



Debates

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Wednesday, 12 February 2020

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

Bushfires—recovery support

MRS JONES (Murrumbidgee) (10.01): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the devastation across Australia caused by the bushfires, including the loss of 33 lives, the destruction of over 3000 homes, the incredible loss of wildlife and the devastating impact on local communities and economies across Australia;
- (b) the impact of the recent fires in the ACT, including the Beard and Orroral Valley fires which have collectively burnt tens of thousands of hectares;
- (c) the contribution and dedication of volunteer and career fire-fighters, emergency services personnel, and Australian Defence Force personnel and reservists; and
- (d) the generosity of individuals, families, neighbours and organisations such as schools, religious groups, local clubs and businesses who have donated their time, energy and resources to assist those in need;

(2) express gratitude to the ACT Emergency Services Agency, ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT State Emergency Service, ACT Fire and Rescue, ACT Ambulance Service, ACT Policing, ACT Parks and Conservation and all other workers and volunteers who have assisted in protecting and supporting the ACT during the ongoing bushfire season; and

(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) commit itself to learn any lessons from this fire season; and
- (b) fully support the affected areas of the ACT to recover and rebuild.

As we discussed yesterday, this summer we have faced a terrible bushfire season on a national scale. The fires have ripped through our highest mountains, beautiful beaches, national parks, forests, farms, suburbs and villages. We have seen day turn into night and cities choking on smoke. Early in this bushfire season hundreds of dedicated ACT volunteer firefighters helped our neighbours in New South Wales and Victoria fight their fires, with the smoke from some of these fires blanketing the ACT with a thick, hazardous haze for weeks.

More recently, we have experienced our own fires much closer to home—the Beard and Orroral Valley fires. Collectively they have burnt through tens of thousands of hectares of land, with the Orroral Valley fire destroying up to 80 per cent of Namadgi National Park. Thankfully, the contributions and dedication of the hundreds of career

and volunteer firefighters and the wind direction meant that these fires did not cause the widespread devastation to property and lives as we saw in 2003. The hundreds of RFS volunteers and ESA personnel fought tirelessly to contain these fires. With more favourable weather conditions over the past little while they have achieved the task. Our firefighters were ably assisted by the Australian Defence Force. Australia-wide, over 6,000 ADF personnel, including 3,000 reservists, were deployed across the country. Our defence forces provided vital logistical, informational and on-the-ground support.

I would like to thank the many individuals, families, neighbours and organisations who have donated their time, energy and resources to assist those in need. I spoke at length yesterday about the generosity of some of the people in and around Canberra, and I reiterate today my thanks to them. There has also been such great generosity from people internationally, as well as domestically. We have seen firefighters from many other countries come and fight our fires with us. We have seen public figures from across the globe raising money for Australian charities and RFS crews.

Comedian Celeste Barber raised tens of millions of dollars for the NSW Rural Fire Service. We saw generous donations from dozens of tennis players who were playing in the Australian Open, from Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal to Nick Kyrgios and the awesome Ash Barty. Famous Aussies such as Chris Hemsworth and Nicole Kidman also donated. As I said yesterday, closer to home the “G” Spot in Gungahlin, the Canberra Sikh community and many other generous Canberrans also donated their time and effort.

While many fires continue to burn across our region, this week we take time to acknowledge the impacts of these fires and recognise and thank those who have protected us and supported our communities, and we commit ourselves, vitally, to learning from this experience. There is already a discussion going on in some segments of our community about what we can do better next time. Many constituents have reported positive interactions with the ESA, particularly on the use of their social media channels. For those who lived through the 2003 fires this was a great change, and the improvement in communication was welcome.

The bushfire season, however, has also highlighted some areas that require improving or addressing, and it is important that we put this on record and commit ourselves to learning from, and understanding better, these experiences. Many RFS volunteers have been disappointed with the lack of training in driving with lights and sirens, which culminated in the ESA directing the RFS not to use this important emergency tool. We need to look at how we can provide sufficient training for our firefighters to drive with lights and sirens.

It is not good enough that during the Beard fires the ACT RFS crews were stuck in traffic, initially unable to use their lights and sirens to get past. Meanwhile, all other responding services were able to get past. I understand that eventually, after some time, the RFS chief gave permission to use lights and sirens, though this would appear to conflict with the ESA’s earlier position of not using them due to insufficient training. This confusion and lack of training must be looked into and resolved. I also think we should look at recognition of prior learning. If RFS volunteers have been

fully trained to drive with lights and sirens in another Australian jurisdiction then surely they should have that knowledge recognised when they transfer to the ACT.

I turn now to the issue of breathing masks for RFS volunteers. The whole community has learnt a lot about breathing masks over this period. It is important to note that RFS volunteers are issued with P2 masks to protect them from inhaling dangerous smoke and fumes; however, the current masks have several issues which make them less than adequate, including not sealing well. Particularly for members with facial hair, the masks are prone to collapse. They are ignitable by embers—a somewhat troubling problem, as they are issued to firefighters.

It has been suggested to me that the ACT government has been warned of the risks to health of using inappropriate masks, which may leave the government liable under work health and safety laws. I understand that the ACT RFS is currently running a trial of better respiratory masks; however, it is unclear when such masks would be rolled out to frontline firefighters, whether there is funding available, what criteria will deem a mask to be suitable, and what independent subject matter experts will be consulted during this trial. Other jurisdictions, such as Queensland and Western Australia, already provide better respiratory protection to bushfire fighters, so it is unclear why the ACT government still has not. I think this is something we must definitely look into and resolve.

Another issue is ageing fire trucks. Historically, the process for RFS vehicle turnover has been to replace light units, such as command vehicles and Land Cruiser units, every 10 years, and heavy units, such as medium and heavy trucks, every 15 years. However, these time intervals have increased during the last three to four years, seemingly by stealth, and with little to no consultation with RFS personnel. An ageing fleet presents a number of issues, such as vehicle safety, lower trade-in value, higher maintenance costs and reduced access to replacement parts, and having a workforce that is sufficiently skilled at working on older vehicles, not to mention the environmental emissions, which I am sure my colleagues on the other side would care passionately about as well. Perhaps the RFS should instead consider a lower age limit for vehicles, such as 10 years, and hold that as a hard ceiling. This is yet another area we must look into and have clear, open resolution on.

I turn, now, to the rollover and falling object protection systems—ROPS and FOPS. If this fire season has taught us anything, it is the tragic and deadly risk of vehicle rollovers and falling trees. I understand that many, if not all, of the ACT Rural Fire Service vehicles do not have falling object protection systems installed, which are the large bars or cages over the top of vehicle cabs. I am told that even the newer RFS light units have not been fitted with such protective systems. I am sure that we would all share a concern about that.

The Chief Minister, during a recent press conference, suggested that the ADF could be used on a regular basis to prepare for the bushfire season. I think it is something to look into, though I note that the Orroral Valley fire was ignited by a Defence helicopter—a demonstration that the ADF and its equipment is not tailored for this kind of bushfire work. The ADF buys equipment with overseas use in mind, and

spends decades planning what to buy for the types of conflicts it expects to be in; it does not necessarily translate perfectly into a bushfire setting.

Thousands of ADF personnel assisted in bushfire-fighting efforts this season, including doorknocking, assisting with the clearing of properties and working in evacuation centres, and we are extremely grateful for this assistance. Perhaps we could train more local volunteers to assist with some of the roles the ADF have been tasked with. My husband, for example, is in the ADF and is also a member of the local CFU—the Community Fire Unit. The CFUs are able to assist with some of the tasks the ADF members were used for, such as doorknocking. With a little more training they could assist in preparing the ACT for the season more than they do at present. This is just one area that we could look into.

On the topic of hazard reduction burns and cultural burns, I have previously raised the need for additional training and resources to conduct hazard reduction burns when the conditions are favourable. I know we must be cautious about these burns, which is why I have raised the possibility of activating our RFS and other volunteers to assist with these efforts on good days, which I believe is a practice that we used to employ. Three years ago, just seven per cent of hazard reduction burns were completed in the ACT. The year after, just 24 per cent were completed. After raising this matter on multiple occasions, and with the minister telling me that nothing could be done about it, I was really pleased to see that last year 75 per cent of the burns were completed. While there is still room to improve, there has been progress, which I welcome. So well done to the parks and conservation service and the firefighters there for getting through so much in a shorter than usual back-burning season.

