



Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

NINTH ASSEMBLY

5 JUNE 2019

www.hansard.act.gov.au

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Wednesday, 5 June 2019

The Assembly met at 10 am.

(Quorum formed.)

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

Environment—waste disposal

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (10.02): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) up to 37 percent of ACT residential rubbish bin contents are food waste, which ends up in landfill;
- (b) it is estimated that a composting site and a food organics and garden organics collection service in the ACT could see over 40 000 tonnes of waste diverted from landfill each year;
- (c) over 48 percent of local councils in Victoria and over 22 percent of local councils in NSW have already implemented a food organics and garden organics collection service;
- (d) up to 80 percent of people living in apartments would like better options for food waste;
- (e) the ACT Greens have called for specific actions on food waste in Parliamentary Agreements as far back as 2008;
- (f) the ACT Greens called for the green bin collection service to include food waste at the outset of the green bin trial period;
- (g) in keeping with the timeframe set by the Waste Feasibility Study in order to divert 90 percent of waste from landfill by 2025, the Waste Feasibility Study prepared by ACT No Waste recommended the implementation of a kerbside food organics and garden organics collection service, which would align with the existing ACT Government garden organics bin roll-out program and the Territory's existing kerbside collection contract, which expires in 2023;
- (h) the 2018 ACT Better Suburbs Statement recommended the inclusion of all compostable waste in green bins;
- (i) the Select Committee on Estimates 2018-2019 recommended that the ACT Government implement initiatives to collect and process organic food waste from residential and commercial waste streams, to prevent it from entering landfill;

- (j) the ACT Government currently provides green waste services to multi-unit developments and will investigate ways to improve waste collection in the future;
 - (k) the ACT has a target of zero net greenhouse gas emissions and achieving this requires the Government to address the emissions released by organic waste; and
 - (l) the ACT Government has been consulting on processing solutions for organic waste including anaerobic digestion; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) begin implementing a kerbside food organics and garden organics collection service as part of the existing ACT Government garden organics bin roll-out program by August 2020 with a roll out to all households by the end of 2023;
 - (b) require food businesses in the ACT to implement a “zero food waste to landfill” program involving composting, as well as usable food to be donated to charities such as Ozharvest, with regulations or legislation for both to be in place by August 2020;
 - (c) assist multi-unit dwelling occupants who will not have access to the kerbside food organics and garden organics collection service by:
 - (i) supporting willing owners’ corporations to install food organics and garden organics options such as communal composting via a closed loop system, food scrap collection program or worm farms; and
 - (ii) investigating how food waste composting requirements can be best incorporated into regulations for new apartment developments; and
 - (d) report to the Assembly on progress by November 2019.

I have moved this motion today to give the community of Canberra a better way of disposing of food waste, changing it from being food waste to valuable, black-gold compost. Since we started, the ACT Greens have been calling for a zero waste economy. This involves reducing waste by refusing unneeded things and reusing things where possible. When waste is produced, some of it can be recycled and some of it can be turned into other valuable resources. Turning food waste into compost is a perfect example of this. We have called for action on food waste in our policies, in our election commitments and in all of our parliamentary agreements with the Labor Party for over a decade now.

This is far from being a niche, Greens-only issue. In 1996 the then ACT government introduced the NoWaste by 2010 strategy. We still have not got there yet but at the time the ACT led Australia in waste reduction.

In 2017 I moved a motion calling for the government to deliver a participatory budgeting pilot based on a discretionary portion of the city services budget. Participatory budgeting is an important way to increase citizen participation in democracy. It is more than just allowing community groups to make submissions. It involves direct community decision-making on expenditure.

In response to my motion the government did not quite deliver that but what it delivered was the better suburbs process which included a citizens forum of 54 Canberra residents as a representative sample of the ACT population. It was not able to make the bigger budgetary decisions but it was asked to, and it did, prioritise city services' responsibilities. It ranked household waste and recycling as the equal second most urgent and important responsibility for city services.

In the 2019-20 budget, which was released yesterday, the ACT government has committed to managing waste better via undertaking early planning for a food organics and garden organics, FOGO, waste service. I should mention that, while of course I am pleased the ACT government made this commitment, as a crossbench member I had no knowledge of this when I lodged my motion. My motion, if passed, which I hope it will be, will see an acceleration of the planning and then the early implementation of a food organics—I was going to say “recycling service”; maybe that is not the way to put it—compost service. There is a really strong case for implementing a food and organic waste collection service.

Many of us compost our food waste at home but unfortunately not everyone in Canberra does. They do not have the time or they do not have the space. In Canberra food waste is about 37 per cent of the volume of residential landfill. For Canberra to be carbon neutral by 2045, as we have committed to, we must address this as a community, as a government and as businesses. Food waste is carbon based, and when it decomposes in landfill it produces methane, which is a potent greenhouse gas.

Mugga Lane landfill is filling up. Expanding it or starting a whole new landfill site would be both difficult and expensive. We need to take urgent action now to simply reduce the amount of waste going to landfill and we need to take urgent action now to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases that the ACT produces. Organic waste is, in both these contexts, low-hanging fruit and we should work on it sooner rather than later.

As well, there are lots of benefits. Food waste is bulky. Inherently, this is going to be a local or regional exercise, producing local and regional jobs. There are already local companies who work on this and they produce local, sustainable jobs. Putting nutrient-rich organic matter in landfill is inherently wasteful. We need to be looking at circular, sustainable systems for returning carbon and nutrients to agricultural soil. Compost is a growing business, literally, in any sense of the word.

Kerbside food and organic waste collection services work elsewhere—elsewhere in the world and elsewhere in Australia; we just do not need to reinvent the wheel on this. Across Australia councils ranging from those in urban areas such as Melbourne's Moreland City Council, with a population of around 170,000, to rural councils such as Coolamon Shire in mid-western New South Wales, with a population of fewer than 5,000, have already rolled out successful food and organic waste collection programs.

At least 28 of New South Wales's 129 local government areas now have food and organic waste programs in place. And they have all done them a little differently and there are things that we can learn from them. Shellharbour City Council have made a

series of short videos to increase community awareness of how their food and organic waste collection system works. Bega Shire Council have provided residents with a kitchen caddy for their food waste, along with 150 compostable caddy liners each year, which reduces the likelihood of contamination due to residents using non-biodegradable bin liners.

Many jurisdictions have found they can reduce their green-lidded rubbish landfill waste collection from weekly to fortnightly once they have their organic waste collection system in place. That is the bit, after all, that in summer rots and smells. It makes up, as I said, more than a third of the landfill going from households. If you deal with that you can reduce your costs on the rest of it.

Of course, it is not just household food waste that we need to deal with. There is plenty of food waste from restaurants, supermarkets, facilities, event venues and other food and hospitality-related businesses. Some of that food is still edible, and some businesses in Canberra donate their excess to charities such as OzHarvest, SecondBite and Foodbank Australia. These collections can easily be expanded because even in Canberra there are people who go hungry. Nationally, nearly four million people experience food insecurity every year, and a quarter of them are children.

France was the first country to ban supermarkets throwing away or destroying unsold food, and they are required to donate it to charities or food banks instead, which is a really positive step forward and, I guess, what you would expect from a country that takes food so seriously. We need to take food equally seriously.

We have spoken to constituents, waste consultants, academics and stakeholders, and they all say the same thing: changing how we handle food organics and garden organics, which is known in the sector as FOGO, is long overdue. The ACT leads the way in many areas, and we should lead here but we in fact are far below the average on this one. What my motion is pointing out is that it is well past time to roll out a FOGO waste collection and it calls for a full program to be in place across Canberra by 2023.

The key to successful food waste composting is to ensure that you are only composting food waste; in other words, there is no contamination. One small piece of glass or plastic—glass in particular—can be enough to contaminate a significant amount of a truckload of FOGO waste. Maintaining low contamination levels means lower processing costs and higher quality, more marketable end product, not something that can only be used for mine rehabilitation.

The really good news here is that the contamination rate for our garden waste collection in the ACT is currently very low. And if we do as well as that with food waste—and there is no reason why we should not—we will be able to create high quality, saleable, usable compost out of our food waste. To do this, of course, our program has to commit to ongoing education and monitoring.

As you may be aware, the green-bin trucks have cameras on them so that they can see what is going in, and if people are doing the wrong thing they can be told, “No, this is not what you do with your green bin.” We need to keep up the same sort of system

and education to ensure that people put just food waste in the bin for food waste—or food waste and garden waste, I expect. The communications and community engagement strategies will have to be there at the beginning of the rollout and they will have to keep going over the years to keep the quality going and to make sure that we actually do put our food waste in the right bin.

Of course, not all of us live in units and houses that have the green bin garden waste system. And there are some practical issues for collecting food and organic waste in multi-storey, multi-unit developments. The good news is that this is a global issue and many solutions are being developed. I have heard of self-contained composting units that can be scaled in size depending on the number of occupants in a building. They can compost the complex's food waste entirely onsite and have a very saleable product at the other end. If there is a communal garden or landscaped area there may well be space for conventional composting on site. I know that there are some government grants available for this and that some multi-unit developments have taken advantage of them.

There are also, as I mentioned, commercial food waste producers: cafes, restaurants, supermarkets and events. These businesses do not get a waste service from the ACT government. They have to organise and pay for it themselves. My motion would require them to implement a zero food waste to landfill program involving composting as well as donating usable food to charities such as OzHarvest.

I imagine that, in practice, this will be implemented by a combination of carrots—in terms of government assistance for setting up new collection methodology, including for existing food rescue organisations such as OzHarvest who I am sure would be delighted to be able to expand—and also sticks such as have been used in France to stop food going to landfill.

Once collected, there are many options for processing food waste such as open-window composting, worm composting and anaerobic digestion which produces compost and biogas. Currently, there are businesses such as Goterra in Fyshwick which use black soldier fly larvae to compost organic waste and turn it into valuable feedstock; all of Queanbeyan hospital's food waste is treated by them. Able Organic Recycling collects twice weekly from a number of government departments and uses worms in their facility at Weston Creek. Corkhills have been composting Canberra's garden waste for literally decades, and the Living Green Vegan Market composts 100 per cent of their food waste, and that is collected by Global Worming.

The ANU used to compost all of its food waste and use it onsite in their extensive landscaped areas. The University of Canberra are currently in the process of putting together a new sustainable strategy which includes improving waste management on campus. They have started a compost trial as part of achieving this goal. Via food scrap collection they have measured the amount of organic waste they are producing and they are now looking into how they are going to manage it. These are just a few examples of what is being done.

One other thing that is being done in other jurisdictions and should be done here is the love food, hate waste program, whereby we need to educate the community about

how valuable food is and how we can better use it so that there will be less food waste and thus less to compost. Ultimately, of course, the best thing to do with food is eat it. Compost is a good thing to do if there is not something you can do with the food. Ultimately, we need to look at the whole food supply chain, reduce waste and, with what waste we do have, use it better, compost it, and not send it to landfill.

Today is World Environment Day, which is an international day created to encourage awareness and action to protect our environment. The theme for this year's day is air pollution. Given that when food and garden organic waste are put into landfill it decomposes and it releases methane gas, that is a relevant issue for today's World Environment Day.

Composting offers an environmentally superior alternative to sending organic matter to landfill, drastically reduces methane production, improving soil fertility as well as providing a series of economic and environmental co-benefits. The Greens have been pushing for action on organic waste for the entire time I have been a member of this place. We believe that the more waste we can reduce, recycle and compost, the better off our environment, our climate and our soil will be. I look forward to the Assembly supporting this step today.

Visitors

MADAM SPEAKER: I bring to members' attention that in the gallery we have year 6 students from Ainslie Primary School visiting the Assembly this morning. Welcome to your Assembly, and thank you for visiting us.

Environment—waste disposal

Debate resumed.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for City Services, Minister for Community Services and Facilities, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Roads) (10.16): I would like to thank Ms Le Couteur for bringing this motion before the Assembly as an advocate for waste reduction in our community. This motion reaffirms the commitment that our government has made to introducing food organics and garden organics based collection, as initially outlined in our waste feasibility study from last year.

We have an ambitious target to divert 90 per cent of waste from landfill by 2025, and our government has set out time frames to achieve this. We have successfully rolled out green bins to every Canberra household, ahead of schedule and under budget. We have introduced a container deposit scheme to encourage more Canberrans to recycle bottles and other containers. We are investigating waste-to-energy solutions for our city, including advanced forms of composting, including organic processing like anaerobic digestion. And as part of yesterday's budget, we are beginning planning for food organics and garden organics collection to begin in the ACT. I want to again thank the Greens for their support of our government's commitment to FOGO.

I am pleased to provide the Assembly with an update on what the ACT government is doing to reduce organic waste going into landfill in the ACT. This important issue was highlighted in the ACT government's waste management strategy for 2011-25, which identifies the importance of reducing organic matter in landfill. The strategy seeks to not only recover valuable food resources but reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that are generated from them.

It is estimated that 37 per cent of household bin contents is organic food waste. With around 70,000 tonnes of rubbish collected in our household garbage bins, this means around 25,000 tonnes of compostable household waste is being buried at the Mugga Lane landfill each year. Add the figures from commercial sources of food waste in the ACT and there is a total of around 40,000 tonnes of food waste going into landfill. Food waste is also an economic burden, estimated to cost the Australian economy \$20 billion annually. At the household level, this translates to anywhere from \$2,200 to \$3,800 a year. The national food waste baseline found that in 2016-17, as a nation, we generated an estimated 7.3 million tonnes of food waste across the supply and consumption chain. This is equivalent to 13,594 Telstra towers.

The waste feasibility study, funded in the 2015-16 budget, was established to seek pathways to achieving the goals of the waste management strategy. The study's final road map discussion paper released in May last year provided three key recommendations in relation to addressing food waste. No 1 is that it is best practice to educate households and businesses on how to avoid food waste in the first place. No 2 is to maintain the ACT's participation in and support for the national food waste initiatives. No 3 is source separation of food waste through a collection service, which would leverage the green bins that we have made available across all Canberra suburbs since March this year. The study presented a compelling case for food waste reduction.

I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the ACT government, in the budget that we released yesterday, is investing \$973,000 over two years to undertake a community education pilot and early planning for a food organics and garden organics collection service. If we are to fight food waste in the ACT, the ACT government wants to do it properly. The funding will seek to teach the Canberra community and businesses how we can avoid food waste in the first place. But getting the food waste to the bin, free from contamination, is only the first step. Once food waste is in the bin, the government is responsible for ensuring that the material is collected, is processed and goes to the right markets to keep the circular economy in place.

The importance of robust markets for recycled products cannot be underestimated. The 2019-20 budget funding will support research on identifying and confirming robust markets for the recycled FOGO material, and a site to process the material needs to be identified and established. We need to give proper consideration to neighbours and the potential odours and truck movements associated with composting large quantities of organics, something that Ms Lawder has raised in relation to the Mugga Lane landfill in the past. Such considerations should include conversations with our regional neighbours and the local governments that surround the ACT.

Lessons from other jurisdictions tell us that education is critical to reducing contamination of FOGO bins, and efforts need to commence well before a full service rollout. We would not want to see contamination of FOGO too high for product specifications or environmental standards due to inadequate user education. Nor do we want the Canberra community to embrace separating their food scraps only to see this material stockpiled or in landfill due to market instability. That would be truly wasteful. Robust research on a collection model for FOGO needs to occur, with collections potentially coinciding with the conclusion of the key territory waste and recycling collection contracts in 2023.

While FOGO would build on the highly popular green bins service in single-unit dwellings, apartment blocks will present a challenge. ACT NoWaste has been working with building managers to accommodate green bins where possible; however, not all sites can easily accommodate additional waste services. The recently updated 2019 development control code for waste management requires building designers to set aside space for green bins, but the existing stock of apartments and townhouses will need specific strategies to accommodate FOGO facilities.

ACT NoWaste is working through these matters. The challenges are not insurmountable, and we have a responsibility as global citizens to address this issue. Food waste prevention is an integral part of the European Commission's new circular economy package, and in the United States they have a goal of halving food waste and loss by the year 2030. Halving per capita global food waste is also the foundation of United Nations sustainable development goal 12.3. In alignment with this goal, the national food waste strategy, released in late 2017 by all Australian governments, aims to halve food waste and loss by 2030.

The ACT government continues to engage proactively with the commonwealth government, with Food Innovation Australia Ltd and the Fight Food Waste Cooperative Research Centre. While the ACT works with our national counterparts on halving food waste by 2030, there is great work being done locally on educating Canberra's schoolchildren and businesses on reducing food waste, through the government's Actsmart program. Food rescue charities, such as OzHarvest, are recovering thousands of kilos of fresh and frozen food and feeding Canberrans with support through the Community Services Directorate. Many Canberrans are already doing the right thing in composting or feeding chickens with kitchen scraps. But not everyone can do this. With the green bins now available to all suburbs, we are a step closer to FOGO as the government continues to work on the issues I have outlined today.

The ACT generates around one million tonnes of waste per annum across the categories of household, commercial and industrial, and construction and demolition waste. Around 70 per cent of this is currently diverted from landfill. For every 10,000 tonnes of waste we recover, we get one per cent closer towards our resource recovery target of 90 per cent by 2025.

Reducing food waste is an important issue for our community. But the success is contingent upon effective planning before we are ready to roll out a FOGO collection

service. This is no small task and will require time to do it properly. I am moving amendments to this motion to reflect the time frame outlined in the waste feasibility study, which recommends that FOGO collections align with the territory's kerbside collection contract, which is to be renewed in 2023. This time frame also gives the government the opportunity to begin education with businesses and in the community, as the budget has made provision for.

There will also be a need to investigate an appropriate food organics processing facility for the ACT. As outlined in the *Food and garden organics best practice collection manual* prepared for the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, garden organics can be processed through relatively inexpensive means, while food waste generally requires more expensive technology. Technologies range from vermi-composting, with small piles of organic material provided for worms, to open windrowing, where composting raw materials are turned regularly, which is inexpensive but has odour risks. There are also aerated static piles, in-vessel composting, and fully enclosed composting, just to name a few of the technologies.

We need to consider all of these technologies and their application to the ACT. The first stage in the journey is to effect change through a food waste avoidance education campaign for both the community and businesses. Some of the next stages will involve rigorous research and options analysis to deliver such a service.

I look forward to providing the Assembly with further updates as we continue to work towards a well-designed and effective food organics and garden organics collection and processing service for the territory.

I move:

Omit paragraphs (2)(a) and (b), substitute:

- “(a) begin planning for a food organics and garden organics collection service to commence with the Territory's kerbside collection contract, which is to be renewed in 2023;
- (b) begin work to prepare ACT businesses and residents for food organics and garden organics collections through an education program to commence in 2020;
- (c) consult with food businesses and charities in the ACT on a ‘zero food waste to landfill’ program involving composting, as well as usable food to be donated to charities such as Ozharvest;”.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (10.26): Looking at the motion from Ms Le Couteur today, which is an important motion, made me reflect a bit on what the purpose of government is. Is it to protect residents, enforce the law and champion freedoms? Is it to ensure our children receive a good education and get care in hospital when they need it? Is it to look after you when you most need it? Is it to spruik federal opposition policy? Some people say yes to some of these. Some may say yes to all of them. Some might say no to all of them. But what we are hearing today is that the government is here to tell you to compost your food waste and force you to do that.

I think we can all agree that minimisation of waste is vital. It is absolutely important for our community. The Canberra Liberals have long supported sustainable practices for waste management. I will quote from a document from 1996, a message from the Minister for Urban Services. It said:

Problems associated with the generation and disposal of waste are issues of increasing importance to the community. Energy and resources are being wasted while tips are filling quickly.

The ACT Government is committed to achieving sustainable practices for the management of our wastes.

This Waste Management Strategy for Canberra has been developed through an extensive community consultation process. The strategy sets the vision of how we can become a waste free society by 2010 and outlines the future direction for waste management whereby we will be turning our wastes into resources.

We are the first Government anywhere to embrace such a bold target—of becoming a waste free society. This will be a most rewarding challenge for our community to adopt and I commend this strategy for its vision.

Tony De Domenico MLA
Minister for Urban Services

These words remain as true today as they were in 1996. But this government is the one that stepped away from that strategy of no waste by 2010.

I cannot help feeling that this motion is a bit of a stunt from Ms Le Couteur, a bit of a media opportunity or a bit of an appeal to the green base to try to counteract their continued and continual sharing of the government and government policies, because, as we have seen from yesterday's budget and from the minister's speech this morning, this is already in the budget. Page 130 of budget paper No 3, to be exact, says:

The government will ... commence planning for Canberra's future waste infrastructure needs and undertake early planning for a food organics and garden organics (FOGO) waste service.

Imagine my shock, Madam Speaker. The day before a crossbench motion calling on the government to investigate the possibility of a food organics waste processing service, the government announces a budget commitment for that very purpose.

We have three options here, three ways to look at this remarkable coincidence. The first is that the government, having seen Ms Le Couteur's motion, maybe on Monday afternoon, decided it was a great idea and decided to whack it into the budget at the very last minute. I do not think that is particularly likely. The second option is that the government, completely independent of the Greens crossbench, have decided to support a new separate food organics waste service. Ms Le Couteur, completely independently, with no consultation or discussion with the government, had the exact same idea at the exact same time and put this motion forward today as a complete

coincidence. I do not think that option is very likely either. The third option is that this was not a coincidence: maybe Ms Le Couteur is in cahoots with the government. Shock, horror—what a thought!

It is clear that this motion has been prepared in consultation between Ms Le Couteur and her government counterparts. Sometimes I wonder why we bother continuing to try to refer to it as a crossbench. The voting records, I am sure, would indicate a more government backbench-frontbench relationship between Ms Le Couteur and the Labor executive here. To paraphrase what Mr Coe, the Leader of the Opposition, quite memorably said during the Motor Accident Injury Bill debate last month, I wonder whether the Greens really realised what they were signing up to when they gave a blank cheque to the Labor Party. But I think the reverse is also true. It is a question for others to ponder, but at the end of the day it is a two-way street. It means that some motions, such as this, will be supported.

On the substance of the motion itself, reducing waste is an absolute necessity for the ACT. As the minister has already alluded to, reducing odour from the tip is also absolutely important. The implementation of a kerbside food organics and garden organics collection service is fundamentally a good idea. But I remind Ms Le Couteur and those opposite that these projects always come at a cost, and many Canberrans are already struggling with mounting costs as we speak. What will the cost of these bins be? Will Canberrans have to purchase them themselves? What will happen if they cannot afford the bin themselves? These are all questions that need to, and I am sure will, be answered during a consultation period.

The requirement for businesses to implement zero food waste to landfill is where we have major concerns. We agree in principle, as I have said many times already, that waste minimisation is a good thing. In fact back in 1996 we committed to zero waste by 2010, which this government have backed away from. However, more and more regulation and enforcement is not necessarily the best approach. We are fundamentally opposed to the government inserting itself in every aspect of our life. Incentivisation and accessibility are viable alternatives which may not require excessive government intervention into these business practices.

Another thing that needs to be talked through, addressed and consulted on is reference to charities such as OzHarvest, SecondBite, Foodbank, Communities@Work and YWCA. Many organisations have foodbank and food rescue components. Do they have the infrastructure to cope with such food as may be forthcoming? How many more trucks and volunteers or paid staff would be required to collect and redistribute it all? What cost would that have for charities, and would the funding for that come from the government? How would the health and hygiene risks be managed?

This motion itself is really just for show. It is reflective of the theatre that this place often becomes. I hope the government listens to our concerns and will come back in good faith to the community and the stakeholders when developing its food organics waste system.

The “calls on” in part (2)(b) is where we have significant issues with Ms Le Couteur’s motion. We support the concept of waste minimisation, even though we are generally

not in favour of more and more regulation and legislation. It is an admirable goal. But what we are seeing today is a political stunt from the Greens, in cahoots with the government, on something that is already in the budget. It is simply another way of amplifying and promoting something that is in the budget. It has been funded, as we saw yesterday in the budget papers.

Reducing waste is everyone's responsibility. Canberrans are already very good at reducing waste through composting, recycling, reducing their usage and being part of a sharing economy. These are things that are already happening without government intervention. Is more and more regulation and legislation the best way to go? We do not believe that that is the case.

We will not object to Ms Le Couteur's motion, because we fundamentally agree with the concept of waste minimisation—with those precautionary messages about intervening more and more in people's lives.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (10.37): Ms Lawder described this as a stunt. To some extent everything we do in the Assembly is a stunt. Leaving that aside, Ms Lawder has not got a very good grasp of the realities of being a private member in this place, particularly a private member in a party which only has one private member. I have a party—

Ms Lawder: You are part of the government, really.

MADAM SPEAKER: Let the member speak.

MS LE COUTEUR: It would be really polite if you were prepared to listen to me as I listened to you. I only have an item of business every three sitting weeks. Believe it or not, I plan out at the beginning of the year what we want to do and when we can do it. So the fact that this came up after the budget is not because I had any inside knowledge of the budget. I can assure everybody that I did not have any inside knowledge of the budget. I can occasionally observe the moods of people but I had absolutely no idea what would or would not be in the budget as far as waste is concerned.

Talking about that specifically, to achieve the aims of the motion—even the motion as amended with additional time lines by Minister Steel—will probably require more resources than have been put in the budget. I assume that that basically is why Minister Steel wishes to amend my motion. The reason why I have the time lines I have in my motion is, I hope, abundantly clear to everyone. As a member of the Assembly I am very conscious that this Assembly ceases in effect in August 2020. We actually cease in October 2020 but, while asking to do anything after that is something that we can do and something that may happen, we are not in a position to bind future Assemblies to do anything, or future governments to do anything. That is why the time lines in my motion are all in the time line of this Assembly.

While Ms Lawder may regard what I am saying as a stunt, it is not a stunt. It is something that I and the Greens care deeply about. It was really great to hear her quoting previous Liberal minister Tony De Domenico. I must admit that my memory

was that it was Brendan Smyth, but thank you. It is very disappointing to me that last century, in 1996, the ACT had vastly higher ambition as far as waste is concerned than we do now. I am very pleased that the Liberal Party remember their roots and will be supporting this motion. It is not a stunt; the Greens have been trying to achieve this for even longer than members of the Liberal Party. I am really frustrated that, despite the fact that it has been in all of our parliamentary agreements, we have not had actual, tangible progress on the ground. That is what this motion is about: having actual, tangible progress. Hopefully, this will lead to it.

I am very pleased that Minister Steel's speech was so positive about it. I appreciate that both Minister Steel and Ms Lawder have brought out lots of very reasonable points about the difficulties and time lines in implementation. Particularly for Minister Steel, it is his role to take the Assembly's brilliant ideas and turn them into practice. I wish him and his department very well in doing that. Not being a minister, it is not my role to get all of the little bits right. I thank both sides of the Assembly for their support—more fulsome from one side than the other. Generally, what we are saying is what everybody is saying: we need to look at how we deal with waste in the ACT.

First we need to look at less food waste. Number one is less food waste. Use food better. But, given that we will still have food waste, we need to look at that waste as a resource to be used rather than as a problem that goes into our landfill and creates more greenhouse gases. The obvious solution is to compost it. We know how to do it. Other parts of the world are doing it. Other parts of Australia are doing it. People just over the border from us are doing it. So we are calling on the government to accelerate what I assume it was going to do anyway—the waste feasibility study is going entirely in that direction—and make a commitment to doing it, and doing it as soon as possible.

I am also calling on the food businesses of the ACT to come on board. Reduce your food waste as far as possible. Give edible food to organisations like OzHarvest, Communities@Work et cetera. The commercial collectors of waste—because most food businesses are not having their waste collected by the ACT government; they are having it collected commercially—should look at this and realise it is actually a really good, new business opportunity for you. You may be in it already, like Goterra, Able Organic and Global Worming—which I must say is a wonderful name. This is a chance for you to expand your business. If you are looking for a new business opportunity, this could well be an opportunity for you.

