budget is the amount spent on ground hire. Over the past four years clubs have seen these costs have real consequences on the way they impact on their budgets and over the past 12 months I have had the opportunity to talk to many clubs about their major issues and priorities.

One club in particular gave me a very graphic example of the cost of ground hire. This particular club has had the cost of its ground hire rise from \$15,000 in 2013 to almost \$35,000 in 2015, an increase of \$20,000 in just two years. Why? Was there additional lighting installed for the club? Were facilities upgraded? What changed? Nothing changed for that club. There was no improvement to the lighting; the facilities were not upgraded. The only thing that changed was the exorbitant cost that has gone from \$15,000 to \$35,000 in just two years. Of course these costs then are passed, inevitably, onto the parents and participants at the club. It is just another example of how this government is constantly increasing the cost of living for Canberrans.

However, whilst these increases in cost are forced onto local clubs year after year they are consistently forced to play on substandard facilities. It is not as if the increases mean that there are more facility repairs and better sporting grounds made available. The facilities, the sporting grounds, are becoming substandard.

This same club told me the story of their local oval, which had always had exposed sprinkler heads that were never fixed and which had drainage which meant that water would always pool any time it rained. This of course meant that after rain the ground turned to sludge, meaning the ground became unplayable, sometimes for quite a while. Add to this the total lack of parking in the area and it adds up to a less than great experience, all at the cost of an extra \$20,000 for the two years. This is not an uncommon experience among sports clubs. With the recent constant closure of sportsgrounds this year, I had a number of people mention that it was as though any sign of rain meant the oval should be closed.

The official line from government is that the grounds need to be closed to protect the playing surface—and that is correct—but why is the playing surface unable to drain sufficiently when, just across the border, either to the north or the south, local council facilities manage to get the surface drainage correct and they can allow most games to proceed up to significant and continuing wet weather events? In Canberra closure is a certainty because of the risk of disrepair and breakdown in services for every ground even after just one session of rain.

How unsurprisingly, if you ask this government if their management plan for sporting facilities in Canberra is working and the best and most effective they can be, then you are accused of constantly talking down Canberra's sporting facilities. While various ministers in this Labor-Greens alliance continue to stick their heads in the sand I will continue to stand up for the local community sporting clubs and their volunteers, who are the backbone of every junior and senior club in Canberra and whose requests for the government to listen to their very real issues are falling on deaf ears within this government.

Our community deserve better than what this government has been delivering to them at ever-increasingly higher costs. During estimates Mr Hinder raised the issue of the sports booking system and I think very unfairly cast aspersions on clubs whom he suggested made multiple bookings and then did not always proceed with the bookings and in doing so prevented others using that oval.

Some years ago I met with Sport and Recreation officials about the booking system because the larger football clubs and the smaller ones had expressed their enormous frustration at the time and difficulty they had in trying to book grounds for clubs with a multiple number of teams. From reading the *Hansard* transcript you are left with the impression that it is all the fault of the clubs for being selfish and not acting ethically.

I was somewhat surprised at Mr Hinder's comments as he tells me that he is involved in junior sport. If he is, he is not listening to the problems his clubs face. I think his comments are a slur on the clubs. The booking system is ineffective and clunky and it ought to have been addressed years ago. This government rabbits on about its ICT capability and talks up just how efficient the new Access Canberra portal is when it is not that at all. And so it is with the booking system.

It is well past time for Sport and Recreation officers to sit down and consult deeply with their clients, the users of the booking service, to better understand the difficulties that our local clubs face. I know consultation is not something that this government have much form on or, I guess, interest in but it is time that they learnt.

We have a population of kids who, by the Chief Health Officer's own records, are getting less fit and less healthy. One of the reasons is the cost of playing sport. That needs to be fixed.

But how do the smaller clubs communicate with government? Even if government were to listen, our local sports clubs are run by volunteers who have day jobs and their time is limited. The sports booking system is just one of the areas that take up so much valuable time for these volunteers. Sitting down to write a submission or seek an appointment is out of reach for many clubs. I have spoken about this on a number of occasions but many of the smaller local clubs now have no avenues to voice their concerns. I can speak up about it but the government has sat back and allowed ACTSport to collapse or as a number of the board members of ACTSport have said, "This government has assisted or engineered the demise of ACTSport." They are tough words, but that is coming through from a number of individuals who have been connected with ACTSport and from clubs who also feel the absence of an organisation like ACTSport.

A number of times I have asked about this issue but I am patronisingly told that while they appreciate this is a subject in which I have a great interest I have got it wrong; it is not the government's fault. I am always told that ACTSport were looking at their business model, which was not working. I find it curious though that recently in estimates when I asked about ACTSport and the UC sports hub area I was told:

And just recently we have gone out to look at what other community sports might like to locate into that space. To date we have not had any responses from anyone in that community sport area.

Let me get this straight. ACTSport were “encouraged”—and I use that word in inverted commas—to move from Sports House in Hackett where they were supposed to be able to rent out space to some of the sports they represented and in return they could use some of that rent to help offset their own costs in this space at the University Canberra.

The move was not at ACTSport’s request but to satisfy some sort of government or, more correctly, the Chief Minister’s, grand vision for the university to be a sports centre. The offer was that ACTSport would move and then on-sell some of the space. ACTSport found that difficult, impossible, to do and told the government that and the government then decided that ACTSport was not required anymore; it was an outdated model. Having enticed them to come into an area the government then found it easier to bring down the entity that was so useful to the Canberra community for so long.

How is any business model going to succeed in an environment promoted and encouraged by this government when no-one wants to move there? Quite clearly it is another bright idea—or perhaps not so bright idea—from this government that has not worked and the community, as usual, is paying the price. Once again we have seen this government get it wrong but place the blame on someone else. It is always someone else. It is “them”. It is never teflon Andrew who in the past has managed to weasel his way out of tricky situations. But the good news for the community is that the Chief Minister’s teflon is starting to wear thin.

Ms Berry: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, you have been here long enough. Sit down. Thank you. Ms Berry.

Ms Berry: Speakers have made a number of suggestions in this place that people should be correctly referred to by their title. Mr Doszpot has referred to the Chief Minister inappropriately.

MR DOSZPOT: ON the point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, can we stop the clock?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: The word “teflon” is not a disparaging remark.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I just remind everybody to be respectful and to refer to people by their appropriate title.

MR DOSZPOT: Teflon is a sheer and veneer—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, I am making a ruling and the ruling is that I remind you to refer to people by their correct title.

MR DOSZPOT: I withdraw “teflon” from the description I gave of the Chief Minister.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: But the Chief Minister’s reputation is wearing thin. Coupled with the community’s recognition that there is something wrong with this government there is an aroma, and it is not pleasant. A lot of the current community issues confronting this jaded government relate to their inability to consult the community and their arrogance.

Only recently we had the minister re-announce the 2012 election promise for a pool in the Weston area. Once again this is yet another example of this government’s refusal to consult the community. The *Canberra Times* in July quoted the head coach of the Canberra Diving Academy who said she believed that the government was ignoring their concerns:

But Ms Widdup believes the government has ignored the aquatic community, by not building diving boards at the Gungahlin Leisure centre in 2014, announcing the Olympic Pool will be replaced with a new sports stadium within a decade and backflipping on plans to build a diving pool as part of the City to the Lake project.

It would seem fairly straightforward that when you want to build an aquatic centre you would consult the aquatic community about what their needs are but apparently even that simple concept has escaped this government.

Time prevents me listing all the failures of the Labor government in this area: the mess that was the rebuilding of Woden park, the leaking Olympic pool that is continually being shut down for repairs, the state of our grounds. My motion has again highlighted the costs and the condition of ACT sportsgrounds and I am calling on this government to address the deteriorating conditions in a number of our local ovals and, as per my motion, commit to delivering real support to local clubs and local teams.

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) (5.26): I thank Mr Doszpot for bringing the motion on today. Unlike the Canberra Liberals talking Canberra down, as per usual, I will be talking about what a great place Canberra is to live in and what fantastic sports facilities we have here in the ACT.

To begin, I believe I have been misrepresented by Mr Doszpot. The question that came to me in estimates was from Mr Smyth. I wonder whether Mr Smyth has shared the response that I provided to Mr Doszpot on his question. To confirm, and to help Mr Doszpot understand, there have been no cuts to staff and no cuts to services or

club support or maintenance. None of those cuts has incurred. Perhaps Mr Doszpot needs to look through his papers or maybe give Mr Smyth a call to find the response that I gave to that question to give him some more detail.

Some of the funding for the Brumbies was transferred from the Sport and Recreation portfolio to the Chief Minister's directorate, as well as funding for the Capitals. I suggest that Mr Doszpot checks that out instead of coming in here, taking bits and pieces, quoting them and trying to mislead people. I guess that is the way the Canberra Liberals work; they just quote bits and pieces at a time without providing the full information to the community.

What we can all agree on is that sport and recreation is at the heart of our community. It deserves, and can rightly demand, a strong commitment from our government. The funding needs of sport and recreation are diverse, with costs that range from training athletes—currently doing us proud in Rio, which you mentioned earlier, Madam Deputy Speaker—to delivering critical operational funding support to our sporting organisations, to encouraging children to connect with outdoor play through nature play, through to maintaining and overseeing our sportsground and aquatic facilities.

The annual cost of all of this is significant and varies each budget year with the comings and goings of capital developments as well as new initiatives. The cost that we are talking about here is in the order of a recurrent payment of \$25.122 million. The variation on the 2015-16 payments is explained by a number of output movements and the completion of some initiatives, which I provided on notice after the estimates and have just suggested that Mr Doszpot check out.

Community attention often draws back to our sportsgrounds, the repair and maintenance of them and their availability for local clubs. I would remind the Assembly that the ACT government manages and maintains over 442 hectares. Of this, we irrigate 287 hectares, comprising 711 individual hireable fields for the Canberra community. Active Canberra administered 86,723 hours of sportsground bookings in 2015-16. Twenty-one full-time staff bring this service together.

Delivering this service is not without its challenges. Our Canberra climate presents the toughest turf management conditions in the country: scorching heat in summer and an average of 99 frosts each winter. Weather conditions in Canberra this winter have been particularly challenging for turf maintenance. The month of June was the wettest on record, with 144 millimetres of rain, representing more than three times the average rainfall for the month. A further 71 millimetres of rain—almost double the monthly average—fell in July.

In the interest of safety and to minimise surface damage, sportsground closures have been necessary across the region—not just in Canberra—to assist in preserving the conditions of the playing surfaces. I have been to see the Gungahlin enclosed oval and am aware of the pressures on the high use of this ground. Despite these challenges, Active Canberra has continued to work closely with sporting representatives to assist in the delivery of their respective training and competition needs. Madam Deputy Speaker, I can assure you and I can assure the Assembly that, whatever the challenges are, you will not find this government painting the grass to keep it green.

Members would recall the Kanga Cup played recently in Canberra. Some 5,000 visitors came to our city. Capital Football have expressed their thanks to the ACT government for the support they received from Active Canberra to assist in the delivery of this event in trying circumstances this year.

As members know, ACT government sportsgrounds, with the exception of synthetic facilities, are closed twice yearly for necessary remediation works. The renovation involves removal and installation of goalposts by cranes, aerating, dethatching, fertilising, top dressing, seeding and, in some cases, turfing. The restoration shutdown is now well established with fixed periods in March and September. A rolling shutdown has been previously explored by Active Canberra. However, this model is not practical for a number of reasons. The intensiveness of the program and the resources involved, including the need for flexibility to move quickly and progressively from one ground to the other, does not lend itself to some grounds being left on-line for use.

From a budget perspective, there are efficiencies in undertaking the necessary bulk maintenance requirements during short, intense periods and the need to rest the grounds briefly from any use is essential. Expenditure associated with maintaining the ACT government's sportsgrounds in 2015-16 was \$15.7 million. This funding primarily supported the maintenance of irrigated and synthetic fields. Importantly, it should be recognised that all revenue received from the hire of ACT government sportsgrounds offsets the costs associated with ongoing maintenance of these valuable community assets.

Annual increases to sportsground fees and charges each year go only a small way towards better cost recovery for delivery of this key service to the community. Revenue collected from sportsground hire in 2015-16 was \$2.5 million. This represents a cost recovery ratio of just 16 per cent. In other words, a government subsidy of 84 per cent is currently being provided to sport and recreation user groups for their sportsground usage.

The increases which have occurred are bringing the government subsidy gradually back to 80 per cent, where it typically sits in other jurisdictions. Further, I would point to the additional investment in the 2016-17 budget of \$1.8 million for a sportsground irrigation and maintenance funding boost, as well as \$1.1 million for community sporting infrastructure and asset maintenance.

The government seeks to work actively with local sports to support affordability and participation. It is important to point out that the ACT government's sportsground fees and charges make up only a small proportion of the cost for participants, especially at the junior level. A junior football club is currently charged \$6 per hour to hire one football field for training. Some football clubs share this space across numerous teams, accommodating the needs of up to 50 participants per field. So there can be no question that the ACT government has an ongoing record of providing quality and subsidised sport and recreation facilities for use by the local sports industry and the broader ACT community.

However, as part of my amendment, which I will move shortly, makes clear, the government is always willing to work with sports around suggestions to improve the way it books and maintains fields. I have asked Active Canberra to place particular emphasis on working with sports on upcoming closures in September this year and March 2017. Other support to local clubs and local teams is also reflected in the delivery of current capital works projects valued at over \$17.27 million, including upgrades of the Narrabundah ball park and Phillip oval and the development of the Melrose football precinct. This is off the back of recently completed works, including the Woden park upgrade, oval restorations at Bonython, Watson and Weetangera, the Gungahlin enclosed oval and the Franklin community recreation park. These works combined have just surpassed the \$30 million mark.

We also provide support for sports via the \$2.3 million sport and recreation grants program, which can be used by sports to fund participation programs, projects that improve facilities, organisational development, planning and costs associated with education and training. Under this program, I have been pleased to announce this morning that the government will work with sporting bodies to grow women's representation on their boards. We also look to fund programs and infrastructure which make participation more attractive for girls and young women.

At the end of the day, we all want the same thing: a large selection of high-quality, affordable sportsgrounds that are open for use and are safe and fit for purpose. My ambition as Minister for Sport and Recreation goes further. I want an inclusive and ever-growing sport and recreation community that welcomes everyone regardless of age, ability, class, gender or background.

If Mr Doszpot is contacted by local clubs, as he says he is, that are having issues with the booking system for ovals or fields in the ACT or having difficulties with applying for grants, I would encourage him to have them get in touch with either my office or Active Canberra so that we can provide them with support to access the booking system or apply for grants, if that is what they are after, rather than just coming into this place and talking about it as if there is a problem. Nobody ever contacts my office or Active Canberra in order for us to resolve it, so I would encourage him to do that. I move the amendment which has been circulated in my name:

Omit all words after "That this Assembly", substitute:

"(1) notes:

- (a) the ongoing investments of the ACT Government to support sport and recreation in Canberra, including operational and infrastructure funding for community sporting organisations;
- (b) the specific investments in the 2016-2017 Budget of \$1.8 million for a sportsground irrigation and maintenance funding boost and \$1.1 million for community sporting infrastructure and asset maintenance;
- (c) that the ACT Government currently subsidises community use of government-owned sportsgrounds at the rate of 84 per cent and that

16 per cent cost recovery is significantly below the 20 per cent benchmark generally applied in other jurisdictions; and

(d) the challenges for sportsground maintenance presented by climatic conditions in the ACT; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

(a) continue to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the current approach to sportsground bookings and maintenance; and

(b) work actively with local sporting clubs around awareness and planning for scheduled ground closures.”.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (5.40): I will be speaking in support of Minister Berry’s amendment. I thank her for providing that clarity. She has made a number of interesting points, and I will speak to a few of those in my comments today. As Minister Berry has stated, and I know myself from my time with Sport and Recreation Services, the community quite rightly has high expectations of the quality of ACT government-managed sportsgrounds. Equally, I know that Active Canberra work hard to ensure that all sportsgrounds are safe and fit for purpose for the thousands of Canberrans who are out training or competing nearly every day of the year in every season in an extraordinary array of sporting activities.