We should also look at how we can incorporate more cultural practices when reducing fuel loads. There are many methods employed across Australia and in other countries, including selective tree removal; the mulching of the undergrowth and dead tree matter to speed its conversion to soil, not fuel load; cultural burns, which are generally cooler burns that are more targeted and precise; and the various forms of grazing, which I know we use to some degree already.

On the topic of planning, I am sure that management of our natural places and how they interact with urban areas and housing will form part of the local and national conversation after this fire season. However, it is worth revisiting the assumptions behind our bushfire operational plan and our bushfire prone areas and the planning implications that come with that. Perhaps we do not have to accept as inevitable that our bushland will go up in smoke every 15 to 20 years.

I think there is an appetite in the community—I have certainly had several phone calls from locals in my area about this—for the use of effective fire breaks around our suburbs, and there have been questions about whether they are being maintained as well as they could be. For example, the fire break in Duffy, which is mown or grazed, is sometimes overgrown and, according to those who have spoken to me, this does not fill the community with confidence. There are questions about the fire trails. I know the minister stated yesterday that the fire trails had been used well and were being well maintained, but it is something to look at, nonetheless, to inform the community better.

Regarding emergency and evacuation procedures, in Gungahlin there are very strong community concerns about the ability of certain areas to evacuate. Given the way that suburbs have been developed, many with just one or two exit options, there is a fear that if evacuation were ever needed in our far north it would be difficult. Lastly, I will touch on the ACT Fire & Rescue enterprise agreement issues. I believe there have been over 1,000 days without an enterprise agreement for our career, urban firefighters in the Fire & Rescue. At a time of such need, it is rather unfortunate that this matter has not been resolved and inroads appear to not have been made in repairing the relationship between the ESA and the union.

The issues I have raised today are just some of the areas that will need to be reviewed in good time. I understand that an internal government review will be undertaken at the close of the bushfire season, as I am sure is standard practice. In the same vein, I suspect the JACS committee may well want to follow on with a public process for anyone in the community wanting to make public input. Once further details have been finalised that will also, no doubt, be announced in due course.

The process of reviewing and highlighting areas in need of improvement and learning from them does not in any way take away from the many professionals doing their jobs very well this bushfire season. It does not take away from the things that have been done so well. We are certainly forever grateful for the tireless work that our career and volunteer firefighters and emergency services workers have done for us, putting on their uniforms and walking or driving towards danger on our behalf. However, nothing is perfect, and we can genuinely use this opportunity to become better at the work we do in relation to the preparedness for bushfire seasons and the best use of resources as we go into future bushfire seasons. We all hope for an even better management of risk and resources as we advance as a city and a community.

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) (10.15): I thank Mrs Jones for this motion today. Let me begin in the same way that I commenced yesterday—by thanking and acknowledging the hardworking men and women, paid staff and volunteers, of the Emergency Services Agency and the services that make up the ESA, ACT Policing, the parks and conservation service and staff across ACT government.

We have heard praise from all sides of the chamber indicating a broad endorsement of how successfully they worked to keep us safe over this long, dry and challenging summer. Over the past few days I have heard remarks from some saying we were lucky, and remarks also about favourable wind conditions. I do not agree. It was not luck. This was about being well prepared and well resourced so that our ESA and parks personnel were able to take advantage of those conditions. They were able to focus on the immediate responses to the fires while also thinking about the longer term plans to tackle and contain them. What we saw was some of the best in Australia—proud Canberrans standing up and working to protect our territory in unprecedented conditions.

We know that natural disaster and emergencies are dynamic and unpredictable by nature and there is no such thing as a perfect response. While this season has seen exceptional service to the territory, neither the Commissioner of the ESA, the Chief Minister or I have been backward in saying that we will review, we will look at how we can do things better and we will improve.

Our territory indicated early a willingness to be involved in a potential royal commission, and we have continued to engage constructively with the commonwealth on this. While we have not yet reached the end of the bushfire season, initial work has begun on how we performed this season, and this will naturally accelerate once we are safely at the season's end. Having said this, the ESA has been listening to community feedback over our long summer and has responded to their concerns and made changes.

As minister I have kept our Assembly updated about our preparedness, about the lessons we have learnt and the improvements that we have made. The continuous focus of the ESA and everyone involved in bushfire and emergency preparedness ensured that Canberra was better prepared than ever before.

Perhaps our approach can be summarised by the remarks of Mr Parton on 29 January this year, speaking ahead of the state of emergency being declared. He told *Sky News*:

... we are much more prepared. We learnt so much out of 2003. I tell you who's absolutely nailing it is Georgeina Whelan; just doing a sensational job under enormous pressure but really showing the way for the ACT. I have got great hope that we will get through this next week relatively unscathed, but it won't be by chance.

Yesterday I outlined the difficult conditions that we faced, including the challenges brought about by climate change. I encourage everyone to reflect on my remarks, including the extensive resources we have provided over the years and the lessons from 2003 that have been implemented.

I want to focus today on the efforts that were made before the commencement of the bushfire season. The environment division within the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate also comprises our parks and conservation service. They undertook significant work to prepare for the current fire season, including prescribed burning, grazing and slashing of vegetation to reduce fuel loads, providing and maintaining fire access trails, and ensuring our people were trained and equipped to respond. It is this work that has aided our response. But let me be clear: the advice I have is that no amount of preparedness would have mitigated the fires, given the extreme dryness, high temperatures and low humidity. These conditions and the fire behaviour are unprecedented.

Having said this, as an experienced government we constantly review our approach to bushfire preparedness based on the changing climate. We trust the experts, ensuring prescribed burns are appropriate and evidence based. This helps our community to keep safe.

We know that our people and the environment are resilient, but both need our support as we now move into the recovery phase. A post-fire recovery team has been established to assess recovery needs across the conservation estate. The post-fire recovery team are a multidisciplinary team that specialises in fire impact assessment for threatened species, habitat, water quality, cultural heritage assets, infrastructure and threats to water catchments.

The team will assess post-fire recovery needs in the environment and will provide land managers with information on the impacts of the fire on environmental and cultural values. The team will also work to identify risks following the fire, given the increased likelihood of soil erosion and the occurrence of invasive species, and will provide advice on how these risks may be addressed. Opportunities for community engagement in post-fire recovery are also being developed, based on advice from ecologists, land managers and the specialist risk assessment team. As I have already said to our community, we will rebuild; we will recover and enhance our parks. I am leading this work and it has commenced.

I want to pass on my sincere thanks to all involved in assisting the community to remain safe. I thank the volunteers and staff from the ACT Rural Fire Service, the ACT State Emergency Service, the ACT Ambulance Service, ACT Fire & Rescue, ACT mapping and planning support, ESA support services, the ACT parks and conservation service, ACT Policing, the Australian Defence Force, and public servants across the ACT government who have worked tirelessly on the ground and in the incident management team, the IMT, to keep the territory safe and respond to storms and bushfires.

I want to acknowledge the families, friends and employers of the emergency service volunteers and the personnel who have assisted the ESA. Without your support to our volunteers across the ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT SES and ACT mapping and planning support it would not have been possible to respond to these incidents in the way that we have. Through your support to those volunteering in our services, you have helped to keep the community safe.

I also want to acknowledge and give thanks for the support provided to the territory by the Australian Defence Force and the New Zealand Defence Force and their personnel. They helped to protect the ACT and surrounding region. Thank you also to the crews from interstate, including New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania, for their support in helping respond to bushfires and storms that have occurred so far.

I want to acknowledge the continued support from the ACT community and communities from around Australia with generous donations for our volunteer firefighters and those who have been impacted by fires. Particular thanks go to Dean from the "G" Spot, Roseanne Howes, Samantha Fenton and Lia Therese from Slabs for Heroes, Rod and Sara Wark for their assistance to Slabs for Heroes, and the wider community for coming together to recognise and support not only the ACT community but all bushfire-affected communities in Australia.

Thank you to GIVIT, the Australian Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the St Vincent de Paul Society for their tireless support for everyone across our region who is now having to find a new normal as a result of the recent bushfires. Thank you to Kevin Jeffery and Steve Angus for their support and liaison with the community in Tharwa and the rural areas most impacted by the Orroral Valley fire.