This is one of the many areas where the ACT is in a position to lead in terms of a sustainable, circular economy. We are definitely big enough to do it and smart enough to do it, and it is something we should be doing. We have a campaign on a website called compostnotlandfill.org. If you would like a sticker about this, you can go there or call in at my office, because we have a large supply of them. I would not have had quite as large a supply as I do have if I had been as confident as Ms Lawder was about the positive reception for this motion today. I thank the Assembly for what I believe will be their support and I look forward to more compost and less landfill.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Government—taxes and charges

MR COE (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.44): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the increasing cost of living in Canberra due to ACT Government rates, taxes, fees and charges;
- (b) general rates and land tax have risen from \$324 million in 2011-2012 to \$625 million in 2017-2018; and
- (c) ACT Government decisions have led to considerable hardship, including:
 - (i) the tax burden has increased significantly;
 - (ii) the price of land has doubled between 2011 and today;
 - (iii) Canberra is now the most expensive city to rent a house; and
 - (iv) the ACT is the worst in the country for repeat periods of homelessness; and

(2) calls on the Government to bring about urgent relief for Canberrans by:

- (a) halting Labor's punitive rates and land tax increases; and
- (b) bringing certainty, confidence and efficiency to the land release and planning system.

I have moved this very important motion today because I know that there are thousands of Canberrans that are doing it tough. When we look to the gallery and see all the students from Ainslie Primary School, we are reminded of the importance of making wise decisions here so that their future is even brighter, even better, even stronger, than what it is right now.

That is why I am so concerned about the situation with our budget and particularly the cost of living in the ACT. I believe that there are thousands of Canberrans that are doing it tough, largely because of decisions that this government has made. Particularly through rates, land taxes, a myriad of fees and charges, and of course the cumbersome planning system, this government has driven up the cost of living in this city. The cost of housing in the ACT is out of reach for tens of thousands of people.

This government seem to have no qualms about the fact that, under their watch, after 18 years of Labor, we have 27,000 people living in poverty—27,000 people below the poverty line—in the ACT, after 18 years of Labor. That is what it has come to. This has been exacerbated as a result of this so-called tax reform. What the tax reform has done is drive up the cost of housing in the ACT. In fact it is renters that feel the pinch the worst.

There is not a single property in the ACT, according to Anglicare, that is deemed to be affordable. How can the members of the Labor Party tolerate that? How can the backbench members of the Labor Party tolerate the fact that there is not one single affordable property in the ACT? Not one. Of the 170,000 properties in the ACT, not one is deemed to be affordable by Anglicare.

How is it that not one member of the Labor Party stands up here and calls their own party to account? How is it that all of these social justice warriors will not stand up for the 27,000 people in Canberra living below the poverty line so much because of the decisions of this Labor government?

Think about land tax. It is very easy for the Labor Party to concoct this argument that it is all about rich investors. The reality is, unfortunately, that investing in Canberra does not really stack up the way it used to. Maybe this is Andrew Barr's objective: maybe he does want to drive out all of the investors from the ACT. Maybe he does not want to have people doing business in the ACT. Maybe he does not want to have private sector jobs.

As a direct consequence of not having residential property investors, the ACT does not have rental properties. The few that you do have will go up. That is exactly what we are seeing. That is why Anglicare says that there is not one single property in the ACT that is affordable. That is as a result of 18 years of Labor, but particularly as a result of Andrew Barr as Chief Minister and Treasurer.

The other serious issue with regard to the cost of living in the ACT and particularly the cost of housing is land supply. This government has deliberately driven up the cost of land so that it is out of reach for so many Canberrans. This suits their narrative for several reasons: (1), they do not like the idea of families living on a block of land; and, (2), by restricting the supply of land, they then increase the cost of that land. It therefore gives them justification to increase the value of every other block in Canberra and, in turn, hike up the rates.

That is exactly what has happened. In recent years we have seen an increase to the ratings factors; that is, the multiplier. What they have just discovered is that they can have a double whammy effect if they not only increase the multiplier but also increase the value. If you increase the base and you increase the multiplier, you get an exponential increase. That is exactly what is happening right now.

They are doing it right across the ACT. I am afraid that many people who buy a block of land in Throsby, Casey, Taylor, Moncrieff, Coombs, Whitlam or Denman do not realise that the top dollar that they are paying for their block then becomes their unimproved value for ratings purposes.

Not only are they paying top dollar up front but they will pay top dollar every single year from then on. It is not just a capital hit; it is an ongoing income hit as well. When someone pays \$480,000 for a 500 square metre block of land in Throsby, they pay stamp duty, they have paid top dollar for the land, and then they pay extortionate rates forever.

The tragedy of all this is that it will be very hard to fix the land crisis that this government has caused because the last thing anybody wants is to devalue the price of land in the ACT. So many families have worked hard, they have saved up huge amounts of money to put together a deposit, so they can buy a block of land. We need to respect that purchase and we need to respect their equity.

The solution is not one that can take one, two or three years; the solution will more likely take 10 or 20 years. It has taken 18 years to get to this point. Who knows; it might take 18 years to fix it. We need to make sure that the cost of land does not increase by 10 per cent, year on year, as it has done. If it keeps increasing by 10 per cent year on year, by the time these kids in the gallery are ready to buy a block of land, it will be \$1.5 million dollars. It will cost \$1.5 million dollars to buy a 400 square metre block of land in Gungahlin.

That is the trajectory that this Chief Minister has established. He is deliberately pricing out of the market the next generation of Canberrans. I want Canberrans who grew up in this city, who love this city, to be able to afford to live in this place. But it seems Andrew Barr and the Labor Party have a totally different vision for this city. They are consciously pricing people out of the market. They are deliberately moving people over the border into New South Wales, because they are not his sort of people.

We need to get these policy settings right. We owe it to the 27,000 people in Canberra living below the poverty line; we owe it to the working poor in Canberra; we owe it to the families that are doing it tough; we owe it to the retirees, to the pensioners; we owe it to everyone to get this right. But most of all, we owe it to the next generation of Canberrans. The last thing we should do is price our kids out of this city. That is exactly what is happening under ACT Labor.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Social Inclusion and Equality, Minister for Tourism and Special Events and Minister for Trade, Industry and Investment) (10.54): I move:

Omit all text after “notes”, substitute:

- “(a) that, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the ACT’s tax per capita is in line with the national average and significantly lower than New South Wales and Victoria;
- (b) so far, the ACT Government:
 - (i) has fully phased out insurance duty;
 - (ii) has removed stamp duty for around 70 percent of commercial transactions;
 - (iii) has raised the payroll tax threshold so that about 90 percent of Canberra’s small and medium businesses do not have to pay it; and
 - (iv) is continuing to cut stamp duty rates for all residential property transactions each and every year; and
- (c) from 1 July this year, the ACT Government is fully abolishing stamp duty for eligible first home buyers, making it easier for young people and those on low incomes to own their own home;

(2) further notes:

- (a) the significant volatility in stamp duty revenue experienced in other Australian jurisdictions caused by the boom and bust cycle of the Australian property market;
- (b) the ACT’s 20 year tax reform agenda is designed to create stability in the ACT Budget; and

- (c) the heaviest lifting of this reform process has been achieved and the rate of growth in rates will now begin to slow; and
- (3) also notes:
- (a) housing affordability is a problem facing many Canberrans;
 - (b) the ACT Government has made the largest investment in public housing renewal and growth in the Territory's history;
 - (c) over the 10 years to 2024, the ACT Government will have invested more than \$1 billion in public housing and renewed approximately 20 percent of the portfolio;
 - (d) following an Assembly Motion, the ACT Government is piloting a land tax concessions program for property owners who make properties available at less than 75 percent of the current market rate;
 - (e) 15 percent of dwellings in the ACT Government's land release program are to be set aside for community, public and affordable housing; and
 - (f) the ACT is the only jurisdiction in Australia where homelessness decreased between the 2011 census and 2016 census, but rough sleeping has increased."

The amendment highlights the facts as they relate to the ACT economy, to our levels of taxation and to the reforms that have been undertaken in recent times.

There are many things that the Leader of the Opposition has said in his remarks that are not supported by facts. I know we live in a world where you apparently can now just say anything, and expect people to believe it, even though there are no facts to actually support your propositions. Not the least is this continued assertion from the Leader of the Opposition that somehow there is a mass exodus out of the Australian Capital Territory. We in fact have been achieving above national average levels of population growth, and all three components of population growth—births, international migration and migration within Australia into the ACT—have been positive. That is why we have been growing by more than 8,000 people a year. People are voting with their feet and they are moving into Canberra. That would seem to belie the very negative narrative that the Leader of the Opposition has about our city.

More than 8,000 new residents each year are joining our city. That is a very clear indication that people want to live, work, raise a family, study and start a business in this city. In recent times, in the last few years, we have seen very significant business growth in the ACT. We have seen more than 3,000 net new businesses establish themselves in Canberra over the last four years. We have seen our territory's gross state product grow faster than in the rest of Australia and we have seen per capita gross state product increase. Not only is our population increasing and our economy growing, but per capita we are doing better year on year. That is not an economic circumstance that the majority of Australians are experiencing.

For these reasons I cannot accept the very negative and oppositional assertions of the Leader of the Opposition that somehow no-one wants to live in Canberra, that everyone is leaving, that this place is terrible. It is not. It is the best city in the world in which to live.

Our citizens enjoy the highest quality public services. They have sent a very clear message through the ballot box on countless occasions—most recently, only two weeks ago—that they want public services from government. They want us to invest in health, education, social infrastructure, public transport and all of the things that make this city a great place to live.

That is why the budget that we delivered yesterday focuses on those core priorities. There is more funding for schools, more teachers, more teacher assistants, more nurses, more doctors, more police officers, more firefighters—more people who go to work every day to make our lives better. We are supporting those people and our growing communities by making these investments.

On the specific issue of tax reform, we look very carefully at how the ACT ranks according to the ABS against all of the other Australian states and territories. The ABS have clearly indicated, through their most recent data, that our tax per capita is almost spot on the Australian average. It is lower than in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia.

The government's tax reforms have seen the phasing out of stamp duty—to be abolished for first homebuyers from 1 July. Each year, stamp duty has been cut. The savings now are towards the tens of thousands of dollars on average properties. The individual stamp duty rates per property see tens of thousands of dollars in savings. If we had left the stamp duty rates where they were, stamp duty would be raking in half a billion dollars in revenue, if not more.

We have abolished taxes on insurance products, phased out stamp duties, raised the payroll tax free threshold, and shifted our revenue base away from taxing capital and labour towards the simplest, fairest and most efficient form of revenue raising available to state and territory governments: through our rating system. That is the simplest, fairest and most efficient way. Why? Because it means that we all contribute each year to the services that we all consume.

When someone in your family has had a heart attack and needs an ambulance to get them to hospital and get treatment, you will care about that investment in health services. That is the thing that will matter to you the most. If you have kids in a school or you are a student in one of our schools, what matters to you is that we have a quality teacher in the classroom and the school is properly resourced. That matters to people. If you are working in community services to assist the most vulnerable, your organisation needs to be properly funded. That is what matters to people.

That is the other side of the equation—the community, the human side of the equation—that you never hear about from the Leader of the Opposition. You never hear that. They are not interested in the services that government provides to communities. They never have been. It is not in the DNA of the Liberal Party to care about that. It is all about investors and their relative rate of returns. It is all about that sort of stuff and never about people. It is never about the essential services that the community relies upon government to deliver.

That is why I have moved the amendment that outlines the rationale for the government's tax reforms, a debate we have had in this place every year for the last eight years and we will continue to have into the future. It is a good debate to have. It is a debate about priorities and whether you believe in public services or not, whether you have a miserable-ist view of the role of government in society and your objective in public life is to make government smaller, do less and help fewer people.

If that is your objective, and that is why you run for office, you should be in the Liberal Party. That is clearly what they are here to do. That will be their agenda. That is what it is. It is a wonderful part of our democracy that that alternative view is put, but it is not one that we subscribe to on this side of the chamber. We believe in people. We believe in public services—good quality public services—that are properly and sustainably funded for the long term.

They are the difficult choices that governments have to make every year in putting together a budget. We go out to the community and ask for input into the budget process. We get requests to spend somewhere between \$12 billion and \$18 billion each year. We have a \$6 billion budget. Clearly, we cannot meet every single spending request that comes through the budget process. It is a difficult process each year. But when we look on the revenue side, when we look to where we sit comparative to other jurisdictions and the Australian average, we sit spot on the Australian average for taxation from local and state governments, according to the ABS. That is a fact, Madam Assistant Speaker. It might not suit the Leader of the Opposition's argument, but it remains a fact.

When we talk about housing affordability and land supply, undoubtedly we have seen a massive boom in recent times in the construction of new dwellings—all-time record levels of building approvals in recent times. The supply side is lifting in response to the increased demand we are seeing from the rapid influx of new residents into our city. We would not be having these supply side challenges if Mr Coe was correct and no-one wanted to live in Canberra. If that was the case, if everyone was fleeing over the border and everyone was abandoning this city, our problem would not be that we do not have enough dwellings to meet demand.

Through this budget and through the various initiatives that are contained within, we have focused very strongly on delivering more public housing. We are the only state or territory in this nation growing our public housing stock. Think about that for a moment. Every other state and territory has gone backwards on that measure; we are the only one growing. And we are continuing to invest for the future, with the single largest investment in renewal of the territory's public housing in the history of self-government. That is a priority for this government, and it demonstrates our commitment to support those most in need.

I note that there is an important conversation about how governments at all levels can support the most vulnerable in our community. That is why I have called for an increase in the Newstart allowance. That is why I opposed penalty rate cuts for the most vulnerable workers. That is why I support the outcome of the Fair Work Commission's determination on increasing the minimum wage in this nation. That is important.

Mr Wall interjecting—

MR BARR: We know what your position is on penalty rates, Mr Wall. We know you want them cut. We know you want to put downward pressure on wages. We know that. You have said it on the public record numerous times.

We now hear from the Leader of the Opposition that he wants to put downward pressure on house prices; he wants to devalue people's principal asset. That would be the eventual outcome of the policies that he proposes to introduce, it would seem. He is saying, "We will do it over a longer period of time but we are going to do it." That is what he has just said this morning. That is his objective, now on the public record. It will take time; he will not do it immediately. But that is what he wants to do.

That is what every Canberra home owner needs to hear from the Leader of the Opposition: how quickly he intends to move on his policy to reduce the value of their homes. That is what he has just said. He did not say he would do it in one year; he said it might take a decade. But he is going to do it. It is now on the public record. I will remind him of this every day between now and October 2020. I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (11.07): As will surprise nobody here, the Greens will be voting for the ALP amendment. This motion is particularly bizarre given that it is about a budget which clearly the Leader of the Opposition had not seen when he wrote the motion. I was going to use the word "stunt" about it, but given the comments earlier today maybe I should not. I think it would be more fitting. I truly had no idea what was in the budget. Mr Coe, I am sure, truly had no idea what was in the budget. But he did a motion about it anyway. That is something of a waste of time or a stunt.

This motion fails in at least four areas. It uses numbers to selectively mislead. It blames the ACT government for the results of federal Liberal policies. It throws in the serious issue of homelessness, which undermines the motion's calls. And Mr Coe has demonstrated that he does not appear to understand very much about land supply in the ACT. Whatever you may think about the powers of the ACT government—I will stop being facetious because it never looks well when it is written down—it is not within their power to increase the amount of land in the ACT.

The Greens have been talking very strongly with the Labor Party, with the government, about the need to try and increase the ACT's border in the area of Ginninderry because of the significant governance issues there. I know the ACT government has been negotiating about that with New South Wales. As yet the New South Wales government has not seen the eminent logic of the ACT government's approach.

But apart from that, it is really beyond me how the Leader of the Opposition thinks that the ACT government could actually increase the amount of land in the ACT. Are you proposing that we should get rid of the national park or any offset areas? It is utterly beyond me what the Leader of the Opposition thinks the government should do on that.

When you do start to think about it, I suggest, Mr Coe, that you might like to look at a question on notice from the planning committee when we did our inquiry into the planning strategy, in passing on the cost of developing greenfield versus infilled land. I put that as a question on notice. There is a fascinating document where the ACT government has gone through the cost of developing land in greenfield areas and infill areas in the ACT. It is fascinating. I commend it to the Liberal Party—in fact, to anyone in Canberra. The bottom line is that it is a lot cheaper to use the spaces that we already have—in other words, to densify in our existing urban areas rather than go out to the greenfield areas.

Another thing I would point out, to both the Liberals and the Labor Party, is that we do have an issue with growth in the ACT and worldwide. It clearly is not sustainable for the world to keep on growing our population and consumption at the rate we are. This is the fundamental reason why we are ending up with the environmental challenges we have. This is the fundamental driver behind our climate change issues.

Mr Coe's argument basically was that we are going to grow forever and the fact that this is going to lead to real costs is somehow wrong and we should not be stopping growing forever. The Greens recognise we live on one planet; there is no extra planet that we can get resources from. We are already in the situation where the world as a whole is using the resources of more than one planet. The people of the ACT are using resources—I do not have the numbers in front of me, because I was not expecting this from Mr Coe—at a rate about 3½ times the rate of the average person in the world. Whatever the exact figure is, it is a large and unsustainable figure.

That is my first problem with Mr Coe's speech. Next, going to the selective numbers, he talks about rates and land tax rises, but he does not talk about the abolition of insurance duty or the cuts to stamp duty rates.

Further, Mr Coe blames the ACT government for the price of land doubling between 2011 and now. I have spoken about some of the land issues, but I should have pointed out that he does not actually say that the price of land has also doubled in Sydney over that period under a Liberal state government. The Liberal state government might be having the same sorts of problems that the ACT does in terms of producing new land out of nowhere. I do not know what they are thinking about. He does not say that the price of land has also doubled in Melbourne over that period, for years in which there was a Liberal state government. He does not mention that the price of land has been growing very quickly across all of Australia for almost the whole period since 1999.

What is the common thread here? There are two common threads. One, as I talked about, is unsustainable growth for our whole world. The other common thread is the federal Liberal tax policies: negative gearing and the capital gains tax discount. The year 1999 is significant, because it is the year that the Howard federal government introduced the 50 per cent capital gains tax discount, which, coupled with negative gearing, has turned housing into a speculative investment rather than a necessity of life. That is one of the substantive issues in terms of housing and homelessness.

This brings us to homelessness. Canberra has a very serious homelessness problem. Yes, I do agree with Mr Coe that the ACT government could be doing more to solve it. I am sure that members have all seen people who are sleeping rough within a few metres of this building. They are only the most visible victims of homelessness; there are many couch surfers, many people sleeping in their cars and many people staying in shelters.

What is Mr Coe's solution to this problem? It is an interesting one. It is "halt tax increases". I am not quite sure how freezing government revenue is going to solve homelessness. In the real world that the government's budget is framed in, if you have a revenue freeze, you are going to end up with expenditure freezing and so-called efficiency dividends. Fixing homelessness is going to require more government spending, not less.

In conclusion I will be supporting the ALP's amendment rather than what I think was a stunt motion attacking a budget that had not even been released when the motion was written.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (11.16): Canberrans are becoming increasingly worried about the costs of day-to-day living, and are not getting any value for money from this Labor-Greens government. If you live in Tuggeranong, the situation is worse, as was clearly illustrated by an ABC article on the government's budget yesterday, labelling Tuggeranong amongst the losers of this year's budget.

The sad reality is that Tuggeranong has been bottom of the list for quite some time under this government. The government have had 18 years—18 years to get the policy settings right, 18 years to manage the territory budget. Yet we still see deficit and rates tripling as we continue to try and keep up the pace of the spendathon that Mr Barr has taken the territory on.

In 2012 the Canberra Liberals said that under Labor rates would triple. That was labelled as scaremongering at the time. However, this very grim prophecy has and is continuing to be reality for many home owners in Canberra. The aspiration of home ownership for many Canberrans is rapidly becoming a pipe dream, and it is dramatically out of reach for many. For renters, the story is the same. Canberra is one of the most expensive cities in the country in which to rent, overtaking Sydney for the second quarter in a row, according to the Domain national housing report.

Top of mind for most Tuggeranong residents I speak to is the cost of living pressures that they are facing. They are seeing household bills increase faster and faster and are struggling to keep pace and make ends meet.

In 2018 the average electricity bill in Canberra was \$423 more than across the border in New South Wales and \$621 more than the average Victorian bill. Canberra now has the fourth highest electricity prices in the country, behind the Northern Territory, South Australia and Tasmania. Reports from the Australian Energy Market Commission found that 12.7 per cent of the average Canberra power bill goes to paying for this government's renewable energy targets, the highest proportion paid in

the country. Whilst many Canberrans agree with this policy, they struggle with the hip pocket pressures it places on them.

This is a government that is out of touch. It is out of touch with those in the suburbs who are seeing their bills creeping up and out of touch with those who are doing it the toughest. This year's budget offers no respite and no reprieve. This year's budget sees home owners shouldering the burden of Labor's financial mismanagement once again. Rates are increasing by up to 11 per cent for home owners, forcing them to tighten their belts even more. They are \$400 a year or more for many home owners across the ACT, and there is nothing extra in return.

Where underlying costs for property increase, they tend to be passed on. Rents typically, at their next renewal, will be seen to be increasing, as property owners have no choice but to pass those costs on, further adding pressure to the many who have been priced out of the home ownership aspiration in this city and have been forced to live in rental accommodation because there is no offer of home ownership in this territory.

The Chief Minister is quick to try and suggest that a whole series of taxes have been reduced and things are getting better for people. When you look at the raw numbers, the raw numbers do not lie. In 2011-12 the budget was suggesting that rates would raise \$209 million, stamp duty \$267 million and land tax \$114 million, a total revenue from those sources of about \$592 million. Fast forward eight years, eight budgets later. Rates are up to \$599 million, stamp duty \$264 million and land tax \$150 million, bringing the total to over \$1 billion. This, as the Treasurer has said on many occasions, is a revenue-neutral taxation shift. We have had an increase of over \$400 million in the taxation take and he continues to claim that these policy shifts are revenue neutral. This is the kind of deceit portrayed by the banks in Australia. We had a royal commission to get to the bottom of that. This is an equivalent monumental furphy. Home owners and residents across Canberra are being forced to bear this continued taxation increase.

We are hearing that stamp duty is being phased out. It is worth noting that there is a really nice line in the 2011-12 budget which says that stamp duty should be abolished over a 10 to 20-year period. We are the best part of 10 years in and stamp duty has only gone down by \$3 million in revenue terms—only \$3 million less than what it was almost a decade ago. But stamp duty in the ACT is not all that much better than it is in some of the other states. The average house price in the ACT for 2018 is listed at around \$670,000. If you are lucky enough to be able to afford \$670,000 to buy a home, you will be paying more stamp duty in the ACT than you would be if you were buying it in Queensland. And \$670,000 in most parts of Queensland goes a hell of a lot further than it does here in the ACT. So there is little benefit from the taxation reforms that the Chief Minister has implemented thus far other than to inflict pain and suffering and price many Canberrans out of the housing market.

We have been lucky in this city to see the growth that we have. People that are coming to Canberra are coming here because they have been priced out of other markets such as Sydney and Melbourne. Whilst we have had the benefit of those people seeing Canberra as an opportunity, we are failing to take note of those who are

doing it the toughest. The people that were doing it tough in this city seven or eight years ago in many instances have had no choice but to leave; or they have had to sell up, downsize, and find other means to keep a roof over their family's head. It points to what we were talking about with the homelessness problem. These are people who may have been able to scrape by in previous days but are being priced out of this city. Canberrans deserve certainty.

The budget that was handed down yesterday is in stark contrast to the economic settings that the Reserve Bank is trying to achieve nationally. The Reserve Bank cut interest rates yesterday just moments before the Chief Minister stood to deliver his budget speech. They are trying to put more money in Australians' pockets. They want to see people spending money in the economy. They want business to be prosperous. They want Australians out spending their money to drive our economy, to drive growth and to drive the prosperity of this country. Here in the ACT we have a Treasurer and Chief Minister who believes that that money is better sitting in the coffers of consolidated revenue in Treasury's bank account, where it is his discretion as to how it gets spent, as opposed to being in the pockets of the individuals that work hard and earn it.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (11.24): I rise to speak today to the amendment moved by the Chief Minister, which I agree with, of course, and particularly to the issue of housing and homelessness that was popped into the motion by the Leader of the Opposition. It gives me the chance to talk about the new housing strategy that the ACT government has implemented and is taking action on, making sure that we can fund all the commitments under the plan which include making sure that accessible, affordable and secure housing opportunities are a reality for more Canberrans.

The opposition might have missed some of the investments that the ACT government has made in affordable housing in this year's budget. It gives me the chance now to outline the single biggest investment in growing public housing that we have ever seen. In this year's budget a new \$100 million investment in the growth and renewal of public housing is the beginning. This program will build 1,200 new homes across the territory, including 200 new homes that will be made available for people in need of housing. This is the largest per capita investment in public housing in the country. And let us not forget that the last time the Canberra Liberals were in government in the ACT they got rid of 1,000 public housing properties.

If this investment by the ACT government was replicated nationally there would be almost \$6 billion invested into growing and renewing public housing. Imagine what that would mean and what could be achieved in addressing housing affordability and reducing homelessness across the country. For many Canberrans let down by the private housing market, growing our public housing is the best way to get them into secure and long-term affordable housing. This investment builds on the current renewal program, which will soon be finished, renewing 1,288 dwellings across the city with new, energy efficient homes that better suit the needs of our tenants.

Taken together, the current renewal and incoming growth and renewal programs will see 20 per cent of our public housing replaced for new tenants over a period of 10 years. Under the housing strategy there will not be sell-offs or privatisation but real investment in government-owned and run public assets which currently house over 20,000 Canberrans, with more to join soon.

This year's budget also allocates funding for Common Ground at Dickson, which will provide 40 units of social and affordable housing for people who are experiencing chronic homelessness. This fantastic model, and the government's support, under the housing strategy will continue building on the success of the first Common Ground in Canberra in Gungahlin. I have seen many examples of Common Ground around this country. It is a great model for the ACT, with wraparound supports which see residents in long-term accommodation stay safe and happy.

The ACT saw a reduction in homelessness between the 2011 census and the 2016 census, despite a rise nationally and an increase in population in the ACT. This is thanks to the hard work of the specialist services in the homelessness sector working together in early intervention as well as working with people to get the housing supports that they need. And whilst there has been a small increase in rough sleeping, the government is building on that support with more funding in last year's budget to establish new homelessness programs for emerging cohorts, including older women, migrant and refugee families.

It is important to point out the big difference that the reduction in stamp duty and the abolition of stamp duty for first homebuyers will make for people in this community. It will absolutely benefit first homebuyers in the ACT. From 1 July first homebuyers will be able to purchase a new home without having to worry about saving money for stamp duty payments. That will make a significant difference to the lives of people in the ACT community—getting into a home of their own for the first time.

I thank Mr Coe for bringing on this motion today, because it gives the ACT government the chance to again explain the tax reform that has been taken on by the Chief Minister as well as some of the record investments in housing in this year's budget.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (11.29): I rise to support Mr Coe's motion today and I thank him for bringing it to the Assembly today. It is an important topic for us to discuss. This is a motion that recognises those in our society who are struggling—struggling with their taxes, struggling with their rates, struggling with the cost of living in our city. This is a motion that recognises and supports the most vulnerable members of our society. This is a motion that puts into effect the Canberra Liberals' commitment for those most vulnerable in our society.

For most of us, Canberra is a wonderful place to live. It is a beautiful city and it has many advantages. But we have a two-tiered city, and the gap between those two tiers is increasingly evident. I hear a lot from constituents about the pressures of mounting costs of living. Things are getting so much more expensive in Canberra.

I talk specifically about a group that the increasing cost of living is having an increasingly high impact on, and that is older Canberrans, our seniors. No group in our society seems to be feeling the pressure of the increasing cost of living more than older Canberrans. As a cohort, they are more likely to be living on fixed incomes, they are more likely to have a disability or a chronic condition, they are more likely to be sensitive to the increasing cost of living.

Older Canberrans are not just vulnerable; they are worried. They are worried that they will not be able to afford to live in the city they call home. They are worried that they will not be able to continue to live the way they have always lived and the way that they worked for while they were working in our community. They are worried they are being priced out of their own home by the rates, fees and charges applicable to their own home. They are worried about being a burden on their children and families. They are worried whether they can afford to turn the heater on this winter which, as we all know, has already been bitterly cold just in the past week or so.