There are quite a lot of sportsgrounds and spaces across the territory. There are 280 hectares of irrigated sportsgrounds spread out over 124 different sports and recreation sportsgrounds and 884 individual fields. These grounds cater for a wide range of organised sports but are also a place to kick the footy around, throw a frisbee with your family or walk the dog. That underlines the fact that the vast majority of ACT government sportsgrounds are open to the community and the elements most of the year. They are many things to many people, including those who practice golf on them and whack holes in the grass, and all the other things that happen on our sportsgrounds.

We need to recognise the true costs of providing these facilities and also manage our sportsgrounds in line with community expectations of performance and accessibility. I know that Mr Doszpot spends enough time out at sporting events to understand that some of the issues that see these grounds closed are in fact desirable or otherwise unavoidable and out of the hands of government. Certainly Ms Berry in her remarks has highlighted some of the recent weather events. Between the weather events and the necessary maintenance, it is necessary at times to close these grounds to keep them safe and fit for purpose.

Obviously at times this causes inconvenience for some. I have been impacted by it myself at times, wanting to use an oval that is necessarily closed. The observation around continuing to work with community organisations to improve awareness of that and to explain the necessity of it is an important point that Mr Doszpot has picked up and it has been reflected in Ms Berry’s amendment. There is no doubt room for ongoing efforts to improve communication, particularly as people change over. Volunteers change in organisations and it is incumbent on government to continue to explain both the necessity of that and to ensure that there is plenty and good warning

of the necessary maintenance period. There is really no other way to meet the dual missions for Active Canberra in keeping grounds safe, fit for purpose and in line with community expectations. There are times when that maintenance will be necessary. The suggestion that it is possible to keep the ovals to a standard and keep them open 365 days a year is impossible and one that I trust nobody in this place has an expectation of.

The other issue we face in the ACT, which in fact the world is seeing, is changing weather patterns: changing rainfall and, particularly, higher than average temperatures in the summer months. These unavoidable facts are driven by climate change. These are certainly factors that we are going to need to take into account in the longer term. Hotter, drier summers make it more difficult to maintain ovals. They put upward pressure on the amount of water that is necessary and upward pressure on maintenance. These are challenges that we will need to continue to adapt to.

In closing, I acknowledge Minister Berry's willingness to talk about the substance of the issues raised by Mr Doszpot today. I also acknowledge the points that she has made in her amendment, that there are specific investments in this year's budget of \$1.8 million for a sportsground irrigation and maintenance funding boost and \$1.1 million for community sporting infrastructure and asset maintenance.

The point around the continued significant subsidy of sporting facilities is an important one. The ACT sits below the general benchmark applied in other jurisdictions for cost recovery. That is something that sets us apart from other jurisdictions. The cost to hire fields, in the scheme of things, is quite reasonable. I have had this discussion with organisations in the past. I have talked to them about the real cost of hiring ovals. I think they understand the situation. Yes, it would be nice for it to be less, but someone has to pay for it.

I am pretty certain Mr Doszpot is going to say—and he is going to take this policy to the election—"I'm going to cut the hire fees for community ovals." He is not going to tell people that he will have to find that money from somewhere else. He might cut the direct hire cost, but he will just slip it onto the rates at the other end of the equation. He will slip it onto some other cost factor. It is a fairly disingenuous approach to make that case. You can put quite a few people on an oval and, as Minister Berry cited, it is a handful of dollars an hour to hire a field for training. I think it is not unreasonable. It is disingenuous to slip it onto some other part of the government cost schedule and say, "You're not paying for it anymore." Someone has to pay for it; it has to be paid for somehow.

I do not think—and it is what Mr Doszpot opened with—that ACT sporting facilities are in an appalling state. Individual facilities have got a bit old. Some of the sporting sheds around town are hitting a point of needing extra maintenance. There is a steady program in government. Certainly when I was sports minister I went to a number of facilities that had just been upgraded, and I know how much the community appreciated that. That work needs to continue. Facilities are ageing. We need to continue to upgrade them. The project that has just gone on to upgrade netball facilities across the city has made an enormous difference. It is a great example of the government investing very strategically to support those organisations. I know how much the clubs around town have appreciated that. I think that is a good example.

Mr Doszpot spoke about losing the battle of the bulge. We have real problems in that regard. The statistics show that the increasing rates of obesity in our community are alarming. It is an effort we need to continue to make right across government. I noticed Mr Hanson the other day being very disparaging about government efforts to promote healthier food alternatives. I was quite surprised to hear that because I think there is a general recognition that that is a problem we face as a community. There is a lot of work to do in this space, but I will be supporting Ms Berry's amendment today. I think it lays out the case fairly succinctly and makes the points that are very real in this discussion.

Visitors

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before I put the question on the motion and give Mr Doszpot a chance to close, I welcome members of the ACT arts community who have joined us in the gallery to attend the Speaker's reception. Welcome to your parliament. There are a couple of familiar faces. I notice Helen Musa there and also Neal. It did not take you very long to come back to the building, Mr Baudinette, so welcome. Enjoy the reception. The question is that Ms Berry's amendment be agreed to.

Sport and recreation facilities—maintenance

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (5.48): If I may, through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I did say to Mr Neil Baudinette that it would only be a very short space of time before we saw him back in the Assembly, so I am glad to see him here.

I am rather disappointed in the sports minister's response to a motion that basically wants to highlight the issues the community have brought to me. Ms Berry, I am actually over here; if you want to listen to any of the things that we have talked about I would be very happy for you to hear what the community has asked me to say to you, that is, there is unhappiness about the state of the grounds and there is an issue with the continued cutting of the sports budget.

The minister said I had misrepresented her. For the minister's information, the comments I made were from *Hansard*, and I will quote once again:

Minister, in budget paper B, page 26, output class 9.4, table 23, what is the reason for the reduction in spending on sport and rec in this year's budget?

Ms Berry: Thank you for that question. I asked the same question when we were looking at these papers leading up to this. This is about some of the initiatives that Sport and Recreation funded previously ceasing. I might get Mr Dawes to explain a bit more to the committee about what happened there.

These are the minister's words from *Hansard*. I believe what Ms Berry was referring to was that Mr Smyth had asked her something different. That is exactly what she was asked, and that is what Ms Berry responded with—exactly what I said. I also repeated Mr Dawes's exact words. If that is not reduction in funding I suggest the minister learn to understand the figures listed in her own budget papers. Yes, there is a funding cut, and the minister has totally ignored that, as she has ignored the words of the community about the declining state of our sporting grounds and our sporting ovals.

The amendment Ms Berry moved is basically just a veneer on trying to put the government propaganda out there in all of the notes. It addresses what the government says they are doing and calls on the government—on themselves—to continue to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the current approach to sports ground bookings and maintenance. It is not to look at the current booking issues and not to look at what people associated with the sports grounds are telling the minister but just to continue to do what they are doing at the moment. Until you recognise, minister, that there is a problem in the community, you will not be able to fix it let alone continue to do what you do. If you do what you do, you will always do what you do and you will not address the issues the community wants you to.

My motion has highlighted, yet again, the costs and the condition of the ACT sports grounds. I am calling on this government—again—to address the deteriorating conditions of a number of our local ovals. By the way, that means I will not support Ms Berry's amendments. I am calling on the government to address the deteriorating conditions of a number of our local ovals, work with local sporting clubs to better understand their needs, including the timing of ground shut downs and condition of playing surfaces, and commit to delivering real support to local clubs and local teams.

But all of this is rather academic at this stage. This government has had 15 years to address all of the issues we have spoken about that are now escalating exponentially, just like the rates they have imposed on our community. With the election just a couple of months away, the arrogance of this Chief Minister, the lack of experience and judgement of his ministers, and their single-minded focus on the light rail has blinded them to the real needs of our community, be it in sport, health, education or cost of living. Roll on, 15 October.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 7

Ms Berry

Ms Fitzharris

Mr Coe

Mrs Jones

Dr Bourke

Mr Gentleman

Mr Doszpot

Ms Lawder

Ms Burch

Mr Hinder

Mrs Dunne

Mr Wall

Mr Corbell

Mr Rattenbury

Mr Hanson

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

At approximately 6 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the motion for the adjournment of the Assembly was put and negatived.

Sitting suspended from 5.58 to 7.31 pm.

Executive business—precedence

Ordered that executive business be called on.

Appropriation Bill 2016-2017

[Cognate bill:

Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2016-2017

Cognate papers:

Estimates 2016-2017—Select Committee report

Estimates 2016-2017—Select Committee—government response]

Debate resumed from 9 August 2016.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind members that in debating order of the day No 1, executive business, they may also address their remarks to executive business order of the day No 2, the Assembly business order of the day relating to the report of the Select Committee on Estimates 2016-2017 and the government's response.

Detail stage

Environment and Planning Directorate—Schedule 1, Part 1.9

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (7.32): I am pleased to speak today in the budget debate about the Environment and Planning Directorate and also the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.

Firstly, I would like to speak a bit about weeds funding. Last year in estimates hearings, the Conservation Council ACT Region appeared before the committee and expressed its concerns about the 2015-16 ACT budget reduction in the weeds management program, especially considering the absence of any scientific evidence to support the reduction. In answer to a question on notice from July 2016, Minister Gentleman said:

The invasive weeds budget for 2016/17 is \$2,185,259. This is made up of \$1,685,259 of recurrent funding and \$500,000 of one off initiative funding.

Stakeholders have told me that they feel the amount allocated to weeds in this year's budget is not adequate and they have had difficulty working out where different bits of the weeds funding may be in the budget papers.

In estimates hearings on 1 July, senior directorate officials outlined that African lovegrass and blackberry will be prioritised as the most high priority weeds for control in our protected areas. Members here may recall that back in November 2015 I had a motion in the Assembly about weed management and spoke about African lovegrass and the adverse impacts on the environment of inadequate weed management. Weeds in the urban, suburban and rural areas of the ACT are becoming more and more of a problem, including African lovegrass, blackberry, serrated tussock and Madagascan fireweed, amongst others. Constituents have raised their concerns with me about the

invasion of African lovegrass out in the Tidbinbilla area especially, but it is also very much in our suburban areas. I am not sure that the \$500,000 in one-off initiative funding this year will be sufficient to address the invasive weeds.

I would like to make a few brief comments about the proposed new suburb in Tuggeranong. In early March 2016, a *Canberra Times* article quoted Minister Gentleman as raising the prospect of a new suburb in Tuggeranong with the proposed name, at that time, of Thompson. There was quite a bit of outcry from the community, including local sporting clubs in the area. In its briefing paper released in March this year, the Conservation Council outlined its concerns about this proposed development, in particular its concerns about potential impacts on the Murrumbidgee River corridor. Due to public sentiment, which was largely against the proposed development of the new suburb, the government no longer refers to it as Thompson and is now referring to this as western Greenway.

I understand the government is undertaking public consultation on this development, and it was listed recently as the western Greenway neighbourhood proposal on time to talk. What constituents are asking me is whether the government will actually listen and incorporate any community feedback received during the consultation. Constituents are very concerned about the impact on the Murrumbidgee River corridor. They wonder if it is going to go ahead whether the community consultation indicates that or not.

Last night, Minister Gentleman spoke about the importance of town and centre plans in order to maximise the use of areas, but the proposed new suburb of Thompson did not take the Tuggeranong town centre master plan into consideration.

Also last night, Minister Gentleman spoke about a single conservation agency. I am not quite sure how many times we have spoken about that in this place, both in this current Assembly and before then. Is it two, four, six, eight, 10 times? I do not know how many times it is, but it is a considerable number of times. It is good to see that from 1 July of this year that has actually taken place. As long ago as March 2013 the Liberals moved a motion asking the government to establish a single nature conservation agency, and that work has been ongoing in this place since 2013. It is good to see that it now is in place, although it did take quite some time.

Another item that we talked about during estimates committee hearings was the kangaroo fertility trial and the kangaroo cull. The caring for our environment kangaroo population research and control initiative in this year's budget says that it aims to "manage native wildlife which has the potential to become overabundant and cause environmental impacts to the Territory's nature reserves". So the current focus is on kangaroo population management activities, including research and monitoring of non-lethal population control methods.

In the estimates hearings, I asked about the costs of the fertility control trials for the kangaroos. In answer to a question on notice, Minister Corbell said that the kangaroo population research and control initiative "includes the 2016-17 delivery of both the operational implementation of kangaroo management (\$538,000) and the research and monitoring component (\$164,000)". There was, I think, additional funding in the

budget for the fertility trials. It will be of continuing interest to us to see whether the funding does in fact deliver both the operational implementation of kangaroo management and the research and monitoring component.

Also in the estimates hearings I asked some questions about the Riverview development near west Belconnen and some concerns that have been raised with me about the nature reserve areas. The Riverview development is adjacent to the Murrumbidgee River and Ginninderra gorge. There are many species in the area, including the swift parrot and Rosenberg's goanna, that are on a number of lists. Some groups have raised environmental concerns with me about the Riverview development; that the proposed reserve is not sufficient to maintain and support all of the threatened and endangered species in that area.

I will make a few comments about the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. The commissioner is an independent statutory position that undertakes functions and activities including investigating complaints about the management of the environment by the territory or a territory authority and issues relating to ecologically sustainable development in the ACT; conducts investigations as directed by the minister; conducts, on the commissioner's own initiative, investigations into actions of an agency where those actions would have a substantial impact on the environment of the ACT; and delivers the state of the environment report.

The state of the environment reports are prepared every four years. Some feedback I have had from various constituents is that the format of the state of the environment report could be more user-friendly and more useful to members of the public rather than addressing the government's agenda. It would be great for members of our community to have access to a more user-friendly state of the environment report.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Health Directorate—Part 1.10

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (7.40): I am very pleased to stand in this place tonight to talk about health, which for me is a number one priority. Fixing the health system is something that we have put on the agenda and, if we are elected in October, is something that we will do. Today's announcement makes that very clear. This is something that we see as our number one priority. It is a significant announcement and I am delighted with the reception that we have received from nurses, nurses unions, doctors and members of our Canberra community.

It is clear that after 15 years this is a health system that is in crisis. Mr Corbell did not really deny it tonight; he was just looking at whom to blame. It was quite interesting to see the way he put his predecessor, Senator Gallagher, in it for creating this problem. It seems to be Mr Corbell's excuse that he is now trying to clean up the mess. I am not sure what Ms Gallagher would think if she were to read the transcripts of Mr Corbell's answers in question time.

We have seen a lack of capacity. We have seen terrible reports of a toxic culture. We have seen decaying and ageing infrastructure. It is being crisis managed. We have had

an enormous amount of criticism about the health system. I have spoken of a lot of that criticism. It has come from doctors groups, from nurses groups, from patients. We have the lowest patient satisfaction rating for ED in Australia.

Nobody thinks that the health system is performing as it should. Let me be very clear at the outset that that is not because of a lack of goodwill and hard work by the staff. It is a failure of administration by this government, a failure to back our staff up. The fact that this government has failed to back the Canberra Liberals' announcements today shows just how little they really care, when it comes down to it, about staff at the Canberra Hospital.

Back in 2011, in the lead-up to the last election, the Labor Party, under the stewardship of Katy Gallagher, now Senator Gallagher, promised to rebuild the Canberra Hospital—\$800 million. They took that into the election—indeed, to such a point that they put \$41 million in the budget. This was not just some notional promise; \$41 million was in the budget. We talked about it in estimates. We talked about it in health hearings. We talked about it in the Assembly. There were press releases put out, much grand fanfare. I received briefings—I think one or two briefings—on the need for this. I have to say that I concurred. It was a significant amount of money, but the case was put to me that, because of demand, because of the ageing infrastructure, it needed to be done. I accepted that case at that time.