As we pause to thank the hardworking staff and volunteers from the ESA and across government and our community organisations and acknowledge the impact on Canberrans of this long, hard summer, we must continue to remain alert but not alarmed. This season is not yet over. Despite the recent rain there is still a lot of work to be done, and everyone in the community, me included, is behind all of our emergency services personnel, from the volunteers and staff on the ground to the support staff behind the scenes and the pilots in the air. Please stay safe out there and know that our thoughts and support are with you.

Madam Speaker, I have circulated an amendment in my name which recognises the work that we have already done. I understand that both Mrs Jones and the Greens support this, so I move the following amendment:

Omit paragraph (3), substitute:

“(3) further notes that the ACT Government is:

- (a) committed to learning any lessons from the current bushfire season; and
- (b) supporting affected areas of the ACT to recover and rebuild.”.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (10.24): I want to thank Mrs Jones for bringing this motion forward. We have spoken about the great threat that these fires posed to this community, but the fact is that they have brought out the best in people in the community. I find it quite refreshing to be extensively quoted by Minister Gentleman in this chamber and that he is doing so not mocking me. We have found ourselves on pretty much the same page on most things in this space and that is what you would expect.

Mrs Jones has covered a lot of specific matters pertaining to the way that the fire was fought, and I do not really want to cover that territory other than to say that I did attend one of the many briefings that Minister Gentleman spoke at in the Lanyon Valley. I note that at this particular briefing there was some discussion after a question from the floor on potential evacuation routes out of the Lanyon Valley, should there be ember attacks and spot fires impacting on Tharwa Drive.

I know it was not widely reported, but Mr Gentleman responded in part to one of those questions. He said that there was even some consideration being given to opening up the fire trails that go over the saddle of Tuggeranong Hill so that people could potentially get out via Theodore. It was interesting to see that all options were being examined, but I think that is a part of what must be done in the review, because those sorts of contingencies should not be figured out the day before they are needed. I am sure the review will examine these issues.

I did not speak yesterday, but I do want to play tribute to all those who kept us safe in the last month. You have all done a fine job. I also want to pay tribute to the Top Naas Road community, particularly the Curtis family and the Hogan family and others around them who stared down the beast on a number of occasions and came up trumps. Again, as was reflected by my words on *Sky News* quoted by Minister Gentleman, it is not by chance that their houses are still there. They really did face a great threat. Those of us in the suburbs who think we have been through a crisis in the last month have no comprehension of what was faced by those rural landholders.

I want to reflect briefly on some of the differences in our response to these fires as opposed to the fires in 2003. We did learn a hell of a lot in 2003 and those lessons were very clearly seen on many fronts. I do not know a great deal about fighting fires, but I do know a fair bit about communication, and I want to reflect on our response to the fires in that space.

I was here, as you were, Madam Speaker, in 2003. On 18 January 2003 I was living in Florey and I remember standing in the backyard and watching that menacing plume of black smoke as it reached high into the sky way to the south. I can remember very clearly that when I heard the official advice which was given to us all on that day—the official advice, which was, of course, that the fires were not going to impact the suburbs—I struggled to believe it. It was, history shows, a disastrous message that was given, and when the fire did reach the suburbs on that day it caught many of us by surprise. We were not getting a great deal of information from the authorities. That has been well documented, but it became apparent to me early in that afternoon that we had a major emergency on our hands and that the provision of relevant information was woefully inadequate.

At the time, I was the breakfast announcer on Mix 106.3 and so I jumped in the car and drove to the radio station at Crace. One of our casual announcers was on air doing a normal, run-of-the-mill music shift. I pulled rank and took over at around 3 o'clock and commenced a nine-hour emergency information broadcast. I had done genuine emergency broadcasts before. I had mounted a marathon shift back in 1995 in Coffs Harbour as that city was swallowed by floodwaters. Again, it was immediately clear to me on that day how important instant and relevant information was in the time of emergency.

On that occasion in Coffs Harbour, the emergency services headquarters, including all of their communications infrastructure, ended up under water. On the night of those floods the only citywide source of information was the radio. On that day, I just opened up the phone lines and received rolling updates on water inundation, where people were in need of assistance, and police and other emergency services personnel all put their radios on to 2CS to keep up with the latest information.

After that experience on the North Coast, I was extremely aware in 2003 how important current relevant information is to all of us dealing with a natural emergency and how that importance increases dramatically if there is no other information available, official or otherwise. On the afternoon and evening of 18 January 2003, I opened up the phone lines and took literally hundreds of calls from all over the

city, from home owners who had fled their homes, from volunteer firefighters wishing to pass on information.

We got updates on roadblocks, on the emergence of spot fires, and I can clearly remember getting a call from a distressed resident on Dixon Drive asking for information on his house. I cannot remember the number of the house, but we were able to confirm through further calls that the house had survived. I still meet people, 17 years later, who thank me for that night of broadcasting. They talk to me about how calm and measured we were on that afternoon and evening and say that, without that broadcast, there was no way of knowing what was going on in the suburbs in the thick black smoke.

But, of course, getting out information should not have actually been needed in that way. One of the biggest things that shone through for me on that afternoon and evening was the lack of any real and relevant information from our emergency services bureau.

I understand that, as I was undertaking that broadcast at Mix 106.3, there was a similar operation being undertaken at the local ABC, but they were scratching around for any relevant information that they could get our hands on, in the knowledge that the magnitude of the emergency had overwhelmed the relevant authorities. The McLeod inquiry looked into the response to those fires and the McLeod report told us:

The Emergency Services Bureau centre in Curtin ... was unable to handle efficiently the large amount of data and communications traffic into and out of the centre at the height of the crisis. This affected the operational managers' ability to control and direct their assets on the ground ...

It is fascinating to wind the clock forward to 2020, having, I think, learned a lot of things in 2003, but we really saw how not to deal with a major fire emergency—with all respect to those involved, because I know the McLeod report also did not question the endeavour and the commitment of those involved. But there were a number of things we made a mess of, particularly on the communications front. The response in 2020 was at least 20 times better than in 2003. The constant flow of relevant information was a comfort to all of us, and I want to commend all those involved.

It is so important that we understand that, although our response to these fires was exceptional—and we have already heard this from the minister—it probably was not perfect. Our response was not perfect. There will be many things that we could have done better, and we just have to make sure that people understand that it is okay to suggest that some mistakes were made.

I was at a somewhat fiery meeting at the Tharwa community hall on the Thursday morning leading up our potentially catastrophic weekend. It was very clear to me on that morning that there were some major differences of opinion on operational matters. A number of Tharwa landholders were absolutely ropeable that they had been given a virtual green light for back-burning much earlier in that week, to subsequently have it withdrawn.

There was also much grumbling over the ESA call to issue a “leave Tharwa now” edict earlier in the week and, additionally, that it was followed only 20 minutes later with an official call that it was now too late to leave. Many of those on the ground did not believe that the threat at that time warranted such a call. There were also a number of questions being asked about the stationing of resources in Tuggeranong just in case the fire reached the suburbs. Those who questioned this at the time believed that those resources should be actually fighting the fires, rather than preparing for what might happen in the suburbs.

In the first instance, the ESA has made no apologies for these things and, indeed, it has, mainly through Commissioner Whelan and Joe Murphy, continued to outline its priorities and basically said that the first priority was the preservation of life, followed by the preservation of property. It is difficult to argue against those priorities but, in line with what has come forward in Mrs Jones’s motion, I think that we really must forensically look at what we have done, what was done well, and what perhaps could have been done better. This was a wonderful fire effort, and I commend all those who played a role, but let us not believe for a moment that it was perfect. There will be many lessons to be learned from this emergency. Let us commit to learning them.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.34): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this motion today, following on from our extensive discussion yesterday. I join Mrs Jones in expressing our gratitude to the incredible range of people who have made a contribution to what has been a significant effort in recent times to deal with the natural disasters that have faced us. I spoke yesterday about a range of agencies. I certainly acknowledge the ones listed in the motion, including the Emergency Services Agency, the Rural Fire Service, the State Emergency Service, ACT Fire & Rescue, the ACT Ambulance Service, ACT Policing and ACT parks and conservation.

As I noted yesterday, across the ACT public service many, many other people were involved in a range of ways, from the senior officials, the directors-general, who were sitting in daily—sometimes more than daily—security and emergency management cabinet meetings as well as the sensov meetings, through to people at Access Canberra who put on extra shifts to ensure that there was someone to talk to if people needed to get a range of information. Right across ACT government there have been an enormous number of contributors.