How many older Canberrans are counting their coins and cutting back on social events so that they can pay their next bills? That might not sound important but loneliness and isolation have many flow-on effects to the health and wellbeing of our older Canberrans. How many grandparents are unable to buy that birthday present for their grandchildren? How many lay awake at night worried and scared about the financial burdens they are carrying and the future financial burdens because they know that under this government their rates, fees and charges continue to go up? These are people who have worked and paid taxes their whole lives.

But this government has abandoned them. The government has left them behind in their crusade for the young, hip city. Their bus route has been cut. The government wanted to close the hydrotherapy pool without considering it may be a three-hour round trip to go to the proposed replacement hydrotherapy pool.

In last year's budget the ACT seniors spectacle scheme was cut significantly, which made vision care less accessible for older Canberrans. In yesterday's budget \$1½ million was stripped from the inclusion and participation subunit which administers and funds community sector services and programs and contributes towards community events, awards, ceremonies and grants for seniors and veterans. If we were to test the morals of this government on how it treats its older citizens, I would have to say that the answer would be: embarrassingly poorly.

The difference here between the government and the Canberra Liberals could not be starker. We recognise that every action in this place directly affects Canberrans. We are listening to the community and we hear what they are saying. We understand that the ever-increasing taxes, fees and charges are making it harder for people to live in this city, many of whom have lived here for decades, if not their entire lives.

For pensioners, for self-funded retirees and even for those older Canberrans who are still working and indeed who may have to keep working in order to pay their bills, this city is becoming increasingly unaffordable. We see that rates and land tax have increased by \$300 million in six years—nearly doubling—and we know this is more than just numbers on the page of a budget book.

We know that older Canberrans, specifically older women, are increasingly vulnerable in the housing market and are increasingly at risk of homelessness because of this government's policies. Canberra has the highest rents in Australia as a direct result of this government's policies. We have a housing affordability crisis as a direct result of this government's policies.

That is why my colleague Mr Coe has brought forward this motion today. It calls on the government to stop its relentless assault on the cost of living in Canberra and to give our more vulnerable citizens a break. It calls on the Assembly to recognise the impacts that their decisions are having on our most vulnerable.

It has been said that the measure of a society is how it treat its most vulnerable members. Those opposite have that choice today. They can open their eyes to the reality of how their rates, fees and charges are hurting people in Canberra. They can take their stance or they can choose to remain silent and continue their support for a government progressing tax reform for ideological reasons, never mind who falls behind.

As former Labor Chief Minister Jon Stanhope said today in the *CityNews*, the government has, in the implementation of taxation reform, reneged on the undertaking that the reforms will be revenue neutral. It has ignored the recommendation to abolish land tax, which has contributed to the rental crisis. It has also introduced a raft of flat charges, has reneged on its commitment to not increase the flat component of general rates and has ignored recommendations regarding concessions to ameliorate the effect of the reforms on people on low to moderate incomes. These, according to Mr Stanhope, are not the actions of a progressive government. I like to think of Mr Stanhope as the conscience of this government. He is no longer constrained by party room, by caucus. He can say what he really believes.

We on this side of the chamber have always believed that Canberrans know how to manage their budget better than this government. But Canberrans are under such pressure. Are they going to be able to have the heater on? Do they have to choose between having bread and butter and meat on the table and turning the heater on? I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MR COE (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.37): The fact that no Labor backbencher wants to either come to the government's defence or hold them to account, not just on this motion today but also across the board when it comes to rates reform, tax reform, the cost of living and indeed the extraordinary disadvantage we have in this city, shows just how far the Labor Party has shifted from its base.

This is a Labor Party that no longer represents the working poor. This is a Labor Party that no longer advocates for the disadvantaged. This is a Labor Party that cares only about people who believe in their ideology, support their pet projects and, importantly, can afford to pay for it.

The reality is that so many Canberrans simply cannot afford this government. This government has put Canberrans out of reach of their city. So many people in Canberra

struggle to live in the city that they love. Canberra is a great place. We all love it. We all choose to make it our home. But just imagine if you did not have the choice to stay in the city that you love.

Andrew Barr seems to think that the fact that a lot of people pay rates and can afford this city is a ringing endorsement of his policies. If that is a ringing endorsement then what about the 27,000 people who are living below the poverty line in the ACT? What about the 5,000 kids in the ACT who are living in poverty after 18 years of ACT Labor? That is what this government has come to: 5,000 kids in the ACT living in poverty.

Not one member of the Labor Party stands up and says, “We have to change that.” Not one member of the Labor Party says, “Perhaps we need to slow things down a bit.” Not one member of the Labor Party rebukes their leader and says, “Enough is enough.” It shows they are far more interested in their careers than they are in the 5,000 kids living in poverty.

Next October is going to be a very significant point for the future of Canberra. We will be doing everything we can to make sure that we can end this injustice, this unfairness, happening in the territory right now because somebody does need to stand up for the 27,000 people living in poverty. Somebody needs to stand up for the working poor in the ACT. And somebody needs to stand up for the hardworking taxpayers of Canberra who see their money get blown by this government.

This is a government that is very good at collecting revenue and very good at spending but not so good at getting value for money. This is a government that rips off the people they are meant to represent. This is a government that has no qualms with pricing people out of this city.

The fact that the Greens are willing to back the Labor Party at all costs shows just how tight this coalition is. I have said it before and I will say it again: it shows that the Greens’ loyalty to the Labor Party is stronger than their commitment to the disadvantaged of Canberra. There are thousands of people who are doing it tough and the Greens are being absolutely ineffective in doing anything about it—absolutely ineffective.

That is exactly what Ms Le Couteur said in her contribution. She said, “Admittedly, we have not done as much as we would have liked.” It has been a massive failure. There are 5,000 kids living in poverty after 18 years of Labor, and the Greens are propping them up along the way.

Things have to change. Things absolutely have to change. It is clear that it will not come from the Labor Party. It is clear it is not going to come from the Greens. It has to come from the Liberal Party. We are very pleased to stand up and fight for the many people in Canberra that do not have a voice but are doing it very tough as a result of Andrew Barr and his party.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 12

Noes 9

Mr Barr	Ms Orr	Miss C Burch	Ms Lawder
Ms Berry	Mr Pettersson	Mr Coe	Mr Parton
Ms J Burch	Mr Ramsay	Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall
Ms Cheyne	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson	
Ms Fitzharris	Mr Steel	Mrs Jones	
Ms Le Couteur	Ms Stephen-Smith	Mrs Kikkert	

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Employment—job security

MS CODY (Murrumbidgee) (11.48): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the policy of the Liberal Party to cut \$1.5 billion and thousands of jobs from the Federal Public Service in Canberra; and
- (b) the policy of the National Party to transfer Federal Public Service jobs away from Canberra;

(2) also notes:

- (a) concerns expressed by the Reserve Bank and leading economists about the short-term outlook for the Australian economy;
- (b) the ongoing low rate of wage growth; and
- (c) that, although the ACT still has the lowest unemployment rate of any jurisdiction, unemployment continues to rise in some jurisdictions;

(3) also notes that ACT Labor has fulfilled its election commitment to:

- (a) protect ACT Public Service jobs;
- (b) maintain public service levels to ensure workloads are manageable; and
- (c) maintain real public service wages;

(4) further notes that the ACT Budget is:

- (a) delivering job security for City Services workers by progressively converting temporary and contract staff to permanent employees;
- (b) delivering better job security and working conditions for our hard-working school cleaners by transitioning externally contracted school cleaning services to a Territory-run service by establishing a cleaning workforce within the Education Directorate;
- (c) supporting more ACT Government jobs by reviewing the use of casual and temporary employment across Directorates to identify roles or work currently being done by temporary staff that can be transitioned to secure, permanent roles over time;

- (d) establishing a Future Skills for Future Jobs grants program to support industry projects that help increase Australian Apprenticeship commencements in the ACT;
 - (e) matching apprentices and trainees to the right job by establishing a new Workforce Skills and Development unit to help match training workers to suitable employment placements;
 - (f) investing in attraction and facilitation of major projects like the UNSW Canberra campus;
 - (g) supporting local business to become export market ready and further developing key local industries; and
 - (h) continuing to invest in Canberra's knowledge ecosystem through the CBR Innovation Network; and
- (5) calls on the ACT Government to prioritise the availability of secure employment with good conditions for the people of Canberra by:
- (a) using public sector works and employment practices to set a high standard for employment in the ACT;
 - (b) ensuring our workers and trainees have the skills our city needs for the future; and
 - (c) continuing the project of diversifying the ACT economy to reduce dependence on the Federal Government.

Yesterday we heard the Treasurer deliver his budget speech. Having listened to that speech and considered the papers, you will note I have revised my motion for today. Just as Mr Barr was about to make his speech yesterday, I heard the Reserve Bank had cut interest rates. Looking at the economic data and comparing the outlook of the various states and territories, it is clear that there are a range of challenges facing the Australian economy.

Locally, we have an additional challenge of a federal Liberal-National coalition government, a coalition of Liberals who like nothing more than trashing public services and the public service. The Nationals are very happy for taxpayer spending, but only if it is pork-barrelling for their electorates. Mr Barr's management of the local economy has maintained growth and strong employment whilst the Nationals continue to try to nick off with all the jobs. This shows the success of his approach.

It is the resilience of not just Mr Barr that deserves praise but also of every worker and employer in the ACT. This morning I attended the ACT Business Chamber budget breakfast, where I had the opportunity to speak to many local business owners and CEOs, and one thing is clear: the ACT is continuing to grow. The economy is growing and jobs are growing. But it is not easy on our economy when one of the biggest employers in town is actively undermining the local economy. Our community's success in delivering jobs should be celebrated.

From my perspective, it is a matter of choices and priorities. I had a look at some of the opposition's comments, both in the paper and on social media. It is pretty clear

they would make different choices and have different priorities. ACT Labor is putting the provision of well-paid, secure jobs at number one on our list of priorities, not just ensuring that the ACT government is a good boss but also providing an incentive and good regulation to make sure private sector workers have the best possible conditions.

We need to support our most vulnerable workers, those in casual or contract work. It is time for our workforce to be permanent, to be ongoing, and to be secure. Secure employment does not just provide the employee with the security to buy a house with a mortgage, raise a family and sleep at night without the stress of insecure employment; it also means people can commit to full roles within their community.

Secure employment supports people to commit to coaching their daughter's footy team, acting as a dependable carer for a relative or friend, or contributing to the community in thousands of other ways. Secure, well-paid employment is the bedrock of a strong community. We can achieve that by being a model employer. We can achieve that through the implementation of the secure local jobs code. We can achieve that by maintaining a strong local economy.

But that is not enough. We also need to ensure we provide the training so that our young people, or those who need or want to be retrained, have the skills for the job. Maintaining a highly skilled workforce matters because it attracts employers and gives workers the ability to start their own businesses, if that is their choice. The establishment of a future skills for future jobs program is one way that apprentices will be supported. As I have said many times in this place, I started my career as an apprentice hairdresser, and it was one of my most favourite times. But it was a very different time, particularly to today.

I am pleased to see the Barr Labor government acknowledge the important roles apprentices and tradespeople play in our city and our economy. Australia has given us a federal government interested only in what it can take from Canberra. That means it is time for us to take care of ourselves. It is not pleasant but it is true.

We have to do what we have to do to take care of ourselves. We want to make sure Canberra grows as a high-wage economy. That means high skills and good jobs. That means training. That means diversifying our economy. And that is exactly what ACT Labor means to do.

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 11.55 am to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice

Public housing—relocations

MR COE: The question I have is for the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, I understand that residents in a particular public housing complex in Canberra will be transferred out with the assistance of Housing ACT

because of extreme violence, criminal behaviour as well as severe antisocial behaviour. We do not wish to name the particular site in the chamber but I understand that you are aware of the site in question. Minister, have more than a dozen residents of that particular complex been offered assistance to relocate to other Housing ACT properties?

MS BERRY: Yes, I am aware of the issues that have been raised by the Leader of the Opposition and the Canberra Liberals today. I do not have the exact figure but I am aware that some tenants have been supported by Housing ACT to move to different accommodation.

MR COE: Whilst I note that you do not have the exact number, do you know roughly how many tenants we are talking about? Are we talking about a couple or are we talking about dozens? And when will these transfers be complete?

MS BERRY: The last time I discussed this with Housing ACT I was not aware that it was dozens. It was initially a very small number that were being moved to new housing accommodation. This has been something on which Housing ACT has been working with the tenants very closely, as well as with ACT Policing, the Justice and Community Safety Directorate and Minister Shane Rattenbury, so that we can make sure that people are safe and happy in their accommodation. I have not been briefed more recently on the numbers that the opposition is referring to. If that information has changed, I can bring that back to the Assembly and make that known to members.

MR PARTON: Minister, for how long have the tenants in question been seeking transfers?

MS BERRY: Given that I am unclear on the numbers as well, I will have to check that information and see what information I can provide to the Assembly.

Government—land sales

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Minister for Urban Renewal and relates to the failed sales process for Northbourne flats. Minister, given that the community often complains about the quality of infill, why was the ACT government not able to sell the land to what was reported to be the best development tender on offer?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Le Couteur for her question. This was a two-stage process, which considered the design outcomes. There was quite a clear and specific directive around design and the financial contribution. In this process the CEO of the Suburban Land Agency has been fairly clear. There was a lengthy negotiation with the preferred tenderer out of the three organisations that put in a tender, around the fact that they had a quality design and whether they could meet the market value to enable SLA to sell them that land. That was not able to be achieved. Under the SLA's legal requirements, they are not able to sell that land below the market value. This was not able to be achieved. That is why the sale could not go ahead.

MS LE COUTEUR: Minister, how will the next sales process for the Northbourne flats sites, or in fact anywhere else, be changed so that high quality developments are ruled in, not ruled out?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It is certainly not the case that high quality development here was ruled out. The Suburban Land Agency and the City Renewal Authority, who jointly managed this process, are working through the lessons learnt from this process and the lessons learnt from the sales of the other sites in Griffith and Narrabundah, which both also have a requirement for good design and good urban renewal outcomes but had a different sales process involved.

There will be a conversation between the CRA, SLA and relevant ministers around how we take that process forward. Those conversations have just started. But we will certainly not be sacrificing good design in the urban renewal corridor, in the Northbourne Avenue corridor; it is absolutely imperative. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity with the renewal of the Northbourne corridor. Getting a good quality development and good urban design outcomes are absolutely a priority for the government in that space.

Public housing—relocations

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, I refer again to the public housing complex transfers raised in the question from the opposition leader. In his question the opposition leader suggested that these transfers were being made because of extreme violence and criminal and antisocial behaviour. Is his characterisation consistent with your assessment of the reasons for providing transfers for multiple residents at one time? If not, what are the reasons?

MS BERRY: Transfers occur in a number of situations, including housing not meeting the needs of a particular group that live in a particular area. There are probably a number of reasons why tenants have asked for transfers, which include concerns around safety or feelings of safety within a particular place. In this circumstance the accommodation may not have been suitable for more reasons than just the reasons that have been identified by the opposition leader today.

MR PARTON: How many residents in the complex reported or complained about illicit drug dealing or being threatened by other residents in possession of lethal and illegal weapons?

MS BERRY: I am aware of concerns raised by members of the community, in particular, and some tenants, but I am not aware of the actual number. Given the questions that have been asked today about the numbers of tenants that the opposition have asked me to confirm around transfers, I will need to check that number and bring it back to the Assembly if it is available. I am also mindful of not wanting to identify any individuals. I will check and get some advice on what information I can disclose safely; then I will provide that, if that is the best way to go forward.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, what other measures have you taken to curb illegal and violent behaviours in this particular complex?

MS BERRY: Illegal and violent behaviours are generally criminal matters and are usually managed by the police. However, the police and Housing ACT work closely together to ensure that tenants meet—they are obliged to meet—their obligations as tenants of Housing ACT. Primarily, criminal behaviour is not something that Housing ACT is responsible for; it is a Policing matter because it is a criminal matter. But Housing ACT has an MOU with Policing and we work closely together to resolve those issues where we can.

Budget—fiscal strategy

MS ORR: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, how is the ACT government building for Canberra's future through the 2019-20 ACT budget?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Orr for the question. There are a number of very important investments contained in this year's budget, particularly investments in people: early intervention and services to tackle disadvantage; a significant boost for services for Canberrans with disability, by transition to the full scheme NDIS; major funding increases in the Justice and Community Safety portfolio, including additional resources for ACT Policing; and a new approach to reducing family and domestic violence.

On the infrastructure side, there is clearly a very big program of health and healthcare investment; investment in schools; transport infrastructure investment; and investment at a suburban level, with a range of upgrades for local shops, new playgrounds, road and intersection upgrades, and better community centres right across the city. We also have a very significant commitment to continue growing and renewing public housing. This takes up a very significant proportion of the budget's new capital spend.

MS ORR: Chief Minister, what is the outlook for Canberra's local economy, according to the 2019-20 ACT budget?

MR BARR: The outlook is very positive. It builds on the last three years, when we have seen combined economic growth of 12 per cent, supporting the creation of over 3,200 new businesses in Canberra and more than 16,000 jobs. Our economy, as measured by the gross state product, has now reached \$40 billion. It is larger than Tasmania's—as a point of interest. It has been boosted by significant increases in service exports, particularly in higher education and tourism.

The budget contains a continued investment in economic development and industry diversification. A pleasing figure to see is that there are now 142,000 Canberrans employed in the private sector. They are working in a growing range of industries, including research and innovation, defence, space, cybersecurity, construction, tourism and hospitality, social services and retail. That is 62 per cent of the workforce now.

As we project forward, the budget is forecasting economic growth to be at around 3.3 per cent over the next four years, which consolidates our recent rapid growth. Ongoing population growth, a strong pipeline of both public and private sector investment and continued demand for our territory's education and tourism exports are all anticipated to continue making a positive contribution to the territory's economy.

MR PETTERSSON: Chief Minister, what is the ACT government's fiscal strategy and how does the 2019-20 ACT budget deliver on this?

MR BARR: There are three core objectives of the strategy: to strengthen the local economy, with a particular focus on the creation of good jobs and the continued delivery of high quality services; to invest in infrastructure projects and assets that generate economic growth and projects that protect Canberra's livability as our city grows; and to maintain a strong operating balance over the medium term.

Over the last three years we have seen a cumulative surplus of around \$100 million. Over the coming four years we are projecting a cumulative surplus of around \$400 million—a cumulative surplus of around \$500 million over the six-year period of last year, the current fiscal year and the next four. The application of our fiscal strategy in this year's budget will see us make a further significant investment in health care, in education, in transport and in community infrastructure. This will be funded through small deficits in the near term which are more than offset by the surpluses delivered in the last two years and those projected over the forward estimates period. We are delivering today and we are building for a strong Canberra into the 2020s.

Public housing—relocations

MISS C BURCH: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, I refer again to the public housing complex matter raised in previous questions. Minister, what will be done with the vacant dwellings arising from these relocations?

MS BERRY: We are not closing down this public housing dwelling. We will assess the situation that is occurring. It is being investigated. Some of the issues are being investigated by the police at the moment. Once all of these issues are resolved, Housing ACT will make assessments about their properties and whether they are appropriate to be tenanted by other tenants.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, will these dwellings be reallocated to public housing residents from other locations or to some of the 2,000-odd people on the public housing waiting list?

MS BERRY: It could be a combination of both. That will be a decision for Housing ACT through the processes that it takes in allocating housing to people who have applied for it. It starts at the priority list. Priorities are also placed around different individuals on the list. I have provided information to Mr Parton in the past on how

allocations are made but I can go through that again, if that provides some assistance to the Assembly. Housing ACT goes through processes in making sure that those people most in need get allocated housing first.

MR PARTON: Minister, what will be the basis of choosing tenants to move into this particular complex given that you have indicated in this chamber already that personal safety is the main reason for moving people out? If the current residents are not safe, how can new residents be safe?

MS BERRY: I did not. I actually said that it was one of the reasons for tenants being moved out of particular housing. This housing is built for a particular purpose and there are a number of community partners involved in tenanting some of these properties. It does have a number of programs through it at the moment. There are some issues that have been identified by the community that police are investigating and Housing ACT is well involved in, as is the Justice and Community Safety Directorate. Without jumping to any conclusions or making decisions yet, I will allow those officials and others to get on with their work in ensuring that people are safe where they live and providing supports to those people who most need it. We can then go on to the next stage: if there are vacant properties, that they are allocated appropriately.

Public housing—safety

MR WALL: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, it has been reported that contractors have refused to undertake work orders at the complex referred to in previous questions, due to antisocial and violent behaviours. It is also reported that residents will not leave their units at night due to the intimidatory and unsafe environment. Minister, have Housing ACT contractors been threatened or actually assaulted at the particular complex in question?

MS BERRY: I have not been advised and I am not able to respond to Mr Wall's question with regard to the actual numbers that Mr Wall has asked about. I am aware—

Mr Wall: No, I said “have any”.

MS BERRY: This is a pretty serious matter. I am trying to be very careful about not identifying any individuals or others. I think everybody understands that there is a situation that is being investigated by the police. Directorates and experts in this place are all involved in resolving this issue and getting to some point where people feel safe again. So let us just let those people get on with the work. I am happy to answer questions where I can, but it is under police investigation. All the officials and experts in resolving these issues are involved. It is best for them to get on with their work; then we can work out a way forward for these individuals and others. Housing ACT works closely with all of these organisations, as well as program facilities management, in addressing issues around safety and security.

Mr Coe: Madam Speaker, I raise a point of order on relevance. The specific question that Mr Wall asked was about Housing ACT contractors. I ask that the minister be directly relevant. I am sure she can be without naming any contractor.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Coe. Minister, I think that at the beginning of the answer you were saying you were unsure of the numbers and did not have that information to hand, so I do not think there is a point of order. You have 10 seconds left to continue.

MS BERRY: No, thank you.

MR WALL: Minister, have you or your department failed in the duty of care to provide a safe environment for either contractors visiting the complex or the residents living in this complex by failing to address the issues of violence occurring?

Mr Ramsay: On a point of order, the question is specifically asking for a legal opinion on whether someone has failed in a duty of care. There is very clear evidence—

MR WALL: Let me rephrase the question, please, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, have you failed to ensure there is a safe environment for either contractors working at that facility or the residents that are forced to live in that property as a result of the violence occurring?

MS BERRY: Did you say “forced”?

Mr Wall: They are forced to live there. That is the home they have got.

MADAM SPEAKER: There is no discussion across the floor.

MS BERRY: I was seeking clarification. I beg your pardon, Madam Speaker; I was curious about the language regarding people being forced to live in public housing. Housing ACT supports people who often have complex issues and complicated things going on in their lives, and they need additional support. Sometimes people need extra support in learning how to live back in the community in a safe way. But Housing ACT is not responsible for ensuring that criminal investigations are carried out by Housing ACT staff. That is a matter for the police.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, we do not need your commentary.

MS BERRY: However, Housing ACT works very closely with policing where issues of a criminal nature are being investigated. As I said before, if there are breaches of the Residential Tenancies Act then Housing ACT makes sure that they take the appropriate action that is required. Criminal matters are investigated by the police. Housing ACT matters are matters for Housing ACT, which includes making sure that we work with the different community organisations, as well as the Justice and Community Safety Directorate and their minister, to make sure that people who need that extra support, who have complicated lives, are supported appropriately.

MR PARTON: Minister, what have you done to ensure the safety of contractors in such a hostile environment?

MS BERRY: I have not, as I said in response to an earlier question, been advised around the numbers of individuals who are contracted to maintain the public housing in this particular circumstance. Housing ACT works very closely with all of these organisations, including project facilities management, to ensure that if there are safety and security issues on any public housing site, they are addressed.

Public housing—safety

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development.

Ms Berry: Not more on the same thing.

MRS JONES: It is pretty important.

Ms Berry: It is an important topic. I just thought I'd responded to everything.

MRS JONES: It is your turn today, minister. Minister, I refer once again to the disturbing level of violence at the complex referred to in previous questions. What assistance is given, in particular, to victims of shooting or stabbing incidents or other violent activities that occur in this housing complex?

MS BERRY: I cannot comment on what Mrs Jones said might have occurred at this place. I do not have advice that any of that behaviour has occurred. It is a criminal investigation. I think that, in the first instance, we should let the police get on with their job.

MRS JONES: When incidents like this occur, what assistance is given to residents in a complex where there are a number of Housing ACT properties on the same plot?

MS BERRY: If they continue to be Housing ACT tenants, Housing ACT would, through their client support services, make sure that Housing ACT residents get the supports that they need. Through the police investigations, police will have victim support available for people who may need that additional support. That would happen across the board, not just for public housing tenants, as I would understand it.

MR PARTON: Minister, have you been to Jerilderie Court this year, and is it true that there was a major police raid there this morning?

MS BERRY: Have I been there this morning? No, I have not.

Mr Parton: The question was about this year.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, if the minister needs the member to repeat the question, she will ask. If not, let her conclude her answer.

MS BERRY: What I can say is that the matter is being investigated by police, and in the first instance we should let that continue in these circumstances.

Canberra—community facilities

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Community Services and Facilities. Minister, how is the ACT government boosting community infrastructure for our growing city?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Pettersson for his question. As our city continues to grow, our government is investing in the infrastructure and services that our community needs. One of the priorities, as outlined by the Treasurer yesterday, is providing more community facilities and community infrastructure in our suburbs.

We know that community centres are hubs of activity and are essential parts of our town centres across Canberra. To ensure that our community centres continue to provide for Canberrans, we will be repairing and refurbishing Belconnen community centre, which has been providing excellent services to our community since 1987.

Mount Rogers Community Centre, Spence Children's Cottage, the Maitland centre and Tuggeranong Community Centre will also receive upgrades ranging from roof repairs and heating and ventilation upgrades to improving the environment for staff and community groups. Families and children also benefit from our government's investments in new playgrounds for our city to support children's physical health and wellbeing.

Every region in Canberra will see the construction of new and upgraded playgrounds: Richardson and Kambah in Tuggeranong, Waramanga in Weston Creek, Torrens in Woden Valley, Narrabundah in central Canberra, Higgins in Belconnen, and Yerrabi Pond in Gungahlin. All of these suburbs will see new and upgraded playgrounds with a better mix of equipment and activities that cater for more ages, abilities and play styles.

Some of these playgrounds will be based on designs done in consultation with the community as part of last year's play space reviews that are currently underway. Kambah and Gungahlin will benefit from new nature play spaces, which will provide creative and imaginative experiences for children using natural elements like logs, rocks and dry waterbeds to encourage children to climb, jump and explore.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how will the government make it easier for Canberrans to access community facilities in our suburbs?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Pettersson for his supplementary. The government understands the importance of making it easier for Canberrans to move around our city and to access services. As we build more community facilities and infrastructure

and as our city continues to grow, it is natural to see pressure on car parking at our local shops, particularly at major group centres.

Gungahlin is a growing region. I have heard from Mr Pettersson that many residents and shop owners at Palmerston want more parking at the local shopping centre so that people can access the range of services provided there. Following Mr Pettersson's advocacy, I was very pleased to announce that an additional 25 sealed car parks will be constructed at the Palmerston shops, in front of the Palmerston community centre, which we expect to deliver in the next financial year.

Molonglo Valley is another growing region of our city, but the planned Molonglo group centre is still some time away from being built. That is why in the meantime our government will provide funding to construct an additional 150 car parks at Cooleman Court on the block of land at Brierly Street and Parkinson Street. It is well known on the south side that parking at Cooleman Court is the number one issue for many Weston Creek residents. Certainly, Ms Cody has been advocating on this issue on behalf of residents for some time. These new car parks will be located directly next to the new rapid bus stops at Cooleman Court, providing better connections to our public transport network in Weston Creek, making it easier to access the local shops at Cooleman Court and also providing access to the brand-new Weston Creek walk-in centre, which will open later this year.