As we know, the history is that after the election in 2012 this government ripped that money out of the budget. They fumbled along for a while. As late as 2014, Senator Gallagher was still saying that this was going to happen, that the money was in the budget, that the money had been found. Let me read the answer to a question that Mrs Jones asked in early 2014. Ms Gallagher said that the money was there. She said:

I think the budget has shown the preparedness of this government to make provision for large infrastructure projects. We have made provision, and we have also made space within the budget to fund those projects.

The money was there. The plan was there, and the Labor Party dropped it. It was very disappointing. I note that the Nursing Federation put out a press release today saying that ANMF welcomes the Liberals' proposed \$403 million expansion of the Canberra Hospital. I will read from it: "The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation ACT Branch has welcomed today's announcement by the Liberal Party to effectively implement the Labor Party's 2012 Canberra Hospital expansion platform." They go on at some length—if I have time, I will go back to it—about concerns that they have with the health system, concerns that they have raised.

I do not shy away from the fact that what we have released today is based on what Labor had up until 2014. It is based on that. That is an enormous amount of work that has been done in the Health Directorate—good work that has been done by a lot of professionals to come up with the best plan, the best way ahead. I do not shy away from that, and if I have time I will go back to some of the concerns. It says here that the AMNF was so concerned in respect of an increase in the number of reports of unsafe work conditions and practice across ACT Health that on 5 April this year it called on the ACT government to take action.

So the support that we have received is not just from the AMA—and I will go to some of the comments there later—and not just from patients, not just from nurses. This is the nurses union that have come out saying, “Well done; this is a good policy.” They make the point. They are not making a judgement on whether it is Liberal or Labor. They are saying they will support good policy. Good on them for doing that. There is a natural inclination of some unions, I would have to say, to blindly back the Labor Party no matter what the evidence. I commend the nurses union for putting their members first. That is what they have done here. They have said, “We are not going to make a judgement on whether this is Liberal or Labor. We make a judgement on whether this is good policy or not.” I commend the secretary of the ANMF and the staff there for that decision.

There is a long litany of problems with our health system leading up to this point; I have spoken about those at length in this place before. But I must say I was shocked at estimates this year when I was asking questions of the minister and his bureaucrats and it came out that the plan was to manage extreme and high-risk infrastructure. Basically we are band-aiding the health system, managing extreme and high-risk infrastructure. That is a hell of a way to manage a health system, isn't it?

If the budget was in such a position that it was the only thing that could be done, and if the government said, “Look, we have a will. We want to do something more but we have not got the money,” that would be one thing. But the fact that they have this largesse with the tram, the billions of dollars that they are prepared to spend on the tram, is what is really causing grief in our community. They are going to band-aid the health system, managing high-risk, extreme risk infrastructure, while they spend money on the tram.

Some of the work that has been done recently has been described by Mr Corbell as temporary and short term. Temporary and short term? That is not the way to manage a health system. That is what we see as the errors that have been made by this government in managing infrastructure for far too long.

Dr Hall, who runs the ED, when this temporary solution was put forward, said, “It involved a significant compromise.” Is this how we run health in this town? A significant compromise? Is that the way we do it under Labor now? The previous project director described it as unconscionable that they had withdrawn this funding.

The statistics are well known. The statistics are well known in terms of demand and how we are meeting that demand across the board for elective surgery, for emergency department treatment. And it does not just go to timeliness. We have talked about that before. It also goes to the quality of the provision of the services and what overcrowding means with regard to patient safety. Once you get to a certain point in a hospital, 85 or 95 per cent, doctors will tell you that it is unsafe. It is not a safe place to be when you get that high.

There is a concern about the number of beds we have. There is no question about that. Statistics get thrown around and so on. One of the problems that we really have here is the fact that many of our overnight beds are occupied by New South Wales

residents because we provide a regional service. When it comes down to it, we only have 1.8 or 1.9 beds per thousand for ACT residents, which is the lowest in Australia by quite some margin.

We have seen projections of growth by this government being wildly inaccurate. That is one of the problems we have right here in the women and children's hospital at the moment. The government's projections were inaccurate. (*Second speaking period taken.*)

It is a reminder for us all of the projections that were put forward by Mr Corbell with his jail. He said in 2007 that the jail in its current configuration would have capacity for 25 years. Two years later when it was opened it was already full. You cannot trust Mr Corbell when it comes to a projection on bed numbers. There are a lot staff and people in the AMC who have seen the grim reality of Mr Corbell's projections. We have heard from people like Michael Hall, who said:

I still believe that we need to start from scratch and build an emergency department from the ground up ... There are still compromises being made by the fact that this is a series of extensions on the outside of an existing facility.

It involves "significant compromise".

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, can you just—

MR HANSON: Yes, could you stop the clock, please?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Can you repeat what you have just said? Who have you quoted and what you have quoted?

MR HANSON: Can you stop the clock, please?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Stop the clock.

MR HANSON: It is a little bit unusual, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I would be mid-speech—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have asked you to repeat your quote and—

MR HANSON: This is the clinical director of the emergency department, Dr Michael Hall. I will read the quote:

"I still believe that we need to start from scratch and build an emergency department from the ground up," he said. "There are still compromises being made by the fact that this is a series of extensions on the outside of an existing facility."

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, I urge you to be cautious. If you are not aware, there is something in the public domain that shows a lack of satisfaction with your using those quotes by that individual. I would urge you to be cautious.

MR HANSON: That is one of the quotes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson—

MR HANSON: I will have a look but I am just reading the quotes. I am quoting—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would encourage your colleagues to go to the *Canberra Times* website.

MR HANSON: I am quoting from the *Canberra Times* of 13 April 2015. Anyway, moving on, if I may?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please, with the reminder to be cautious in how you use that quote.

MR HANSON: Madam Deputy Speaker, a quote is a quote.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR HANSON: A quote is a quote.

Mrs Jones: On a point of order.

MR HANSON: Could you stop the clock while there is a point of order, please?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Stop the clock. Point of order, Mrs Jones?

Mrs Jones: Yes, I wonder under which standing order you are making a ruling about quotes that have been used in a speech and the opinion of the *Canberra Times*?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is a continued resolution of the Commissioner for Standards applying to the Assembly.

Mrs Jones: May I ask what that is?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I gave you a hint by directing you to the—

Mrs Jones: No, I understand that. I am only curious as to what the standing resolution is that you are referring to.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: The standing resolution concerns the Commissioner for Standards.

Mrs Jones: Yes.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes.

Mrs Jones: No, but which standing resolution of the Commissioner for Standards?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I can check with the Clerk. It is 5AA.

Mrs Jones: Okay.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, would you continue?

MR HANSON: Start the clock again. Anyway, the case has been made comprehensively by Ms Gallagher and many others that work needed to be done to rebuild the hospital. This was a plan that was then designed in stages. There were various stages that were presented to us.

Stage 1, which costed at about \$375 million, involved an expansion of the emergency department, the ICU, the medical assessment planning unit, the emergency medical unit, ambulatory spaces, treatment spaces, a new medical imaging unit, sterilisation unit, up to 20 operating theatres and so on. People who work in the Canberra Hospital will tell you that the existing facilities that they are working in to perform all those tasks are temporary, are inadequate and are not up to speed.

The plan—this was the government’s plan—was to rebuild building 3 and move those facilities in so they are world class with potential for growth to meet the demand projections that we have. That is the plan that was proposed. I think it was a good plan. It was a well thought through plan. It is a plan that we will commit to.

What this allows is a massive expansion not just in beds, and you will note that these are critical care beds. It is also what else it provides in terms of operating theatres, medical imaging, the sterilisation unit and so on. It then allows for the existing facilities, where those elements are in compromised positions not suited to critical care, not suited to the treatment that they are delivering there, to be adaptively reused to provide up to 150 more beds if required.

It is space for about 150 beds, depending on how you treat it, and 100 more ambulatory treatment spaces. Not only do you get the massive increase in capacity and capability of the new building, depending on demand and depending on need, the space that is then vacated can also be reused for well over 150 hospital beds. In total we are talking about a significant increase in capacity and capability across the board.

This has been received well. As I said, we were at the hospital today speaking to staff. They were delighted with what has been proposed. We have been speaking to groups who are representative bodies. As I said, the nursing federation has put out a statement supporting what the Canberra Liberals are proposing, which is great. We have also had the support of the AMA. I can quote the AMA. I will leave one word out because it might be unparliamentary, Madam Deputy Speaker.

“It’s a ... fantastic initiative, it is just really a great piece of policy and we would really like to support this,” ACT president Professor Stephen Robson said.

He went further in this report to state:

There's a very rapidly closing window of opportunity. The current facilities are only just holding and if you delay this sort of infrastructure any longer it may well mean the wheels will come off the cart and the hospital won't cope ... The hospital is at breaking point.

I am very encouraged that that is the view of the AMA. I know that when I spoke to the president of the AMA about his comments he said that they reflected the views of the members that he had spoken to; as I understand it, a number of clinicians who work within the system. He says about the hospital and about the current facilities, "It is old, poorly designed and very, very difficult to work with." He is also quoted as saying:

It was 'dangerous and terrible' for patients, who had to share lifts with visitors and others as they were wheeled around.

In terms of the forward design and all the work that we have put into this, he said:

It's a hospital that will just revolutionalise care, and make it a much, much improved place for patients ... It's taking a 1960s relic and bringing it up to match what's going on in other hospitals.

He said that much work had gone into Labor's design and that there was "a great deal of disappointment" when it had not gone ahead. I repeat: there was a great deal of disappointment when it had not gone ahead. Certainly, that is the response that we have got from people who would be, I think, traditional Labor supporters, people for whom health and education are core Labor values. They were staggered, were shocked, were disappointed when, after all the work that had been done, all the case had been made to say that we need to improve our hospital, not just incrementally, not just by managing extreme and high risk, but a significant enhancement for the next decade and more—long-term thinking—Labor pulled the pin on that and went with the Greens' pressure on the tram.

I am sure the Greens are laughing all the way on this. They have got what they wanted out of this. The Greens member has been a very loyal member of the Labor cabinet, as Mr Stanhope described him, because he got what he wanted, which is a tram but the problem is that fundamentally it is the people of Canberra who will pay for this if the Greens get their way because they will get a tram and they will not get the sort of health system that they deserve.

In my remaining time I want to note that it is important we do not focus just on the bricks and mortar, although this will be a massive expansion, a massive renewal. Ultimately it is the people within a health system who make it good or make it bad. What I would say is that we have some of the best people in our health system in the world.

One of my greatest pleasures of being an MLA is going to the graduation of the young doctors at the end of every year and seeing some of the smartest, most energetic, most dedicated people that you could ever wish to meet who are then in the main coming into our health system to work in our health system to take care of us.

Equally, the nurses who are graduating in our local universities, at the Australian Catholic University and at University of Canberra and many nurses who are coming in from overseas, are dedicated to their profession and to the care of people in the Canberra community who are often at their most vulnerable. They are being cared for at times of great illness, when people are dying because they are old.

One thing I hear almost exclusively from patients when they come to me in my role as shadow health minister with particular problems they have with the health system—I hear many of these stories—is, “But the nurses were excellent.” If I had a dollar for every time I heard that—“the nurses are excellent”—then I would be a wealthy man. We do have good staff. We do have good nurses, good doctors, good allied health professionals, good administrators. The administrators are a very important component of any hospital, as are the wardsmen, the security staff and everybody else.

These staff deserve to work in world-class facilities. They deserve to work in a hospital where they can deliver the sort of treatment that they want rather than being in a hospital, as it is now, that is subject to such significant compromise.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (8.03): I would like to raise a matter in relation to my constituents. Since I originally raised this matter, it has become a more sensitive matter because of a recent industrial death on the site. The residents of Kangara Waters retirement village approached me and the Minister for Health several weeks ago about the noise coming from the construction site on the other side of Aikman Drive, the University of Canberra subacute hospital.

The noise is coming from large diesel-powered generators that are running all day and all night, especially disrupting residents’ sleep at night. This is especially so for residents living in the units directly opposite the construction site. The generators are required for lighting and security on the site. The generators are required because there is no electricity connected to the site yet.

When the problem was raised, the building contractor did what he could to mitigate the noise by erecting sound buffers and by relocating generators further away to a new location further up the hill. So it was always going to be likely that the noise would be exacerbated, not muffled.

We all in this place should be acutely aware of the death that occurred at the site when a crane moving one of the generators toppled over. This is a particularly tragic event, a tragedy of the worst kind, and my heart goes out to the family and friends of the victim. But, as I said earlier, the construction contractor wanted to do the right thing and move the generators further away so that the noise would not impact so much on the residents of Kangara Waters. However, all of this raises the question as to why electricity was not supplied to the site at the outset, thus avoiding the need for the very expensive, very noisy generators that have been used on the site.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will give you an answer. Actually, I am not entirely sure that I can give an answer. There seems to be a large amount of pussyfooting going on between the government and the University of Canberra, who are both trying to avoid

costs. In the end the community is paying mightily for the generators. As soon as I was advised on the noise issues—in fact, on the same day—I wrote to the Minister for Health urging him to take positive and swift action to deal with these noise issues.

My staff gave one of the minister's advisers a heads-up phone call to say the letter was on its way and then hand delivered the letter to his office. That was on Friday, 10 June. Nearly nine weeks later I am still waiting for a response. I should hate to think that this Minister for Health's failure even to acknowledge the receipt of my letter is an indication of his attention to or concern for this matter. I would hate to think this Minister for Health holds the health and wellbeing of our ageing residents in such disdain. I would hate to think this Minister for Health has taken his eye off the ball when it comes to the planning of a major infrastructure project.

He has form in this with his past history with projects like the GDE and the Alexander Maconochie Centre. He no longer has responsibility for delivering on his latest pet project, light rail, and he will not be here to take responsibility for the delivery of this hospital. The Labor-Greens coalition has failed in so many ways and it has failed on the delivery of infrastructure projects to be on time and on budget. It has failed to maintain the amenity and the quiet enjoyment of the residents of Kangara Waters.

I do raise the question why it is that we have to use generators and incur the cost of running three large generators, I think, day and night for an extended period of time. We are now months into the project and those generators run day and night to provide power to the site because there is no substation.

That seems to me to have been the responsibility of the University of Canberra who has put off, it seems, building the substation that is necessary for that part of their development site, thereby foisting on the ACT public the cost of running generators which impinge considerably on the amenity of the people who live at Kangara Waters, and there is no end in sight.

They do not know, I do not know—no-one is able to tell us—when the substation will be built and when the generators will be turned off. This is an important issue that this minister has failed comprehensively to address in any way. I put questions on notice and I have done a range of things but I have not got a satisfactory answer about who is responsible for the decision not to install a substation early in the piece, who is responsible for making the decision about when the substation will be installed and why the ACT taxpayer is bearing the cost through the project of running three generators 24-7 for months at a time. I would be very interested to hear the minister's response on this question.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for the Environment and Climate Change) (8.08): It is good to be here this evening to speak about the government's continued investment of health as part of this year's budget. At \$1.6 billion over the next four years this is a record level of investment and almost a third of the entire ACT budget appropriation. It not only demonstrates the importance the government places on maintaining investment in our public health system but also the commitment to providing even better health services for our community.

As our population increases demand on our health system continues to grow and we need to grow and adapt to meet those future needs. The government is responding to this through a reform-growth agenda that is increasing our workforce, using modern models and capitalising on technology advances while still delivering more beds where they are needed.