As was touched on yesterday and again today, a whole range of community members have stepped up, be that in recognised non-government organisations such as the Red Cross and various others—WIRES, ACT Wildlife Rescue, all of these sorts of groups, which are perhaps more formal, in a sense non-government organisations—and then the community members who realised there was a gap or there was something they thought they could do that would make a contribution and just got stuck in and did it. I think it has demonstrated the wonders of things like Facebook. For all the ills that social media can have, it also has enormous positives and people have been able to activate groups or activate things to do by putting it out there and having lots of other people jumping in and helping.

The danger of a motion like this and wanting to give thanks—and I think a few people touched on this yesterday—is that we of course do not know all the things that have been done. But it has been great to see this Assembly take this opportunity both yesterday and today to make those recognitions. All of us know different little anecdotes and different little stories that we have seen, either through our own personal connections or through stuff that has been in the media, but, as many people have said through this period, whilst these have been incredibly difficult times it has also shown, in many regards, the best of human nature and the best strengths of our community. On that, I add my thanks to each person who has done their bit to contribute.

I think there are many learnings. Again, we have heard some of that conversation this morning. For me, the first starting point in learnings is the comparison to 2003, which Mr Parton just made some remarks on. There is no doubt that the ACT is significantly better prepared than we were in 2003. That, again, goes to the work of a lot of people over the years in between and those that are still there today.

One of the things that I particularly noticed in the preparation, and I have seen this for a couple years but it really came through during this period, was that there are still a significant number of people around who were here in 2003, for whom the lessons are very personal, and therefore we can have a real confidence that those lessons will not be forgotten—people like Brett McNamara and Neil Cooper from the parks and conversation service, a couple of people I have dealt with over the years, and many others whom I perhaps do not know as personally. They are, for me, a couple of examples of, in this case, guys who were around in 2003—there are, of course, women as well—who have a very personal conviction to making sure we are better prepared because they experienced the shortcomings that we had in 2003.

I think where one can really lay criticism, if there is to be any, is not learning the lessons. I think what we can see is that lessons were well learned. Both our preparations and response this time around were much better as a result. I have already seen it—people internally making observations: “That worked pretty well but we need to do this,” or “Technology has come so much further and now we can do this as well or instead.” For me, a big part of the learnings is actually the fact that we have learned from last time. I think our community can be both proud of that and grateful that those lessons have been learned.

Having said that, there will be new lessons from this time. I think the hazard reduction discussion will go on quite substantially. We have seen that play out in many forms over the summer—some of it helpful, some of it not so helpful. Members may have seen that I wrote a column on this because there were some important things to say. I think we do it pretty well in the ACT.

Our strategic bushfire management plan, I think, is the key to that. It is a long-term plan. It is a five-year plan. It brings in all key stakeholders, be it the rural fire services, the rural lessees, the traditional custodians or conservationists. All those people who have a stake in this are at the table and, as I observed in my remarks in that article, for me, one of the real strengths of our strategic bushfire management plan is the

consensus building that goes on in actually coming up with that plan and people bringing their different perspectives to the table and having to work through some of those issues.

I think that the other key discussion when it comes to hazard reduction is that burning is not the sole answer. That has come out in today's discussion. There are a range of techniques, whether it is grazing or physical removal, and modern burning techniques will be part of it. I think there is improving discussion about traditional burning techniques. I heard Wally Bell talk about it on radio recently. The Firesticks Alliance is doing interesting work. I think we will see a lot more of this. We have seen some interesting case studies down the South Coast where some traditional burning has been employed. We need to have a sensible, evidence-based, scientific discussion about burning and get away from some of the more reactionary comments that we have seen.

Another massive lesson for us out of recent months has been the issue of smoke. In all the times that I have sat at the cabinet table and in the various discussions I have been involved in, nobody ever contemplated a smoke incident in the way that we have seen. In all the scenario planning no-one said, "Actually, six or eight weeks of hazardous air pollution is something we need to think about." This is what my motion tomorrow goes to—so I will not speak to it too much now—but we clearly need to say, "This is something we didn't see coming. How do we react to it now?" I think there was some great work done in a fairly quick way to react to it. Now we have an opportunity to sit back and think about it more strategically.

I reflected on the fact that I have no recollection of the smoke sticking around after the 2003 fires. I think in the 24 hours or so there was smoke in the air but there were not weeks of hazardous smoke in the way we have just gone through or the blanketing of the city, despite the fact that the fire really hit the city in such a full-on way in 2003. There is definitely some learning and some research to be done in that space.

I have been very conscious of mental health issues throughout this period. I spoke a little about that yesterday as well. I think we made some good responses this time, but there will be some learnings to do in that space as well. How do we make sure that we give our community the support they need, particularly for these sustained periods of anxiety? What does that look like? It is probably not so much in the acute mental health space but it is more a whole-of-population issue. How do we give people the right advice and help them deal with what they are experiencing? As I say, I touched on that a little yesterday. We certainly made a deliberate effort during this recent period to make people like our Chief Psychiatrist available to the media to give some independent, expert-led advice to the community, and I think that is a space where we can improve our responses.

The other fascinating one for me is what I loosely call supply chain issues. It did not really affect us so much in the ACT this time. As somebody who was at the South Coast over the period of the fires—and Mr Hanson spoke about this yesterday—I fortunately was not in an area that was directly burnt, but the supply chain issues were extraordinary, with the closing of key access routes and then the loss of power. We saw a whole lot of things flow from that.

There was no mobile phone coverage. There was no internet. Where I was, there was no water supply because the power had gone off and the pumps did not work. At least you could still get it out of the tank. We had fuel issues. Through the loss of electricity, suddenly there was no EFTPOS. There were no ATMs. People were not carrying cash. A lot of people were on holiday and were not self-sustainable in the way they would normally be in their own homes. We saw massive queues at supermarkets. We saw issues that in a modern world we are not used to having to grapple with.

Whilst we did not experience that directly in the ACT, I think there are things for us to look at, to think about. Interestingly, we have seen some of that thinking in our emergency contingency planning in the ACT, but now we have a real-life case study to look at and probably learn some lessons from in thinking about scenario planning.

In the time I have left, I will speak briefly about rebuild. Again reflecting on 2003, when we start to think about rebuild and repair we have been fortunate in the ACT not to have the direct impact that some of our regional colleagues have had, whether it is as close as the Michelago and Bredbo areas or the South Coast and then further afield. Today we hear that they are starting to move in right across the country to clean up some of the sites where people have lost their homes.

But thinking about how long rebuild takes, we are still working on the lower Cotter catchment 17 years on from 2003. There are still teams out there doing work—the parks and conservation service, Landcare groups, Icon and the like—who are thinking about how we protect that catchment and make sure that our water quality remains extremely high all these years down the track. We should not lose sight of how long term some of these rebuild efforts can be. With significant parts of Namadgi being re-burnt just 17 years down the track, the ecological issues are certainly at the forefront of my mind.

I was very interested in the comments in today's *Canberra Times* by Professor Lindenmayer, who is a world-recognised expert in this space, about some of the subtleties of what that looks like. What does the ecological recovery look like and how do we treat certain areas? Do we leave some alone? How much do we intervene? There is the necessity of getting stuck into the predators during this period when our native species are so vulnerable to the likes of cats, foxes, dogs and pigs and all these sorts of things.

Certainly in the ACT I think that that ecological rebuild is at the forefront of the areas where we need to respond, in the absence of having significant property loss in the ACT. So we are fortunate in one sense. We have not had that significant property loss but we have certainly had significant impact, and that is an area where I think we particularly need to put both our thinking and resourcing in the coming not just weeks and months but, undoubtedly, years.

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss a few of these issues today in perhaps a bit more depth than we had the chance to yesterday. I note Mr Gentleman's amendment. I believe it has been discussed. We are certainly very happy to support it. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss these matters today.

MRS JONES (Murrumbidgee) (10.46): The Canberra Liberals are happy to support the amendment. It does not substantially change the purpose of the motion and acknowledges perhaps up-to-date information from the government about their work. I thank all members for their participation.

Yesterday's debate was a different debate; it was a time for reflecting on the impact of the fire and the great things that were happening. Today I am trying to do justice to those who have contacted me with things that they would like to see done better. It is good and right and just that we should come here and discuss this and make sure that it is on the record and the government has plenty of information to use to respond with. It also will be good to have a public process for people to submit their thoughts and ideas.