MS CODY: Minister, is the government providing more community facilities for Woden?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Cody for her question. The population of Woden is growing and will continue to grow as more and more people come to live and work in the town centre. Since becoming a member of this place and since talking with the community and listening to their concerns about community facilities in the town centre, I am really delighted that the government, in the budget yesterday, is backing the Woden community centre project, which is a priority of the Woden community, with an investment of \$1.75 million to fund the design of a new community centre to meet the growing needs of the Woden area. This will provide a dedicated, fit-for-purpose community centre for the growing needs of our community and the growing number of community services offered by particularly Woden Community Service. The new centre will provide a new home for Woden Community Service to deliver its range of integrated services. It will provide a large community space for activities and events as well as the arts. The design and service offerings will be informed by ongoing engagement with the Woden community.

The government will also invest half a million dollars in upgrading and refurbishing the Woden library, including upgrading spaces for use by the community. Community spaces and exhibition spaces will be delivered on the mezzanine level of Woden library. We will also be upgrading the downstairs meeting room to make it available for use and access after hours, with security installed and a partition added to the toilets.

This is a significant investment for the south side, and I am very proud to be part of a government that is delivering better community infrastructure for our city.

Schools—violence

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development. Minister, in an answer published yesterday to questions on notice 2448 to 2485 directed to the Chief Minister seeking the total number of occupational violence incidents in each directorate, he reported that for the period 1 July 2018 to 10 April 2019 the Education Directorate had the highest number of occupational violence reports and the highest number of physical injuries arising from those reports. In October last year the Education Directorate was issued with an enforceable undertaking by WorkSafe ACT, including a \$2 million occupational violence policy and management plan. Given these statistics cover the majority of the period since introduction of that plan and investment, what evidence do you have that the plan is having an impact?

MS BERRY: The evidence we have is that there is now a culture of reporting within Education that did not exist before. The high incidence of reporting, which has resulted from a number of incidents occurring, has also shown us that whilst there is a high number of reports, which is good because then we know what is going on and we can work with the schools to resolve those issues, there is also not a high number of work days lost as a result of injuries within schools. That is also good information to have, because it shows that we are addressing issues and providing supports to teachers and staff within school communities to ensure that they can continue at work.

This is an issue that we are facing as a community, and schools are not immune to that. We all have a role to play in resolving issues around bullying and violence within our community. Within our schools we have a plan and a process in place—nation leading, the first in the country to do something like this, confirmed and backed up by the Work Safety Commissioner—where we are taking action. But it will require significant change across our community to address the issues that are occurring in our schools. These are sometimes complex and complicated issues but the Education Directorate is absolutely committed, as is the ACT government, to addressing these issues, along with the involvement of staff, learning professionals, parents, students and the union.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, have you hosted the forum with other jurisdictions on occupational violence in education settings which was part of the enforceable undertaking? If not, when will you do so? If so, what were the outcomes of that forum?

MS BERRY: Yes, that forum has been held. It was very positively received by other state and territory representatives who attended. The communique on that forum is available on the Education website.

MR WALL: Minister, why has the Education Directorate continued to have a higher incidence of workplace injury than the police, the emergency services or the Health Directorate?

MS BERRY: This is a matter that I have been working on with the Australian

Education Union since my appointment as education minister. It is about ensuring a significant change in culture which requires reporting of every incident. We are working through that culture change of reporting through Education so that we can make sure that we know what the problems and the issues are and so that we can work within our school communities to resolve them.

I am confident that some of the issues raised have been as a result of some complex issues within our school communities that we will get more information on as that reporting culture continues to evolve. It also points to the fact that some of these incidents are repeat incidents, not just one incident on one particular occasion.

There is a lot of information coming to the Education Directorate, which is important so that we can go some way towards making sure that the plans and policies we have developed with the Australian Education Union can be put to good use and we can resolve these issues.

Hospitals—emergency department waiting times

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. In 2018-19 the public health service had as a target seeing 75 per cent of urgent emergency department presentations within 30 minutes. However, the expected outcome is that only one-third of urgent patients will have been seen within the clinically appropriate time. Minister, why does the government continue to put two-thirds of urgent presentations in the emergency department at risk of serious health outcomes by their not being seen within the clinically approved times?

MS FITZHARRIS: It does not. Across both public hospitals there are very busy emergency departments. I note that we are now facing a flu season slightly earlier than we might normally face it. It is the case that, as I have stated publicly on many occasions, part of our challenge is in managing growing presentations. What we are seeing, in addition to increased presentations to both our emergency departments, are investments from the government, significantly expanding the Calvary emergency department and expanding and upgrading the Canberra Hospital emergency department, as well as providing additional staffing resources—nurses and doctors—for both emergency departments.

As the opposition is aware, the new CEO of Canberra Health Services, almost immediately upon her commencement in the role, implemented a timely care strategy which is looking at patient flows throughout the whole of Canberra Hospital. That work continues with a whole of organisation effort. The effort is in making sure that there can be good patient flows across the hospital.

It is certainly the case that, with increasing presentations, the category 3 patients are the lowest performing category. Much effort is being made to improve that. I would note that there has been a significant decrease in our category 4 and 5 presentations to the hospitals. That means people with more minor illnesses and ailments are going to alternative service providers. That may be their GP, but we are seeing increasing presentations to our nurse walk-in centres, which the opposition do not like. We will continue to work very much on providing timely care to patients throughout our public health system and in particular in our busy emergency departments.

MRS DUNNE: I note that the minister did not answer the question as to why only a third of category 2 patients are seen on time. Minister, why does the ACT health system continue to have amongst the worst emergency department wait times in the country?

MS FITZHARRIS: I refer Mrs Dunne to my previous answer on significant effort in terms of the timely care strategy at Canberra Hospital and efforts at Calvary Public Hospital, as well as our investments in Calvary and Canberra hospitals' emergency departments.

MRS JONES: Minister, why, despite these efforts, does the government continue to have two-thirds of urgent presentations not seen on time?

MS FITZHARRIS: Of course, as minister I am responsible, but I note that the opposition say that the government is not seeing these patients on time. What they are saying is that the staff, who work very hard in our emergency departments, are not doing their jobs.

Mrs Jones: A point of order, Madam Speaker: I am not sure the minister understood the question, which was why two-thirds of urgent presentations are not seen on time, not whether the government sees them.

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister has a minute and a half to get to the answer.

MS FITZHARRIS: I have nothing further to add.

Health—nurse-led walk-in centres

MS CODY: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, can you please provide an update to the Assembly on the Weston Creek walk-in centre?

MS FITZHARRIS: I am delighted to provide an update on the Weston Creek walk-in centre, in Ms Cody's electorate of Murrumbidgee. I am pleased to advise that Weston Creek, adjacent to Cooleman Court, is not only getting new car parks but a walk-in centre opening later this year. The work there is progressing very well indeed. The main construction works are on track to be completed in November this year, and the walk-in centre is scheduled to be open before Christmas. I know, through overwhelmingly positive local feedback, that local residents in Weston Creek, Molonglo Valley and the Woden region are eagerly awaiting the arrival of a nurse-led walk-in centre.

Preliminary sketch plans are progressing well and the development of the initial design will continue to be informed by clinician and stakeholder engagement, including staff from Canberra Health Services and the Health Care Consumers Association. Very soon Canberra Health Services will also be providing a community information session to the Woden Valley Community Council. The existing maternal and child health services located at the community health centre have been temporarily relocated and will soon be moving back into a refurbished facility to continue providing important health services to the local community.

The new walk-in centre at Weston Creek will improve access to quality health care for those living and working in the Woden, Weston Creek and Molonglo areas.

MS CODY: Minister, as has been the case for the residents of Belconnen, Tuggeranong and Gungahlin, what benefits will this provide to the people in Weston Creek and the Molonglo?

MS FITZHARRIS: Our walk-in centres are more popular every week, with the existing centres in Belconnen and Tuggeranong now seeing over 22½ thousand presentations a year. Since the new Gungahlin centre opened six months ago, it has already seen over 10,000 presentations. With walk-in centres opening seven days a week between 7.30 am and 10 pm, we can expect to see similar levels of patronage in the Weston Creek walk-in centre.

All walk-in centres are led by a team of highly skilled advanced practice nurses and nurse practitioners with extensive experience in treating people with minor injuries and illnesses. Walk-in centres also collaborate across primary and community-based healthcare services to link in with, for example, a patient's regular GP and other health professionals as necessary.

All members of our community are now also able to access real-time data on estimated waiting times at ACT public health services, including our walk-in centres, as well as estimated door-to-door travel times to assist patients to access timely care. Anyone can join the over 4,000 other Canberrans who are already using the ACT Health app, available for download now.

Walk-in centres have been highly successful in contributing to the broad range of ACT public health services offered by the government, meeting increasing demand for health services closer to home when and where people need them.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, what further updates can the government provide on the network of walk-in centres serving the Canberra community?

MS FITZHARRIS: In addition to the three existing walk-in centres—and the Weston Creek walk-in centre that I have mentioned—we are also building a new walk-in centre in Dickson to provide faster access to free health care for minor injury and illness for people living and working particularly in Canberra's inner north.

The new walk-in centre will be located close to the Dickson group centre and the new light rail and transport routes, making it easy and convenient to access. It will also help to upgrade the existing Dickson community health centre, with four treatment rooms added for the new walk-in centre within the building's existing footprint. The Dickson walk-in centre will complement existing services provided at the community health centre, including maternal and child health services. It will start taking patients in late 2020.

With the location now decided for the new inner north walk-in centre at Dickson, the \$9.8 million ACT budget investment for the inner north walk-in centre is also a key

element of this term's parliamentary agreement. It fully delivers on our 2016 election commitment to grow the network of walk-in centres across Canberra to five: across Gungahlin, Weston Creek, Belconnen, Tuggeranong and now Dickson. Of course, by delivering more great community healthcare facilities through the recent budget, we are growing the services and infrastructure Canberrans will need for better health and wellbeing in the years to come.

Transport Canberra and City Services—logistical challenges

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for City Services. Minister, in January this year the *Canberra Times* reported that up to 250 tonnes of potentially recyclable material was dumped into landfill. To quote the directorate, this occurred as a result of "logistical challenges". Minister, why has the directorate suffered from logistical challenges?

MR STEEL: The reason is that we have a national waste crisis at the moment as a result of the China sword policy, which has seen significant restrictions placed on waste being exported from overseas. That has affected markets for waste resources nationally. As a result of that, the MRF in particular has also been seeing very significant effects here in the ACT.

That did not impact us until the crunch period during December-January this year. This is a particularly busy period, the holiday period, for the MRF. As a result there was a significant amount of material on site. The government's WorkSafe went in and closed the facility for a few days. We then stockpiled material at the Mugga Lane landfill. Unfortunately, it got to a point where we could not stockpile that material any further, and one day's worth of recycling material had to be put into landfill. Importantly, that was not material from the container deposit scheme. The container deposit scheme has been working to make sure that we can better access the markets domestically by providing a waste stream that is freer from contamination.

As a result of that, we have been working with the MRF on a regular basis to make sure that they address safety issues. They now have a full-time safety officer employed on the site. We have been working with a logistics expert to deal with the material on site as well. We have just announced in the budget that we will be undertaking a review into the future needs of the materials recovery facility.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what impact have these logistical challenges had on the environment, and will you apologise to the Canberra community for allowing this to happen?

MR STEEL: This is a MRF operated by a third party. We continue to work with them to make sure that they responsibly manage the waste resources that go to the MRF. We will continue to do that to make sure we reach our target of reducing the amount of waste going to landfill by 90 per cent by 2025. This is an important piece of work because we want to build a circular economy, using these waste resources as many times as possible in the economy and creating jobs along the way.

This stands in stark contrast to the approach of those opposite, who have opposed the

container deposit scheme and opposed more recycling, including our green bin waste service. Our government will always invest in increasing the rates of recycling in our city. That is the approach we take. Under the Liberals you will see more material go to landfill, including more plastics. They also oppose the work we are doing to phase out single-use plastics. That is in stark contrast to their colleagues in the commonwealth, where a dedicated minister for reducing waste has now been appointed. It would be fantastic if the Canberra Liberals took the same approach.

MR PARTON: Minister, how can Canberrans be confident there will not be any more logistical challenges within your directorate that derail your forecast outcomes?

MR STEEL: Because we have been working with logistics experts to deal with the amount of waste that is coming into our landfill. In the budget yesterday we funded a new hard stand that will be built to take the baled recycled material at the MRF and expand the service. We are undertaking a review of the materials recovery facility and we have been working very closely with the MRF operator, Re.Group, to address the safety issues. As a result the MRF has been operating very efficiently. We will continue to work with them as this national waste crisis continues.

What we have seen in Victoria is much more of a problem than in other states around the country, where local governments have been land filling recycled material—massive amounts of it—because they simply cannot find a market for that material. Here in the ACT we have been finding those markets quite successfully, and we will continue to make sure that we grow our container deposit scheme so that we have cleaner waste streams and we can access good markets.

We are recycling that material. We are trialling the use of that material in our road base, and I announced to Roads Australia that we will be looking to include that material in all of our roads in the ACT. We are looking at how we can procure that at the moment. The community can be very confident that our government is getting on with the responsible management of waste in the ACT.

Municipal services—cemeteries

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for City Services. In January the *Canberra Times* reported that you had instructed the city services directorate to investigate the Norwood Park Crematorium and the ACT cemeteries authority after a number of cremated ashes had gone missing. How can Canberrans be confident in laying their loved ones to rest in our city when their remains go missing?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Hanson for his question. The regulator of cemeteries has been investigating the matter of the missing ashes at the privately operated Norwood crematorium. The report is currently being finalised in consultation with both Norwood Park and the affected families involved. I look forward to the regulator releasing that report tomorrow.

MR HANSON: Minister, will the report that is released be made available to members of the Assembly?

MR STEEL: Yes, it will be.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how many other missing cremated remains do you know of?

MR STEEL: I am not going to pre-empt the report being released tomorrow. That will certainly be outlined in the detailed report that the regulator will make.

Hospitals—waiting times

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Canberra has Australia's most expensive hospitals but also Australia's worst hospital waiting times and the worst scores for quick treatment of urgent patients. It was reported last week that Canberra mothers leave hospital quicker than those in any other jurisdiction. Minister, why do Canberrans pay so much more for their hospitals and receive poor performance in return?

MS FITZHARRIS: I reject that they do.

MS LAWDER: Minister, when will performance improve so that we have better waiting times, have better scores for quick treatment of urgent patients and address the concerns of mothers leaving hospital more quickly than those in any other jurisdiction?

MS FITZHARRIS: Our staff right across our public health system work extremely hard. I note that all we ever hear from the opposition is relentless criticism. There is significant work underway in terms of investment right across our public health system, whether in supporting staff for a variety of significantly funded new initiatives; investing in increasing, expanding and upgrading our infrastructure; investing in new nurses, new doctors and new allied health staff; or investing in medical and health research.

On the opposition's reference to the length of stay of women birthing in our public hospitals, there are a variety of views around that particular issue. It certainly is the case that some women seek to return home as quickly as possible. A number of women who have low-risk births seek to return home as soon as possible. There is a lot more in that story than the opposition have asserted.

We particularly look forward to, in the very near future, publicly releasing the final outcome from our extensive consultations on our new approach to delivering maternity services, which was funded in yesterday's budget. There is a lot of excitement and optimism around this particular service. It is the first time a territory-wide maternity service will be provided. It provides a significantly improved approach to new mums, in particular, accessing maternity services right across our territory and builds on our significant investments in Centenary hospital as well as the significant investment in expanding Calvary public maternity ward last year.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, what responsibility do you take, as the minister for health, for the 18 years of increasing costs and decreasing services in Canberra's public hospitals?

MS FITZHARRIS: As Mrs Dunne is aware, more recently, this year, we have seen our costs come down. I take absolute responsibility for making sure that we continue to make significant investments in health services, to support our hardworking staff and to invest in hospitals, community health centres, walk-in centres, and medical and health research. I am particularly proud of the announcements we have made in this week's budget, particularly proud of our commitment to our expanded SPIRE proposal that we took to the last election, and particularly proud of the clinical engagement we have done with that. I take responsibility for those significant investments and look forward to the government delivering on all of those for the Canberra community.

Budget—disability services

MS CHEYNE: My question is to the Minister for Disability. Minister, could you please update the Assembly on the implementation of the NDIS in the ACT?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Cheyne for her question. The national disability insurance scheme, NDIS, is the largest social policy reform since the introduction of Medicare. This year's ACT budget invests more than \$716 million over four years to ensure that NDIS participants can access the supports and services they need. This reconfirms the ACT government's long-term commitment to the NDIS and fully funds our share of the scheme, around half of the cost of the scheme in the territory, as set out in the recently signed bilateral agreement with the commonwealth government for the full scheme which starts from 1 July 2019.

In 2013, of course, the ACT was the first state or territory to sign on to the NDIS. The ACT was also the first state or territory to transition all eligible participants into the scheme in 2016-17.

The NDIS has been life changing for many people with disability and their families and carers, enabling them to get the support they need to lead full lives and participate in the community. There are currently more than 6,800 Canberrans receiving funding and support through their individual NDIS plans, including 862 people with psychosocial disability, 1,343 people with intellectual disability and 3,268 children and young people. More than 1,589 providers are now registered with the NDIS compared to 64 providers when the scheme commenced in 2014.

The ACT government recognises that the experience of the NDIS has not been uniformly positive, and that is why we continue to advocate for participants to see improvements in pathways, communication and a better understanding of the lived experience of disability within the agency. This work of stepping up and advocating for Canberrans will continue into the full scheme, just as our commitment to fully fund our share of NDIS will continue.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, what is the ACT government doing to ensure people with disability continue to get the services and supports they need?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Cheyne for the supplementary. The

ACT government knows that most people with disability are not in fact NDIS participants. Some are waiting for a decision on their NDIS eligibility. The NDIS was never intended to be the only answer for people with disability and, even for participants, was never intended to meet every need.

That is why the ACT government is continuing to invest, through the 2019-20 budget, to fund important services, including the integrated service response program established last year. This program ensures that people with high or complex needs are being supported with the services they need, including additional help in navigating mainstream services or the NDIS, particularly when they are in crisis and need that extra support.

Another service that will receive support with this funding in this year's budget is the children and young people's equipment loan program, CAYPELS, which provides specialist paediatric equipment and assistive technology for children with disability through their carers and health professionals.

Other services that will remain accessible through this investment include the child development service, which offers free assessment, referral, information and linkages for children zero to six years where there are concerns relating to their development; the ACT taxi subsidy scheme, a highly valued scheme which supports NDIS participants and other eligible Canberrans with their transport needs by subsidising regular taxi trips; and maintaining support for rehabilitation, aged and community care services that the commonwealth has now determined are no longer considered "in kind" supports under the NDIS.

The ACT government is committed to ensuring that Canberra is the most accessible and inclusive city we can be for all people with disability. That means continuing to fund mainstream and universal services that our community needs in addition to our commitment to fully fund our share of the NDIS.

MS ORR: Minister, what else is the ACT government doing to ensure that people with disability can participate fully in our community and society?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary. By fostering an inclusive and engaged community, people with disability are better able to participate fully in our community and enjoy their rights as citizens.

Work is underway on a disability justice strategy for the ACT. It is well established that people with disability often do not have access to the legal supports and services they need and that the legal system can be particularly difficult to navigate. I am looking forward to the release of the finalised disability justice strategy in coming months, along with the first action plan.

The next round of the disability inclusion grants will open later this month. These grants provide community groups, organisations and small businesses with the opportunity to apply for a grant of up to \$20,000 in order to become more inclusive and accessible for people with disability. The impact will be spread across people's lives in areas of employment, recreation, sporting pursuits and participation in

community groups. People with disability are encouraged to get involved by identifying groups, organisations and activities they would like to participate in and to let those organisations and places know how to apply for a disability inclusion grant. I encourage all members who have constituents with disability talking to them about a lack of access to make them aware of the disability inclusion grants program, an ACT Labor election commitment.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the hard work of the Disability Reference Group, which met just yesterday. The DRG, led by its passionate community co-chair, Dougie Herd, provides me and the ACT government with advice on government policies and insights into the issues faced by Canberrans with a disability. I was thrilled to appoint a number of new members to the DRG recently. Alarna Barratt, Michael Bleasdale, Jackson Sievers and Kerry Snell will make the DRG even stronger and further increase its capacity to shape and help deliver a more inclusive Canberra.

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

Supplementary answer to question without notice Municipal services—cemeteries

MR STEEL: In question time I said that the report associated with the investigation of the missing ashes from the crematorium at Norwood Park would be released tomorrow. It will in fact be released on Friday.

Paper

Madam Speaker presented the following paper:

Inspector of Correctional Services Act, pursuant to subsection 30(2)—Report of a Review of a Critical Incident by the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services—Assault of a detainee at the Alexander Maconochie Centre on 16 December 2018, dated 16 May 2019.

Employment—job security

Debate resumed.

MISS C BURCH (Kurrajong) (3.04): Again today we hear Ms Cody throwing around accusations about the federal government that are simply not true. Ms Cody's claims that the federal coalition will cut \$1.5 billion and thousands of jobs from the federal public service are factually incorrect. The \$1 billion in cuts that Ms Cody claims is simply the efficiency dividend not decreasing as quickly as originally estimated.

Ms Cody has also selectively ignored today that it was her federal Labor colleagues who wanted to cut \$2.1 billion in funding from the Australian public service had they won the election last month. Let us not forget that it was the last federal Labor government who imposed an additional 1.25 per cent efficiency dividend on top of the existing 2.5 per cent dividend on the public service. The last time the efficiency

dividend was higher than 2.5 per cent, under the federal Labor government, it prompted a public sector wide wage freeze, the very issue Ms Cody is pretending to be concerned about today.

I also note that it was a federal Labor government who commenced the process of decentralisation, with former Prime Minister Julia Gillard moving APS jobs out of Canberra to places like Geelong and the Northern Territory. It was the ALP who cut 14,500 jobs from Canberra last time they were in government. Andrew Leigh, another of Ms Cody's federal colleagues, has continued to express his support for decentralisation initiatives, while Liberal Senator Zed Seselja has continued to fight to keep them in town centres and to argue that, when decentralisation does occur, jobs should be moved from Sydney or Melbourne.

Ms Cody's claim that the federal Liberal Party has cut thousands of jobs is not true. In this year's federal budget there was a net increase of 1,271 ASL, in addition to the 912 in the previous budget. The APS is \$600 million better off under the re-elected Morrison government than it would have been under a Bill Shorten government.

What is also surprising is the claim by Ms Cody that the ACT Labor-Greens government has protected ACT public service jobs. As per this week's budget, there has been a distinct lack of growth in ACT public service employee expenses. There has only been a minimal net increase in actual expenses within the public service. This totally contradicts her claim that she has ensured that ACT public servants' workloads remain manageable, when the government has in fact not put in any more staff to help cope with increased workloads that come with the growing territory. I am sure our hardworking front-line public servants such as those in health and emergency services would disagree with Ms Cody's claims that their workloads are manageable.

Ms Cody has also called on the government to use public sector employment practices to set a high standard of employment in the ACT—ACT public sector employment practices as a high standard. With so many in our Health Directorate subject to workplace bullying and so many in Education subject to violence in their workplaces, it really is astounding to hear that this is the high standard Ms Cody would like to see across Canberra.

I share Ms Cody's passion for ensuring that we future-proof the ACT economy through upskilling and the diversification of our economy. Those on our side of the chamber have always maintained that a well-equipped workforce is what drives and incentivises small business and boosts wages. With the majority of Canberrans employed outside the public sector, small business should be the backbone of our economy here in the ACT.

The serious issue that Ms Cody should be concerning herself with is the cost of living here in Canberra. As my colleagues have already raised this morning, under this government we continue to see rates skyrocket. Housing affordability is putting significant strain on Canberrans. We are seeing thousands of Canberrans being priced out of the market and driven out of our city by this government—thousands of Canberrans who work here, who still consider themselves to be Canberrans despite

the fact that they can no longer afford to live in our city, people who want to live here but cannot afford to. But, no, Ms Cody refuses to stand up for those Canberrans. Instead Ms Cody and her Labor colleagues are, shamefully, again trying to blame their revenue gouging on the federal government.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Disability, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Employment and Workplace Safety, Minister for Government Services and Procurement, Minister for Urban Renewal) (3.09): I thank Ms Cody for bringing forward this motion and providing us the opportunity to discuss secure employment in the ACT.

As the Chief Minister has highlighted in talking about the budget, the ACT economy is among the strongest, if not the strongest, in Australia, with combined economic growth of 12 per cent over the last three years supporting the creation of 3,200 new businesses and more than 16,000 jobs. Miss C Burch has left the chamber. The ACT's \$40 billion economy has been boosted by a significant increase in services exports, particularly in the higher education and tourism sectors. This is, of course, the result of continued investment by the ACT government in economic development and diversification to protect the ACT economy and create more good jobs for Canberrans now and into the future.

Yesterday's budget outlined how the ACT government will continue to drive the diversification of Canberra's economy through investment in the attraction and facilitation of major projects, like the proposed new University of New South Wales campus, growing exports in products and services. This investment is important to grow our economy and protect us from the shock of federal public service cuts. However, we recognise that this town does remain one where the public service employs more than one in three people.

The ACT government is the second biggest employer in Canberra, employing more than 21,000 full-time equivalent positions across the most diverse workforce of any government in this country. This figure is projected to grow by three per cent, to more than 22,000 full-time equivalent positions in the next fiscal year. That is something Miss C Burch might want to take a look at. That is more teachers, planners, ambos and police, to name just a few.

As we in this place know too well, there is no greater duty than the duty of public service. While there are many differences between the work of those elected to public office and the work of those who are employed as public servants, often our reasons for getting involved are very similar. Whether employed by the commonwealth or the ACT government, public servants work to serve their communities locally, nationally and even internationally. Often they are highly educated, bright and sought after. While we continue to diversify our economy in the ACT, there is no doubt of the important role those employed in the public service play in our region.

Where the starkest differences lie between commonwealth and ACT government workers is in the actions of their employers. For those employed by the ACT government, we have negotiated with our employees and their representatives in

good faith over a number of years, resulting in fair pay increases and conditions that support a positive work-life balance. As a progressive ACT Labor government, treating workers with respect is a core principle of our movement. That principle carries through to the respect we afford ACT government workers. In the most recent round of bargaining we have made accessing leave easier, including for carers and those who may have experienced family violence. We have committed to pay superannuation on unpaid parental leave to ensure that a break from the workforce does not result in disadvantage in retirement. And we have started the work to address insecure employment in the ACT public service.

We recognise that to feel respected, to be paid well and to have good working conditions and, importantly, stability in employment is critical. That is why in the budget announced yesterday the ACT government committed \$470,000 in 2019-20 to continue funding the important work of improving job security and increasing permanent employment for ACT public service employees. The ACT government is leading by example in providing secure, well-paid jobs. Through the insecure work task force, we are reviewing the use of casual and temporary employment across the ACT government, with the aim of identifying insecure employment arrangements that can and should be transitioned to secure permanent jobs. In addition to this, the ACT government is undertaking a service-wide classification review to ensure that the classification of staff accurately reflects the increasing complexity of work undertaken by the ACT public service.

It is important to recognise that ACT public service employees are also part of our broader community and that they too benefit from the positive agenda for workers set out by our government. I commend the Deputy Chief Minister, Minister Berry, on her recent announcement in relation to the insourcing of ACT public school cleaners—a positive example of the difference that we can make to people's lives as an employer. This will deliver better job security and working conditions for our hardworking school cleaners. As one of the cleaners said of the announcement, "I always felt like I was part of the school. Now I'll officially be part of it. That means everything to me." Another example of this work is the efforts of the Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate to increase the ratio of permanent staff compared with contract staff over the next several years. This has started with the conversion of temporary and contract roles within the city presentation unit to permanent positions.

It is, despite Miss C Burch's rhetoric, markedly different for workers employed by the commonwealth. During a period of record low wages growth and a now historic cut to the official interest rate, the coalition government has had the opportunity over many years to use commonwealth public sector wage increases as a macro-economic lever to stimulate growth. Instead we have seen the commonwealth public service be subjected to the Liberal-National coalition's repressive workplace bargaining policy. This policy requires workers' participation in decision-making to be limited, pay rises to be capped at two per cent per annum with no provision for back pay, and strictly no enhancements of conditions, leaving some workers, in agencies where agreements could not be reached, without a pay rise for more than five years.