As part of this year's budget there is \$237 million in new funding over four years to expand existing health services and provide better and more tailored health services to our most vulnerable Canberrans. We are investing in better mental health services. We are upgrading, maintaining and building new health infrastructure and we are boosting our front-line capacity with more health professionals for our community, including more doctors, more nurses and more allied health professionals.

Before I expand further on this record investment in health I will take the opportunity to reflect on some of the key achievements of the portfolio over the past 12 months. As I have said before in this place, one of my main priorities has been about improving access to timely health services for Canberrans, particularly acute care. This includes in our emergency department and in a range of other areas. In the emergency department we have been opening a number of key areas of the emergency department expansion. The first phase, which opened in January, includes the new mental health short stay unit which has six new separate patient bedrooms with staff nearby and an overall increase in beds. In early February the second area of the first phase of the emergency medicine unit opened, and that provides an additional 12 patient bays, an overall increase of three.

The second area of the ED expansion saw the ACT's first dedicated paediatric streaming and waiting area at the Canberra Hospital. With six patient beds, two consulting rooms and a private sub-waiting area, this new space is improving how we care for some of our youngest patients. The second phase also delivered the clinical forensic medical service, an area with a consultation room and waiting and interview space designed primarily for adults and children who have experienced assault, physical abuse, domestic violence or sexual assault. The third phase, which became operational in June, includes the new fast track area: 10 bed spaces and three procedure rooms. This area, again with its own dedicated waiting area, will be utilised to treat patients with less acute conditions.

Overall, when the expansion is complete the Canberra Hospital ED will have an extra 1,000 square metres of floor space, a 30 per cent increase in patient treatment spaces and three more ambulance bays. I am pleased to say these improvements, complemented by the reform process we began earlier this year, are already making a difference in improving access to timely care in the ED. Between March and the end of June this year, compared with the same period in 2015, the average wait time in the Canberra Hospital ED has improved by 15 per cent, and the average treatment time has been cut by 35 minutes. That has occurred even though the average daily presentation rate has continued to grow. Through the hard work undertaken by our doctors, nurses and hospital administrators as part of our ED reform agenda and the injection of \$29 million in new funding in this year's budget for 54 new health staff in the ACT in the ED over the next four years I expect the improvements and timeliness to continue.

In outlining these achievements it would be remiss of me not to talk about the great work that has been undertaken to reduce waiting times for elective surgery. We know that for so many people elective surgery is central to their quality of life. If you cannot move around properly, if you are unable to get back to work, if you cannot look after your kids because you are waiting too long for elective surgery, this has a direct impact on your life, your family's life and our community as a whole.

Through the elective surgery blitz the government has focused very strongly on reforms in the way we deliver elective surgery. I am pleased to say that in 2015-16 the blitz has delivered the highest number of elective surgery procedures ever performed with over 13,400 surgeries undertaken. This is more than 1,500 above what was provided for in the previous year. This increase has significantly reduced the number of long wait patients in the ACT from 1,335 when we started the blitz to just 373 at the end of June. That is a 72 per cent improvement in the number of people no longer waiting for elective surgery longer than clinically indicated.

I want to acknowledge the very hard work of our surgical teams and specialists, nurses, doctors and hospital administrators who, over the past nine months, have put these reforms into place and put in extra hours and commitment to reduce the long wait list. While I am very pleased with the efforts of ACT Health over the past 12 months, there is much more work to be done. That is why through this year's budget the government is delivering new funding to expand our health services and boost front-line staff.

There will be \$139 million in new recurrent funding over four years to provide for an additional 170 new health staff, including 22 more doctors, 91 more nurses and 34 more allied health professionals. As part of this \$139 million commitment, the budget delivers the \$29 million in funding over four years to staff the expansion of the emergency department. It also includes \$4.6 million for an additional intensive care unit bed and nine new health staff; \$5.3 million for two special care nursery beds and eight staff at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children; and an additional \$5 million to improve access to timely assessment and acute stroke treatment services in our city.

We know that stroke is among Australia's three largest causes of death and a leading cause of disability. We also know that timeliness in the treatment of stroke is critical. This new funding for acute stroke services will see the employment of an additional four specialised staff to provide timely assessments for clot breakdown treatment at Canberra and Calvary public hospitals and provide better access to vital clot retrieval procedures for patients who need it.

In addition, the new recurrent funding will improve access to a number of outpatient services including neurology, cardiology, respiratory and sleep services by delivering \$4.2 million in funding. It will deliver \$2.1 million to expand palliative care services by providing an additional paediatric palliative care nurse to address the needs of children and young adolescents, and \$1.3 million for an extra 300 endoscopic procedures each year helping to meet growing demand in these areas.

I have always said that looking after the mental wellbeing of Canberrans is one of my priority areas and I am particularly pleased to say that this budget will see a further investment of \$50 million in new funding for better mental health services. As part of this we are providing targeted funding in acute and community health services that complement investment in new and improved mental health facilities.

This includes funding of over \$43 million for 60 new health staff at the secure mental health unit; \$3 million to establish a young people's mental health treatment team for young people experiencing or at risk of developing serious mental illness; \$2.7 million for two new beds and four new staff to expand our adult mental health; and a \$1 million boost to services for community health services who are providing mental health and suicide prevention.

The government will also provide \$7.9 million in 2016-17 for the opening of the secure mental health unit, growing to \$11.6 million in its first year of operation. This new health facility, which will open later this year, represents an important addition to health service provision and will provide access to secure inpatient mental health care, treatment and support, meeting a vital gap in the health and criminal justice system.

The government is also delivering through this budget \$108 million over four years to build better health infrastructure. This includes just over \$100 million to upgrade and maintain health assets into the future; \$2.4 million to build new accommodation; \$3.4 million to operate support services for people with mental health concerns and to help them to recover in a community setting; \$1 million to plan for and improve health information communication technology; and over \$300,000 to start investigations for the options for a new city health centre.

These new capital allocations build on the investment this Labor government has made through our health infrastructure program, which has delivered such important projects as the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, the Canberra Region Cancer Centre, the Gungahlin, Belconnen and Tuggeranong community health centres, the new adult mental health unit and new building 15 at the Canberra Hospital.

This year we are also looking forward to the completion of a number of health infrastructure projects that are underway, including the expansion of the emergency department at Canberra Hospital, the new Ngunnawal bush healing farm and the new secure mental health unit. In 2018 we anticipate that the new University of Canberra public hospital will open its doors as a new purpose-built subacute facility. This will be an important third public hospital for the ACT. It will offer a range of rehabilitation services, support people in their recovery as well as provide targeted clinical services for older people and people with mental health concerns. It will focus on supporting people in an environment that is specifically designed for rehabilitation without the intense areas of surgery, an emergency department or an intensive care unit.

We all are aware there has been a horrible accident at the site of this project in the past week. The Chief Minister and the government as a whole have extended their

condolences to the family of the worker who has lost his life and we have also extended every possible assistance to the contractor and workers on the site who have suffered trauma and distress as a result of this horrific accident. Whilst we can only wait for the outcomes of investigations to be complete into the cause of and responsibility for what has occurred, we will be continuing to work very closely with our contractors to make sure the project continues to be delivered for our community.

I note that Mrs Dunne has raised some concerns about the use of generators on the site. The first point I make about that is that only one generator is used 24-7; the other two are utilised during working hours only. One generator is required for essential power for lighting and other activities that need to be maintained throughout the night. Secondly, the decision to use generators is a matter for the contractor, not the ACT government. It does not affect the overall price the government pays for the delivery of the project. Thirdly, the decision to use generators is not uncommon for green and brownfield redevelopment sites. Indeed, generators have been used for other health projects until building is at a stage where mains power can be connected. This includes projects such as the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children where, again, generators were used for a period of time before mains power was connected, and for a range of other health projects.

That said, the government recognises the concerns raised by adjacent residents and we have been diligent in ensuring that the performance of the generators and the noise associated with them is within the standards required of the Environment Protection Authority. We will continue to look closely at these matters and make sure the contractor is meeting their obligations in relation to noise standards. I am aware the contractor has taken a range of steps to help ameliorate noise and to meet the necessary environmental protection standards. Finally, it is the case that mains power is due to be connected later this year and the government is working with the contractor to see whether or not that program can be brought forward to further ameliorate the concerns of residents in the adjacent area.

I am pleased to say that the government is making sure Canberra is at the forefront of health service delivery and technology. We are delivering \$7.3 million in new diagnosis and patient care technology that will allow new and existing drug therapies to be tailored to meet the individual needs of patients based on their genetic predisposition. The establishment of this new clinical genomic service will help clinicians to manage patients with immunological disease and other complex diseases through the use of personalised medicine. The new genomics program will build on existing research, expertise and achievements of the Centre for Personalised Immunology at the John Curtin School of Medical Research at the ANU. This funding will help put Canberra at the cutting edge of these new and exciting clinical developments.

In conclusion, the funding initiatives contained in this budget are not just a list of additional services; they are part of the government's plan to ensure that Canberrans can access a safe, effective and timely health system that meets their needs. As part of this commitment we will continue to work with the community, the clinical workforce, private service providers, non-government organisations and key stakeholders to deliver strong results for the people who use, rely upon and work in our healthcare system.

I close today by taking this opportunity to acknowledge the outstanding work undertaken by the staff of ACT Health and health-related non-government organisations as well as those many volunteers and carers who support the health system across the ACT and region. These committed individuals provide a professional and modern health service with compassion and integrity, and their efforts should be applauded. I commend the health budget to the Assembly.

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (8.25): As the shadow minister for mental health I am pleased to stand and speak about the importance of this health area. Mental health and the wellbeing of people is an incredibly important area of our health system, so much so that I believe it is important to have this dedicated portfolio for mental health. The research shows that one in five people experience mental health concerns in any given year. It is a significant proportion of our community. The term “mental health” encompasses such a broad range of ailments from depression and anxiety conditions all the way through to schizophrenia and bipolar and other severe conditions and through to the very acute end of psychotic episodes.

The treatment and care needed is incredibly broad, from counselling to psychologists, ongoing medication for some, and the need to stay for a time in one of our mental health facilities here in Canberra, for others. Irrespective of the care and treatment needed, patients need the help of a good GP and the support and care of family and friends. Those suffering mental concerns in whatever place on that spectrum need to be able to live within our community without discrimination or fear of judgement.

I would like to highlight a couple of the areas that I have concerns about with regard to mental health. Firstly—and I have spoken about it before in the chamber—the safety and wellbeing of nurses and other staff within the adult mental health unit is of concern to me. I have particular ongoing concerns in that area as we prepare to open the secure mental health facility that perhaps will continue to need some work. The men and women who work in this very specialised area of mental health must be able to work knowing that they will be safe and not be fearful of assault or abuse. In the same way, clients and patients in these facilities need to have confidence that they will not suffer assault or abuse from others in our facilities.

Given the challenges in recruiting and retaining specialist staff at the adult mental health unit I have ongoing concerns regarding the staffing for the secure mental health facility that we will open. With the secure mental health facility due to open in September this year it is an area I will be watching closely to ensure that nurses and staff are as safe as possible.

In June, when the government brought amendments to the Mental Health Act, I expressed my deep concern at the change of reporting time frames from “within 12 hours” to “as soon as possible” with regard to reporting on psychiatric treatment orders, community care orders and the statement of action if a patient is restrained where there has been involuntary seclusion or the need for medication to be given forcibly. I do remain concerned that the amendment to the time frame on the reporting to the Public Advocate and other such bodies could leave some patients vulnerable and that “as soon as possible” could mean that reports are not lodged for some time and that this would still fall within the “as soon as possible” if it could be justified. I do hope that the change will not leave vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Although the Canberra Liberals and I are supportive of the secure mental health facility, I have expressed concerns about the mix of patients coming from the Alexander Maconochie Centre, a prison facility, and patients who will be admitted from the general community. Many in the community have raised with me their concerns about how this will be managed. I am starting to get a picture of how that will occur after some time spent in briefings with the department, organised by Minister Corbell's office.

Many patients who will be coming from the general community have never had an encounter with a jail-like system and will not necessarily be familiar with family being searched in order to visit them, nor will they be familiar with the room and belongings being searched for contraband and so on. So it will be an area we will need to look at very carefully to ensure that patients are not having their human rights degraded or breached.

Another key area of concern within the mental health field is that of youth. In the last day or so I have heard from the government about new funding for youth mental health, and I applaud this move. In February this year I moved a motion calling for a select committee to be established to look into the issue of youth suicide here in the ACT. I was pleased that it was supported and we did in fact undertake a short inquiry to start a conversation again about this area.

Back in 2014 Ms Gallagher committed to funding research into suicide in the ACT. That is being undertaken by the ANU Medical School's Academic Unit of Psychiatry and Addiction Medicine. I understand that Professor Bev Raphael is leading the research team and that the report is expected in December of this year. I am quite aware that research has already been delayed. So I look forward to the report to see what can be done to help in the area of youth suicide, which obviously is of grave concern to many in the ACT.

In particular in the area of youth it appears that we still need better preventative intervention services for young people and better acute care for young people with ongoing mental health issues as well as specific care and support services for those battling eating disorders. I am told that many families are still taking their teenage children to Sydney to seek treatment for eating disorders, which does concern me. Obviously you want to get the treatment right. I have not formed an opinion yet about whether that can be done in the ACT. Without effective mental health support care for our young people we risk those who are afflicted or living with mental health concerns moving into adulthood plagued by mental health challenges. It is clear that this is an area that we still have a great deal of work to do in.

Finally I want to recognise all of those in the community who support and care for those who have a mental illness and who are paid under this area of the budget—our nurses within our mental health facilities, the doctors and other medical staff, the ambulance officers, police officers and fire brigade who are often the first on call when someone has a serious issue with a mental illness and work as the conduit in helping those people access the right help and care—and of course the family and friends of those who are the carers of some of those living with mental illness and

who carry a heavy load every single day. Sometimes ultimately, because of this load, they suffer their own mental health concerns. I hope we will continue to do the best we can to respect and support those with mental health needs in our city and surrounds.

MS FITZHARRIS (Molonglo—Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research, Minister for Transport Canberra and City Services and Assistant Minister for Health) (8.32): I am very pleased today to stand to talk about the ACT government's record investments in Health as part of the 2016-17 budget and the very proud record this government has in ensuring that Canberrans continue to have access to the best health care possible. As Minister Corbell has said, health makes up one-third of the entire ACT budget and we will continue to prioritise health. It is this level of investment that demonstrates the importance Labor places on making sure everyone in our community can get access to health care when and where they need it.

Canberra is one of the healthiest communities in the country. We lead the nation in life expectancy and in many areas we have lower levels of chronic disease than our counterparts. We have a healthy environment and clear air, clean drinking water and access to healthy and safe food. As our city is planned, we have lots of open space and parkland, which gives us many opportunities to enjoy active and healthy lifestyles with our families and friends.

Indeed, the latest Chief Health Officer's report, *Healthy Canberra*, released in June, shows where we lead the nation in the key indicators of a healthy community. We lead Australia in childhood immunisation with nearly 91 per cent immunisation coverage for children aged 12 months. We have 78 per cent of year 7 students receiving full doses of the human papilloma virus vaccination. Also the *Healthy Canberra* report shows we are leading the way in tackling smoking with the ACT's daily smoking rate the lowest in the country. In 1996 only 44 per cent of high school students said that they had never smoked. Today that number is 81 per cent, a fantastic achievement that as a community we can be proud of.

There is, of course, always more for us to do to improve the health of our city and that is why through this year's budget we are investing over \$144 million for rehabilitation, aged and community care; \$37 million in public health initiatives; and \$94 million in early intervention and prevention services.