There are people who are hurting. There are people who disagree with things that have been done. It does not take away from the great work that has been done. As Mr Parton said, we would all have to agree that things are at least 20 times better than they were in 2003. However, there are ongoing mental health concerns for our region and for some people in the ACT who have been affected, either directly or indirectly, including people in the areas south of Tharwa who have been directly fighting the Orroral Valley fire, as well as people in the Pialligo area who experienced the Beard fire directly.

Some really great ladies from an organisation called Picking up the Peaces were saying to me the other day that after a major incident like the one we have seen at the coast—or, indeed, the smoke haze; as Minister Rattenbury says, we did not really previously consider what that could be like and how to respond—there can be very severe ongoing mental health concerns for some individuals. After a big disaster such as has happened down the coast, the suicide rate in the two years following the incident can be much higher than the deaths that occurred during the fires themselves.

That is something that we need to keep an eye on. As Minister Rattenbury said, we need to make sure there is plenty of public information about how to respond. It is an area that the whole community is learning about. There is a great openness in Canberra to learning how to manage mental health better, but we still lack lots of public information.

While Mr Rattenbury is in the chamber, I want to mention again something I talked about yesterday when he was not here. The work that the prison did in preparing meals for the people on the fireground was an excellent contribution. We should learn from that what the people in our prison can do. It can be good for them and good for the community. There is great scope there for more to be done on that basis. We know that the prison needs more opportunities for work. Community service is probably something we have not thought of in a big way in the ACT before.

Let me go to matters that it is very clear we still have to resolve for our firefighting forces and emergency services. There are some significant frustrations in the RFS that I have been contacted about. We have had over 1,000 days without an enterprise agreement for Fire & Rescue, which is a long time to wait. There are worries in

Gungahlin. As Mr Parton mentioned, there are concerns in the Lanyon Valley about the method and route of evacuation which should be discussed. There are the firebreaks and suburban planning. There is an appetite in the community to understand better what the bushfire operational plan says and whether it is good enough or whether we can do better. There is a conversation to be had about hazard reduction. There is a strong appetite for that.

It is appalling, and I think many people would be very concerned, that we do not have rollover and falling object protection systems for many of our emergency vehicles. We know that this season there was one falling tree incident within the ACT close to or on a vehicle. If we can protect better from that, we really must. When the roads were closed to go down the coast, there was a public conversation and a media conversation about trees that were burning on the inside that may have looked as though they had finished burning but had not. There are trees that have lost their integrity and can fall because of their sheer weight and the lack of integrity on the inside after a fire has gone through. That is something that the mainstream community is now discussing and learning about. We can take that opportunity to make sure that we use that knowledge to gain support for better protecting our firefighters, not just people who are driving on the roads after the fire.

The issue of training to use lights and sirens for RFS personnel was raised with me right at the beginning of the fire season. Now we have seen an example, in the Beard fire, of how this impacts people's ability to do their jobs. I think people were rightly disappointed that there were mixed messages. They were not to use them, then they were to use them. They got stuck in traffic and other services were able to get through and they were not. That is the perfect demonstration of why we have to get through our training with the volunteers, who are very willing to attend training, particularly after hours and on the weekends. I am sure it can be delivered, and it must be delivered better than it has been.

I want to put on record my thanks to the federal health minister, who has not yet been mentioned in our debates in this place this week, to my knowledge. He opened the federal stockpile of P2 masks to the ACT. These are masks that the federal government has stockpiled for epidemics—for example, influenza outbreaks. The government provided us with a very large number of masks for the vulnerable people who might need them. As Minister Rattenbury said, it is something that we will have to think about for the future: whether we have our own stockpile for such events or whether there is something even better that we can do about air quality issues and how people cope.

I also put on record my thanks to all the public servants who worked super hard, especially during the state of alert and then in the state of emergency when the whole government was geared towards the Orroral Valley fire. As I have mentioned, I also want to thank the uniformed personnel and volunteers. Before I conclude, a very special thanks goes to Minister Gentleman. Thanks to Minister Gentleman because, for the first time since I have been here, Minister Gentleman answered his own emails during this crisis. It was extraordinarily comforting to those who were coming to me that he responded immediately. It goes to show what can be done in this place.

Mr Wall: It shows Mick is at his computer.

MRS JONES: I think he was doing it remotely, to be honest. It shows what can be done once people put their heads together. I really thank his office for facilitating briefings that I asked for and for responding to community concerns that were being brought to the opposition. I put great thanks to him on the record. We would love to see more of that in the future from Minister Gentleman.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Parking infringements

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (10.55): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that unexpected parking infringements may have negative effects on Canberrans' personal circumstances, including:
 - (i) receiving an infringement can have a significant impact on a person's budget and ability to cover their everyday expenses; and
 - (ii) due to this cost, unexpected parking fines can cause some stress and anxiety for members of our community;
- (b) that these fines should not target people who are trying to do the right thing, but simply did not get back to their car in time;
- (c) the impact on parking inspectors, including that:
 - (i) parking inspectors can often become the targets of abuse from angry members of the public;
 - (ii) this anger can be a result of members of the public returning as, or immediately after, their parking expired and find an inspector issuing an infringement; and
 - (iii) parking inspectors should not be put at risk of abuse as a result of doing their job; and
- (d) that equitable access to parking options remains an important part of living in our city and that parking infringement notices are a deterrent to people who want to abuse the system; and

(2) calls on the Government to explore the feasibility of implementing a 10 minute grace period for parking fines issued to vehicles that have been paid for an hour or more of parking.

I rise today to move this motion which calls on the government to investigate the feasibility of implementing a 10-minute grace period for parking fines in the ACT. No-one likes a parking fine. No-one likes receiving them, and parking inspectors do not particularly enjoy giving them out. That is why I think a commonsense change to parking fines will make our city an even better place to live.

When a Canberran pays for their parking, they are showing that they are trying to do the right thing. What they cannot always plan for is the unexpected: the meeting that runs late, the long queue at the shops, or a doctor's appointment that goes a bit too long. It is for these moments that a commonsense approach to parking fines will make life a little better, which is why I think the government should investigate the introduction of grace periods for people who have paid for their parking—nothing so large as to distort people's parking decisions but nothing so small that it can be thrown out by differences in people's clocks.

Most of our community understand that they should follow the parking rules. People almost always pay for parking when they need to and usually return to their cars before their time is up. This motion seeks to provide understanding to the many members of the public who do the right thing but, for some reason or another, are running a few minutes late. Generally speaking, people who intend to abuse the system are likely to stay significantly longer than those who accidentally return to their car late. These people who do not pay for parking or well overstay their welcome should be the main targets of infringement notices.

Receiving a parking infringement for returning to your car five minutes late feels rough to anyone but particularly to those doing it tough. It is essentially a double whammy: you pay for parking and still end up with a parking fine. This can damage the weekly budget for some Canberrans and for others can be unaffordable, resulting in a lot of stress and anxiety or even going on a payment plan. This very simple change will, hopefully, make a difference.

I know that this place has considered other ideas to address the inequalities experienced in parking fines, namely the proposal to base fines on income. We have had that debate and we know the outcome. However, this idea will serve as a way to help address this issue—not solve it, just help.

This motion will, hopefully, also protect our parking inspectors from abuse. This abuse can be especially bad when parking inspectors issue infringements to people just after their parking has expired. People often become angry and abusive towards parking inspectors, even though they are just trying to do their job.

We are a city that understands the risks and impacts of climate change. We have developed an excellent public transport network for Canberra that we always encourage people to use. And people are using public transport now more than ever, with a seven per cent increase in passengers across the network since the opening of light rail.

This motion will not discourage people from making use of our integrated public transport network. Instead, it simply seeks to provide a grace period for those situations in which taking public transport is not an option. There are always circumstances in which driving to and from work, an appointment or the local shops is necessary, and parking in a ticketed area is required for some. A small grace period will not distort people's transport choices. No-one is going to decide not to catch the bus when they might previously have done so because they plan to utilise a couple of minutes of extra parking.

This motion calls on the government to investigate a more sensible and compassionate approach to parking infringements. This approach would ultimately be beneficial to the community, especially those who most suffer the impacts of infringements. Our community will, I think, be well served by a little leeway when it comes to parking fines.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (11.00): I move:

In paragraph (2), add “, and report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day in June 2020.”.