Mr Coe wants to talk about the cost of living. Maybe he should talk to his federal

Liberal colleagues about that. Couple this with the fact that in some agencies workers on contracts outnumber those in permanent employment, and there is little question of this conservative commonwealth government's agenda to undermine, privatise and outsource Australian workers, even their own workforce.

Madam Assistant Speaker Cody, this is a very important motion. Thank you very much for bringing it forward. It highlights the difference between the public sectors of the two governments in the ACT: the Liberal-National commonwealth government, which limits wages growth, limits workers' voices, undermines the work of a professional public service and, on the eve of the federal election, announced a further \$1.5 billion cut to the public service; and the ACT Labor government, which respects its workers with fair pay and conditions, prioritises secure work and sets the highest standards for employment in the ACT by working collaboratively with workers and their representatives. I would like to acknowledge the public sector unions, who work tirelessly to represent their members in all government sectors. Their work is critical in supporting their members across both the territory and commonwealth governments.

I thank Ms Cody again for bringing this matter to the Assembly. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (3.17): I rise in support of Ms Cody's motion and thank her for acting to protect Canberrans from the coalition federal government. The Australian public service is the backbone of our city and our nation. We all rely on the public service, whether it is in the delivery of key services such as Centrelink or Medicare or the development and implementation of policies that create a stronger and healthier Australia.

As a former public servant, I know just how brutal coalition governments are when it comes to cutting jobs. In 2013, the policy unit I was working in was disbanded overnight by the Abbott government. This left me in a situation where I did not know what was to come next. I had gone from working in a good, secure job where I was contributing to improving infrastructure for cities across Australia. I valued this job, but unfortunately the coalition government at the time did not. While I was able to find another position within the department, because of the conditions put in place by the federal coalition government, I was not able to be permanently put into that position. In the course of 18 months, I had to apply three times before staffing caps were lifted and my supervisors could confirm our working conditions.

At the time this was going on, the coalition government had put in place one of the toughest bargaining policies ever seen in the public service, which stripped many conditions from the rights in our EA, things that really should have been a no-brainer. The one that I still feel quite strongly about, even to this day, is changing the wording for mothers returning from work from saying that their position would be held for them to saying that it may be held for them. Women should have the right to come back to the job they left. It should not be a condition of them having a baby that they give up their position of work.

I was not the first person in my family affected by coalition governments and the impacts they have through slashing the public service. In the 1990s my dad was

working at the Department of Administrative Services when Howard cut the whole department. We were at my uncle's farm up in Parkes when it was announced on the news that the department would be cut. That is how my dad found out he had lost his job.

I remember quite vividly over that Christmas break—I believe it was the Christmas break—walking through the Canberra Centre with my dad and running into lots of people he had previously worked with and talking with them about their job prospects. With a small population such as Canberra, cutting a whole department had a huge impact. People were not finding work easily, because as well as cutting a department, they were not up-staffing in other areas. Suddenly what would have been a regular afternoon shopping trip at the mall turned into a series of commiserations and pep talks, with people trying to stay strong in the face of not having any employment, even though all people wanted to do, as a public servant, was contribute to the wellbeing of the country.

In the week leading up to the recent federal election, the Morrison government left us with a gift that Canberrans resoundingly rejected. We know that the proposed cut of \$1.5 billion and thousands of jobs from the public service will not deliver more productivity or efficiency. Instead, it will leave people unemployed and see their jobs outsourced to private companies, costing the taxpayer millions.

Unfortunately, this privatisation has already occurred. In their previous term, the coalition government capped the size of the Australian public service to around or below 2006-07 staffing levels. This means that, regardless of how much work needs to be done, agencies are forced to arbitrarily limit their staff. We know that this staffing cap is contributing to privatisation by labour hire, outsourcing and contracting. As this privatisation increases, services have been worsening.

At the Department of Human Services, 3,000 job cuts have led to serious issues with service delivery. More than 48 million calls went unanswered last year, pensioners have been waiting six months for their claims to be processed, and the robo-debt disaster is continuing to hurt Australians who rely on government support.

Despite this poor performance, the government has started to privatise Centrelink and Medicare. There are 2,750 outsourced call centre jobs and more than 1,000 labour hire employees across the country, including in Medicare. These are jobs that could and should be made secure by returning them to the public service. The Liberals and Nationals will continue with their privatisation of our public service because they have no interest in secure jobs for Canberrans or Australians.

A strong public service needs strong support from its government. A \$1.5 billion cut with thousands of job losses is unprecedented. I do not think any representative in this place can stand by or defend such a deplorable slash. Canberrans will be hurt by the coalition government's anti public service agenda. That is why the Barr Labor government will now have to step up to ensure that Canberrans are provided with the skills and opportunities for jobs within a diversified job sector.

Ms Cody's motion calls on the ACT government to prioritise the availability of secure employment with good conditions for Canberrans. I wholeheartedly support this call and the request for action that will protect working people in this city. I value the work of the public service. I understand the importance of governments investing in a strong public service and secure jobs right across the board. I will stand up for the public servants in our city and I will continue to work with my ACT Labor colleagues to do everything we can to mitigate the disastrous impacts that the Morrison coalition government will have on Canberra.

I would also like to take a moment to do a shout-out to my union, the CPSU, in which I was a workplace delegate and sectional counsellor.

Mr Hanson: No, that is not so.

MS ORR: Yes, it is true, Jeremy. They spent every day standing up for the rights of workers in the public service. Having been a delegate, it is very obvious that, despite the good intentions of people within workplaces, things do go wrong. You need to have representation then.

It is also very true that, with very harsh bargaining policies and the very harsh workplace conditions that have been in place since the coalition government has been in place, the CPSU and the work they do, the advocacy that they do, are vital in securing employment that is secure for workers within the public service; that has reasonable rights and conditions, including the right for women who are returning from maternity leave to return to the job they left; that those rights and conditions are put in place. I am very grateful every day that, as a member of my union, I and all the other members of the union work together to stand up for rights and conditions within the workplace.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.24): Madam Assistant Speaker Cody, I rise to speak to your motion today. I would like to speak on the ACT Greens' views on the importance of secure work and add our voice to the role that a progressive government can play in this area. We fundamentally believe that all people have the right to meaningful and secure paid employment. Like our Labor colleagues, we also believe that workers have the right to organise, collectively bargain and be represented, and that unions play an important role in advocacy for workers. We know that in a town like ours, with such a high proportion of local and commonwealth public servants, both the federal and ACT governments should have higher regard and set higher benchmarks for employment conditions.

We are more than just a public service town these days, and have been for many years. The backbone of the capital's foundation was to service the nation. This has become a part of our shared story. It is not too hard to acknowledge the links to the establishment and growth of our world-class education and training facilities that have produced many of the country's leading thinkers and administrators. As Ms Cody's motion recognises, this will continue to grow over time.

We should also recognise that we as governments do not just employ public servants directly. There is an entire service sector that has grown up around the institutions of government and beyond as we purchase goods and services from a broad range of small, medium and large providers, from family businesses to multinationals that have local operation arms.

I am pleased to be part of a government that has set a higher standard for our own employees and, through things like the secure local jobs code, has endeavoured to ensure that the employment expectations we have for members of our own family are applied to people right across the workforce. This is an important principle. It is right to seek to be a model employer, and the ACT government is making some progress in this space.

In the time that I have been in this place, with the urging of the Greens, we have extended our approach to ethical investment policy. For me, this is important. When we think about our purchasing decisions and the choices that we make, global supply chains can have quite a broad effect. Things like ethical investment policies can be a really important part of our desire for people to work in decent and respectable conditions, as much as possible.

The Greens think that the ACT public service should, and does, set an example of good industrial relations policies and practices that respect staff and offer conditions that attract and retain quality staff. For us, that includes offering a balance between paid work and personal time, with fair pay for overtime and unsociable hours and innovative and flexible working arrangements to be offered to employees.

It is important, though, when we talk about flexible working arrangements, that we do not seek to justify some equation of flexibility with insecure employment. We have seen that in the federal sphere in recent times. Sometimes the two are rather too conveniently interchanged; we need to make sure that flexibility does not equate to insecurity.

I think it is fair to say that both current Liberal and, dare I say it, previous Labor governments have made Canberra, our city, the scapegoat for poor budget outlooks and threatened the financial security of our friends and family in order to pursue efficiency drives that demonstrably cost the taxpayer more in terms of outrageous consultancy fees and outsourcing of business as usual operations, only to see failures of policy and a distinct lack of continuity in program implementation. I imagine there are case studies where it has ended up being more expensive in the long run.

It is our hope that in time federal politicians of all persuasions will see Canberra as more than just a fly-in fly-out temporary office and instead consider us a strong, vibrant and growing regional centre in our own right, where people deserve to be employed in a secure position. Until that day it is important that we continue to progress the ideas that we are talking about in this debate today and that we view employees as investments in our community's future, not just as chattels.

Of course, we want people employed in industries of high social and environmental value to be adequately remunerated. We also want employers to consider a variety of ways we can support workers. The Greens believe this could include better policies that allow for lifelong learning and further education and training. We must prepare our current industries to respond to the challenges and opportunities of the future. And, yes, we believe we should support, wherever we can, the diversification of the local economy.

I am very conscious that all of us are reading articles about the changing nature of the workforce, how some industries will become obsolete over time and there will be increased automation of some industries. We need to make sure that we provide clear opportunities for people to make a just transition as those things happen but also continue to invest in important institutions like our CIT. That is why we have committed so strongly to ensuring continued government funding of the CIT here in the territory. It is disappointing to see around the country that the VET sector is not getting the same level of support from governments, but it is critically important that we continue to provide those sorts of opportunities for people.

I cannot talk on some of these issues today without repeating the Greens' previous comments in similar recent debates about the decentralisation of some of our federal departments, which we unfortunately anticipate will continue, with the re-election of the government a couple weeks ago. This not only damages our economy but also undervalues the work that those agencies perform and the rationale for having a national capital.

Collocation of scientists, academics, professionals and policymakers is not an accident. It was designed that way to create efficiencies, to create cross-fertilisation, to ensure that Australia was a nation that excelled in many fields. We have been a leader in many ways, in many fields, across the years, I think, because of the opportunities that have been created by collocating national institutions, national agencies and key research bodies here in the ACT.

The very nature of Ms Cody's motion and the discussion of secure work result in a broad-ranging discussion. My remarks have reflected that a bit today. We are pleased to support this motion. We think these are important discussions to be having. We think to some extent they should be beyond politics. This is about treating people with decency and respect and also about getting the best outcomes for our community.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra) (3.32): I too rise today in support of Ms Cody's motion. With the exception of Miss Burch's hyperbolic and largely incorrect speech, I am pleased to join the chorus of voices standing up for the ACT in this place today. I do have to say I feel like a broken record. Here we are again, defending Australian public service jobs. Here we are again, defending Canberra workers. I have spoken many times before about my desire to staunchly stand up for our public servants as the coalition government continues to treat them like pawns on a chessboard. I have spoken many times before about my fierce opposition to deep spending cuts and short-sighted pork-barrelling. Blow after blow and, with the coalition government returned to power, the assault on Canberra continues.

Now the dust has settled on the federal election, ACT public servants face another federal term burdened by efficiency dividends. The coalition has pledged to cut \$1.5 billion from public service spending over the next four years, leaving the efficiency dividend at two per cent over the next two, an announcement made just a measly two days before the federal election because they were trying to hide it.

The Nationals will continue peddling their misguided decentralisation agenda. Let us not forget the coalition's plan to carve up the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, shifting 76 jobs, a quarter of that agency's staff, to regional towns right across New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. This decision beggars belief in light of the damning Murray-Darling Basin Royal Commission report, a report that highlighted grave concerns about negligence and maladministration within the authority. Surely the focus should be on addressing these problems rather than pork-barrelling across multiple locations with a problem child.

That is not all. Since I last spoke about decentralisation in this chamber, we have learned that the coalition will move another 24 public services jobs to Orange, in central western New South Wales, a region where the Shooters, Fishers, and Farmers Party continued to snatch votes from the Nationals at the New South Wales state election. We still do not know where these APS jobs are being taken from.

If that was not enough, Prime Minister Scott Morrison has appointed himself Minister for the Public Service. This is the same man who continually castigates the so-called Canberra bubble and fails to differentiate between Parliament House and the rest of this great city and its people. I am greatly concerned about the coalition's disdain for Canberra and the impact of its misguided and lazy policies.

Canberra's public servants are an easy target for a federal government that has chosen to plunder the national capital rather than come up with better policies and more innovative job creation. It is not good enough now and it has never been good enough. It is incumbent on all of us, as representatives of the ACT, to denounce attacks on our workers and our city more broadly.

I will give credit where it is due in that we are starting to see Senator Seselja speak up about the decentralisation agenda. But Miss Burch's claims earlier were, frankly, an embellishment. He was largely silent when Canberrans expected him to speak up. In many ways, it is too little, too late. The damage has started and it is hurting. It has been reported that Senator Seselja made a commitment last week to make the case to the new minister for decentralisation, God help us, about how the focus should be on decentralising jobs from cities like Sydney and Melbourne, rather than targeting Canberra. We look forward to the update on how these urgent discussions go. Instead of writing and speaking outrageous claims here today, I suggest that Miss Burch more wisely use her time to follow up with her colleague she wants to so vigorously defend.

The ACT government remains committed to protecting and, importantly, creating Canberra jobs. We practise what we preach. The recently announced ACT budget includes funding to recruit another 81 doctors, nurses and other health professionals

and administration staff at Calvary Hospital in my electorate of Ginninderra. The budget also commits funding to bolster ACT Policing's force with more than 60 new front-line, operational and support roles. Another 36 firefighters will be recruited as well.

We also have a range of health infrastructure projects in the pipeline. In Ginninderra, Calvary Hospital is undergoing major upgrades, including the expansion of the emergency department and two new operating theatres and staff to support these. As the Chief Minister said in yesterday's budget speech, Canberra's economic growth has been among the fastest in the country over the past four years. It has supported the creation of more than 3,200 new businesses and more than 16,000 jobs.

We are also focused on the better protection of existing workers: workers like school cleaners, who will be directly employed by the ACT government rather than through contractors, enabling better job security and conditions; workers like construction employees and security staff of companies who tender for ACT government work, thanks to the secure local jobs code, which ensures contracts are awarded only to businesses that meet the highest ethical and labour standards; and workers like our territory public servants.

The ACT government is committed to protecting ACT public sector jobs through appropriate resourcing, fair pay and the promotion of permanent employment. Over the past five years, the sector has grown by an average of two per cent each year. In 2019-20 it is set to expand to more than 22,600 full-time equivalent jobs, an increase of 726 FTE positions year on year.

We continue to diversify our economy by supporting entrepreneurialism and innovation. The \$7.6 million committed to the Canberra Innovation Network in this budget is just one example of this. We continue to grow our tourism industry and attract investment in the ACT. We continue to serve as a hub for renewable energy, attracting and creating jobs in this sector as we move closer to our target of being 100 per cent renewable by 2020. And we continue to advocate for the Australian public service in its home, fiercely and passionately.

I will continue to sound like a broken record until the situation changes. I will continue to stand up in this chamber and defend our federal public servants. I have said it before and I will say it again: they are not pawns; they are people. They are people who serve our country through hard work; people who bring a wealth of experience, knowledge, and connections to their respective departments and agencies; people who call Canberra home.

I will continue to stand up in this chamber and advocate for all Canberra workers. This government is passionate about protecting Canberra jobs. This government is passionate about creating Canberra jobs. And we are getting on with the job. It is good for our economy and it is good for all of us who live and work in the ACT. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS CODY (Murrumbidgee) (3.40), in reply: I would like to thank all my colleagues for their kind words today and their support for this motion. Mr Rattenbury raised a number of very important points in his speech about the support and the ongoing commitment to funding for the CIT here in Canberra. He is correct. Other TAFEs and other vocational education training facilities across the country struggle to make ends meet and struggle to continue to receive government funding. It is wonderful to see that our CIT is still going strong, after so many years here in Canberra, in the work that it does to support our community by training them and giving them opportunities.

I rise to address some of what Miss C Burch raised in her speech. I do have to empathise with Miss C Burch a little. She probably is not able to remember the 1996 cuts of Mr Howard's era and how Canberra suffered terribly under those cuts. I was entering the workforce. I know—Madam Assistant Speaker Orr, you spoke about this in your speech—it was under those cuts that Canberra suffered irreparable damage. Small businesses went broke. People lost their lives, their livelihood, their homes and their families. It was quite devastating to sit around and watch those terrible decisions, made by people that did not necessarily live here, affect us so deeply.

It is why, as Ms Cheyne has said today, we continuously come into this place and stand up and fight for our community and for secure jobs in our community. We stand up and ensure that we will not let those across the lake do this to us ever again. It is the Barr Labor government that continues to invest in our economy. It continues to invest in our small businesses by providing the opportunity to become export market ready—to give them advice, to promote them, to help them to be able to promote their wares, not only nationally but internationally.

I heard today the Chief Minister comment that 62 per cent of our workforce is now employed in the private sector. Sixty-two per cent is such a wonderful thing to see. It is such a wonderful thing that we, on this side of the chamber, continue to stand up to ensure that those jobs that 62 per cent of Canberrans work in are secure, well paid and well supported.

I again would like to thank everyone for their contributions today, particularly those on this side of the chamber. I remind Miss C Burch that, when she does try to give me a history lesson, she may need to go a little further back in history to look at exactly what Canberra has suffered under some of the cuts that her federal colleagues have made. I commend the motion to the Assembly. Thank you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Health—infrastructure

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (3.44): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of maintaining health infrastructure for the wellbeing of the whole Canberra community;

- (b) a Strategic Assets Management Plan for health infrastructure completed in February 2018 identified that critical assets are nearing the end of their useful life;
 - (c) a Territory-wide Master Plan is due to be developed;
 - (d) the Calvary Network Agreement recognises that there needs to be major capital investment in the buildings at Calvary Hospital;
 - (e) a report from September 2018 identified that approximately 61 percent of the buildings at Calvary are reaching the end of their useful life;
 - (f) planning needs to be done for a northside hospital project strategic business case;
 - (g) the funding envelope of the Building Health Services Project is approximately \$900 million; and
 - (h) an investment of at least \$109 million is needed to keep buildings at Calvary Public Hospital going; and
- (2) calls on the Minister for Health and Wellbeing to report to the Legislative Assembly, by the first sitting day in August 2019, on:
- (a) any strategic asset management plans underway or recently undertaken;
 - (b) planning for the renewal of ageing health infrastructure; and
 - (c) planning for the new northside hospital.

This is a very important motion because it seeks to create some clarity and some certainty about the development and maintenance of health infrastructure, which has been one of the most important issues facing the territory in its history. Health infrastructure has played an important part in the 114-year history of the ACT. The Royal Canberra Hospital opened in 1914, just one year after the ACT came into existence, on its site in Acton. It was one of the first buildings developed in the new national capital.

As Canberra grew, the federal Liberal government decided to build a new hospital on the south side, and work started on the Woden Valley Hospital 50 years ago. It opened in 1973. Calvary Hospital opened in 1979. The commonwealth government opened a range of community health facilities as Canberra grew, with many facilities dating from the 60s, 70s and 80s.

The fledgling ACT government faced a difficult decision about the Royal Canberra Hospital. It was approaching its use-by date and was increasingly difficult to maintain. The alliance government decided to close the Royal Canberra Hospital and upgrade Woden Valley Hospital. The south side hospital was renamed the Canberra Hospital and the infrastructure was upgraded. Calvary Public Hospital became the hospital serving the north of Canberra.

In 2008 the then health minister, Katy Gallagher, warned of a “health tsunami”, with the government planning to spend \$700 million over the next 10 years on capital works. Last week I went to hear former Chief Minister Jon Stanhope speak on the

health budget. Mr Stanhope stated in his opening remarks that when he left office in 2011 his government had provided money for necessary infrastructure to meet our growing health needs. However, subsequent Labor governments have decided to spend that money on other things.

In 2015 KPMG developed a case for a \$1.2 billion redevelopment of the Canberra Hospital. The business case warned that the ageing buildings were in desperate need of upgrades. Cabinet did not agree with the proposal put forward at the time, and nothing was done. As part of the 2016-17 budget the government received a report from an engineering firm, AECOM, which revealed that there were four extreme and 143 high risks in the Canberra Hospital infrastructure. Cabinet approved a program called UMAHA on the back of this AECOM report. It is interesting to note the lengths that the people of Canberra had to go through, via the work of the Canberra Liberals, to get that document out into the open.

Recently I received an answer to a question on notice which showed that the UMAHA program was behind schedule and well over budget. An example, an issue that has received some coverage, is the hospital switchboard upgrade for buildings 2 and 12, which were known to be at risk for some time and one of which was the cause of the fire in April 2017. The cost of the upgrade has grown from \$14 million to \$42 million, a tripling in the cost. It was forecast to be finished in September 2018 but is not finished and will not be finished until the end of this year.

On the eve of the 2016 election, Ms Fitzharris announced the SPIRE project, at a predicted cost of \$500 million. No feasibility study, planning or early design work was done before SPIRE was announced. I have said in the past that it looked like a project drawn on the back of a drink coaster. Last year the minister announced that SPIRE would have to be moved to another site because the drink coaster was not big enough to accommodate the helipad and the car park on the proposed site of SPIRE. Now the drink coaster has been turned into a two-volume novel, introducing significant changes to the scope of the project. This is because the original drink coaster proposal failed to consider the future, with SPIRE facilities reaching their capacity almost before the building would have been finished. This shows why planning is important and why there needs to be transparency, which is the thrust of my motion.

On 4 May 2019 the acting director-general of Health sent a brief to the minister. It noted:

... the Strategic Asset Management Plans (SAMP) recently completed in February 2018 for the Canberra Hospital and Community and Other Assets, identifies critical assets which are at the end of their useful life.

The acting director-general of Health then stated:

... the draft Calvary SAMP shows an aged infrastructure profile.

To add to this, the former Chief Minister, Ms Gallagher, and Dr John Merchant prepared a discussion paper in relation to Calvary Hospital infrastructure in July last year. Ms Gallagher and Dr Merchant noted:

... approximately 61 per cent of the buildings at Calvary Public Hospital have less than 25% of life remaining.

The SAMP also indicates that an indicative figure of \$109 million combined recurrent and capital investment over a five-year period and above current financial investment levels would be needed to keep these assets going. That is to keep them going, not to make them fit for the 21st century.

There are many important health infrastructure assets that need to be upgraded. For example, there is the intensive care unit at the Canberra Hospital. A senior planner at the Canberra Hospital warned last year that the ICU would be facing capacity problems in October 2019. That is four months from now. The government acknowledged this problem and announced that it had a medium-term plan to address the capacity issues. I do not know what medium term means when we have been warned that by October this year, in four months time, we will be at capacity.

The federal budget announced by the coalition in April provided funding for an upgrade of the ICU. This will provide, essentially, interim funding before the SPIRE project comes online. A planning document received by the opposition states that the current ICU does not meet current Australian standards. It also states that the coronary care unit and the cardiac catheter suites also do not meet Australian standards.

The director-general of Health proposed in May of last year developing a territory-wide master plan to develop an infrastructure investment strategy for the future, a very sound plan. I hope that it has been done and I hope that the minister can enlighten us about the status of that plan and the money that would be attached to it.

The building services health program investment level is predicted to be in the order of \$900 million. This level of funding is well short of what is required when you add together the issues that have been pointed out in relation to intensive care, the coronary care unit, the catheter suites and the ageing infrastructure at Calvary, just to name the ones that the Canberra Liberals are aware of.

SPIRE is forecast to cost \$500 million plus, but we do not know what that will be because that figure has not been announced in the budget. It is headed "Not for publication" in the budget papers. The government is not prepared to tell us exactly how much SPIRE will cost. However, with the expanded scope, along with the extended time line, and the minister's capacity for prevarication, delays and cost overruns, we can expect this project to cost more than the \$500 million set aside so far. The Barr Labor-Greens government should tell us what the new budget for the SPIRE project is so that the community can fully understand and keep this minister and this government accountable for its expenditure. The community cannot trust Minister Fitzharris to deliver this infrastructure without the openness that this motion is calling for.

The Canberra Liberals have seen several briefs sent to the minister for health referring to a "Bruce general hospital" or a "north side hospital" and various other terms.

Sometimes it is suggested that it might be built on the Calvary Hospital site or elsewhere. The former director-general of Health advised that the indicative cost for a project such as a new north side hospital would be approximately \$250 million. The current director-general of Health advised the minister in May 2018 that there would be a strategic business case delivered in the 2019-20 budget to address the issue of a new north side hospital. I am sure you have noticed, Madam Assistant Speaker, that that strategic business case is not in the budget. So we do not know how the minister is going to go about planning for a new north side hospital.

We also need to plan for replacing our community health facilities, as they are growing old. The ACT government and this health minister are doing very little in this space, even though they know that some community health facilities are reaching the end of their life. We have had the saga of the hydrotherapy pool, which I do not need to repeat here. But there were myriad misleading public statements and on-again, off-again intentions and wrong assumptions that led to a great deal of uncertainty in an important community which depends upon the hydrotherapy pool. It was only because of intense pressure brought about by the public that the government finally started to listen. But I think it has only learned the lesson in relation to the hydrotherapy pool; it has not learned the lesson in relation to the wider health infrastructure that we have in the ACT.

Is important that we have a coherent, rational, clear and transparent policy in relation to what to do with our infrastructure. The case of the electrical switchboard that tripled in cost is an important indicator of what we need to do. It is important that we have a rational process for dealing with infrastructure and that we actually know what is out there, what needs to be done, because if every refurbishment and bringing up to date that happens at the Canberra Hospital or at Calvary Hospital, for instance, blows out by three times and the project life extends for a year or more, then there is a problem we need to know about and we need to perhaps have a different strategy for dealing with.

The problem we have at the moment is that it is a piecemeal approach, a bandaid approach. We are seeing ACT Health and the ACT taxpayer bleeding money without a whole-of-government holistic approach to what health infrastructure should look like. It is time for the minister to develop a strategic master plan for health infrastructure. It is time for this minister to advise the Assembly and the Canberra community exactly how much it will cost to replace our ageing health infrastructure. The alternative is for this government to continue an ad hoc bandaid approach to infrastructure which is failing to meet the community's needs and risks needlessly wasting taxpayers' money and time.

In 1990 the ACT government had to close the Royal Canberra Hospital because the commonwealth government, in wanting to hand over to the ACT, had failed to upgrade its infrastructure and it had become too costly to maintain. We should be learning the lessons of the past and making sure we do not put our health infrastructure in a situation where it goes unrepaired until it becomes unreparable. The federal government should have turned its mind to the Royal Canberra Hospital in the years before the run-up to self-government, and perhaps the ACT's alliance government would have made a different decision about its closure.

The reality is that we run the risk of having to close community facilities because this government has failed to invest in their upgrade in a timely manner. The ACT has had a Labor government or a Labor-Greens government for nearly two decades, but our health infrastructure is crumbling and our health system is failing to deliver for the people of the ACT. In the meantime our hardworking doctors, nurses, health professionals and other staff must deliver services in outdated buildings with unreliable infrastructure, services and equipment. That means we have, as we discussed in question time today, quite poor outcomes and high costs because we are delivering in, in many cases, substandard circumstances.

I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS FITZHARRIS (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Medical and Health Research, Minister for Transport and Minister for Vocational Education and Skills) (3.59): I thank Mrs Dunne for bringing this motion to the Assembly today, noting the continued negativity in the week when we make record investments in health infrastructure in the ACT. In just over a few weeks time we will be celebrating the first anniversary of the University of Canberra Hospital. If Mrs Dunne wishes to correct the record, I do not believe she mentioned the University of Canberra Hospital, in her own electorate, that is fast approaching its first birthday.

Mrs Dunne: It is not a critical piece of infrastructure reaching the end of its useful life.

MS FITZHARRIS: The University of Canberra Hospital is not a critical piece of health infrastructure?

Mrs Dunne: Reaching the end of its useful life.