We know that people who are overweight or obese are more likely to develop chronic disease which in turn impacts on their lifestyles, our health system and the cost of delivering services that we provide the community. Although recently the proportion of overweight or obese adults and children has remained relatively stable, which is great news, the important work of the ACT government's healthy weight initiative will continue to be rolled out to encourage more people to become active and choose to eat healthier foods.

As part of this, the 2016-17 budget invests \$1.5 million to continue to address the overweight and obesity levels across the ACT, to continue to deliver existing programs and to implement exciting new initiatives. A further investment of

\$2 million has been allocated through the budget to help get kids moving and encourage more active travel across our suburbs. We want to make riding or walking to school in Canberra the norm once again. This includes the expansion of the active streets for schools program, a further rollout of the ride or walk to school program, the creation of a dedicated schools transport coordinator and resourcing of the active travel office.

As the minister responsible for community health services, population health and public health protection policy I am pleased to say that this budget will see more services provided in the community. There is more than \$8 million over four years for drug services in the community sector including measures to address family violence; \$2.7 million over four years for community services for hard-to-reach populations, sexual health initiatives and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health initiatives; and \$4.2 million over four years to provide additional outpatient services for cancer services, respiratory, neurology and cardiac services.

Funding is also provided to meet demand for forensic chemistry by the ACT Analytical Laboratory. The laboratory provides analytical support for the criminal justice system in relation to controlled substances and has seen a significant increase in samples requiring testing. Five hundred thousand dollars will be provided for two additional staff in this area. Funding of \$50,000 has also been allocated to scope the requirements of an upgrade to the ACT notifiable diseases database. An upgrade to the database will make sure that the ACT can comply with local and national public health legislation and actively respond to cases and outbreaks of notifiable diseases and the protection of the health of our community.

In addition this year's budget is investing in services that will make a big difference to the lives of Canberrans experiencing tragedy and trauma. Palliative care is a significant and crucial service provided to those in our community, particularly those requiring end-of-life care, not just for the elderly. Sadly, on occasion, children are also in need of these services as well. As Minister Corbell noted, over the next four years the ACT government will expand palliative care through a \$2.1 million investment to fund for the first time a paediatric palliative care nurse to specifically address the needs of children and young adolescents.

I would like to take the time to say it has been a privilege to be appointed to the role of Assistant Health Minister this year. I have had many firsthand experiences of how essential the health services are and I have the responsibility to improve the health of the community and protect the health of Canberrans through speciality areas. I have also seen how community health services and population health programs, delivered through our community health centres, our walk-in centres and healthy lifestyle programs and activities, support the acute healthcare services that are provided within our public hospitals. As you know, we have six community health centres and two nurse-led walk-in centres in Canberra which provide a comprehensive range of services to local communities where they need it and when they need it.

To name some of the services provided through our community health centres, there are: nursing and allied health, maternal and child health, mental health and alcohol and drug services, dental, diabetes services, physiotherapy and podiatry. Our

community health centres also provide important primary care and post-hospital care. They deliver care where people need it and when they need it. They are affordable and accessible, demonstrating how this government has made improving community healthcare options to Canberrans a priority.

In the delivery of high quality, tailored healthcare services to our community ACT Health also has strong community partnerships. These partnerships and service funding agreements are with many wonderful non-government organisations that provide innovative and much-needed health services to people in our community. The government is proud to continue to support these organisations and the vital services they provide to Canberrans every day.

Before I finish I would like to certainly reiterate the words of Minister Corbell and take the time to acknowledge the hardworking and dedicated health professionals right across our health system: the doctors, the nurses, the allied health staff, the health professionals and all the teams that work so hard each day to ensure our community receives the highest level of health care. We also have many volunteers and carers who support the work of our clinicians and I would like to note particularly their contribution as well. I thank them very much for their commitment to our community and the services they deliver every day. I stand with Minister Corbell in commending the health expenditure in this year's budget.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Housing ACT—Schedule 1, Part 1.11

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (8.40): It is a pleasure to speak on the housing part of the budget. Firstly I would like to mention the Auditor-General's report on the maintenance of public housing, which was released in April of this year. The Auditor-General made a number of recommendations, including in relation to the timeliness, effectiveness and maintenance of public housing property. This report, as well as concerns that constituents have brought to my attention over the past few years, was discussed in estimates hearing on 24 June. We spoke about one Housing ACT tenant who said she moved into a new property and there was no phone line connected from the power pole to her house. She spent six months trying to get Housing ACT to organise for the physical telephone wire to be connected to her Housing ACT property.

Another example of poor maintenance of our public housing was when a public housing tenant from Braddon questioned whether their public housing unit and the unit complex as a whole complied with fire safety requirements. This constituent was very concerned for their safety and that of other tenants and, in particular, was concerned that the doors connecting units to the basement car park and the front doors of the units might not be fire safety doors.

Some constituents seem to have trouble getting maintenance issues addressed. One constituent said their experience with Spotless maintenance has been that the contractors they hire to conduct work on a property are usually below standard. They said they are battling Housing to ensure tenants are safe and often feel their requests for help fall on deaf ears, so it is good to be heard.

The maintenance contract for public housing is one of the territory's largest ongoing contracts, and the Auditor-General raised serious concerns about the management and oversight of that contract. It will be good to see a lot of improvement in those areas. We also hear concerns from subcontractors contracted by Spotless who are concerned about the way things are managed on occasion. If the Auditor-General's report into the maintenance of public housing is anything to go by, a lot of work obviously needs to be done in this area.

A lot of money is being spent on renewal of our public housing stock. Of course, the point we have made over and over again is that it is not a voluntary attempt to renew our public housing stock; it started off as a plan for light rail and the government has tried to rebadge it into urban renewal. It is quite transparent in the examples we have seen that it is only about the light rail. In one example flats along Northbourne Avenue that are about 50 years old are being emptied out and the ACT government has purchased flats about 50 years old from the ANU which have been kept in much better condition than the ACT public housing units that tenants are being moved from. So it is actually about maintaining the stock we have. Unfortunately for those properties on Northbourne Avenue, it is too late. They have been rundown to such a state that it is not possible and not fair to leave people in them.

The public housing renewal program also led us to question the salt and pepper policy. Salt and peppering is a good policy; it aims to distribute public housing so that it does not create concentrations of disadvantage. Minister Berry said during estimates hearings:

... the salt and pepper policy is not really based on a principle of statistics or numbers on particular streets; it is more about breaking down big numbers of disadvantaged people living together and distributing them all across our city. There is no actual formula used in the salt and pepper principle to make sure that we give everybody a chance to live all across our community regardless of their income, regardless of the postcode.

It raises some questions about what, if anything, the government takes into account when allocating the location of new public housing properties. At present it seems to me just a process of finding any available land. One example with the salt and peppering approach in mind is some new public housing located in Chisholm. We have spoken before about creating transport disadvantage and locating new public housing that is not close to shops and other facilities. In addition, in Chisholm it seems to go against some of the salt and peppering principles because Chisholm was one of the top suburbs named in the dropping off the edge report as experiencing concentrations of disadvantage. The government has been putting additional public housing in to Chisholm. To my mind that is not following a salt and pepper approach; that is creating more areas of disadvantage, and it is because they are in such a rush to empty out the Northbourne Avenue corridor for their light rail program.

On 1 July this year OneLink started to replace FirstPoint, the central information and access point for human services in the ACT. So OneLink is a partnership between Woden and Belconnen community services, and it aims to link people with services including housing, disability and family support services. Obviously OneLink is in its

infancy and it remains to be seen what will occur in that space. Hopefully it will be a good thing, because I have heard some concerns about FirstPoint in the past. For example, the operating hours of FirstPoint were cut over a period of time.

It is apparent that the hours of operation of a service that aims, for example, to connect people experiencing homelessness with available accommodation involves a number of issues. Firstly, if you need emergency accommodation for the night, you are unlikely to be thinking about that or in need of it during the course of a normal business day. A lot of the crises arise in the evening and that is when people might be looking for somewhere to stay as an emergency. One of the next issues is that there is often nowhere for people to be placed; there is no emergency accommodation available. When reporting on homelessness and homelessness support services, it remains to be seen what the reports from OneLink will be like. If there is nowhere for people to be placed into homelessness services, it makes it very difficult for their reports to show improvements.

We have just had the census—or part of the census perhaps—in the past couple of days. It will take some time for the results to be known and that is the case each time. It is a huge exercise to pull together the data. So at this time the 2011 census is in the only information we have. That shows the ACT has the second worst rate of homelessness in Australia, second only to the Northern Territory. So even though the definition of “homelessness” to some degree had changed from the 2006 census to the 2011 census, the rates of homelessness remained very similar. It is quite disturbing that in a city like Canberra, a city state, we have such high rates of homelessness.

A number of people receive services from our great homelessness services, but we should never forget that someone receiving a service from a specialist homelessness service is still experiencing homelessness. To be able to move people out of the cycle of homelessness, what some people have referred to as churning through homelessness services, what is really needed is housing. Housing is the flip side of homelessness. You also need the supports in place to address some of the underlying drivers as to why someone maybe experiencing homelessness or going through repeat cycles of homelessness. But without adequate housing the availability of housing for those in the lowest quintile or even the lower two quintiles in this territory is an issue that will not be solved. That is something this government has failed to address over a number of years.

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) (8.50): The ACT government is proud to maintain the most significant social housing system in Australia, with 30 dwellings per 1,000 people against a national average of 17 per 1,000. A good secure home is fundamental to so many parts of life: school, work, good health, friendships, comfort, security and happiness. That is why in housing the 2016 budget continues the government's strong commitment to public housing and the housing needs of some of the most disadvantaged members of the community.

Some \$184 million is being invested in housing and homelessness support. Last week during National Homelessness Week I announced the extension of funding to

Canberra's 48 specialist homelessness services. This is on top of the \$169 million being invested in 2016-17 for public housing renewal, \$391 million over the forward estimates.

Aside from public housing renewal, Housing ACT is also replacing and refurbishing properties under its annual capital program. This will see about 70 dwellings replaced each year with properties better suited to meeting the needs of public housing tenants. As more and more of this new housing comes online I have seen the life-changing effect it can have on the people who move in and the great way it is being welcomed into local communities.

As of 30 June 2016 the government's social housing stock was estimated to be 11,659. In the coming three years property numbers will increase by a further 148 to 11,807 properties. The budget also continues our support for Common Ground with funding of \$308,000 for onsite services there.

Housing is also deeply linked to the government's better services reforms. In many ways it is the frontier of this work. One of the pilot projects funded under better services was the human services gateway in Belconnen. Recently the gateway has expanded to incorporate child and youth services developing the one-stop-shop philosophy as well as providing an efficiency for the government's investment. The government will provide \$4.4 million over three years for OneLink and continue to work with it to progress changes to improve our service system.

Lastly, I again welcome the findings of this year's audit into public housing maintenance. The government is acting on each recommendation and we are now in a better position to ensure that this contract is functioning at its best, both for housing tenants and for taxpayers. I would like to thank both Housing and Spotless for their very constructive engagement during the audit process, and I reaffirm the government's commitment to continuing to work hard to support quality homes and quality lives for our 22,000-plus Housing ACT tenants.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Icon Water Limited—Schedule 1, Part 1.12

MR COE (Ginninderra) (8.53): Icon Water Limited delivers water and sewerage services to the ACT as well as managing investment in ActewAGL on behalf of the territory. As a public trading enterprise Icon Water provides dividends to the ACT government. Last financial year Icon provided a dividend of \$76 million, and one-off dividend relief was also provided to Icon by reducing the payout ratio to 64 per cent. Of course, it begs the question why such relief is necessary and whether there are any structural issues with the way water is priced in the ACT or with how Icon is being managed. This matter has been discussed on many occasions in this place, and I dare say there is a chance it will be considered many more times.

Of course, separate to this is the worrying balance sheet for Icon Water, especially when you look at the interest bearing liabilities. The current and non-current interest bearing liabilities are absolutely massive at over \$1.5 billion. Then, of course, there is

another \$400 million in non-current provisions, which I believe is a deferred tax liability. The fact that the \$1.5 billion liability is hovering at that point and is, in effect, increasing is a real worry. It shows there is real risk that interest expense will be capitalised as a result of our inability to tackle the principal. There is a real structural issue that will have to be addressed at some point. Although the total assets or net assets are still reasonable, there is still that significant issue with regard to the ever-increasing interest bearing liabilities and the potential for the interest to capitalise.

I want to touch on a couple of issues with regard to the bulk water alliance Auditor-General's report released last year, but with the tabling of a PAC report this week it is topical to mention a few concerns. It is important to note a few paragraphs in this report, in particular, paragraph 5.68:

The then ACTEW Managing Director's 17 September 2009 report to the Legislative Assembly, in response to a 16 September 2009 Legislative Assembly motion, used material from a report that had been provided to the ACT Government by ACTEW in December 2008. Information in the December 2008 report conveyed that there had been a significant increase in the cost of reinforced steel. It is apparent, however, that the cost of reinforced steel had reduced in 2009. While it would have been prudent for ACTEW to review and revise this information it had only approximately one day to prepare and present this information to the Assembly.

It is important to note that ACTEW were, in effect, blaming several commodities for going up in price as being a cause of or a contributor to the blowout in the cost of the Cotter Dam when, in actual fact, the Auditor-General found that the price of steel had decreased in that time and, therefore, was a contributor to the cost going down, not increasing.

It is also worth noting paragraph 5.47 in the report. It states:

In October 2007 the ACT Government, on the advice of ACTEW, announced that the expected cost of construction of the Enlarged Cotter Dam would be \$145 million. Notwithstanding the limitations of this figure it was not specifically and publically refuted until early September 2009.

That date is very important—early September 2009. It goes on:

Following its initial consideration and prior to its endorsement of the Final Target Outturn Cost (\$299 million) the ACTEW Board communicated the revised figure to the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister (and Cabinet).

I will go on. Paragraph 5.57 says:

Based on an analysis of documented material there is evidence that information was made available to the then Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister, throughout 2008 and 2009, on expected cost increases for the project.

It is very important to note that the government, the two shareholders of ACTEW, were being kept aware of cost increases for the Cotter Dam project despite the fact, as I have already read out, they only notified the public in September 2009.

Dot point 3 of paragraph 5.55 states:

information tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 17 September 2009, prepared by ACTEW, advised that ACTEW Board papers for the meeting on 26 August 2009 had been delivered to departmental representatives on Friday 21 August 2009 and that the ACTEW Managing Director had 'met with the heads of both Chief Minister's Department and Treasury to discuss the proposed costings provided in the Board papers.' (It is not clear as to when these meetings occurred);

To recap, we know from the Auditor-General's report that throughout 2008 and 2009 the government knew the costs of the project were increasing. They also knew that the cost as of 21 August was going to be significantly higher than what was in the public realm.

The reason I said that the date of September 2009 was important is because according to paragraph 5.53 the then planning minister announced the use of call-in powers for the enlarged Cotter Dam project on the morning of 26 August 2009. So it seems we have a situation where the government knew the cost of the dam was going up markedly. The Auditor-General says they were kept alert to cost increases in 2008 and 2009. ACTEW had advised on Friday, 21 August the Chief Minister's department and Treasury that the cost was significantly higher than what was in the public realm, yet the government went ahead with the call-in anyway. That goes to the integrity of this government.

It is also worth noting that paragraph 5.75 states:

The geological condition of the Enlarged Cotter Dam site became better known as geotechnical surveys were conducted between 2007 and September 2009. A statement in a September 2009 newspaper article, quoting the then Managing Director of ACTEW saying that the cost had increased due to '... going down about another 9m on what we anticipated for the foundations' is not supported by geotechnical investigations that were undertaken.

We have a situation where they said steel was increasing and that that was driving up the cost of the dam, and that was wrong. They said that they had to go down another nine metres in excavation, but that was not supported by geotechnical investigations that were undertaken. In addition, the costs were increasing throughout 2008 and 2009 and the government knew about it—the shareholders knew about it—yet Minister Barr, who I believe was then the planning minister, went ahead and called in the project and did not allow proper scrutiny before the dam had been given the green light.