The Greens will be supporting Mr Pettersson’s motion. One effect of this motion will be to codify what is, to all accounts, the current practice of parking officers. One only has to leave this building and walk in either direction along London Circuit to find an ACT government surface car park. If you spend any time in them, as all MLAs here do, given that our car spaces are in one of them, you will have seen parking officers at work—I possibly less than most, as I normally catch the bus to the Assembly. My observation of parking officers at work is that they do not appear to issue parking infringement notices overzealously in the surface car parks.

There are some other conversations, I appreciate, about some instances at school fetes and things. But that is appreciably a different question. On the contrary, the parking officers tend to have a good look around and if they see someone buying a ticket at one of the machines or racing back to their car from wherever they are, they do not generally issue a ticket, because it is just not an instant process. I have also never heard of someone getting a ticket for being a just few minutes over their time limit, although I am sure it happens. There are some particularly efficient black-letter law people, process-oriented people, in the world, and some of them must be parking officers.

The parking operations compliance framework, which guides the work of parking officers, states that the appropriate enforcement response is:

... determined based on the risk, or realised consequences. This allows a degree of flexibility to ensure the right regulatory approach for the right situation.

It goes on to say:

Conduct which contravenes the legislation is considered on a case-by-case basis and with consideration given to the circumstances of the conduct. Access Canberra will apply the most appropriate regulatory tool to address the conduct and to achieve the desired regulatory outcome which, depending on the circumstances, may include: a warning or a Parking Infringement Notice (PIN).

Be that as it may, I am sure that having an extra 10 minutes grace will be helpful to some people. We have all been in situations where the queue we were in moved at a snail’s pace, the doctor was running late, the toddler had a meltdown or whatever. But in most of these instances, 10 minutes grace is not going to be enough to solve your problems.

What would make a real difference on many of these occasions—to particularly reflect on Mr Pettersson’s motion and the reasons for it—would be if the parking infringement notice better reflected the recipient’s capacity to pay it. Sadly, as we learned last year in the government’s response to my motion, adopting an income-based fines system would be administratively very difficult for the ACT government to do by itself. That is why it is a good thing that in 2011 former MLA Amanda Bresnan, who was one of my Greens colleagues, introduced legislation that allowed people who are on low incomes or otherwise disadvantaged and receive a traffic or parking infringement to enter into an infringement notice management plan, which enables them to participate in community service in lieu of the fine or, in exceptional circumstances, have the infringement waived.

So I was pleased to see that Mr Pettersson’s motion notes that:

- (i) receiving an infringement can have a significant impact on a person’s budget and ability to cover their everyday expenses; and
- (ii) due to this cost, unexpected parking fines can cause some stress and anxiety for members of our community ...

The logic applies to any type of unexpected fine—or possibly even any fine. I am not sure that most of us expect them, whether it is for parking or because a person does not pick up after their dog. It particularly, of course, applies to people who have a limited capacity to pay a fine. As I noted when quoting both the Attorney-General and the Chief Minister at the time when I tabled my Magistrates Court (Infringement Notices) Amendment Bill 2019 in November last year, I could not have said this better myself. Thank you, Mr Pettersson, for adding to the government support. The consistency of sentiment from the government benches regarding the effect that fines can have on individuals leaves me optimistic that the government will support my bill when it is debated next week.

Of course, being me, it would not seem right if I did not say a bit more about some of the other solutions to parking fines. Clearly the ultimate solution to parking fines is not having to park. If you do not have to park, you cannot get fined. Parking fines would be less of an issue if we had a world-class public transport system and better infrastructure for active transport. On that note, I thank the government for the work they have done to tweak network 19 and look forward to seeing the timetables when they are released. I also look forward to an expansion of our bus fleet, not just the much-needed replacement of some of the no longer disability compliant older buses.

I also thank the government for its work on upgrading cycling infrastructure, particularly in Belconnen and Woden. However, there is a lot more still to be done. I am afraid I regularly get complaints about bike infrastructure that is problematic. Most recently it was about the cycle lane on Adelaide Avenue. Minister Steel’s attempts to make the intersection of Cotter Road and Adelaide Avenue easier for motorists have unfortunately made it a lot less safe for cyclists. However, it is pleasing to see that improved public transport and upgrading cycling infrastructure, which are both items in the parliamentary agreement, are being rolled out. I am sure we can all agree there is a lot more to be done in all of these areas.

Another area where there is more to be done is transport for people who, for reasons of age, sickness or disability, cannot take public transport, cycle or walk. These people need good parking provision as well as better specialised parking options. One of the reasons why we have the current parking fine system is so that the disabled parking spaces are actually available for disabled parkers. It has been my experience that in instances where parking times are exceeded then fines are either not issued or waived if the person in the vehicle has a significant mobility problem.

When I read this motion, the one thing that was surprising was that it did not include a time frame in its call, or a call for the government to report back to the Assembly. Bearing that in mind, I have moved an amendment which does that. It says that the government is going to do this work—great—and report back to the Assembly on when this is going to happen. I commend my amendment and the resulting motion to the Assembly.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (11.09): I would like to thank Mr Pettersson for bringing forward this motion today. At its base it is a good motion, and we will be supporting it today, but we have some comments to make and concerns to raise. For example, we would like to do away with the unnecessary proposal for further study or consultation. I would presume that Mr Pettersson has already investigated this a little. He is not going to bring it forward for a feasibility study and have it not go forward. If we all agree, as we already have, that this is a good idea, why don't we just get on with it and do it?

It is about time that the government did this. Having a system where infringement notices are placed on vehicles as a driver may be approaching their vehicle is poor public policy, and there can be poor occupational health and safety for those people involved. It creates unnecessary tension. Mr Pettersson alluded in his motion to parking inspectors potentially becoming targets of abuse from angry members of the public. It is not acceptable to make them targets for abuse. Unfortunately, it can happen.

This can mean, as Mr Pettersson said, that members of the public return at the time or immediately after their parking has expired and find an inspector issuing an infringement. Of course, the inspector is just doing their job. But if we can allow them to exercise that period of grace, it may remove some misunderstandings and potentially some more serious outcomes.

We believe in protecting the rights of frontline government officials. We believe in providing protections for them. We have been calling on protections for all frontline workers—nurses, doctors, ambulance officers and police—for years. We want to make government officials' jobs safer. They are just doing their job. But they are doing their job within the framework that we set for them here in our legislation. We need to make their jobs as safe as possible.

We agree that there should be a period of grace on infringements for car parking where the parking has been paid for one hour or more. It is an easy and obvious step to protect parking inspectors and reduce unnecessary tension.

With respect to some of the issues that we have with this motion today, firstly, as I have already mentioned, there is the call for action “to explore the feasibility of” this proposal. It is unnecessary procrastination and it is a waste of time. We should just get on with implementing this period of grace. Secondly, it shows the disingenuous actions of the government. In an election year, the government proposes to dangle a shiny bauble, hopefully to a grateful public, while at the same time the same government has been gouging this hapless electorate with excessive and massively increasing parking fines for years.

In 2017 parking patrol vans were introduced. These are vans equipped with infra-red cameras to scan licence plates, to track how long cars have been in parking zones. According to a report by the ABC in October 2019, this technology saw revenue from the patrol vans alone jump from \$1.6 million to more than \$4 million in 12 months, in 2019—a 26 per cent increase in revenue. There will be no 10-minute periods of grace for fines collected by a van. In the 2019-20 budget, the amounts projected to be raised by parking fees have gone from \$19.492 million in the 2018-19 year to an estimate in 2022-23 of \$22.258 million.

The Chief Minister is on record as saying, quite correctly, that parking fines are “voluntary”. It is the action of the individual driver that leads to the parking fine. He said that it’s only revenue raising if people park illegally. That is true. But think about those people who have been pinged at their school fetes right across Canberra by the parking vans circling school fetes on weekends, fining mums and dads who are supporting their local schools. I know I have received a lot of correspondence about this, and I am sure other members have as well.

No-one wants unsafe parking. No-one wants people to be parking in other people’s driveways. But where do you expect people to park, and how do you expect them to get to their local school on a weekend to support their school fete? It does seem extremely opportunistic.

This government has parking vans at sports fields on weekends, fining mums and dads who are taking their kids to organised sport to participate in healthy outdoor sport. These children who are attending sport on the weekend are highly dependent on their parents driving them to sport, especially those living in the farther parts of the city. It is hard for parents to get their kids to sport without using a car, except for those lucky ones who might have an oval just down the road from where they live. But most organised sport moves around. Football matches et cetera move around throughout Canberra; they are not always at the same location. So even if you live near an oval, you may have to drive to another sportsground.