MS FITZHARRIS: Speaking of things reaching the end of their useful life, I will respond to Mrs Dunne's motion. Indeed, it gives me this opportunity to highlight our record investment. This budget invests almost \$1 billion over the next five years in public health infrastructure, and we are building new, state-of-the-art health facilities, expanding existing ones and refurbishing ageing infrastructure across our portfolio. We do this because Canberrans deserve access to a modern, innovative health system, and that is exactly what this government is delivering.

I have circulated an amendment to Mrs Dunne's motion and I will move that at the conclusion of my speech. This reflects the work that has been done over the term of this government and highlights some of the other investments over the past decade. The amendment also commits to continuing the work we have done with clinicians and stakeholders to build a better healthcare system that can meet the needs of our growing community and commits to providing an update to the Assembly on the government's territory-wide infrastructure planning. In this term of government alone, we have continued to invest in staff, health facilities management and the development of new healthcare facilities to meet the needs of our rapidly growing city.

The government is committed to delivering safe and effective care through an integrated and territory-wide health system, with the appropriate infrastructure to meet the future health needs of the ACT. What this means is a health system that keeps people as healthy and as well as they can be—a system that is easy to understand, meets the needs of the community and, where possible, prevents people coming to hospital. But if they need to visit our health facilities they can visit them closer to home or indeed in one of our acute public hospitals.

I am very proud to have overseen the delivery of a range of new health infrastructure projects in this term of government alone since 2016: the new University of Canberra Hospital, the region's first public rehabilitation hospital; a new walk-in centre at Gungahlin, with construction underway for a new walk-in centre in Weston Creek; the Dhulwa secure mental health unit, which was opened in 2016; the emergency department expansion at Canberra Hospital; the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm; upgrades to Calvary Hospital; contributions to new bulk-billing GP clinics in Tuggeranong and the Molonglo Valley; a significant program of upgrades at the Canberra Hospital, including the upgrade to the acute aged-care ward and the ongoing work to deliver an upgraded oncology ward; and, indeed, a very important grant to Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services for a significant expansion of that wonderful primary care facility servicing not only the needs of Canberra and the region's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population but many local residents as well. All in all, the government has provided already \$525 million in health infrastructure over the past three years.

Planning and design work is well underway for major developments at the Canberra Hospital. The government has made a commitment to a significant investment in the SPIRE centre at Canberra Hospital. Indeed, our original budget was \$500 million for this investment and in this week's budget papers—as Mrs Dunne noted, it is not for publication—the Chief Minister and I have been clear that with the improvements and expansion of the scope we are likely to spend more, but we do not want to condition the market. We will be fully transparent about the cost of the SPIRE development once that commercial process has taken its course, which is not uncommon government practice.

The SPIRE centre will transform the Canberra Hospital campus and greatly increase the health system's capacity to meet growing demand for acute, emergency and complex healthcare services. Following extensive clinical consultation, which continues, the government has endorsed an expanded scope for SPIRE. I was very pleased to announce in this budget our commitment to future-proofing Canberra's emergency and acute healthcare services.

The new SPIRE centre will include 114 ED treatment spaces, 39 more than are currently available; 60 intensive care unit beds, doubling the number currently available; and within the new ICU there will be four paediatric ICU beds, a family zone to provide support services for families, particularly those of unwell children. SPIRE will also deliver 22 new state-of-the-art operating theatres, nine more than are currently available and two more than our original commitment, including hybrid theatres, as well as interventional radiology that will support the most advanced medical technology and techniques in caring for Canberrans and people in the region.

As also announced last week, a significant investment by the ACT government will be complemented by a new ANU building, a significant and very welcome investment from the ANU, to boost teaching, training and a research presence on the Canberra Hospital campus. This investment by the ANU means Canberra and the SPIRE centre will be very attractive to the best and brightest students and clinicians, not only nationally but internationally, who want to do their medical training and research in a modern, state-of-the-art facility. It will greatly enhance our city's capacity to attract and retain high-calibre medical and clinical staff.

SPIRE's expanded scope has also created an opportunity for the ACT Health Directorate, together with Canberra Health Services and our education partners, the ANU and the University of Canberra, to revisit the Canberra Hospital master plan. With SPIRE as the catalyst for the revitalisation of the campus, the Canberra Hospital master plan will review site opportunities and constraints to provide a vision for what can be achieved on the campus to deliver high quality, efficient and accessible hospital services in facilities that will meet the sustainability and technology standards required of a contemporary, future-focused healthcare facility.

The second major development underway at Canberra Hospital is the expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children. Since it opened in 2012, thousands of babies have been born at the Centenary hospital. The planning and expansion work underway will increase existing services such as maternity and neonatology and create space for new services designed to meet the needs of young people. An important inclusion is the adolescent mental health unit. The new unit will include inpatient and day services and go a long way to continuing to supporting young Canberrans experiencing mental health issues.

Across the lake, we know that the population on Canberra's north side is growing. Investing in health infrastructure and services at Calvary Public Hospital is a key component of territory-wide health service planning. Last week the government announced an additional investment of \$40.5 million to improve services at Calvary Public Hospital. In total, this will provide funding for 81 new doctors, nurses, administrative and other health professionals at Calvary Hospital, including new staff for the expanded ED. The funding will also deliver two additional operating theatres, the first coming online next financial year, and the second in the following year. This is to ensure that Calvary Public Hospital can continue its excellent track record in delivering elective surgery and continue to deliver more of the load of elective surgery across the territory.

This is on top of additional money provided by the ACT government to Calvary last year for the refurbishment and expansion of the Calvary maternity ward and the expansion of the emergency department. Last year I joined with the chair of the Little Company of Mary and we announced that the ACT Health Directorate, Canberra Health Services and the Little Company of Mary are exploring expansion improvement opportunities for Calvary Hospital as part of territory-wide health infrastructure planning, and indeed a down payment on that work was provided in the 2017-18 budget.

Mrs Dunne's motion speaks about the maintenance of existing health infrastructure, and I am very pleased to speak about how the government is investing comprehensively in what is a very complex and extensive asset portfolio across the territory. Canberra Health Services is responsible for maintaining a property portfolio comprising over 60 buildings delivering health care in the ACT. It is not unique to this or any health service, or indeed many other organisations in the ACT, that there are a range of ages in this asset portfolio, with some of them ageing, and each year the ACT government invests at a base level approximately \$12 million in these buildings, their ongoing infrastructure and equipment needs.

The infrastructure portfolio at Canberra Health Services is managed through a comprehensive strategic asset management plan. CHS is also delivering approximately \$150 million of active projects at the Canberra Hospital campus, including projects such as the new cancer ward, due for completion in May next year; the over \$90 million UMAHA program which has been spoken about previously in this place, including this week; and the nearly \$25 million critical health assets program.

Comprehensive asset management plans are being developed for critical health service buildings. These plans provide a structure for Canberra Health Services to ensure that building assets are maintained and upgraded in compliance with applicable building codes and in a manner that addresses critical risks, ensures safety and minimises disruption to services. These programs ensure the effective monitoring, maintenance and management of Canberra's valuable health infrastructure assets and ensure that current and future infrastructure decisions are appropriately informed and prioritised without compromising clinical care.

All maintenance and upgrades are aligned to the territory-wide service planning work being undertaken by the ACT Health Directorate to ensure a coordinated approach to infrastructure planning and maintenance. All the components I have discussed here today comprise the health facilities that our patients, staff and the community interact with every day.

There is more we can do to continue investing in them, and that is exactly what the government is doing. I have always taken an approach of openness when it comes to information sharing and transparency and I am left wondering what additional transparency the opposition is referring to. We have estimates hearings; annual report hearings; opposition briefings; parliamentary proceedings; question time; a variety of constituent and MLA correspondence; over 250 questions on notice in the last financial year, often with significant parts health and wellbeing related; Auditor-General's reports; FOI responses; and committee inquiries.

I urge the opposition to have more faith in our staff who come to work each day not only in delivering healthcare services but maintaining and upgrading our extensive asset portfolio across the territory. Governments have a responsibility to commission work, make responsible decisions and deliver for the Canberra community. We commission reports and we get expert advice so that we can make decisions in the best interests of the community, not just to provide the opposition with another

negative headline. The government is acting on the reports that we have commissioned, and the budget is an excellent example of where the advice we receive has been translated into investment and ongoing expansion and upgrades of our health infrastructure.

The opposition know full well that we funded a scoping study for the expansion of hospital services on the north side. We are doing that in partnership with Calvary. I look forward, as I note in my amendment, to providing an update on territory-wide planning for health infrastructure later this year to keep the Assembly and the community informed on progress and, of course, taking questions in the upcoming estimates hearings.

In closing, Labor governments have a very proud and proven track record of delivering health infrastructure for our community needs. In the recent budget we have made significant commitments to deliver not only infrastructure that will meet our needs over the next few years but significant investments in health infrastructure which will future-proof the health needs of our city.

We are investing in our most acute, complex hospital, the Canberra Hospital and investing in our excellent general hospital, the Calvary Hospital. We have had the University of Canberra rehabilitation and subacute hospital open now for a year. We will continue to invest in community health facilities and we will continue to deliver walk-in centres, something that I know the opposition remains vehemently opposed to. But we are very proud of the record of investing in health. There is work to do and that is exactly what the government is getting on and delivering. I move the amendment circulated in my name:

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

“(1) notes:

- (a) the ACT Government is investing to futureproof the ACT public health system to meet the health and wellbeing needs of the growing population for our region;
- (b) health infrastructure decisions are informed by detailed planning and demand evaluation, as well as stakeholder engagement; and
- (c) ACT Health and Canberra Health Services are making strong progress on Territory-wide planning for building and maintaining health infrastructure;

(2) further notes:

- (a) that this parliamentary term has seen record investment in public health infrastructure in the ACT, including:
 - (i) at The Canberra Hospital:
 - (A) at least \$500 million of investment committed to the Surgical Procedures, Interventional Radiology and Emergency Centre at The Canberra Hospital, delivering 114 emergency department (ED) treatment spaces, 60 intensive care unit (ICU) beds and 22 new state-of-the-art operating theatres, including hybrid and interventional radiology suites;

- (B) the expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children to include additional maternity beds, more special care beds and neonatology services, and an adolescent mental health inpatient unit and day service; and
 - (C) renovation of acute aged care and oncology wards;
 - (ii) at Calvary Public Hospital Bruce, \$55 million investment to expand the ED, deliver additional treatment spaces, improve access and triage arrangements, enhance waiting areas, expand the Short Stay Unit, open more operating theatres, and introduce an expanded urology service;
 - (iii) for Clare Holland House, a \$6 million expansion, adding more inpatient beds, as well as improved administration and clinical support spaces;
 - (iv) in Community Health:
 - (A) the construction of two new Nurse-led Walk-in Centres in Gungahlin and Weston Creek, and planning for Canberra's fifth Walk-in Centre at Dickson; and
 - (B) \$12 million for a new purpose-built health facility for Winnunga Nimmityjah providing healthcare for Canberra's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community; and
 - (v) in Mental Health, the purpose-built, 25 bed Dhulwa Mental Health Unit;
 - (b) in the last decade, the ACT Government has funded and constructed a considerable amount of Public Health infrastructure, including:
 - (i) the Adult Mental Health Unit at The Canberra Hospital;
 - (ii) the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children;
 - (iii) The Canberra Hospital ED and ICU expansion;
 - (iv) the Canberra Region Cancer Centre at The Canberra Hospital;
 - (v) the University of Canberra Hospital; and
 - (vi) the Gungahlin and Tuggeranong Community Health Centres, and the Tuggeranong and Belconnen Walk-in Centres; and
 - (c) the substantial investment by the ACT Government in maintaining and enhancing existing health infrastructure through a targeted and prioritised program of works in the Upgrading and Maintaining Health Assets Program; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) continue to work closely with Calvary Public Hospital Bruce and the Little Company of Mary in scoping and planning for an expansion of Calvary Public Hospital;
 - (b) continue strong investment into the ACT's health infrastructure to meet the health care needs of the growing community now and in the future;
 - (c) continue to engage with clinicians, staff, patients and community stakeholders to inform health infrastructure design and decision-making; and

- (d) provide an update on Territory-wide planning for health infrastructure by the last sitting day in 2019.”.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, Minister for Corrections and Justice Health, Minister for Justice, Consumer Affairs and Road Safety and Minister for Mental Health) (4.13): Health infrastructure is a vitally important part of our health system and contributes to the overall health and wellbeing of the Canberra community. Without state-of-the-art facilities, we cannot deliver the kind of care that the Canberra community needs and expects. Equally, as our city grows, we need to plan and invest for the inevitable growth in demand for health services, as well as maintaining our existing assets. That is the work that is underway at the moment and that the government has been delivering on over recent years.

In addition to significant investments in both the Canberra Hospital and Calvary Public Hospital, last year the ACT government opened the new University of Canberra Hospital, and works are underway to expand the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children.

We also have infrastructure needs in primary and community settings. The government has invested, and continues to invest, in building nurse-led walk-in centres across the city, a key commitment under the parliamentary agreement. At the weekend I was very pleased to see the announcement of the fifth walk-in centre here in the ACT, at Dickson, a service for the inner north conveniently located right in the heart of the Dickson group centre, conveniently within walking and cycling distance for many people in the region and close to public transport. I think it will be a well-appreciated service when it opens. I look forward to the one in Weston Creek opening later this year as well.

Having said all of that, there is, of course, more work to do. We can see in the budget an ongoing commitment to invest in health infrastructure through SPIRE, UMAHA and the expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, including the establishment of an adolescent mental health inpatient unit and day program, which I will speak about more in a moment.

As Minister for Mental Health, I know the importance of continuing to invest in infrastructure to support our growing mental health service system. In last year’s budget we provided almost \$23 million to build new supported accommodation homes for Canberrans experiencing mental illness who require long-term support. I was pleased to attend the launch of the first of those houses earlier this year.

This initiative also provided funding for a new step-up, step-down facility on the south side and refurbishment works at the extended care unit at Brian Hennessy House. The opening of the University of Canberra Hospital provided a new mental health rehabilitation unit with state-of-the-art facilities, as well as an expanded mental health day program based at the same facility.

As a matter of anecdote, I can say I have been pleased to get very positive feedback on these facilities, both from those who needed the services of the unit, the inpatients, and also from staff, who really welcome the new working spaces, and carers, who appreciate their loved ones being in a world-class facility like that.

Mental health is a significant component of the Centenary hospital expansion project. The project will deliver additional maternity beds, more special care beds and neonatology services, a specialised gynaecological procedures room, better integrated maternity services, improved paediatric services, and specifically an adolescent mental health inpatient unit and day service.

Planning and early design work for the adolescent mental health unit is underway and the unit is expected to be completed during the 2021-22 financial year. The specialised adolescent mental health service will be a new addition to our growing mental health system, in recognition of the growing need for these services in the Canberra community. Until now, some people have needed to be sent interstate for these facilities, but soon we will be in a position to provide these services here in the ACT, keeping young people close to home and helping them to stay connected with family and community.

I am pleased with the work that has been done in preparing this new facility in terms of the engagement with clinicians and staff on design features. It would be fair to say that there have been a few iterations of the design as we have worked through this with staff. I am very pleased with that process in the sense that the community can have confidence that the design has been done in a way where the staff who work there feel that we are producing the optimal sort of facility for what is needed for our cohort of patients.

Another important investment was announced in yesterday's budget, with capital and recurrent funding provided to establish a dedicated electroconvulsive therapy service at the adult mental health unit. Having a dedicated ECT facility at the AMHU will significantly improve access to this evidence-based clinical service for patients, leading to reduced length of stay for inpatients and fewer relapses for people requiring maintenance therapy in the community.

Many of our existing mental health facilities are newer than other parts of our health infrastructure, with AMHU opening in 2012 and Dhulwa opening in 2016. Last year we had an independent external review of our mental health facilities undertaken, and the reviewers noted the high quality of the infrastructure. In their final report, the reviewers said that the ACT's mental health inpatient facilities "were generally of an excellent standard, with high levels of consumer and staff amenity" and that "the facilities were clean and well maintained".

Another interesting aspect of infrastructure planning that we encountered through last year's accreditation process was the evolving nature of standards around mental health infrastructure, particularly ligature minimisation. Despite the adult mental health unit having only opened in 2012 and having been built to the latest ligature safe standards at that time, by 2018 the standard for ligature minimisation in inpatient mental health facilities had changed to reflect the availability of new technology.

Since the accreditation, mental health staff have worked to upgrade the facility to align with these new standards as quickly as possible. We have engaged consumer, carer and staff groups in these conversations to determine how these works can be undertaken in a busy and fully operational environment in a way that causes the least amount of disruption but, equally, is most convenient for those who are currently in the facility. The final phase of works is getting underway shortly and I anticipate that these works will be completed by the end of August.

While our mental health facilities are relatively new and in good working condition, I acknowledge that other parts of our health system are facing some infrastructure pressures. In particular, some of our older facilities at Calvary Hospital and some parts of the Canberra Hospital will need upgrades or replacements in the near future. That is the nature of health systems. There will always be a program of maintenance and infrastructure works underway or in the pipeline.

This is an important and complicated process and one that requires detailed planning and demand assessments to ensure that our health system can continue to meet the needs of our community. I understand that the necessary planning and assessment processes are in place and that the Minister for Health and Wellbeing is working with the directorate to plan for our future health infrastructure requirements.

That is why we will be supporting Minister Fitzharris's amendment to the motion today. I look forward to an update on the territory-wide planning process for health infrastructure later this year, including an update on the territory-wide master plan for health infrastructure. In the amendment that Minister Fitzharris has circulated there is a detailed account of a range of infrastructure programs that are underway or being planned that have been funded. I am hopeful that any questions about plans for the renewal of ageing health infrastructure and planning for expanding north-side hospital services that have not been covered in today's debate or in the updated amended motion will be answered through the update of the master plan and the broader master planning process.

As our city grows, the demand for health services is increasing. Some of the old facilities in our health system will require upgrades to cope with increasing demand. We need to take a systemic, territory-wide approach to this process to get the best outcomes, to make the best use of our investment. That process is already underway through the UMAHA program, the territory-wide health services strategy and the planning for SPIRE and the Centenary hospital.

There is more work to do. We will continue to invest in infrastructure, both in mental health and in the broader health system, to prepare our health system for the future. This year's budget clearly demonstrates that commitment and will continue that focus in future years. We will be supporting the amendment.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (4.22): I would like to commend my colleague Mrs Dunne for bringing this important motion forward today. Health and health infrastructure are key items that people raise with me when I am out talking to people in my electorate—indeed, across Canberra. The cost of living, health, education and,

at the moment, buses are the main things that are raised with us as local members of the Assembly.

Canberrans, like anyone anywhere else, deserve state-of-the-art health facilities. We all agree on that. That is why it is important to have this motion here today about the importance of maintaining health infrastructure for the wellbeing of the whole Canberra community. Paragraph 1(b) of the motion notes:

... a Strategic Assets Management Plan for health infrastructure completed in February 2018 identified that critical assets are nearing the end of their useful life

...

In the time I have been here, we have seen things like the switchboard fire. We have already spoken about that this week. The project for the replacement of the switchboard is now tens of millions of dollars over the initial budget. We have spoken in this place this week about our expensive hospitals and our long emergency department waiting times. We have spoken about the allegation that mothers in the ACT are sent home earlier than they are in any other jurisdiction. These are vital issues that we bring forward, amplify and air in the public arena.

That is why, in the middle of this discussion on one of the key items for people of the ACT, as I was upstairs watching on the TV, I was surprised—in fact, I was shocked—to hear a senior member of the government, Ms Fitzharris, the minister for health, refer to my colleague Mrs Dunne as being, to the best of my recollection, at the end of her useful life. Ms Fitzharris said something like “speaking of things being at the end of their useful life” when Mrs Dunne interjected. What an unbecoming thing to say. What an unbecoming thing to say about the longest serving member of the Legislative Assembly. It is ageist, it is elitist, it is arrogant, it is dismissive and it is completely reflective of an ongoing narrative of this government about the value of people who may be older than some of those opposite and their contribution to our public life.

In a recent debate about seniors, I said to Mrs Dunne something like “not to mention how old she or I might be”. This government—I have already said this today—want to be young and hip. Mrs Dunne and I are of a similar age and experience; we have more respect for people who have spent their lifetime contributing to our society, our community and our parliament than those opposite do.

I think Mr Rattenbury thought it was very amusing as well. Mr Rattenbury likes to project himself as holier than thou, as if he would never interject, as if he has an absolutely clear conscience that he never interjects. But he is quite thin-skinned when people call out things about him.

Members interjecting—

MS LAWDER: What we are seeing here—and it is once again demonstrated by those opposite, who cannot seem to control themselves in this forum—is an elitist attitude, an ageist attitude, an attitude of lack of respect for what is one of the most pressing issues for the Canberra community: our health infrastructure.

I do not think there is anyone in Canberra who does not know someone who has used our health facilities. I am sure it is impossible. Family members, friends, neighbours, us—we go to community health centres; we go to the nurse walk-in centre; we may have been to the hospital, for ourselves, for the birth of a child, for our children or for our parents. We have all been users of this health infrastructure. And we are all entitled to ask questions about it without casting aspersions upon someone and suggesting that they are nearing the end of their useful life. It is completely inappropriate, however amusing those opposite might find it.

In the olden days, when I was a bit younger, we used to refer to “women of a certain age”, which is also a terrible term. This is exactly the implication that Ms Fitzharris made today when she talked about Mrs Dunne as being someone potentially reaching the end of their useful life. It is absolutely appalling and it is distasteful. It is just not becoming for someone who would like to see themselves as a senior member of the government.

This issue of health infrastructure should be top of mind. We all know that critical assets are reaching the end of their useful life. It is not a joking matter, however those opposite might strive to frame it. It is a serious matter. It has been identified in review after review. To speak about the longest serving member of this Assembly in such disparaging terms is entirely inappropriate. I call upon Ms Fitzharris to withdraw her comments and I commend Mrs Dunne’s motion to the Assembly.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (4.29): I am not surprised that we are in this situation today. The minister for health has form on this, and she fulfilled the form in her usual style, with the usual grace that she does, by circulating an amendment after I got to my feet to move a motion. There was one occasion recently, in relation to the hydrotherapy pool, when the minister had the courtesy to circulate her amendment before the debate started. But that was the exception to the rule. And, with her usual grace, she waited until I was on my feet and then circulated close to two pages of an amendment.

This actually casts a true picture of the character of the minister. She cannot engage. She does not take an opportunity to engage. She never took up the opportunity to be collaborative in this space. She spends her time criticising the Liberal Party. Yes, she can smirk all she likes, but I put it on the record again that when I became the shadow minister for health and I eventually got a ministerial briefing, some months after I asked for it, I sat in the minister’s office and I said to her in the following terms: “I’ve been doing this job long enough that I don’t need to take everything out into the media to get something done. I would like to work in this space collaboratively because I understand how difficult it is. And if there is ever an occasion when you feel the need to pick up the phone or come to my office and say we have got a problem I will deal with this in a collaborative way.” She has never once taken me up on that offer.

There have been occasions, many occasions, when I have knocked on the minister’s door and said, “This has come across my desk. You might like to know about this.” On a regular basis I draw to the attention of the minister things that constituents tell

me, sometimes anonymously, that are alarming to the minister. Occasionally she takes it up. Occasionally she will respond. But never once in her career as the fully fledged minister for health in this place has she picked up the phone or walked to my office and said, “Mrs Dunne, we’ve got a problem. How can we work this out together?” She could have done it on 5 April 2017, when there was a fire, but she did not.

The problem is that when the minister gets into trouble because she has been badly briefed she gets all defensive: “Mrs Dunne is the worst in the world. Mrs Dunne doesn’t respect health workers. Mrs Dunne et cetera et cetera.” We know the litany of things. We heard it here today.

This motion today is about our ageing infrastructure. I did not talk about the University of Canberra rehabilitation hospital because it is not ageing infrastructure. We will pass over the snide, ageist comment that the minister made in that part of her presentation. I did not ask Ms Lawder to come down and make those comments. I was prepared to let the minister’s comments go. I thought it was interesting, when it was brought to the attention of the government and the crossbench how inappropriate that was, to see that they did not even look a little embarrassed. No-one said, “I am really sorry, Madam Assistant Speaker, if I said something that was misconstrued.” They had the opportunity. She did not do it. This is the character of the minister for health.

The minister for health, as is her wont, has gone immediately to the distraction: “I am pivoting away from the issue of ageing infrastructure to talk about the new things that we have built.” Yes, we have built new things. But this motion is not about the new things that we have built. It is about the things which are old and crumbling.

When health officials and staff at the hospital say, “You can’t safely plug in a hair dryer in some places without the fuses going,” there is a problem. It might be put in a hyperbolic way but it is a problem. The minister took this motion and withdrew everything and pivoted to saying, “Look at the new things we will be building in the future,” without addressing the things that she has been briefed on. I have seen the briefings. She signed off on the briefings. She knows. She knows what I know.

Obviously I know a lot more because the things that I know as the shadow minister are from the things that someone has told me—“You should look at this; you should look at that; you should ask a question about this”—from the FOI requests that we put in in relation to the infrastructure and that come back with blacked out pages and the like, from reading between the lines, from the tip-offs. How dare we ask questions! That is the whole tone of this minister. This minister is saying, “I am constantly asked questions. How dare the opposition ask me questions!” That is her tone.

We dare to ask questions because she will not tell the people of the ACT unless we pressure her over and over again. It was the case with UMAHA. It was the case with the AECOM document that underpinned UMAHA. We asked for the document. We asked nicely for the document. We invoked the standing orders to obtain the document. We had to go and fight for the document through the special adviser process, and we obtained the document.

The minister could have been up-front and provided that document. It would have saved health officials a whole lot of effort. It would have saved the Assembly a whole lot of money. The world did not come to an end because the people of the ACT got to see the AECOM document about the high risks at the Canberra Hospital and elsewhere. The world has not come to an end. However, we can ask questions about it.

The other question that needs to be answered is: if there was \$19 million set aside for UMAHA and \$42 million has been consumed by two switchboards, what has given? What else has not been done?" There are a whole lot of things that have been taken off the list and there are other things that have been put on the list.

There are issues relating to plumbing in the delivery suites in the brand new women's and children's hospital. And the only reason that we know about that is that somebody told the opposition. Somebody came and told us, "You need to look at what is happening with all the plumbing work that is being done." But consistently, one after the other, all the delivery suites in a new hospital were taken offline because of water ingress and mould. It was a health hazard. This minister did not tell anyone about it until she was forced to. That is her track record. That is her form. That is the way she rolls.

This minister has had plenty of opportunities to play nice. She does not know how to. The Canberra Liberals will stand up for the people of the ACT and ensure that, as much as possible, we will expose where things have gone wrong. Something went wrong with those switchboards if it suddenly moved from a \$14 million project to a \$42 million project. The fact is that the minister had to say that the scope of the work evolved. That is some evolution.

What we have got here today is an unacceptable response. The people of the ACT deserve to know what is going on in their hospitals, how safe their hospital buildings are, where the risks are, and they deserve to know that the people for whom they are paying a princely sum to have on the government benches are looking after those things and are working to make them safe, to bring them up to date, to make them fit for purpose in the 21st century.

Mr Rattenbury is right. We need all those things he talked about. We need fit-for-purpose buildings. And many of the buildings that Canberra Health staff are working in are not fit for purpose. This minister today is cocking a snoot and basically saying, "I don't particularly care, and I'm not going to tell you."

MS FITZHARRIS (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Medical and Health Research, Minister for Transport and Minister for Vocational Education and Skills) (3.59), by leave: I was looking to the end of the debate to reject Ms Lawder's assertions about my earlier comments. They have been misunderstood by those opposite. If there was any offence taken then I apologise for that. But they were misunderstood by them, with their very thin skin in this place.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 12		Noes 9	
Mr Barr	Ms Le Couteur	Miss C Burch	Mr Milligan
Ms Berry	Ms Orr	Mr Coe	Mr Parton
Ms J Burch	Mr Pettersson	Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall
Ms Cheyne	Mr Rattenbury	Mrs Jones	
Ms Fitzharris	Mr Steel	Mrs Kikkert	
Mr Gentleman	Ms Stephen-Smith	Ms Lawder	

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Lawder: Madam Assistant Speaker, earlier I asked the minister for health to withdraw her comment alleging that my colleague Mrs Dunne was reaching the end of her useful life. The minister has come up with—at the risk of showing my age—the Clayton’s apology, the apology you make when you are not making an apology. She said that she was sorry if someone took offence. I once again call on the minister to withdraw, and I seek your ruling.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Cody): Ms Lawder, are you making a personal explanation?