This is significant because we have another serious project on the table at the moment. With the light rail project I think we are seeing some of these issues revisited. It seems we may not have learned these lessons with regard to the bulk water alliance and, in particular, the enlarged Cotter Dam project with regard to how we are going about managing the light rail project. I hope the government, through this Auditor-General's report into the bulk water alliance as part of the Icon portfolio, is able to make sure lessons have been learned. (*Second speaking period taken.*)

I hope this audit report and all the other evidence with regard to the problems at the enlarged Cotter Dam site will inform those opposite about the real risks of not managing large infrastructure projects properly.

I also note a whistleblower has raised concerns about this particular project. I have been contacted by this whistleblower and I know he has some very serious concerns that he has passed on to numerous channels. Some of those have been investigated, but I understand he believes there are still some issues that remain unresolved. I believe he may have even been in touch with one of the Assembly committees as well, so there may well still be some outstanding issues with regard to how the enlarged Cotter Dam and other Bulk Water Alliance projects were managed, whether appropriate governance arrangements were in place, whether taxpayers got the best possible deal and whether lessons have been learned and people are accountable for their actions. Some of those questions may well remain unanswered.

I will conclude my remarks on Icon Water, but I urge the government to ensure that, especially with regard to other large infrastructure projects, the lessons from the Bulk Water Alliance have been learned.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for the Environment and Climate Change) (9.06): During the period 2016-17 to 2019-20 Icon Water will pursue four strategic objectives relating to its people, asset management, customer service and financial management. The key focus is on improving efficiency and effectiveness in providing quality water and sewerage services to the people of Canberra.

The change in Icon Water's prices reflected in this year's budget are limited to consumer price index increases and cost pass-throughs approved by the ICRC in June this year. Normal weather patterns, household consumption and development activity have been assumed. However, variability in climatic conditions and development activity may result in material variations to Icon Water's forecasts.

Forecast distribution income from ActewAGL is in line with its electricity pricing proposal for 2016-17, which has been accepted by the Australian Energy Regulator and the November 2015 Energy Regulator's draft determination on gas network pricing. Icon's budget estimates may change as a result of subsequent regulatory decisions and a number of legal proceedings which are anticipated to take some time to resolve. Icon's debt levels continue to be prudently managed with gearing within the sustainable range. They will be less than 60 per cent for the foreseeable future.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission—Schedule 1, Part 1.13.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (9.08): The ICRC is responsible for regulating and advising the government about pricing and other matters for the monopoly or near-monopoly and ministerially declared regulated industries and the ICRC also provides advice on issues related to competition and arbitrates infrastructure access disputes. One of the important roles that the ICRC has is regulating water prices in the territory.

An issue which is regularly raised with members of the Assembly is the price of water for high-volume users such as sporting clubs in particular but also other community groups. I know that there are numerous golf courses around the ACT that are very concerned about how the ICRC rules apply to them and I think an area for this government or a future government to investigate is what relief is going to be possible for these high water users.

It is especially so with regard to the complexity of the legislation and regulations regarding water usage, especially including dams and bore water. I know that there are some complexities in that space. I know that there are several threshold years that are significant when dams or weirs are established. That is, of course, another layer of difficulty with regard to resolving the issue. But one way or another there does have to be some dedication or some commitment by this government or a future government to making water more affordable for high-volume users who are, in effect, community groups.

The other point that I want to make mention of is—again it is another potential structural issue with regard to water pricing in the ACT—with regard to offsite works that are often associated with infrastructure projects such as a residential development or a commercial development. When offsite works are undertaken, such as work on the stormwater system or on sewerage, those offsite works are often gifted to Icon for their management. However, because they are gifted rather than being acquired through market value, it means that the value of those assets does not form part of the basis for determining pricing in the ACT. I know that is a difficult area because, if you did include the market value of all those assets, it would drive up the price of water in the ACT. At the same time you have a situation where Icon is struggling to meet the maintenance requirements of all these assets. Again, we are not flagging that we have a silver bullet here but it is an area of concern and it goes to, again, a structural issue that either this government or a future government, I think, will need to address.

Finally, I will just briefly touch on two paragraphs which are relevant for the ICRC. They come from a report prepared by the ICRC and are referenced in the bulk water alliance report of the Auditor-General. It is the ICRC's final report into water security as of June 2010. The paragraphs read:

It is clear to the Commission that the \$145 million estimate was deficient for the purposes of approving the [Enlarged Cotter Dam] project due to the preliminary nature of the estimates as well as an absence of market testing of the costs assumed in 2007. Additional feasibility studies were required to ensure that the costs were tested and the design of the dam refined. The Commission is concerned that the \$145 million estimate was used in the decision to recommend the dam in 2007 to the ACT government.

As a consequence, ACTEW at that time made decisions which favoured the [Enlarged Cotter Dam], and the favouring of this one option influenced the process for considering other options. The Commission is concerned that the 2007 recommendation ultimately led to the decision to proceed with the [Enlarged Cotter Dam] in 2009 despite the economic returns associated with

meeting the water needs of the community being maximised by not proceeding with the [Enlarged Cotter Dam] project once the full cost of the project was known.

In effect, how I read these paragraphs from the ICRC report of June 2010 reproduced in the Auditor-General's report is that, when you have bad decision-making early on, it has very bad consequences down the track.

There is a very real parallel with regard to the light rail project. When you do not have the correct information or you are not using sound, evidence-based decision-making, not only do you get a bad outcome in the short term but potentially you compound the folly down the track.

I am not saying that the enlarged Cotter Dam should not have been pursued. All I am saying is that there is a lesson to be learnt in making sure that you have all the evidence up front and you make sound decisions on the basis of that because, when you start making political decisions on something as significant as a dam or a light rail project, the cost to the community is potentially huge.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate—Schedule 1, Part 1.14

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (9.14): In talking to this area tonight there are a lot of issues that I want to cover. So I will have to go through each of them probably more briefly than I would like to but I will start with an area that I think has enjoyed the unanimous support of the Assembly in this term, and that is the area of tackling family and domestic violence. It has been the subject of a number of debates in this place. We have seen motions, we have had legislation, and there was the roundtable that was subject to the motion I moved in this place that brought many members of the community together. I found it very educational, certainly, attending that roundtable. I am very glad that this is an area that we have all thought fit to work on.

Mr Gentleman, I would point out, has been a white ribbon ambassador for a notable period of time. He has been a spokesperson for that organisation. He certainly held a prominent role, amongst others who have been active in tackling the scourge of family and domestic violence.

Sadly during this term of the Assembly we have seen fatalities as a consequence of family violence in the ACT. It is a tragedy. This is an area where, in the main, I commend the government for the work that they have been doing. I think that in the main what they have done has been good, and I welcome that.

I note that in the budget there is the levy to fund the initiatives for family and domestic violence, the \$30 levy. I have heard the arguments that have been put forward by the government as to why they essentially put that money in there and that it would then be hypothecated to family and domestic violence. I do not think it is playing out that way in the community, I would have to say, but I think there is broad support for tackling family and domestic violence in the community. I do not think there is any suggestion that there would not be support.

When the government announced money to be put in the budget I do not think there was anyone out there in the community saying that that should not be done. To then hypothecate it to rates has actually had a perverse effect out there in community and turned this into a debate about, “Was this a tax grab? Was this just a way of hiding a rates increase?” And so on. I do not think it has played out the way the government intended. I do not think it has actually helped the debate.

From the Canberra Liberals’ perspective I do not think it is the right way to go. This is an area that we will look to, not with a view to reducing any funding effort but to make sure that the community maintains its support for this important area and does not let the niggles of this “rates rise by stealth”, as it has been described to me, stop that enjoying broad, unanimous, bipartisan, community support.

There are a lot of areas of JACS that deal with family and community violence: the DPP, the Victims of Crime Commissioner, of course the police, the court system, Legal Aid and so on. All of them work very hard and I commend the staff for that. It is a very complex and difficult area of law.

An area, perhaps, where we have not seen quite so closely eye-to-eye—although I think we nearly did—was our response to outlaw motorcycle gangs, bikie activity. We have had recent legislation in this place dealing in part with organised crime activity but we did not get as far as consorting laws. I have been talking in this place about these now for a long time, probably not as long as Mr Corbell but certainly since 2009 when I first became shadow police minister, as Mr Corbell would well know.

At that time Nathan Rees, the then Premier of New South Wales, said he was going to drive the bikies out of New South Wales. He introduced laws to have that effect. There was a denial from this government that this would lead to an increase in activity in the ACT. What we know is that it has. The advice from ACT Policing is that that is exactly what is happening: bikies from New South Wales, in particular Sydney, are coming to the ACT to conduct activities because they can do things here that they cannot do back in New South Wales.

I am speculating a little but I do get that sense that Mr Corbell eventually got to the point where he became a believer, he understood that this was an issue that needed to be dealt with and there was a paper put out, there was consultation and he said he was going ahead with it but he has not fulfilled that obligation. That is disappointing. I do not know quite what happened in the internal machinations of the Labor Party and the cabinet and so on that quite prevented this happening but what I would say is that, regardless of what the reasons were, that is disappointing.

As a result what we will see is continued bikie activity in the ACT that we would not otherwise have, and that does have an impact on community safety and it does have an impact on scarce police resources that are drained away to deal with issues that they would otherwise have more power to prevent. Certainly it would be an increased deterrent for bikies.

We have had some conversation as well about ice or crystal meth, as it is known. It has got a few names. I have called for a roundtable. We have called for a task force in actual fact to deal with this in the ACT. It is a critical issue and it is one that we would seek to address in government. I would be the first to acknowledge that the response to dealing with ice is not just through law and order; it is through health, through education, through the Community Services Directorate and, for the people who are affected by this curse of a drug, dealing with them compassionately. It is something that we need to tackle from a whole-of-government perspective.

I would be remiss if I did not note the stumbles that have occurred within the police portfolio over the last period. I think that it has been a great shame, not only to this government but to the community, that we have a situation where a police minister in particular, who should be upholding such high levels of integrity in her office, was found to have been providing sensitive information to the CFMEU. That issue spoke volumes about the nature of this government, of this Labor Party, that they were prepared to put the integrity of the police and sensitive information below the priorities of their CFMEU masters.

I think that was probably one of the shabbier incidents that have occurred with government since the beginning of self-government. Certainly it led to the removal of the minister, which is highly unusual, but the police minister's office providing sensitive police information about an investigation to the CFMEU—an organisation that was under investigation and an organisation that donates swathes of money to the Labor Party—cannot be looked at in any other way than entirely unacceptable and is one of the reasons why I think that there are many of those in the community who have lost trust in the government. When you cannot trust your own police minister's office with sensitive police information, how can you trust the government? How can you? That was a shameful incident.

I think also shameful, but in a different way, was the decision by that former minister to cut her police funding, I guess at the behest of Mr Barr, by \$15.36 million. We have been talking about the pressure of domestic violence, the scourge of ice, the necessity to deal with bikies and all of the other issues that our police have to deal with, all the problems that we have seen with violence in Civic. (*Second speaking period taken.*) This government then decided to cut funding to police. It is extraordinary, is it not? That led to job cuts. We have heard a bit about job cuts but these were real job cuts; these were not pretend ones; these were not made-up ones as part of a scare campaign; these were real Labor job cuts from police, some of the hardest working people in our community dealing with some of the most complex issues.

There was an amount restored, I note, of the \$15.36 million—about \$1.8 million was put back in—so that the final cut to police was \$13,484,000. I will say that again: \$13,484,000 was the final amount that was cut. As I have said, we will restore that funding to ACT Policing so that they can do their job.

But the very big difference, it would appear, between this side of the chamber and those opposite when it comes to resourcing, when it comes to leaking police sensitive information, is that we respect our police. And that is a very, very big difference.

We have also made it clear that we will provide protections for our police when it comes to police assaults. That dates back to legislation introduced in this place by Mr Seselja, who was passionate about that issue, I know, and wanted to make sure that if police were assaulted during their duty the punishment fitted the crime so that it acted as a deterrent and restored some sense of authority for police when they go about doing their very difficult duty.

In line with that, what we have also said is that we will instigate coward punch legislation. We have seen the terrible attacks that have occurred; we have seen the images on CCTV. Other jurisdictions have effectively introduced what is called one punch or coward punch legislation to make it very clear that if you cowardly attack someone, unprovoked, often from behind or just go up—and what used to be called a king hit but deservedly gets called the coward punch because it is not a king hit; it is not something to be proud of—and thump someone, attack someone unprovoked, then we need to make sure that the punishment fits that cowardly attack. That, again, will help serve as a deterrent. There is no silver bullet to this stuff—and I accept that—but again the government will not act to back up police. It is just extraordinary that they would not do so.

We will also make sure that our front-line police have tasers. The police want them. At the moment they are issued only to substantive sergeants, but often a substantive sergeant will not be on duty; there will be an acting sergeant or a constable there on duty. So there is no taser available. This is about protecting our police so that they have got the suite of tools available to them, and it is about protecting our community.

There have been some tragic incidents, particularly for people affected by mental illness where the police have had no option but to discharge a firearm for their own safety or that of other people, whereas if they had had a taser they could have used a taser and then someone would not have been critically injured or killed. It is beyond me why we would not provide those tools to our police so that they have the full suite, the full complement of equipment, necessary to deal with their very dangerous and difficult job.

I move from policing to the court system. There is clearly pressure on our court system and it is good that finally in this budget we see an allocation for a fifth judge. This is something that we in the opposition have been calling for since I have been leader. It has been a long time coming but finally we have a fifth judge appointed permanently to the Supreme Court. That is good. I was there on the day of his investiture. I am not sure “investiture” is the correct term but it was great to welcome him. Certainly, from what people said, from his speech and from what I have read about him, I am sure he will be a worthy addition to the bench. That is something I congratulate the government on. I regret that it took so long for them to get there.

I am keeping a watchful eye on the Magistrates Court. It clearly is an area under significant pressure. The delays occurring in the Magistrates Court are, again, significant, and it is, I think, an area where additional resourcing will need to be considered in due course. Whoever does form government in October, I think there will be increasing pressure to look at the resourcing of the Magistrates Court as part of future budgets down the track.

One thing that we have said we would like to see as a reform is a proper domestic violence court. I think that that would be a good way to go. It has certainly got support from many who deal with these complex issues in the community.

There is a lot to go through in this portfolio. It is an important area of government. I have noted a couple of areas where I think that the government has done all right. But, across the board, particularly in that police portfolio, under the previous police minister, I think the treatment of our police has been nothing but shameful.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (9.31): I rise to speak to the Corrective Services portion of the Justice and Community Safety Directorate. For a number of years I have been happy to lead the charge for the Canberra Liberals on a number of issues that have continued to plague the corrections system and, more specifically, the AMC through this term of the Assembly. Security has been one of the major issues at the forefront of what has been happening within Corrective Services and the ACT corrections system over the past couple of years. Time and again we see contraband and we see violence. We see assaults, drugs, fires, escape attempts and items being thrown over fences; symbols of a prison system that is in dire need of some attention, change of direction and better management.

We have seen phones entering into the prison system, allowing criminals to continue their criminal behaviour whilst they are on the inside. Drugs are continuing to flow into our corrections system, causing addicts to continue using and crime to continue occurring whilst prisoners are serving their sentences. We have seen the audacity of some inside the AMC to not just use a mobile phone to record a fight but to then put it on social media, showing that there are absolutely no consequences, or very few consequences, for those on the inside who are seeking to break the rules.