These families are time poor. They are stretched. If they have more than one child, for example, they are probably driving their kids to a couple of different sporting events at different locations. When they get there, they drive around trying to find a car park, and when they do make the decision to park, perhaps on a nature strip somewhere near the oval, they then come back to find they have been pinged with a parking fine.

These are families who are busy with school drop-offs, families who need to get other people—their family members—to and from hospital, families organising child care, families just doing the shopping and getting to and from work. Occasionally, unexpected events happen, and a couple of minutes grace is a nice way to acknowledge that sometimes things happen that are completely out of your control.

These families who are time poor, who are stretched, who are just going about their everyday business, trying to do the best for their families, have not benefited from a 26 per cent increase in their income, unlike the 26 per cent increase in revenue that the ACT government got in 12 months with the introduction of parking vans. Most of these families do not have a free car park at their workplace either. Let us hope that, with the giving of a little on one hand by the government, with a 10-minute grace period, this may somehow offset the massive revenue take by the government in parking revenue gouging.

This government hope we will be grateful for small parking concessions while they keep increasing parking fees and fines every year. This is something that we can just go ahead and do. It is not something that requires a drawn-out feasibility study. The government have the directorate at their disposal to implement this and make this work. I am sure they have already looked at it in some way. Why hold Canberrans to ransom for even longer? Why not do it now? Madam Speaker, I have an amendment to Ms Le Couteur's amendment, which I seek advice on.

MADAM SPEAKER: It is my understanding that it is inconsistent. We need to deal with Ms Le Couteur's amendment; we cannot deal with them together. You would need to seek leave to speak again, should you wish to move your amendment. We will deal with Ms Le Couteur's amendment first.

MS LAWDER: I will do that. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MR RAMSAY (Ginninderra—Attorney-General, Minister for the Arts, Creative Industries and Cultural Events, Minister for Building Quality Improvement, Minister for Business and Regulatory Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (11.18): I would like to thank Mr Pettersson for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. The government does have parking rules and undertakes parking enforcement for a variety of reasons: for public safety, for public amenity, to support businesses in Canberra and to ensure equitable access by the community. It is important to understand that there are a range of reasons why there are parking limitations and parking enforcement. Unfortunately, in Ms Lawder's speech today she has conflated a lot of them into one particular view, which is unhelpful.

When we are looking at time-limited parking areas, as Ms Le Couteur has already noted, Access Canberra inspectors do have and apply a level of discretion when enforcing parking rules. For example, a parking officer who intercepts a motorist committing an offence may issue a warning rather than an infringement, and a warning may be issued in instances where a motorist returns to their vehicle before a parking officer has issued the ticket. For vehicles where the parking time limit has only recently expired, parking officers will generally recognise the position that the

person is simply running a couple of minutes late and inspect other vehicles nearby to give that person time to return to the vehicle before an infringement is issued.

I support, and the government supports, pragmatic, risk-based approaches to the enforcement of legislation. We need to acknowledge that establishing a specific time frame for the non-enforcement of parking for a longer time than permitted effectively amends all time-limited parking spaces in the ACT and that has consequential impacts on parking access and associated movements.

That is why it is important that we look further into this and do not simply jump at it in the way that Ms Lawder has suggested. We have to acknowledge that it also may place extra pressure on parking officers, very dedicated members of Access Canberra who are already doing a difficult job, often under trying circumstances, and who already often experience abuse simply for performing their duties. I place on the record that I believe that this is totally inappropriate.

I want to draw the community's attention to the ParkMobile app as a tool to assist members of the public in avoiding a parking infringement. The app is available for all motorists who use ACT government public parking across the city, and it allows people to purchase time-limited parking. Importantly, the app will send an alert to the user to remind them that their paid parking expiry time is approaching and allow them to pay for additional parking time where that parking time limit allows, or to provide an opportunity to return to their vehicle and move it.

The government is conscious of the impact that a parking fine can have on an individual's weekly budget. If an individual has received a parking infringement then there are already several avenues of resolution available to them. They include applying for a waiver or a withdrawal of the infringement; disputing the liability of the infringement; submitting a written declaration if they were not the person responsible for the infringement; and requesting an extension of time to pay for up to 360 days, entering a payment plan to pay off their infringement debt over a period of time, and this can be for as little as \$10 per week.

In addition, as Ms Le Couteur has also noted, they can enter a work development program to pay off their debts via various activities including volunteering or attending educational or life skill courses. In 2019 over 4,000 people requested an extension of time to pay and 13,000 people entered into a payment plan—that is, 17,000 people took up the option to reduce the immediate financial impact of an infringement due to non-compliance.

The introduction of the infringement payment plan regime was recommended by the targeted assistance strategy panel, which I am pleased to note was part of the work that I performed before being a member of this Assembly. It sought to ensure that people could effectively manage their household budget and break the cycle of increasing infringement debt. It is also important to note that most time-limited parking is in place to meet the practical needs of local businesses, such as business hours parking for customers and loading zone parking at other times to support the delivery of goods and services and the removal of waste products.

Motorists who break the rules at these times can make it difficult for businesses to go about their essential daily activities that support their businesses, and ultimately support their own families and support the broader community. I am always happy for legislative and operational frameworks to be reviewed to ensure that they best serve the business and the community.

Parking rules and enforcement are there to support the community. It is right that we continue to look at how rules and enforcement do that. I note that Access Canberra already exercise significant discretion when deciding to issue a parking infringement and are absolutely happy to support their policy colleagues in other portfolios in the information in any review. In this regard, I note that any policy changes in the matter that this would require are in the area of responsibility of the minister for road safety, and I have already spoken with him about that today.

Ms Le Couteur has moved an amendment to add a date for the reporting back to the Assembly on the investigation that is called for in Mr Pettersson's motion. The government is very pleased to agree to Ms Le Couteur's amendment. But I do want to take a moment to go to Ms Lawder's proposed amendment and the points that she raised in her speech. I do note that timed parking is often there to support businesses. It is there to ensure that there is a turnover of customers who can access the services that businesses provide.

I am often out and about talking to local businesses about their needs, including about equitable access to parking, and parking turnover is something that has been raised with me a number of times. It helps them bring people into their businesses and it is something that we in this government want to ensure occurs. That is why it is important to consult and to check the feasibility of this proposal and its impacts on business before any immediate change.

Secondly, there are also impacts on our parking inspectors. A change like this needs to be supported by an effective communication campaign. Without being clear to the community about any change, how it will work and how it will not work, we run the risk of this measure being misinterpreted. The people might think a five-minute parking area automatically becomes a 15-minute parking area by default. It is our parking inspectors who have the job to explain this at times. They already do an incredibly tough job very well and sometimes some members of the community inappropriately take out their frustration on them. We need to ensure that we have done everything that we can to make sure that there is no confusion.

I note that in Ms Lawder's speech sometimes she talked about people parking on a verge and just having a couple of minutes grace, again demonstrating that she has conflated two quite different issues. That is part of the reason why we need clear communication and to work through this matter clearly. Finally, I want to point out the continued Schrödinger policy positions of the opposition—that is, the ability to hold two conflicting positions simultaneously.

I get a lot of letters from the opposition about existing parking rules and asking for them to be enforced and enforced more diligently. I also get a lot of letters asking for

us to ignore them. Notwithstanding the fact that the minister for regulatory services does not have the authority to direct where parking enforcement occurs, Miss Burch has asked me to organise more stringent parking enforcement.

Mr Coe has asked for this, Mr Hanson has written to me about this, Mrs Jones has written asking for more parking enforcement, Mrs Kikkert has, Mr Wall has three times asked for more parking infringement and Ms Lawder has written to me four times asking for more parking infringement. At the same stage, Miss Burch has also asked for less parking enforcement three times, Mr Coe five times, Mr Hanson three times, Mrs Kikkert once and Mr Wall three times.

It is important that there is a coherent position on this, which clearly the Canberra Liberals do not worry about. That is one of the reasons why they are so clearly unfit to be in government. For community safety, for community certainty in our parking officers, we need to make sure that we check how it is that such a change would occur. On the assumption that Ms Lawder's amendment is moved, we will not be supporting it. We do commend the motion and Ms Le Couteur's amendment.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (11.28), by leave: I move:

In paragraph (2), before “, and report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day in June 2020”, insert “by instituting a trial immediately”.