Ms Lawder: I am seeking your ruling.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms Lawder, for your point of order. I believe the minister has already responded to that point of order. We will return—

Mr Wall: Sorry, Madam Assistant Speaker, the standing orders require that when a withdrawal is made it has to be unconditional. Certainly the minister’s phrasing of her notional withdrawal was not unconditional.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I believe the minister has responded to the point of order but if she would like to, for clarity, withdraw the comment. Minister Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Medical and Health Research, Minister for Transport and Minister for Vocational Education and Skills) (4.45): To clarify, I believe what I said was, “My comments were misinterpreted. I apologise if offence was taken.” If necessary, I withdraw the comments that were misinterpreted by the opposition.

Recycling—solar panels

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (4.46): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) rooftop solar for homes and businesses is growing at a faster rate in the ACT than anywhere else in Australia, with the 104.4 percent year-on-year growth rate easily the biggest in Australia;
- (b) data collected by Green Energy Trading shows residential installations accounted for 18.4 megawatts of capacity, up from 9 megawatts in 2017; and
- (c) there are no current plans for organised disposal, and the safe removal and recycling of solar panels and batteries as they come to end-of-life; and

(2) calls for the ACT Government to:

- (a) undertake studies into how solar panels and batteries are disposed of in countries where solar is a major source of renewable energy;
- (b) develop a Territory-wide plan for the safe disposal of both panels and batteries that does not involve additional costs on households and businesses or add to the increasing landfill problem in the ACT; and
- (c) report to the Assembly by the last sitting week of November 2019 on what safe disposal options will be made available and when such arrangements will be in place.

I rise today to raise this very important issue about recycling of solar panels. Some of you may recall that this was the recent subject of a news story that there is no particular warranty for solar panels and no particularly good way of disposing of them.

The ACT has embraced solar technology with great gusto, as a combination of a commitment to 100 per cent renewable energy by 2020 and a range of incentives offered by the government and energy companies which have combined to ensure that rooftop solar for homes and businesses is growing at a faster rate in the ACT than anywhere else in Australia.

Data collected by Green Energy Trading shows that the territory added 22.8 megawatts of photovoltaic capacity in 2018, with residential installations accounting for 18.4 megawatts and commercial installations more than doubling on previous years. In 2018, 3,333 solar panel systems were registered for the small-scale technology certificates rebate, a jump from 1,666 in 2017. The \$25 million next generation energy storage program is subsidising the rollout of about 36 megawatts of smart battery storage in up to 5,000 homes, and over 1,000 systems have been supported so far.

The global battery storage market is expected to be worth more than \$400 billion by 2030. The government has suggested that the ACT could be the place for national and international businesses wanting to get a place in this emerging industry. It is an impressive story, notwithstanding that it has one small “pink batt moment”, with a registered battery storage provider already placed into voluntary administration.

As Canberra continues to take up solar panel and battery storage, the next issue that will face us here in the ACT is safe disposal of failing panels and dying batteries. This is a serious issue. The media report I referred to earlier called the thousands of ageing rooftop solar panels “a toxic time-bomb” unless Australia acts swiftly to keep them out of landfill.

In April 2018 environment ministers from all jurisdictions apparently agreed to fast-track the development of a new stewardship program for photovoltaic solar panels and associated batteries. Stewardship programs make producers and retailers take responsibility for a product across its life cycle.

Australia already has a number of industry stewardship programs. For example, the ACT houses the head office of Agsafe, which manages DrumMUSTER and ChemClear, agriculture industry funded programs for farmers to dispose of their empty chemical drums. The cost of the scheme is embedded in the retail price of the product, so the user, in effect, is paying for the service.

Since environment ministers met last year and agreed to fast-track such a system, the ACT time bomb has been lit, with Canberrans embracing solar technology at an ever faster rate. The first panels installed are getting close to—I hesitate to use the term, Madam Deputy Speaker—their use-by date.

The life of a solar panel appears to vary depending on what advertising hype you care to believe, but it is agreed that as they get closer to their use-by date, be that 15, 20 or 30 years, they start to lose their strength and finally stop working entirely. The Total Environment Centre’s Jeff Angel, who was a former federal government adviser on stewardship programs, has been quoted as saying that action was long overdue and the delay reveals a fundamental weakness in Australia’s waste policies. He said:

We’ve had a solar panel industry for years which is an important environmental initiative, and it should have been incumbent on government to act in concert with the growth of the industry so we have an environmentally responsible end-of-life strategy.

Solar panels are just the latest product that does not have a sensible sustainable disposal program. Paint, floor coverings and commercial furniture all end up on tips and in transfer stations across Australia. The Australian Council of Recycling chief executive has attributed delays in product stewardship to both bureaucratic malaise and unfounded concern about cost.

The Australian television and computer industry faced a similar slow start, but since 2011 a national TV and computer recycling scheme has required manufacturers and importers to participate in industry-funded collection and recycling. Victoria will ban electronic waste in landfill from July this year, including all parts of a photovoltaic system, mirroring schemes already operating in Europe. Victoria is also leading a project examining end-of-life management options for photovoltaic systems which might be able to be adopted nationally.

Not only is it important to have a sensible panel disposal process to reduce waste and reduce pressure on landfill; if done well, it is also an economic opportunity. A report by the International Energy Agency in 2016 found that recoverable materials from photovoltaic panel waste had a potential value of nearly \$US15 billion by 2050.

According to the work done by companies such as GreenMatch, which operates in the renewable energy and other environmentally sustainable industries space, a supplier of end-of-life recycling could help finance future growth of the solar power industry, with 96 per cent of the materials able to be re-used for producing new solar panels. This not only reduces waste to landfill but also can create employment. I would like to think that the ACT government has already started to look at such schemes as part of emerging industries contemplated in the next generation energy storage narrative.

The reality is that we are building a potential mountain of waste, even here in the ACT, with no established stewardship or recycling process. Admittedly, with the life cycle of panels being anywhere from 20 to 30 years, we still have time to get something established, but this government does not have a strong track record of timely infrastructure delivery. We only have to see the overcrowded schools, the hospital waiting lists, failing hospital switchboards, the slow reaction to building new roads and the snail-like processes in planning to know that this government is failing to plan for the future.

Overseas evidence suggests that if recycling processes were not put in place, there would be 60 million tonnes of photovoltaic panels waste lying in landfills by 2050. By 2017 Europe had already created 43,500 tonnes of PV waste. Since all PV cells contain a certain amount of toxic substances, that would reduce solar panels to a very non-sustainable energy source.

There is time for the ACT to get organised and seek out opportunities for a PV recycling industry. Therefore, my motion today calls on the government to undertake studies into how solar panels and batteries are disposed of in countries where solar is a major source of renewable energy, to develop a territory-wide plan for the safe disposal of both panels and batteries that does not involve additional costs on households and businesses or add to the increasing landfill problem in the ACT, and to report back to the Assembly by the last sitting week of November on what safe disposal options will be made available and when such arrangements will be in place.

I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for City Services, Minister for Community Services and Facilities, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Roads) (4.55): I thank Ms Lawder for bringing forward this motion today. I am very delighted to see a member of the Canberra Liberals who is interested in recycling. I mean the good type of recycling, about waste recovery, not the recycling that the Canberra Liberals are fond of when they announce Labor policies as their own.

Not all of Ms Lawder's colleagues are as passionate about the environment and waste reduction as she appears to be today. We know that Mr Wall has his doubts about the

container deposit scheme. He said that the case for the CDS was unfounded—a scheme that has collected over 23 million containers in less than a year. We know that Mr Coe thinks our nation-leading plan to phase out unnecessary, problematic single-use plastics in the ACT is overreach. Mr Coe thinks we should wait and see when it comes to banning plastics or phasing out problematic plastics. He may not be aware that Australia is in the midst of a national waste crisis and that our government, along with other jurisdictions such as his Liberal counterparts in South Australia, is taking action now.

Perhaps most egregiously, Ms Lee, as the shadow minister for the environment, cast doubts on human involvement in climate change. Despite this, Ms Lawder has taken the brave step of differentiating herself from her Liberal colleagues by moving a suspiciously pro-environment and pro-recycling motion here today.

With this in mind I am very pleased to update the Assembly on what the ACT government is doing to manage the safe disposal, recycling and recovery of end-of-life solar panels and batteries in the ACT. I would like to highlight that the ACT government is continually exploring ways to reduce, re-use and recycle all types of waste in the ACT, not just waste arising from solar panels and batteries. Our waste management strategy is clearly focused on less waste generation and full resource recovery.

Ms Lawder's motion calls on the ACT government to find ways to enable the recycling of PV panels in our city. I think this lacks the contextual information it requires; hence the amendment which has been circulated in my name. This is not just an ACT issue; this is a national issue. I am pleased to provide an update today on efforts to develop a national stewardship approach and improve recovery and recycling arrangements for photovoltaic solar systems, otherwise known as PVs.

PV systems consist of modules, inverters, batteries, installation and control components that use energy from the sun to generate electricity on our rooftops and solar farms. These systems are being increasingly purchased as an alternative to traditional means of energy creation.

According to the latest national survey report of PV applications, in Australia 2017 was a record year for PV installations. In fact, I installed PV on my roof in that year as well. This growing popularity is attributed to increases in electricity prices, the reduced price of PV systems and associated subsidies, a swift ramp-up of renewable energy and increasing awareness amongst the community and businesses of the potential benefits of these systems. This research also tells us that PV system components have an estimated average life span of between seven and 35 years. An increase in solar installations over the last decade means that PV systems will enter Australia's waste stream in significant volumes in coming years.

The life-cycle impacts of PV systems include the end-of-life management of these materials; that is, as PV equipment reaches the end of its useful life span, the level of recovery, recycling, re-use and safe disposal is an important part of PV's environmental performance.

Current estimates state that across Australia last year approximately 6,000 tonnes of PV panels required disposal, with an expected increase of approximately 100,000 tonnes by 2035. This has significant implications for how we manage the disposal, recovery and recycling of these systems now and into the future.

Although there is a growing expectation from consumers and the general community that PV panels are re-used and recycled, the current arrangements for end-of-life management are ad hoc. This means there is a lack of coordinated programs to manage the disposal of these systems.

That is not to say that these systems cannot be recycled or recovered. In fact, PV technologies are equally suitable for recycling and treatment. Panels are commonly made with glass, aluminium, copper, silver and certain semiconductors that can be recovered for the production of new materials. However, these panels also include plastic components that cannot be recycled. Overseas these plastics are treated in waste-to-energy plants or disposed of in landfill. Currently, average recycling rates for silicon-based PV systems are 70 per cent and up to 90 per cent for non-silicon-based PV panels.

Internationally, countries are currently grappling with how to manage the collection, re-use and recycling of PV systems. International efforts to date have been focused on testing new materials and processes, expanding recycling technologies and changing the design of products so that they can be more easily recycled.

In the ACT and across Australia more broadly, there is no known dedicated PV panel recovery, dismantling and recycling provider operating on a commercial scale. This is due to a number of factors, including the expertise required to dismantle and recycle these panels, the high costs associated with recycling panels, and the low material value, as laminated glass makes up the bulk of the product by weight. While there is a market for refurbishment and redistribution of PV panels domestically and through export, there is currently no co-ordinated approach.

Nationally, PV systems have been identified as an emerging e-waste stream with a lack of local reprocessing options. As a result they have been identified as a priority under the commonwealth Product Stewardship Act 2011. This legislation provides a framework to manage the environmental, health and safety impacts of products, with a particular focus on minimising the impacts associated with disposal of products once they have reached the end of their life. More generally, a product stewardship approach places the responsibility for end-of-life treatment on the manufacturers, importers, distributors, retailers and consumers of the product.

To tackle this emerging issue, a multijurisdictional working group has been established to develop a national product stewardship approach for PV panels. Led by the Victorian government, the ACT is part of a working group that has undertaken an assessment of all PV components and stewardship options, in close consultation with Australia's PV sector. This includes assessing voluntary, co-regulatory and mandatory stewardship pathways. This work has also gathered the evidence base required to inform future approaches.

As an update, the national PV stewardship working group has completed an assessment of all product scope and stewardship options, informed by in-depth engagement with Australia's PV sector. Along with non-regulatory options, this includes assessing voluntary, co-regulatory and mandatory product stewardship pathways, and gathering the sound evidence base required to identify the preferred product scope and management approach going forward.

With the options assessment now complete, I understand that the national working group will soon make recommendations to ministers on a preferred product scope and management approach, or approaches, for all or some of the products included in a PV system. If a regulatory model is recommended which may legally require those deemed to be liable to financially contribute to the management of a scheme, this will trigger the need to conduct a COAG regulatory impact statement, or RIS, to accurately assess likely costs, benefits and impacts.

Stakeholder input is crucial for the success of any product stewardship approach. If an RIS is required, further stakeholder engagement informing RIS options will be essential. Australia's PV sector and other potentially impacted stakeholder groups have been engaged throughout the initial options assessment phase and will continue to provide critical input into the next phase of the approach—assessing and testing effective scheme design elements. This working group involves all jurisdictions. All states and territories and the commonwealth understand the importance of implementing product stewardship schemes so that those businesses that create waste are partly responsible for the cost of disposal.

A key issue with Ms Lawder's motion is that she would like to see individual Canberrans pay for the cost of disposing of solar panels, regardless of whether they have them or not, rather than solar panel retailers. That is why I believe that solar panel PV operators must take responsibility for the cost of recycling the panels that they sell under a product stewardship scheme. I will move an amendment to this effect, so that the ACT remains in line with every other jurisdiction in the country in our approach to developing a scheme.

Developing and adopting a national approach for the management of PV systems supports existing ACT government priorities, including our commitment to achieving 100 per cent renewable energy by 2020 and our ambitious target of 90 per cent resource recovery by 2025. This is just one of the reasons that the ACT government is committed to working closely with other Australian governments and industry to develop a national solution to this emerging issue.

Once a preferred stewardship approach is agreed at the national level, the ACT will follow suit to implement the agreed scheme to provide territory-wide certainty for the recycling and recovery of PV panels. It is our hope that such a scheme will be designed and established in the near future, and that panels will not be required to be landfilled. I look forward to keeping the Assembly updated on progress on this important issue. I move my amendment to Ms Lawder's motion that has been circulated in my name:

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

“(2) further notes that:

- (a) there is currently no nationally or internationally co-ordinated program providing for a dedicated pathway for end-of-life management of photovoltaic panels;
- (b) photovoltaic products have been listed as a priority product list under the Commonwealth Government’s *Product Stewardship Act 2011*;
- (c) the Victorian Government has been leading a multi-jurisdictional working group with the photovoltaic sector on a national product stewardship scheme; and
- (d) the working group continues to develop a national product stewardship approach for photovoltaic products as a priority; and

(3) calls for the ACT Government to:

- (a) continue working with all jurisdictions to develop a national stewardship scheme to ensure safe and responsible disposal and recycling for photovoltaic panels and batteries as a priority;
- (b) co-operate with other jurisdictions to undertake studies into how solar panels and batteries are disposed of in countries where solar is a major source of renewable energy; and
- (c) report to the Assembly by the last sitting week of November 2019 on multi-jurisdictional progress.”.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, Minister for Corrections and Justice Health, Minister for Justice, Consumer Affairs and Road Safety and Minister for Mental Health) (5.05): I welcome the opportunity to discuss this interesting and relevant issue in the Assembly this afternoon. Mr Steel has given quite a bit of information on the state of play nationally on this issue, and it has been very informative to listen to those comments. I would like to add a couple of points to what the minister has said, from the perspective of my own portfolio responsibilities.

Members are no doubt aware that as part of our policy supporting 100 per cent renewable electricity we have a household battery program called the next generation energy storage program. Ms Lawder made reference to this in her opening remarks. It is a \$25 million program, and it is supporting the rollout of up to 36 megawatts of smart battery storage. Around 1,100 systems have been supported under the program to date, with the rate of installation expected to increase through 2019.

A recycling component is built into our battery program. All of the next generation energy storage program installers are required to ensure that energy storage systems and components are not disposed of in landfill and do not become unmanaged waste. Essentially, they have a producer responsibility for their products.

The next gen program requirements were developed in consultation with the Australian battery recycling initiative. Under the requirements, installers must follow

best practice end-of-life processing operations, give priority to onshore recycling facilities where these exist, comply with the current Clean Energy Council and ABRI industry guidance, and provide an end-of-life plan for their installations. This is the sort of producer responsibility that we want to see through all sorts of consumer products.

I am very encouraged, if not slightly surprised, to see Ms Lawder bring on this motion today. Just this morning we had a debate about compost and the idea that the government's attempt to see composting take place was an overreach into people's lives. Now we are having a discussion about these sorts of things. I look forward to further support from the Liberal Party for things like producer responsibility, for making sure that we have closed-loop systems and that we take recycling and product stewardship more seriously than perhaps has been the case in the past.

In relation to solar panels, as Ms Lawder has noted in her motion, the ACT is excelling when it comes to solar panel installation. Around 21,000 Canberra households and businesses have now installed a rooftop solar system, totalling around 75 megawatts installed capacity. Coupled with our Canberra-based large-scale solar farms, over 110 megawatts of solar generating capacity is now operating in the territory.

I recently announced the new solar for business program. That is a trial that offers eligible ACT businesses independent tailored advice and rebates of up to \$5,000 for the installation of solar systems. It will be a 12-month trial, running until February next year. The results to date indicate that the trial is effectively addressing the barriers faced by business, including up-front financial costs and limited knowledge about rooftop solar.

That second point is really important. The community organisations and businesses I have spoken to are really appreciating this advice. Energy systems, rooftop solar and energy usage generally are not your core business if you are running a small business—or a church, as was the case I heard about when I was out in Weston Creek last week. Unless somebody in the organisation has expertise from a previous career or outside interest, or simply has the time to sit down and do it, generally it would be put in the too-hard basket. Businesses have indicated to me that they are wary that people who try to sell them a system are trying to sell them something when they are not convinced that it is necessarily in their best interests to take that offer and just do not have the time to research it. What we are seeking to do with this model is provide a level of independent government advice so that people can have confidence in investing in their systems.

For many businesses, it is worthwhile economically, even without a government rebate, to invest. It is not for everybody, but for many it will be. There is no reason why you would not invest in a large-scale solar system for a business, especially if you own the building. For tenants there can be some different discussions. This is where it gets into the complexities and why people are nervous about investing. But for many organisations now, it makes economic sense; in fact, you would be mad not to. We want to get out there and encourage them and help them find their way through some of the barriers that people have expressed to us.

In relation to recycling solar panels, Minister Steel has already discussed the cooperative national efforts being made in this area. Solar panel recycling is already quite a mature market. While there are no solar panel recycling providers currently based in Canberra, there are a number elsewhere in Australia and around the world. I expect that local industry-led solar panel recycling services are likely to appear once there is sufficient local demand. Given the long operating life of solar panels, it has not yet occurred.

Participants in the Actsmart solar for low income and solar for business programs are currently encouraged to contact their providers for more information on recycling or take-back programs offered by manufacturers. The environment directorate is also liaising closely with TCCS and the solar industry to ensure that our approach reflects current best practice.

Let me touch briefly on zero-emission vehicles. Members will know that the ACT government have ambitious zero emission vehicle targets embedded in our strategy. Electric battery vehicles are a key part of this. Battery electric vehicle end of life is not yet a major issue in Australia, as most EVs are relatively new and still in operation on the road. I ran into somebody today who had just sold their 15-year-old Prius. They were proudly telling me that the battery was still going well and the car was still going quite well, but they were just in the fortunate position of upgrading to the 2019 model. They were very pleased that their 2004 model was still going strong.

I can inform the Assembly that Australia has two processing plants that will soon be ready to process EV batteries at the end of their life into their re-usable components. These will be shipped to South Korea, where they will be recycled into the next generation of batteries. If Australia invested in local EV battery manufacturing, this would create opportunities for local recycling. Currently there is no regulation in Australia requiring EV batteries to be recycled at the end of their life. However, that is being considered nationally as part of the development of a national battery stewardship scheme, for which I look forward to hearing support from all members of this chamber.

I am quite keen for the federal government to take some action on this issue and would strongly encourage them to provide investment in local recycling industries and product stewardship schemes—batteries, solar panels and other electrical products included. We do have some distance to go with some of these industries. It is well time that Australia sought to address these issues. I will be supporting Minister Steel's amendment and I look forward to the work that has been outlined in that amendment, including his report back. These are very interesting topics and ones that we all need to be mindful of.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (5.13): I thank my Assembly colleagues for their comments on this important topic today. I would like to reassure the minister that, whilst I would love to take responsibility for it, this motion actually came from Ms Lee, before her unexpected absence due to the birth of her baby over the weekend. I would like to place on record my congratulations to Ms Lee and her family on the arrival of their daughter, Mia.

It is very timely that we talk about this topic, as well as the earlier topic today about green organic waste and food organic waste, because today, 5 June, is World Environment Day. We are aware that we have a national waste crisis. We need to reduce, re-use and recycle. As I have already said, Canberrans are very good at this; they are to be applauded for the work that they are doing.

Whilst my colleagues on the other side try hard to paint us as non-believers, deniers or whatever, historically—as well as in current times—that was absolutely not the case. I remind you that it was our party that, in 1914, declared the first conservation land in the ACT. I remind those opposite that in 1934 it was our side of politics that declared the Gudgenby nature reserve. That is just picking out a couple of examples. I remind my colleagues that in 1971 it was our side of politics that declared the Tidbinbilla nature reserve. And I remind you that just last week we committed to some catchment group funding. This is just a very brief snapshot of our ongoing work in this area.

Today I am happy enough to support the minister's amendments. I thank him for circulating those. This is an area where, time and again, those opposite want to lead Australia, indeed the world, by bringing in new things and being the first. In this particular regard, I am pleased to support Mr Steel's amendment of the motion because it appears to be a ringing endorsement of the approach taken by the Morrison government. The minister, instead of wanting to be world leading or even Australia leading, as those opposite try to do in many respects, wants to assign all responsibility to the federal government. I am very pleased that he has seen that this is an endorsement of the work of my federal colleagues.

This is an important issue. It is one that Canberrans will increasingly face over the coming years with the end of the useful life cycle of their solar panels and our wish not to add to landfill by putting them into landfill. There are resources that can be retrieved from solar panels, whilst being aware of potential contaminants and things that we do not want in our landfill.

I thank my colleagues for their contribution today. I thank them for their thoughtful comments and their support for what is, in effect, the motion of Ms Lee, the shadow minister for the environment. I thank her office for the work they have put into this. We will support the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Gungahlin—infrastructure

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (5.18): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes the strong population growth in the Gungahlin area, including:

- (a) growing by 50 percent over the past five years to more than 75 000 people, Gungahlin is the second-fastest growing region in Australia; and
 - (b) the significant recent investments of the ACT Government in sporting and active recreation facilities in Gungahlin, including:
 - (i) replacement of the Nicholls District Playing Field synthetic surface;
 - (ii) Stage 1 of the Taylor District Playing Fields; and
 - (iii) development and expansion of indoor facilities at Margaret Hendry and Amaroo schools; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to commence community consultation as soon as possible for community facilities in and around Casey.

I rise today to talk about an important issue for the residents of Casey. Casey is a growing suburb and a vibrant community. Casey market town is full of great cafes and shops that cater to the suburb and the surrounding area. There is a great dog park and, across the whole suburb, a close connection to nature.

However, an ongoing issue that has been raised with me time and again is the two areas of vacant land, one across from the shops and one across from the dog park. These two blocks are currently being remediated and prepared for return to the government for development. As they stand, they are both an eyesore, often covered in litter and inaccessible. This is prime land that should serve the Casey community. It is time for this land to be put to use.

The land in Casey was given to developers during the construction of other projects and is due to be remediated by them before being handed back to the ACT government. The two areas in Casey have been slated for a park and for a bowls club, although I understand that demand for a bowling club may be declining. The residents of Casey are sick of waiting. It is my opinion that we should also open up consultation on these two blocks for the people of Casey to have a say on what facilities are built in their community and what they believe will benefit the community.

As far as I am aware, meetings between the EPSDD and the developer are ongoing, with the current timing of the release of the land expected sometime in 2020-21. I call on all parties to expedite the process and return the blocks. I also call for a public consultation process so that the residents of Casey can have their say on how best to use this land for the good of the community.

The ACT's population continues to grow. A natural consequence of having a strong economy and a livable city is that our population will grow. The territory's population expanded by almost 8,000 people over the past 12 months. This is on top of the fastest population growth in the country between 2011 and 2016 in Gungahlin. Gungahlin is Australia's second-fastest growing region, growing by over 50 per cent in five years. A decade ago Gungahlin was almost half the size it is now. As Gungahlin grows, it is vital that we utilise key areas of land. As this area grows we must ensure it remains a great place to live, and that requires amenities and public areas. And they need it now.

This government has been building amenities and community facilities across Gungahlin. From the just announced home of football in Throsby, which will host amazing soccer matches, I am sure, and give the sport a strong base from which to grow into the future, to the replacement of the Nicholls district playing fields with some synthetic surfaces to stage 1 of Taylor district playing fields, this government is delivering for Gungahlin.

However, the vacant blocks in Casey are prime sites for the building of new amenities and facilities. I have had so many people in the community contact me about these blocks, raising ideas like a park, maybe indoor sporting facilities, playing fields, outdoor gyms and much, much more. They have been waiting for the sites to be handed back to the government, and it is about time that this happened. As this area grows, we need to ensure it remains a great place to live, and that requires amenities that the community wants. Empty blocks in such a central location are a huge waste and, rightly, are very frustrating for Casey residents.

Developers have a social licence to operate, and in this case it is to prepare the blocks for further use and return them to the government as soon as possible. Casey residents should not have to stare at an empty block every time they go to the shops. It affects the whole area, making it look unfinished and messy.

Public spaces are vital for community wellbeing. Spaces such as parks or sporting facilities encourage a healthy and active lifestyle. In a suburb like Casey, which has a median age of 30 and where over 25 per cent of residents are under the age of 14, open spaces are important. For children and young people to live active and healthy lives they need spaces to play and exercise. Reduced activity is on the rise and can have negative health implications. Open spaces encourage residents to get outside and to get active. This also contributes to positive mental health outcomes, as time outside can reduce stress and encourage social interaction. Communal spaces are important for the creation of community events and social groups. This will create a socially inclusive suburb in an already inclusive place.

I brought this motion forward today because the people of Casey have been waiting for this land to be put to use for a long time. Construction on Casey market town began in 2014 and finished in 2016. The site next door has stood vacant for three years now. While the site was originally slated for a bowls club, I believe community sentiment does not support this idea in the way it once did, which is why I am interested in seeing what the community has to say.

The block next door to the dog park has been vacant even longer. It has been slated for a park, which I believe the community probably still supports, but I think further consultation is required to confirm this and to make sure that any action is urgent. Community consultation is always a priority for this government, but it is clear that for Casey this process needs to be prioritised because it has taken too long.

It is important that these blocks are developed soon but also that the developments best serve the community. The point is that these blocks have stood empty for years

while Casey has continued to develop. This motion is designed to hasten the process of land return to the Casey community and identify the right community facilities for the land. This is our job as a government.

As a result of my motion, I have already had a lot of fruitful discussions with my colleagues and, broadly speaking, I think most people in this place think it is time to get on with the job in Casey. I am confident that we will get the right result and that we can look forward to the government commencing consultation on these blocks as soon as possible and, hopefully, delivering these community facilities as soon as possible too. I call on all members of this place to support this motion and support the community of Casey.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (5.25): I am pleased today to be speaking about the importance of sport and recreation. As the shadow minister, I believe it is my responsibility to advocate for the community to have the best possible assets and sporting infrastructure that is well placed and well maintained.