We have had reports of fires. We have had escape attempts. Most recently—and I asked the minister a question in question time—whilst the Symonston facility was being used as an overflow stopgap measure to deal with the capacity issues that have plagued the AMC since the day it opened, we hear of an escape attempt—*Shawshank Redemption*-style—where prisoners have sought to punch a hole in the wall and conceal that hole by using posters to cover the work that they have been doing in an attempt to escape. That is a prison system in absolute disarray.

When it comes to the purposes of a prison, what it is supposed to be there for, it is a rehabilitation opportunity. It is an opportunity for us as a society to take people out of the community who have done wrong and give them an opportunity by equipping them with the skills and the life behaviours that they need to go forward so that, hopefully, at the end of their sentence they become constructive members of our community.

In this term we have seen the AMC record one of the highest recidivist rates in the country. Almost 50 per cent of people who were released were back within two years for the same or a similar offence. God only knows the number of prisoners who were back within two years on a different offence. I dare say the recidivist rate in the ACT is much higher than reports such as the ROGS would have us believe.

It is absolutely essential that more be done in our corrections system to focus on rehabilitation. Even the Auditor-General has had quite a number of critical words to say around rehabilitation opportunities. She conducted an extensive audit on the structured day and the activities of rehabilitation and recidivist behaviour within the ACT. It showed that for a human rights compliant jail that was supposed to be prisoner-centric and that would support them in rehabilitation—world’s best practice, as far as human rights compliance goes—it has failed dismally. This was a “you beaut new” prison that we had to build. Those opposite took it to an election and made a commitment. They did the right thing in the instance of the prison. They actually took it to an election, which is more than you can say about the infrastructure projects that they are putting forward today.

We have now got a prison that is overrun with drugs, that is overrun with violence and that is failing to rehabilitate the offenders that our court systems send there. We only need to look at the lack of prison industry that exists. That is before the current minister regarding efficiency in the expansion project, or an over-budgeting in the expansion project perhaps. He is funnelling some of that money into setting up a bakery and a laundry which will serve only the prison itself.

I have seen some of the great work that Corrective Services New South Wales do in their prison industries. I went down to Junee. The prison there has an “earn or learn” policy. You are either in work, contributing to the prison itself or the community around the Junee prison, or you are studying: you are learning a trade or you are doing a tertiary qualification via correspondence. They are the two options that you are given whilst you are serving your sentence.

I must say that the return to community produced by that prison down there is phenomenal. They do meals on wheels out of the jail. They have low-risk prisoners heading out into the community to pick up litter on highways and do garden maintenance around the retirement village. They are doing the sorts of things in the community which councils or local governments simply cannot afford to do on a day-to-day basis. Perhaps there are some lessons to be learned for the ACT in terms of having more engagement with the community for those on the inside rather than forgetting that they are there until it is time for release.

It would be remiss of me not to raise one of the most controversial issues which plagued the last election and the early part of this term—since the departure of now Senator Gallagher, it seems to have gone quiet—and that is the introduction of needles into the AMC. Let me be clear: drugs do not belong in a prison. I do not think it is the place of Corrective Services officers or health officers in the jail to be facilitating drug use whilst someone is on a custodial sentence. Drugs do not belong in a jail.

It is a clear point of difference that at this election Canberrans will be able to have a choice on a number of issues. When it comes to Corrective Services they can have a jail system that is letting contraband in, that is failing to rehabilitate offenders and that is happy to facilitate drug use on the inside. Or they can have the alternative, where we will actually invest into genuine rehabilitation options for prisoners. We will have

an overarching security review to ensure that the prison is functioning as it should, that it is in line with community expectations, that the violence is stemmed, that drug use is stemmed and that the mobile phones, the weapons and the other unthinkable actions that are occurring on the inside are stopped.

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (9.38): As a shadow minister, I stand to speak to the emergency services portion of JACS expenditure and the valuable work that members of our emergency services do across Canberra every single day of the year, and how they are supported. Firstly, I acknowledge the dedication and hard work of the men and women of the various services: Fire and Rescue, including the CFUs, the Ambulance Service, our SES and the Rural Fire Service. This group of people put themselves on the line every single day to help keep all of us safe, or as safe as possible.

I think no-one in this place would doubt the importance of the emergency services to the ACT. I note that last year on the ABC the Chief Minister stated that funding a 24/7 365-day-per-year service comes at a cost. With this in mind, it is important for us to assess how funds are allocated within our Emergency Services Agency. It is absolutely vital that the people of Canberra have complete confidence when faced with an emergency and call 000 and that they are guaranteed the very best possible response and the very best possible service that we can provide.

This is one of the reasons I am concerned about the plan being implemented to establish a call centre fully manned by call operators rather than the model that has been successful to date with the expertise of day-to-day fire and rescue personnel inside the call centre as well as others. Many of the firies have expressed serious concern to me regarding the change, saying that there is potential for this approach to result in delays of services reaching those in need, which could result, obviously, in greater loss of property and, in a worst-case scenario, a possible loss of life.

I have been interested to learn that to get to flashover point in a modern room takes a matter of seconds whereas, with the furnishings that we used to put in our houses, flashover point in a room—which is where the whole room ignites because of the level of chemical in the air—used to take eight or 10 minutes. Now it is a matter of less than a minute generally because of the types of furnishings that we have in our houses. So timing is very important. Anything that would slow down the arrival of an emergency vehicle to a house, whether it is for fire, a medical emergency or other emergencies, should be very carefully scrutinised.

The question has to be asked: what is the purpose of changing the comm centre from being manned partly by firefighters to one manned purely by call-takers? What is the benefit of this change? What is the problem that the government is trying to solve with this change? Or is it merely just an attempt to save money? We have trained firefighters who innately understand the operational process when responding to a structure fire or other type of rescue. They have the expertise to operationally understand what the crisis is and are able to allocate suitable and available teams and appropriate appliances as needed.

There are clearly concerns as to whether or not our call operators will have the ability and the deep understanding to determine whether or not a rescue requires one truck or many trucks as an appliance, an aerial firefighting capacity, specialised breathing apparatus, a compressed air foam system, or whether all of these may be required. Is it the intention that the call centre manned by such operators will potentially be triaging calls to forward them on to an available fire station? If so, is that not just creating an additional layer of decision-making before an appliance is deployed? I am concerned that these proposed changes are not necessarily focused on getting the best outcomes for the community or having a better response time, but rather are a cost-cutting measure or, perhaps even worse, some sort of power change, shift or grab.

I am told that morale is an ongoing issue amongst our firefighters. I understand that their work has increased by over 20 per cent since 2003. The work is not limited to just structural fires, which appear to have gone down a little in number, but a large number of rescues are attended now by Fire and Rescue as a primary responder to emergency in the ACT.

I was told how recently a fire truck was the first on site for a one-week-old baby who had stopped breathing. The truck happened to be at the local shopping area when the call was made to 000. Because they were on site—and because the call centre operators understood that they were on site—and were able to administer CPR, this one-month-old baby was saved. If we are not going to deploy firefighting personnel when they are the closest then such circumstances could end in tragedy. I think that is the concern of those in Fire and Rescue about this change to the call centre. It is about knowledge of what happens on the ground and an ability to think a little creatively about how we can respond.

It is important to recognise the many roles and varied jobs that Fire and Rescue undertake every single day, whether they are first on site with the jaws of life at a car accident and providing on-site support—for example, their attendance at a recent fatality at the UC hospital site—or helping to free a child who has managed to get their finger or head stuck in a drain or small space. Their commitment to the rescue and service of the people of Canberra really is vital. They are quite often the first point of call for all sorts of problems that need solving, not just fires.

Our ambulance officers are also to be commended for their dedication, not just in saving lives but working to help keep our population well with the community health care that they are now providing. I am constantly amazed at the caring and professional approach of the ambos, having experienced it firsthand last year when I needed to call an ambulance for my baby, who had almost stopped breathing. I am very grateful for the fact that the ambos were not focused just on helping my child but also focused on helping me and my family be calm in the midst of such a crisis.

I know that the Ambulance Service has been through significant growth and change over the past few years, having gone from a workforce of around 60 ambulance officers to now close to 240. I am mindful of the fact that with significant growth can come a range of cultural challenges. The rapid increase of on-road staff over such a short period of time implies that the workforce planning before that period had perhaps been somewhat lacking and had become somewhat reactive. I hope we are not going to find ourselves in that position again.

We need to have excellent workforce planning for these vital groups. We must not have a problematic approach, and not just for those carrying the heavy load of working extra shifts sometimes but perhaps putting off holiday leave as there are not sufficient people to cover shifts. But it is seriously problematic to the wellbeing of those on the other end of the phone dialling 000 with a medical emergency. I will be taking a special interest to ensure that the workforce planning is undertaken with a long-term view to ensure that not only the needs of our current ambulance officers are taken into account but also future planning is well catered for.

Much like within the mental health portfolio, where I have expressed concern about the safety and wellbeing of nurses and front-line staff, I am very mindful of the physical and mental health of those who are caring for our community in our Emergency Services Agency. We are also fortunate here in the ACT to have the ACT Rural Fire Service and our SES. Without a rural fire service that helps to protect life and property in the rural parts of the ACT such as Tharwa and surrounds and other villages, where our current serving MLA Val Jeffery is from?

One of the things that have become blatantly clear is the importance of prolonging local knowledge in our parts. Often this local knowledge has been passed down from generation to generation of these families on the land. Local knowledge should be relied upon, respected and consulted upon. I recall speaking to an elderly man in Queanbeyan a few years ago after the 2010 floods who was telling me about the serious floods back in the 1970s. It is this sort of lived experience that can add significant value when facing bushfires and weather patterns in rural regions. We do not have to rely just on experts or people who have studied things academically. There is also a great deal to be learned from the community. They are renowned for their voluntary spirit and great generosity in helping across our community. Our SES is no different; great men and women who willingly give up their time to help those around them when people need a helping hand.

With many trees in the Weston Creek area having suffered through the drought of the 2000s, we have seen a large number of them come down or branches come down over the last five years every time there is a bit of a storm. Very often it is the SES who are out cutting up fallen trees and removing the branches that have come down on people's hedges and roofs. This all contributes to keeping our community safe. There are some thoughts about having some of our emergency services being more independent of the JACS department. That is certainly worth considering.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for the Environment and Climate Change) (9.48): I thank members for their comments on the Justice and Community Safety portfolio budget. I will leave my colleague Mr Rattenbury to deal with comments in relation to Corrective Services, but I will make some comments this evening about the importance the government has attached to a wide-ranging reform agenda to tackle the impact of domestic and family violence in our community.

The investments the government is making in this budget are driven by a fundamental recognition—not just on the part of the government, but I believe on the part of the

community as a whole—that the impact of domestic and family violence in our city, in our neighbourhoods, regardless of social status, income or ethnic background, are so pervasive, are so destructive and leave so much trauma and harm that it is now time, beyond time, to respond to the issues, the challenges and the harm that this particular type of activity causes.

The government commissioned three reports into family violence: the Glanfield inquiry report, the family violence death review, and the gap analysis work. Together they give us a full picture of the seriousness of this issue and the need for all of us to respond to it. This is outlined in the government's response to family violence that was released on 28 June this year. It sets out the clear direction for strong action against violence, and what we all need to do to work together to reduce its prevalence.

Underpinning this is an investment of over \$21 million to tackle the issue of family violence in our community in this year's budget. This is the single largest spend across government and non-government organisations on this particular issue in the history of self-government. It demonstrates a best practice approach for how our response to family violence needs to change to meet the needs of victims and their families and to hold perpetrators to account.

There are nine initiatives within the JACS portfolio that have been funded to address family violence, with a value of \$9.6 million. They include the establishment of the family safety team and a full-time coordinator general. The Office for the Coordinator General for Family Safety will be responsible for facilitating and coordinating work across the ACT in relation to this policy issue. They will also provide accountability to government in ensuring that commitments made in this budget to address family violence are met. There is over \$3 million to fund this important coordinating capability.

Some \$1.46 million is being allocated to support implementation of a broad range of law reform matters identified by the Australian Law Reform Commission and New South Wales Law Reform Commission respectively. These will improve the ACT's legal framework for protecting people from domestic, family and sexual violence and will improve access to legal responses for victims of violence.

This includes extra capability for the Director of Public Prosecutions worth \$1.36 million; extra capability for Legal Aid ACT, \$1.21 million; and extra capability for ACT police—\$1.18 million—to fund additional resources to increase the capability of each of these organisations to directly support and protect the victims of family violence and bring perpetrators to account.

A crucial \$1.22 million is provided to make an investment in a range of justice services when it comes to translation and interpreting services. The lack of third-party interpreter services for victims experiencing domestic and family violence in our courts and tribunals is an injustice that must be addressed. These women, and overwhelmingly they are women, coming from non-English speaking backgrounds, often in precarious circumstances due to ambiguous immigration status—they may have been here sponsored by a spouse who has committed violence against them and is now estranged from them; they may not be Australian citizens; they may not be able to work legally in Australia; and they certainly do not have English as a first

language—are particularly vulnerable in our justice system. This investment is designed to address that.

We are also focused on improving equitable access to justice for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as well as our Indigenous brothers and sisters. Some \$50,000 has been provided in 2016-17 to help develop a common risk assessment tool for use by service providers. This will help us to ensure that we have a common methodology for assessing risks presented by perpetrators and the safety of people who are at risk. There is \$15,000 for an awareness campaign to support better information sharing in relation to family violence cases and \$20,000 for the fantastic Tara Costigan Foundation to establish the Tara's Angels service.

Providing support for and addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system remains a priority for the government. The government has expanded the restorative justice program with the commencement of phase 2, which provides for serious offences and for adult offenders to participate in the RJ process. To support this, the government is providing funding for a second Indigenous guidance partner to ensure that there are no gaps in support and opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in the expanded scheme. This is critically important to make sure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receive culturally appropriate service and maximise the positive benefits that they can receive from the restorative justice process, and in particular as a form of diversion from the traditional criminal court process, criminal justice process, including the issues around over-representation of Indigenous people when it comes to incarceration. There will also be funding of \$186,000 to continue the Galambany courts trial program to develop life skills for Indigenous people and to investigate options for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to reduce or prevent contact with the justice system.

I would like to also draw to the attention of members the initiatives in my portfolio that support high quality police and emergency services. There is over \$3 million over four years for enhanced security and protective measures for ACT police, including improved personal protection equipment and the employment of additional protective service officers to help keep ACT Policing facilities safe in what is an enhanced and heightened security environment.

A number of initiatives will enhance and further develop our emergency service capabilities. An extra \$5 million in recurrent funding and \$4.3 million in capital funding has been allocated to the ESA. This will allow us to build a new ACT State Emergency Service base in Calwell, which will replace the existing temporary facility located in Kambah. I know this investment is being warmly welcomed by the south Tuggeranong community.

There is \$2.5 million over four years to increase the capacity of the emergency 000 call centre and the non-emergency patient transport unit to make sure we can meet demand in this growing area of non-emergency patient transport and ambulance 000 call taking. There is \$518,000 to upgrade the ESA's website capabilities, which provide critical information, advice and warnings to the community during emergencies. There is also funding to support the emergency alert system, the nationally adopted telephony-based warning system.

There is over \$900,000 to upgrade the ACT Fire & Rescue Fyshwick station and funding for the ACT RFS Guises Creek brigade station as part of the women in emergency services strategy to attract and retain women in our emergency services.

Finally, whilst it has not been mentioned much, there is over \$2 million in this year's budget to provide for the purchase of a new AgustaWestland AW139 helicopter for the SouthCare aero-medical retrieval service and to upgrade the hangar to accommodate this new air frame. This new helicopter will be used for retrieval and rescue operations in the south-east region. The initiative will not only address our priorities of providing timely access to health care and continued improvements in public safety, but will make sure we have safe aero-medical support for operations.

The benefits to the community of this initiative to operate the new helicopter will include improved availability and timeliness of ambulance services; better care and wellbeing of the patients who are supported; improved community access to ambulance and health services; and improved potential for patient survival thanks to more timely aero-medical retrieval. This is a really important initiative. I look forward to seeing this new helicopter coming online in the coming months.

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

Adjournment

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

National Tree Day

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (9.59): Today I would like to take the opportunity to speak about National Tree Day. National Tree Day is Australia's largest community tree planting and nature care event. This year Planet Ark celebrated the 21st year of National Tree Day and Schools Tree Day. Tree Day is an opportunity to do something positive for your local environment and community and to reconnect with nature. Since its inception more than 3.8 million people have planted 23 million trees and plants, and it is still growing.

The event is sponsored by Toyota Australia and locally Mirko Milic, Canberra Toyota's dealer principal and his team, have been instrumental in making this day a huge success. With the support of Canberra Toyota I was pleased to plant trees with over 100 children from Teddybears Childcare Centre in Macarthur and Teddybears Childcare Centre in Curtin. It was a great day to spend out in the sunshine and it provided a terrific learning opportunity for the children.

I would like to thank and acknowledge Mirko Milic, dealer principal of Canberra Toyota, and his team: Greg, their customer relationship manager, who was very helpful, and Lisa Gray of Canberra Toyota. I also thank Planet Ark; Mark and Tara Gillette of Teddybears Childcare; Adelia Medina, director of Teddybears Childcare

Macarthur; Denise Mercas from Macarthur; Ms Misaela Leahy from Macarthur, Sabrina Biswas, Tamika Brinkley, Linda Bernardi, Virginia Blanco, Kerrie Lovebridge, Vidya Vorkady, Chhimi Wangmo and Shaz Salehzahi. They also were all from the Macarthur centre. From the Curtin centre, I thank Shaista Farook, Rachel, Livia, Abbegaile, Baljit, Karabi, Wah Wah, Michelle, Nana; Sara, Wendy and Anna.

Thank you so much to all of Canberra Toyota, Toyota Australia, Planet Ark and the Teddybears childcare centres in Macarthur and Curtin for their outstanding service to our environment and for their help with National Tree Day.

Valedictory

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Disability, Minister for Small Business and the Arts and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (10.01): Tomorrow night we draw the Eighth Assembly to a close and look forward to the challenges and opportunities of the Ninth Assembly. As ever, our focus is on delivering good government for the ACT so all members of our community can prosper and enjoy our unique city, which was born over a hundred years ago with dreams for a new capital for a new nation.

In 2012 Katy Gallagher as Chief Minister led us into the Eighth Assembly. We kept the Canberra economy strong and fought for the ACT in the face of federal Liberal government cuts. We celebrated Canberra's centenary, instilling a new pride, confidence and can-do spirit in our city. We tackled the Mr Fluffy legacy, steering through a solution once and for all.

Since Andrew Barr became Chief Minister in December 2014 he has cleverly built the case for brand Canberra as the coolest capital, with a diversified, innovative economy and a city buzzing with events, arts, cultural opportunities and entertainment.

Meanwhile, I and colleagues continue to improve our world-class health and education systems and to build a better transport system to service a population of over 400,000. We have worked to make Canberra a more inclusive community with better opportunities for all. It is wonderful to be part of the continuing development of Canberra as a caring, diverse, prosperous and fun city.

I am proud to end this Assembly with ministerial responsibilities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Children and Young People, Disability, Small Business and the Arts, and Veterans and Seniors. They are portfolios that cover communities I am passionate about. As a proud Aboriginal Canberran, it is a special responsibility to serve the interests of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and it has been an honour to do so.

Of course, I thank my family for their support, particularly my wife, Julie, who encourages me at every opportunity. I also thank my talented staff for their commitment and to all my volunteers who generously give their time, thank you for your hard work and belief.

It is inspiring to work with the clever and experienced public servants of the Community Services and economic development directorates and I thank the great DLOs I have had, especially Ali and Narelle, for cheerfully bridging the gap between my office and the public service.

To my colleagues in the Labor Assembly team, I appreciate your support, friendship and drive to make Canberrans' lives better, along with Shane Rattenbury and our government's executive staff. I also thank the Clerk and chamber support; the committee office and secretaries to committees; the Speaker's office; the Office of the Legislative Assembly; Hansard, Technology and Library staff; and the attendants and facilities staff for their professional and good humoured assistance.

I thank the education office for building public engagement with our city's democracy and those responsible for the wonderful artworks in the Assembly which I am glad to see are reappearing following renovations to prepare for the Ninth Assembly. All of you have provided invaluable work in the running of the Assembly.

Lastly, I thank those opposite for their often amusing debates and for making sure we do the best possible job for Canberra. I hope we can do it all again in the Ninth Assembly.

Ms Sandra Georges—retirement

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (10.05): I would like to take some time tonight to pay tribute to Sandra Georges PSM, Parliamentary Counsel. Members will be aware that Sandra is about to retire from the ACT public service and her role as Parliamentary Counsel. Her colleagues are putting on a farewell party for her next week. I am sure it will be a big event but, sadly, I am unable to attend. It will be a very big event because of the respect with which Sandra Georges is held.

I have worked with the Parliamentary Counsel's Office for many years now, including with Sandra herself on many occasions, both as shadow attorney-general and in a number of other capacities during my time so far in the Assembly. There has been no better testament to Sandra's leadership, professionalism and pragmatism, not to mention her thoroughly accommodating style, than her Public Service Medal award in this year's Queen's Birthday honours list. The citation for this award, given for outstanding public service to the law and the community of the Australian Capital Territory, reads as follows:

Ms Georges has made an outstanding contribution to the law and the community throughout her career in the ACT Parliamentary Counsel's Office within the Justice and Community Safety Directorate. Under her leadership, the Parliamentary Counsel's Office has systematised many of its work practices to achieve a consistently high standard of drafting and publishing.

In addition, Ms Georges actively looks for new ways to innovate and improve work practices, and encourages staff to become involved in projects. The low staff turnover in the ACT Parliamentary Counsel's Office, and continued excellent results from both its client and staff surveys, are testament to the excellence of her leadership.

Ms Georges has also gained wide respect for the active role she has played in the Justice and Community Safety Directorate's Reconciliation Action Plan and for her continued and committed support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues.

From the many years I have worked with Sandra Georges, I can attest unequivocally to those qualities. Sandra Georges' advice has always been professional and impartial. Her attention to detail has been exemplary. She has a consummate ability to understand and action legislative instructions quickly, efficiently and effectively.

To say that it has been a pleasure to work with Sandra Georges over the years is a sad understatement of fact. It is with gratitude and humility that I acknowledge Sandra Georges' work in our community and for the ACT Legislative Assembly. I wish her well as she leaves an inspiring and much-fulfilled career to take up retirement which, I am sure, will just be the opening of another opportunity for her to turn her attention to some of the things that she no doubt has been putting aside for many years.

In paying tribute to Sandra Georges on her retirement, I want to take the opportunity to again pay tribute to the work more generally of the Parliamentary Counsel. We have an exemplary legislation register—the best in the country, in my view—and it is testament to the ongoing work of the Parliamentary Counsel. I extend Sandra Georges best wishes on her retirement and I pass on my thanks to her for her service and to the Parliamentary Counsel's Office more generally for their service to the Australian Capital Territory.

Valedictory

MS BURCH (Brindabella) (10.08): I rise to say a few words as we come to the end of this Assembly. Firstly, I would like to say thank you to all the Assembly staff for your patience in sitting late into tonight—and tomorrow night will be later. To all the Assembly staff, to the committee staff and to everybody who keeps this place functioning, I want to thank you. You are forever patient, forever polite and forever supportive. I am sure everyone in this chamber thanks you for that.

I want to thank my staff—staff who are no longer with me: Phil, Maria, Victor, Mark and Brenton, to name a few; and the staff who still share my office: Melinda, Emma, Thomas and Monique—for their friendship, their loyalty, their dedication and their sense of humour.

Every office has a particular character, and there is a disrespect for plain English that comes in sometimes in my office. I was gifted with a collection of what they referred to as Joy-isms but I think is a collective office-ism. It includes things like “gurgling”, “self-pruning”, “wobbling like a dingbat”, “slapper brigade”, “flippy-flappy”, and “monumentous”, to name a few. I want to add to that list tonight: “woo-hoo-diddly-do”. These are words that are just created by people after a hard day, a long day, a fun day. There is almost a Burch office dictionary now being developed. I want to thank my staff for their patience and for that.

To my colleagues, thank you. It has been a great four years, and I look forward to the next four years.

Finally, to my family, the rock that is my anchor, the harbour that keeps me safe, I thank them for all that they do. It made me think of some words that you hear and that you recall. The two phrases that I want to put on record are from Omar Khayyam. They are “be happy for this moment because this moment is your life” and “Dead yesterdays and unborn tomorrows, why fret about it, if today be sweet”. My family make my days sweet. They provide me with the good moments in my life.

Between my family and my loyal friends in my office, I am sure my office-isms and my dictionary will continue to grow.

Paralympics—ACT team

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) (10.11): We are 28 days from the start of the Paralympics, so I would like to recognise the ACT athletes who will be competing at the games in Rio: Sue Powell, cycling; Katie Kelly, triathlon; Scott Reardon, athletics; Jake Lappin, athletics; Evan O’Hanlon, athletics; Joshua Alford, swimming; Jayden Sawyer, athletics; Katherine Proudfoot, athletics; Louise Ellery, athletics; Emily Tapp, athletics; Nic Beveridge, triathlon; Madeleine Scott, swimming. I want to wish all of these athletes well. I know that all of you will do us proud. Congratulations to you, your families and support teams on making the team. We will be cheering you on as you compete for Australia.

Valedictory

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Minister for Planning and Land Management, Minister for Racing and Gaming and Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations) (10.12): It has been really pleasing to serve the people of Brindabella in this Eighth Assembly, and it has been an exciting and productive Assembly which I have enjoyed immensely. It has been an immense privilege and honour to serve as minister in both the Gallagher and Barr governments, and I thank all my colleagues, past and present, in this place for their ongoing support.

I have been really proud of the reforms which have been passed in this place and the work that we do every day in our portfolio areas. And I would like to thank all of those involved. While the reforms have been continued by Minister Bourke, I am particularly proud of the work I undertook to reform the child protection system encapsulated in the most progressive reforms and the most substantial investment ever made in the most vulnerable children and families by the ACT government under a step up for our kids. It really is true that just one step up for our children can truly make a lifetime of difference. I would like to make a special note of thanks to Natalie Howson and the CSD team who worked on those reforms.

During the time that I was responsible for roads and parking I learned a large amount from and enjoyed working with those from Roads ACT, and I want to mention Gary Byles—who recently retired and whose dedication and loyalty is very sorely missed by all of us here—and Tony Gill, Ben McHugh and Rifaat Shoukrallah in particular.

Working as minister responsible for the eradication of Mr Fluffy loose-fill asbestos has been one of the most important roles that I have undertaken and I would like to thank the entire asbestos response task force team for their commitment to the homeowners that they are working with and who generally strive to achieve the best outcomes possible in what has been an incredibly tough situation. I want to make particular mention of Andrew Kefford and Emily Springett and their teams for their tireless support of ministers, and I congratulate Emily on her new role at TCCS. Emily remains one of the most outstanding communications and stakeholder managers within the ACT public service. She has been with the task force since the beginning and I certainly wish her all the best in delivering an even better transport system for the whole city.

I have enjoyed working as the Minister for Racing and Gaming. I believe we have moved in the right direction with red tape reduction and implementation of the PAC report recommendations. I want to thank Kathy Goth, David Snowden, Mark Kalleske, David Dawes and everyone else from that directorate.

Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations is an area which I have been passionate about for my entire working life, so it will come as no surprise to any of you that I am a proud union member and, despite what comes from the opposition side of the room, being union through and through is a badge of honour that I wear proudly. As such, I have immensely enjoyed my work in the IR portfolio and want to thank the teams of the following people: Michael Young, Chris O'Rourke, Goran Yosipovich and Tracey Savage as well.

I would also acknowledge Mark McCabe who gained respect from government and stakeholders alike in his role as Work Safety Commissioner. I wish him well into the future and I am sure the new commissioner, Greg Jones, will do just as well in his role. I welcome him and look forward to working with him as well.

I will say that planning is one of the most challenging portfolios but absolutely the most rewarding portfolio I have had. Most certainly it is one of the areas of government decision-making that does provoke quite a lot of interest from so many residents across Canberra, as every MLA in this place will attest to. The work in planning involves explaining decisions and actions to the community and doing so with professionalism and expertise in every forum. The development of city-shaping policies which touch nearly every area of our daily lives is an ongoing privilege and I hope it has been reflected well in the statement of planning intent developed during my tenure. It is an intent that is focused on people and outcomes and, I hope, will guide the development of our beautifully planned city for many years to come.

I was especially pleased earlier this year to take on responsibility for land management as well and I want to thank several people who have been instrumental

in the government's achievements in Planning and Land Management over the last two years: Dorte Ekelund, Gary Rake, Ben Ponton, Jim Corrigan, Tony Carmichael, Bruce Fitzgerald, Annie Lane, Daniel Iglesias, Brett Phillips and of course all of their teams who support them and the government not for self-interest but for the good of the entire community.

I have about 1½ minutes until the end of my speaking time. I seek leave of the Assembly to complete the valedictory.

Leave granted.

MR GENTLEMAN: I particularly want to acknowledge the tireless work of the departmental liaison officers in the minister's offices. They are responsible for bridging the divide between what the minister wants and needs and what the directorate can deliver. These roles require the utmost professionalism and often work under extraordinary pressure. I have been lucky to have some exceptional DLOs since I became the minister. These include current DLOs Justin McEvoy, Charlotte Miles and Narelle Cross. Of course, DLOs Kathryn Elton, Georgia Harvey and Ali Trehwella from CSD, and Tania Carter, who was my first DLO as a new minister, helped establish the processes we rely on so heavily to be efficient in our daily work.

I make special mention of Sarah Bourne, who has served in several ministers' offices as DLO in this government and previous ones, and who recently has been recalled to serve where she was needed in the newly formed TCCS ministerial unit. Having been the TAMS DLO for many years in this place, Sarah is one of the most respected DLOs in this building and in the public service. I want to pass on the thanks on behalf of the staff and ministers in the Assembly, and hope to see you back in the building in the near future.

Also thanks to all of the staff of the Legislative Assembly, including the attendants, the clerks, the cleaners and executive support—Pam Darville and Sam Engle and their teams—who ensure that my work as manager of government business runs so smoothly.

I also want to thank all of the staff in my office who have contributed during this term, including office managers, Abigail Gallagher, Natasha Apostoloski and Eben Leifer; my media team, Hayden McGirr and Ellie Yates; my senior policy advisers, Jason Clarke and, before him, Neil Finch, who followed the Community Services Directorate to Minister Bourke's office, Brooke Yates, who backfilled as a planning adviser, and my chief of staff, Adina Cirson "the cirsonator".

I also want to thank the interns for volunteering their time—I hope they have gained some valuable experience in working in my ministerial office—including Max Schumann, Briony Roetlands, Jessica Power and Liam Fitzpatrick.

In closing, I want to thank and also acknowledge the contribution made by my friend and colleague Simon Corbell. As manager for government business, I will certainly miss his photographic memory of every standing order in this place. I wish him luck in the next stage of his life after so many years serving the people of the ACT so diligently and passionately.

Finally, I want to thank the Chief Minister, Andrew Barr. He is a true leader, and a Chief Minister who has a clear vision for the potential and opportunities which are before this great city. I am very proud to serve in his government. I am thrilled to be part of this progressive team and look forward to continuing to build an even better Canberra for all Canberrans in the next term of government.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 10.21 pm.