I also feel obliged, as a member for Yerrabi, to fight for the needs of my electorate—needs which, as with most of Canberra, are not being met by this government. This is despite the high level of tax and revenue they receive and the very poor return on investment most residents of the ACT feel they get back. It is with this in mind that I rise to speak today as the shadow minister for sport and rec and the local member for Yerrabi.

That brings me to Mr Pettersson, a fellow member for Yerrabi, who has been missing in action for the last 1,329 days. Since the ACT election Mr Pettersson has been AWOL. We have heard about his ambition to legalise cannabis, we have heard about his support for pill testing and we know he enjoys video games. But that is about it. Yet, for some reason, 500 days out from the next election, Mr Pettersson has decided to show up and is making some outrageous claims about his performance.

Just last week he tried to claim that after his advocacy for Palmerston shops they were the lucky recipient of funding in the budget for more car parking. This is just not true. The campaign is being led by residents and shop owners, and it has been supported by the Canberra Liberals—by Alistair Coe and me as Liberal members for Yerrabi. Two years ago we worked with parents at the primary school to start a petition. We letterboxed, we doorknocked and we wrote to the government. We managed to get an overflow car park constructed at the school—and that was a good start—but we maintained the rage and worked with local businesses to make representation.

On 4 April this year we invited some of those businesses into this chamber for question time, when we asked why the government would not commit to building this parking area. Mr Pettersson and Ms Orr sat in this chamber with blank faces. In fact, I have it on good authority that the day before Mr Pettersson's media release on this issue he made his first visit to Palmerston shops. During his chat, he revealed that he had not heard anything about it, seen plans or potential costings. This just proves that the Labor backbench is not tuned into the Yerrabi community, and we are now seeing this again in this motion.

His motion is an insult to the community on so many levels. The replacement turf at Nicholls only came after I wrote to the minister, as shadow minister for sport and recreation. I wrote because of concerns over the safety of the surface, following feedback from the sporting groups, the local schools and, of course, parents. The new ovals at Taylor are said to be a great asset for the residents of this new suburb, as well as the local school. However, we know that the project is running late for handover and it appears to be lacking the right foundations in terms of drainage and irrigation. We have seen this with the main oval in Gungahlin, and most recently the oval at Melrose. I will be keeping a close eye on Taylor and making sure cost cutting and shortcuts do not impact too much on the ratepayers of the ACT.

I welcome the announcement that new facilities will be built at Throsby, in partnership with Capital Football. I hope this will be an asset for Canberra. The venue is also available for community and grassroots sport. Whilst this facility is set to have some indoor space for futsal, there still remains a lack of indoor sport centres across Canberra. The claim in this motion that the two school halls solve this issue is just outrageous.

In case Mr Pettersson has not been paying attention—and I gather from this motion and his other interests that he has not—his government made an election promise in 2016 for a feasibility study into indoor sports. Where are we up to with that? Nowhere. The study has been conducted. The consultation was woeful. And the report sits somewhere on the minister's desk with no action, no funding, no vision for the future of sport in the ACT. Indoor sport centres are desperately needed not just for Gungahlin but all across the territory. School halls in Taylor and Amaroo are great, but they are not the answer for our local sporting competitions.

While we are on the topic of broken promises, let us talk about Casey. This motion calls on the government to undertake community consultation for facilities in Casey. Mr Pettersson might try to pretend this is his idea. However, I have seen correspondence from Minister Berry committing to this consultation already. In January this year the minister wrote that the government had started an audit of community recreation and commercial needs for Casey. In early May the minister confirmed that the audit had finished and the government would move on community consultations in June. A government project officer has already been appointed and the plans are underway for the usual social media campaign, letterboxing and surveys. To stand here today and pretend that this is the work of Mr Pettersson or any other Yerrabi Labor MLA is a joke.

What makes this worse is that this government has taken the community for a ride on this issue before. In 2012, as part of the development of the suburb of Casey the ACT Labor Party costed and promised a community sport and recreation area to the tune of \$3 million. This is yet another failed election promise. In 2016 a development application was submitted for a community recreational irrigated park in Casey. The design was good. There was room for a mixed use court, irrigated green space, a playground, a toilet block, 30 car parks and even a community activity centre. I have to say that if Mr Pettersson took his job seriously he would have done something to

fight for these promises in the 1,329 days he has been in this place already. To show up at the eleventh hour with some half-baked motion, grandstanding on an issue he knows nothing about and that the minister is revisiting, is ridiculous.

What we do not need to progress this issue is more community consultation, more talk and reports without real action. Mr Pettersson wants to learn about community consultation. That is what Alistair Coe and I have been doing as part of business as usual. We held a community barbecue in Casey in August last year to talk to locals about this failed commitment. In fact, we hold these community events in the community every month. When we went to Casey we asked the community what they wanted to see. Funnily enough, they said they would like to see things such as a playground, netball courts, indoor courts, lawn bowls, the community club, basketball courts, community gardens and plenty more other suggestions. If Mr Pettersson got out in the community and read and responded to the correspondence coming in then we would not need this motion.

The Canberra Liberals will be supporting this motion today, only because we hope that for Casey it will be a case of third time lucky. We had the \$3 million promise made in 2012, we had the designs ready to go in 2016 and now in 2019 we have an audit and a commitment to community consultation. But I can tell you that the community is sick of the never-ending cycle of consultation and inaction. Just get on with it and build it. Whilst the community know that Mr Pettersson and his Labor Party colleagues are more interested in their pet projects, this motion gives us some hope that residents of Casey will see progress on this issue. You can guarantee that both Alistair and I will keep fighting for the residents of Yerrabi. Let us hope that for Casey it will indeed be third time lucky for this long-awaited community recreation and sporting facility.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (5.34): I will be supporting Mr Pettersson's motion today; how could you not? What the motion calls for appears to be both inoffensive and sensible. I am not quite sure why we are doing it.

Going to the motion's points in turn, the first thing is that Gungahlin is Australia's second fastest growing region in Australia. Yes, good; I am glad we are all on the same page with that. The next part, (1)(b), contains three more statements of the obvious. The motion could go on for a long time, noting all of the wonderful and marvellous things that the ACT government is doing in Gungahlin, but the other way of looking at this, which is possibly the way that the people of Canberra would look at it, is that the government is simply doing its job. The ACT government needs to provide services for the growing regions of Canberra.

The motion calls for the ACT government to commence community consultation as soon as possible for community facilities in and around Casey. That seems fair enough. Community consultation in general is a good idea. The people who live or work in Casey deserve to be consulted, as with people in any other suburb. But shouldn't the government be doing this everywhere in Gungahlin that warrants community consultation—indeed across Canberra? Is the motion necessary because there has been a lack of community consultation in Casey?

I am not a Yerrabi member and I claim no particular knowledge of the exact consultation, but it was interesting to listen to Mr Milligan's views, which are undoubtedly much better informed than mine on this subject. Are we going to have similar motions for Kenny, Taylor and Moncrieff as they are developed? Why don't we just do them as a job lot now and say, "Let's have consultation in Gungahlin"?

Given Casey's distance from the town centre, why not consult with the community about other infrastructure or social services needs that they may currently have, and that they currently need to travel some distance to access—a swimming pool, an indoor sports facility or maybe a second senior secondary college for Gungahlin in or around Casey?

I note that Minister Berry has just announced that a new high school will be built at Kenny. On the surface—again I say that I am not a Yerrabi member—this does not appear to be located near where a lot of the catchment student population is likely to be living. Perhaps, in fact, the government should be planning for a secondary school near Casey. Maybe that is what the government should be using the land for. Of course, there are many issues outside Gungahlin on which more consultation could be undertaken, but, given the reaction last time I tried to broaden a motion to include Woden, I will not continue with that line of thought.

I must say that it is hard to understand why the government require a motion to do what one assumes they should be doing in a business-as-usual capacity. Perhaps, as was the case following Mr Pettersson's media release regarding parking at the Palmerston shops, which was followed by a pre-budget announcement of more car parks at the Palmerston shops, we can expect an imminent government announcement about community consultation in Casey.

I trust that the community consultation in Casey will be meaningful, worthwhile and able to inform and guide government policy regarding the development of community facilities. This, of course, is entirely consistent with the Greens' approach to involving people in decisions that affect them. The Greens, however, are concerned about quality consultation, not just having consultation for consultation's sake.

There are a few general principles for quality consultation that I will list: provision of all relevant information; adequate time and resources for the community and stakeholders to be consulted; publicity so that affected community members and stakeholders know about the consultation; and what I think is probably the most important of all—a genuine commitment by the government to listen to the community and to be prepared to change what they do as a result of community feedback.

Too often it seems that community consultation is done mainly because the government know they have to be seen to do it. It becomes clear either during the consultation or afterwards that the government have already decided what they are going to do and they are going through the motions in doing the consultation. I wonder whether that is the case in Casey with the proposed development. Obviously, the Greens will support this motion. I trust that it will lead to very good consultation in Casey and, ultimately, good community facilities in Casey.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Advanced Technology and Space Industries) (5.39): I thank Mr Pettersson for bringing forward this important motion today. The government, through the ACT planning strategy 2018, has a robust and contemporary planning framework to guide Canberra's future growth and prosperity as a compact and efficient city. The planning strategy includes as a key target supporting sustainable urban growth by delivering up to 70 per cent of new housing within our existing urban footprint.

As our city's population continues to grow and change, we are making sure that social infrastructure is delivered that meets community needs and supports strong communities. Great and convenient local facilities and amenities are a key feature of why Canberra is so livable. Stimulating urban renewal where it is appropriate means that we also assess the capacity of current social infrastructure in potential locations for urban renewal and what is needed to support growing communities.

Investigations have commenced into the capacity of existing social infrastructure to support potential urban intensification in locations identified within the ACT planning strategy. A key focus for this work is to document existing assets and identify thresholds for existing social infrastructure and issues facing the network of facilities and open spaces across our city as a whole.

By combining an understanding of best practice and trends in social infrastructure provision alongside current community infrastructure evidence, this work will provide policy and strategy recommendations that will assist in guiding social infrastructure investment in the ACT. These social infrastructure investigations are providing the evidence on which to plan for appropriate community facilities and open space, and guide and prioritise opportunities for further development within the areas identified for potential urban intensification in the planning strategy.

The approach is positioning the government to pursue collaborative partnerships with key stakeholders, including the private sector and community organisations, to fund and deliver new social infrastructure and facilitate better use of existing infrastructure. The work is also informing potential changes to the statutory planning framework through the ACT planning review, which commenced this year, and relevant policy settings in relation to social infrastructure.

Within the ACT planning strategy, the Gungahlin suburb of Casey is identified as an urban intensification location. Land is already identified in Casey for future release to accommodate a mix of community, recreation, commercial and residential uses. As I have explained, careful consideration must be given to the appropriate mix of future uses to make sure land is provided for facilities and services that meet the needs of the people who live in Casey and the surrounding catchment, now and into the future.

I note that any discussion with the community about planning, and specifically planning for community facilities and services, should be informed and shaped by

contemporary planning practices and available evidence. The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate plans for social infrastructure across Canberra at a broad level, creating a framework of community facility land across our urban and suburban areas. When communities are growing and changing, the directorate will consider the most appropriate community use for community facility zoned land.

To do this the directorate may undertake a site-based community facility needs assessment. Typically, these site-based assessments are developed considering existing and planned community facilities and open space in the vicinity, as well as assessing demographics to understand the current and future population. From this analysis recommendations may be made about the most appropriate community use to meet the needs of the existing and future community. The directorate is currently undertaking a community and recreation needs assessment and a commercial market assessment to look at the range of suitable uses of the land in Casey.

The government will engage the community on the future uses of the land, a process that will be framed by the scope of the needs assessment for Casey. EPSDD will look for an opportunity to discuss with the community the research that informs determining the most appropriate community facility and recreational land uses and will include providing an initial summary of existing local facilities and services, including existing open space areas, and confirming the current and permitted uses for the identified sites in Casey. The directorate can also make the findings and analysis available to the community.

The conversation with the community about Casey will complement the existing work of the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate in the development of a needs assessment and its social infrastructure investigations for our city more broadly. I thank Mr Pettersson for his ongoing interest in planning for the social infrastructure needs of our community.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (5.44), in reply: I thank all members of this place for their contributions—some of more value than others but all interesting. Issues such as this undeveloped land in Casey can be a major source of frustration for local residents. That is why it is so important that we discuss these things in this place. I thank Minister Gentlemen for his contribution. I thought it was particularly enlightening. I am glad that the government is on board to prioritise the consultation and development of this land.

The residents of Casey have waited too long, and I hope that we can deliver this for them sooner rather than later. Gungahlin is one of the fastest growing places in this country, but that does not necessarily mean that blocks of land in Casey have kept up. We need to make sure that the amenities and public spaces are developed at the same rate as our suburbs. It is the only way we can make sure that Gungahlin remains a great place to live. Casey has grown so much since it was established. It is home to an amazing community and they are deserving of a complete suburb.

The two blocks that are in question are in a prime central location, and it is so frustrating that they lie vacant. We can develop these blocks and it is about time we

did. In some of the early discussions a few years ago about what these blocks should be used for, there was talk of a lawn bowls club and a park. I do not have a particularly firm opinion on what those facilities look like. What I do have a very firm opinion on is that the residents of Casey today need to be involved in this and their needs need to be met. It is their suburb. Whether it be sporting facilities, parks, community centres, lawn bowls clubs or whatever it is, it is important that it meet the needs of the local residents and important that we do this speedily.

Whatever the residents need, whatever the needs of Casey are, we need to make sure that they are listened to, that it is addressed and that we start this as soon as possible. I am excited to see how this land can be developed and to continue to see Casey grow.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Canberra Japan Club autumn festival

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (5.47): Canberra is a city with four distinct seasons. This past weekend marked the formal transition from autumn to winter, which made it the ideal time for the Canberra Japan Club to hold their autumn festival, called Aki Matsuri in Japanese. I thank club president Naoko Lamb for generously inviting me to take part in this wonderful event.

In Japan the Aki Matsuri traditionally took place after the rice harvest to thank the gods for a fruitful harvest, as well as to petition for the continued wellbeing of the community. Around the world, Japanese migrant communities now hold autumn festivals to showcase and celebrate Japanese culture. Held at the Cook community hall in my electorate of Ginninderra, the Canberra Japan Club's festival was a delightful opportunity to get a taste of many different aspects of Japanese culture right here in Canberra.

The event was purposely designed to be family friendly, with heaps to catch the attention of both children and adults. Visitors could purchase Japanese soup and bakery products to enjoy, as well as craft items. Workshops were set up to teach things like traditional Japanese calligraphy and origami, Japan's centuries-old art of folding paper into various elaborate designs such as cranes. One workshop even allowed participants to shape their own chopsticks. Another gave kids an opportunity to craft their own teddy bears. Games for children included quoits, a fishpond and a water balloon activity, which I participated in along with enthusiastic children and university students.

All this fun was accompanied by 2½ hours of performances on stage, including music, dancing and even a rock paper scissors competition. The Canberra Japan Club sponsors a community language school and supports a kindergarten, both of which also performed on the day.

I am grateful for community organisations like the Canberra Japan Club. This past weekend's autumn festival provided a small insight into what the club, its president and its many committed members do. Their efforts help to preserve and share Japanese language and culture, and this in turn enriches and strengthens our entire Canberra community.

I wish Mrs Lamb and her colleagues in the Canberra Japan Club all the best success as they continue to serve. The event this past weekend was certainly a fruitful harvest of their dedicated efforts.

ACT public service—questions on notice

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (5.50): It is easy for crossbench and opposition members to get cynical about the government and the public service. We spend a significant part of each day fielding complaints from the community about things that have gone wrong. We only hear one side of the story and we do not know much of the background. Sometimes we also feel like we are given the run-around or are not getting straight answers. Against that, I think it is important to also acknowledge the good work that does get done. Today I would like to acknowledge the time and effort the public service puts into responding to questions on notice.

I would particularly like to single out the officers who responded to two recent questions on notice: the treasury officers who responded to question 2416 about land tax, and the planning officers who responded to question 2407 about Kippax group centre. I am particularly singling out these questions because both of them were long and complex. I am sure that when these questions arrived in the directorates the action officers were not particularly happy with me. One of them took over six hours to complete and the other over four hours. I am sure the officers who did the work felt they had better things to do. However, they did not come up with glib weasel words or give me pointless non-information. They took the time to give me some very useful responses, and that is very much appreciated.

Questions on notice may sometimes seem like a time-consuming pain in the neck that diverts the public service into political time-wasting. However, they are in fact an important part of the transparency and accountability of government. Sometimes questions do serve a political purpose, but more often they are serving the community and may have a political purpose as well. In the case of questions 2416 and 2407, both questions were largely asked on behalf of members of the community. The responses to these questions will help the community to understand important policy issues.

Sometimes the public service gets questions from me, and possibly other backbench MLAs, that I am sure I could with some effort work out for myself. I am sure it is frustrating for the officers working on answers, and I am sure that they sometimes grumble about politicians asking dumb questions. The questions with these obvious answers are very often asked on behalf of a community group or constituent. People in the community can find it much harder than we do to find and understand government information. Sometimes people need to have an answer in writing in the

government's words so that they can say, "The government said whatever," not, "I contacted my local MLA and they said if you look on the website here and here and you put the two together, this is what it actually means."

Some of these questions might be a pain in the neck but they are not a waste of time. They are an important part of open government. Thank you again to the officers who worked on questions 2416 and 2407. Thank you also to all the officers across all the directorates who have given helpful responses to hundreds of my questions.

Public housing—relocations

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (5.53): I want to take the opportunity during the adjournment debate to reflect on something that occurred today during question time.

Immediately before question time started today, Mr Parton from the Canberra Liberals came up and said to me that he was not going to mention a public housing complex by name, and he was not going to mention or talk about any of the individuals that live there. I thanked him for that. Then I got the first question from Mr Coe. I do not mind getting questions. These can be very complex issues. Sometimes it is hard to provide all the information when they are of a sensitive or personal nature, but, nonetheless, that is what we are here for, and I am happy to take the questions. Mr Coe said something like, "We are not going to name the complex or the address in the chamber." He then went ahead and asked the question. I had a number of questions and I responded to them as much as I could. Nobody mentioned the name of the complex, and I thought that was a really grown-up approach to such a sensitive matter.

I was surprised at one of the last questions Mr Parton asked. He named the public housing complex that he had told me earlier he was not going to mention. I was surprised because I had always felt that Mark Parton held himself to his word. And I was disappointed because he had chosen a particularly vulnerable group of Canberrans to bring into the public eye, even after I had said in the response to one of the questions something like, "Let's just let the police and Housing ACT get on with their job of supporting these individuals and managing this issue that has occurred; then we can go on from there and I can provide some more information."

It seems that the Canberra Liberals are now saying one thing and doing another. I do not understand why, particularly in these circumstances, after personally telling me that he would not mention it, and after an undertaking by the Leader of the Opposition that there was not going to be any mention of the complex name, Mr Parton went on to mention it.

I have asked on a number of occasions in this place, and I will ask again, for anybody in here, including members of the government, if they are contacted by individuals, particularly on sensitive and personal situations that might occur where you need information or you want a response for a member of our community, to take a leaf out

of Mrs Dunne's book and give me a phone call or knock on my door. If I can provide information, I will. I ask people not to wait until question time to ask a question about something that is occurring in our community that requires a considered response. I am happy to do that. But I ask them not to wade in here and tell me they are going to do something and then do something completely different.

Again, I put the call out. I am happy to take the calls or the knocks on the door to support and help out. Just before I got that question from Mr Parton, I was about to offer him some more information, but I was disappointed that he decided to make a public announcement about this particular complex when he could have come up and had a chat with me about it. I am happy to do that, and I have done it with him for previous matters. I wanted to mention that tonight and hope that we can get through what is a concerning matter involving a number of vulnerable Canberrans in our community.

Virtual reality

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (5.57): Madam Speaker, it has been said that virtual reality is the first step in a grand adventure into the landscape of the imagination. Virtual reality, VR, is the use of computer technology to create a simulated environment. For a long time, it was very much a Hollywood fantasy. Think *Total Recall* with Arnold Schwarzenegger, *The Matrix* with Keanu Reeves, or *Inception* with Leonardo DiCaprio. But virtual reality is a reality now, and the grand adventure is here with us today.

Back in 2016, PlayStation released a VR headset for gamers. Samsung has a VR system that works with your phone. In some places you can go for an experience which allows you, for example, to walk on a tightrope between two buildings at the 80th floor level. I attempted that recently in Shanghai, at Shanghai's tallest building. I could not take more than one step onto that narrow plank before I decided I could not walk any further. Even though I knew in my mind that solid ground was just a couple of centimetres below my feet, I could not bring myself to keep walking when I looked down and it looked as though I was 80 floors above the surface.

It is not all about sky rises, fun experiences and big companies. There was a recent example much closer to home. On 21 May Volunteering and Contact ACT had their annual awards night at the Arboretum. Volunteering and Contact ACT are the peak body for volunteering and community information services here in the ACT. They drive and influence policy; they advocate for their members and stakeholders; and they are an active link for people, organisations and the government. I would like to put on the record my thanks to Volunteering and Contact ACT, especially Vicky Darling, the CEO; Sarah Wilson, the policy officer; and the other staff and volunteers who work at Volunteering and Contact ACT.

I attended the 2019 Volunteer of the Year awards along with some others in this place. Ms Le Couteur was there and some other MLAs as well. I was impressed, inspired and humbled by the range, the breadth and the passion of volunteers here in the Canberra area.

I specifically want to talk about one group that won an award on the night, the What's Your Reality volunteer team, who won the 2019 innovation award. The What's Your Reality volunteer team was a partnership between Calwell High School, the YWCA Clubhouse and the ACT Parks and Conservation Service. I am very pleased that some members of that volunteer team are here tonight. Welcome to your Assembly, and thank you for coming.

The team members of What's Your Reality volunteered their time to become topic experts in producing nature-based virtual reality. Specifically, their mission was to bring VR to people with a disability. I quote a report from the *Canberra Weekly*:

Students worked with YWCA and Parks to plan, film and produce the content, which showcases experiences and locations that may be inaccessible for people with a disability. The virtual reality experience was showcased to 40 young people with muscular dystrophy in December last year. Once "inside" the VR each participant fell silent as they were lost in the adventure. Staff and carers watched as a room full of wheelchairs was brought to life through VR.

I am so pleased that this project won recognition with an award at the volunteering awards. The target group for this VR project is a group for whom accessing the Tidbinbilla nature reserve would otherwise be difficult, if not impossible. Thank you to each and every one of you who took part in the What's Your Reality volunteer team. Thank you for your kindness, your generosity, your effort and your innovation. Thank you for your work to make sure that VR is available to everyone in the Canberra area.

Visitors

MADAM SPEAKER: I echo the welcome from Ms Lawder. It is good to see our community folk come in and visit the Assembly. Well done, team.

Adjournment

Budget—Yerrabi electorate

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (6.02): I rise this evening to highlight the significant investments that this Labor government is making in my electorate. The 2019-20 ACT budget will continue to deliver on ACT Labor's commitment for great local public schools, particularly in Gungahlin. I was thrilled to join Minister Berry in announcing that new schools will be built in Throsby and Kenny and existing schools will be expanded, with new student places at Franklin Early Childhood School, Gold Creek Senior School and Gungahlin College.

As we all know, Gungahlin has the highest rate of population growth in the ACT and has one of the highest rates of population growth in the country. In fact, population forecasts show the suburbs of Moncrieff, Taylor, Jacka, Kenny and Throsby will welcome 2,300 new children by 2028. It is important that we accommodate this rapid growth with appropriate infrastructure and services that the community needs now and into the future.

The new P-6 school in Throsby will have capacity for 450 students and up to 132 preschool students, with space to accommodate future student growth. I am especially pleased to note that the new Throsby school will be built to the highest standards of sustainability, including all-electric heating and cooling systems. It is so important that we make sure our growth is as sustainable as possible. The school will also feature high quality learning environments, incorporating both indoor and outdoor learning areas as well as integrated spaces to support students with specialised needs. The new Throsby school will be ready to take students in the 2022 school year. I encourage families in the area with young children to keep an eye out.

Gungahlin can also look forward to a new high school in Kenny and this will cater for 800 students from years 7 to 10. It is planned to open in the 2023 school year, and the 2019-20 budget delivers the initial funding to undertake the planning and design for the new high school.

Another exciting infrastructure investment for my electorate is the new home of football in Throsby. This will provide new, dedicated football playing fields, an indoor futsal facility and amenities to support the players and clubs that will call the area home.

I am also happy to report that there has been a strong response from the Yerrabi community following the start of light rail in the Gungahlin town centre. I am pleased to watch people ride along the light rail corridor, embrace the convenience of the new light rail network and incorporate it into their daily commute. After such positive feedback from residents and local businesses, I look forward to the initial works commencing on stage 2, as provided for in the budget, so that my constituents will be able to travel right through to Woden and the south side.

Another significant investment in infrastructure for my electorate will be delivered through duplicating the arterial road between Ginninderra Drive and the Barton Highway. Thousands of Canberrans use this road every single day, and I am pleased that the Belconnen and Gungahlin suburbs of my electorate will be better connected by this project.

It is also worth noting that roadworks on Horse Park Drive and Gundaroo Drive have finished, which will make everyone's daily commute much smoother. The upgrades have delivered a duplication of approximately 2.6 kilometres of Horse Park Drive between the Federal Highway and Well Station Drive, including two lanes in each direction, a new three-metre wide shared path along the southern side of Horse Park Drive, a new road bridge and shared path bridge over Sullivans Creek, 400 eucalyptus trees planted along the corridor and better access to the parking area for the Goorooyarroo nature park.

Finally, I am happy to note that the 2019-20 budget will deliver 17,000 trees across the ACT. This is brilliant news, as more trees will go a long way to improving the livability of the suburbs right across my electorate for residents as well the ecosystem. The 2019-20 ACT budget will deliver significant investment in the infrastructure and services that residents across Belconnen and Gungahlin need. I look forward to

working with my Labor government colleges to deliver on these commitments in building for Yerrabi's future.

Public housing—relocations

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (6.06): I was not intending to speak tonight, but I felt I had to come down and respond to Ms Berry by saying that I am somewhat embarrassed that in the flurry of questions regarding the housing complex today—and it was a moving feast; we were changing supplementaries on the fly—in the heat of that moment, without meaning to, I slipped up and mentioned the name of the housing complex. I apologise for doing that because, as the minister said, I specifically said to her that it was something that I would not be doing. Certainly my office and the Canberra Liberals team had gone to enormous lengths in constructing those questions to ensure that we would not be naming the complex. And I feel a bit of a dill, to be honest.

I also feel dismayed because of the way that Ms Berry responded. She harbours the belief that I perhaps set out to drop the name of the complex in that fashion. I never did. The question is here with me. I have got my handwritten notes at the bottom. I messed up. I hope that in future, when I make a pledge to the minister on something in person, she will accept that I will go to great lengths to fulfil that. I certainly did go to great lengths in this case, but I messed up. That is what I have for you.

Bruce Toastmasters

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra) (6.08): I rise briefly to congratulate the Bruce Toastmasters club on their 30th anniversary in March this year and thank them for their very warm welcome at my attendance at their usual Wednesday meeting, which I was fortunate enough to be part of last week. I know Toastmasters prides itself on organisation, timekeeping and, above all, a supportive environment. My impression is that Bruce Toastmasters club delivers this in spades. I was impressed with the very good humour and encouragement with which everything was expressed throughout the 90-minute meeting.

I am also pleased to say I picked up a few tips. I think I have become very cognisant of the ums and ahs that I say when I am speaking off the cuff, but I certainly felt very warm and supported when I was offered the opportunity to give a brief speech to warmly congratulate them on their 30 wonderful years.

The longevity of any club comes down to its community and I think that, in the little time that I observed the club and its operations, it demonstrated just what a strong community that club still has to this day, 30 years on. It was a real pleasure to be there. I pass on my thanks to president, Sean, for inviting me, to the toastmaster that evening, Felix, for his very warm introduction of me and for having me there, and to the broader community for what was a really lovely evening. Congratulations again, Bruce Toastmasters club.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.10 pm.