I have circulated an amendment to Ms Le Couteur's amendment, asking the government to implement a trial immediately and report back by June 2020. As earlier flagged, I will not speak any further. I simply move my amendment to Ms Le Couteur's amendment.

MISS C BURCH (Kurrajong) (11.29): It is very interesting to see Mr Pettersson bringing forward this motion today, because it does seem to contradict the very well-known attitude of this government towards drivers across our city. This is a government that constantly demonises Canberrans who need to use their vehicles. This is a government that is hell-bent on banning cars wherever it can, having advocated for car-free days where it would arbitrarily ban cars to fulfil its virtue-signalling agenda. Minister Steel has also forced more Canberrans into their cars because of the chaos he has created with the bus network.

The feasibility study outlined in Mr Pettersson's motion implies that this government either has absolutely no intention of ever actually implementing this or this is simply a backbencher who has gone rogue. Either those opposite are scrambling for ideas to disguise their disdain for Canberra drivers or, eight months out from an election, Mr Pettersson has realised just how badly his government is letting down his constituents, quickly throwing together this motion without the support of his frontbench. Mr Ramsay's response certainly implies that both of these things are correct, with a patronising rebuke of Mr Pettersson for bringing forward this motion in the first place whilst also implying that the government has no intention of ever actually doing this.

A feasibility study is another example of what they do best: wasting ratepayers' money and continuing to gouge hardworking Canberrans. Why do we need a feasibility study for parking inspectors to wait just 10 minutes before issuing a ticket? Just get on and do it. Make no mistake, Mr Barr and his government have an addiction—an addiction to revenue. Whether it be fines, fees or charges, this government cannot take enough of Canberrans' hard-earned money. If Mr Barr ever has to choose between revenue and ratepayers, he will always choose revenue, every single time.

Parking fine revenue went up by \$3.3 million last year. This was a 26 per cent increase in revenue over 12 months. Mr Barr was quoted at the time as saying that fines are voluntary, and people should do the right thing. We on this side of the chamber do believe that Canberrans by and large are trying to do the right thing and that they are not deliberately flouting laws. A grace period would go a very long way in helping people, particularly when there is an unexpected queue in the supermarket, when your coffee takes just a little bit longer than anticipated or, as I have often encountered, when the time on the parking machine is actually five to seven minutes fast.

The hypocrisy of 1(d) in Mr Pettersson's motion today is quite laughable. Equitable access to parking options remains an important part of living in our city. In my electorate alone, there are countless local shops where parking facilities have not been upgraded in years and, in fact, car parks continue to be removed. Even in off-peak periods, car parks remain a premium in many locations. This does not just frustrate local residents; it has a huge impact on local business and therefore on our economy.

Really, a grace period is the very least this government could do, given its complete unwillingness to provide any form of quality services to Canberra's drivers. Yes, we support grace periods, but let us not be under any illusions. This government has not, does not and will not support Canberrans who dare to use their car to work and live in our city.

Ms Lawder's amendment to Ms Le Couteur's proposed amendment negated.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (11.34): I want to thank all the members who spoke in support of this this motion. Some were more direct in their support than others but, surprisingly, all were in support. This motion calls for a commonsense approach to parking fines that will, hopefully, make Canberra an even better place to live. We, as representatives of our communities, should be looking at every creative way possible to ease the burden and stress that can sometimes fall upon our community. The introduction of grace periods for people who have paid for their parking is one way that we can make life a little bit better.

This approach means that we can target our resources better. Those who are trying to abuse our parking system should be the target. This gives leeway to the 99 per cent of Canberrans who try to do the right thing by paying for their parking. There are many times when a person could have a reasonable explanation for being a few minutes late to their car, from having to wait at the bank to having a doctor's appointment or being stuck in a queue at the shops.

These situations are all too common in everyday life. Unfortunately, no-one runs on time all the time. When these situations pop up, they can often impact our most vulnerable the most: pensioners, students, people of low socio-economic status. I know that they can access payment plans, but all too often people do not. For those doing it tough, parking fines can break the bank. That can cause anxiety and stress.

Ms Le Couteur likes to bring the discussion back to the idea of tying fines to people's incomes. We have had that debate. This proposal can alleviate some of the issues that she has raised. I understand that it does not solve all of them, but it is one piece of the puzzle.

To the wider points that the Canberra Liberals raised, providing enough parking spaces for the general public is an important part of city planning. We need to be cognisant of how transport options change and our responsibilities to the climate. But, as Minister Ramsay so well pointed out, it is often a balancing act. Sometimes you need more enforcement; sometimes you need less. That is evidenced by a lot of the correspondence that people have brought forward.

To say that this government is failing is just false. Parking infringement notices should remain a deterrent to members of our community that want to abuse the system and overstay their welcome in our car parks. However, I do not think that those who are trying to do the right thing should be a target.

I am conscious that, as Minister Ramsay has alluded to, our parking inspectors too often experience abuse as they go about doing their job. I want to put on the record that that abuse is wrong. No-one should cop a serve at work. The situation can be exacerbated by a fine being handed out within 10 minutes of someone's car parking expiring. This would be one step to help alleviate those situations of conflict. I do not think you can ever get rid of that circumstance, but hopefully we can reduce it, as it is never okay.

At its most simple, this motion calls on the government to investigate an approach that would make parking a bit less stressful for Canberrans. I think our community wants to see this. I think all members of this Assembly would like to see this implemented. Let us get it done.

Ms Le Couteur's amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Leave of absence

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) agreed to:

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Cody for today due to illness.

Business—disaster recovery

MR WALL (Brindabella) (11.38): I move:

That this Assembly notes:

(1) notes:

- (a) the impact on businesses in the ACT in the wake of severe weather events including bushfires in and around the ACT;
- (b) businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector have been particularly impacted;
- (c) some tourism and hospitality businesses are reporting between a 50 percent and 70 percent loss in revenue compared to the same period over previous years;
- (d) hotel providers in Canberra have reported cancellation rates in excess of 35 percent of bookings over the January 2020 period as a direct result of air quality;
- (e) several businesses have been forced to cut jobs in the wake of these losses;
- (f) that the Commonwealth Government have announced a comprehensive suite of assistance measures, including:
 - (i) deferral of all BAS payments until May 2020;
 - (ii) grant funding of up to \$50 000 tax free to businesses and organisations that have sustained damage; and
 - (iii) low interest loans of up to \$500 000 interest free for two years;
- (g) a \$76 million tourism recovery package to protect jobs, small businesses and local economies by helping get tourists travelling across Australia again; and
- (h) until the ACT Government enacts the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement with the Commonwealth, the ACT is behind other States and Territories in accessing recovery initiatives; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) immediately activate its Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement with the Commonwealth Government so ACT businesses can access the same initiatives that are available over the border;
- (b) immediately establish a deferral scheme for commercial rates and payroll tax to ease cash flow pressures after recent significant weather events; and
- (c) increase funding at a minimum of \$200 000 to Visit Canberra to leverage off the Commonwealth investment in tourism advertising and promote Canberra as a destination.

What a start it has been to the year! There has been a lot said already by members in this place over the last couple of days in relation to the horrific weather and specifically the bushfire events that we have seen not just locally but across our region. That has continued not just in recent weeks; it has extended for some three months and is continuing.

I take this opportunity to put on the record my thanks to and acknowledgement of the frontline workers and volunteers who have done all they can to keep the ACT and our region safe. I pay my respects to those from our neighbouring states and fellow Australians who have lost property, livestock and, worse, livelihoods. Most importantly, I recognise those who have sadly paid the ultimate sacrifice in the face of the terrible fires that we have experienced over the last couple of months.

January typically is a time when we see natural disasters, or perhaps it is just a time when people are on leave and have the freedom of thought to pay more attention to what is going on. But this summer, unlike many others, has been unique in our region. Our usually sunny and welcoming city has been shrouded by a cloak of smoke, impacting our air quality, forcing people to stay indoors and keeping visitors away, affecting not just the ACT and our homes but also our playgrounds down the coast.

Road closures and bushfires on our doorstep, in addition to the hailstorms that we saw earlier in the year, are part of a myriad of disasters hitting the ACT region that we have not seen for quite some time, if ever before, at the same time in the one season. The impact on business in the ACT has been profound, in particular our hospitality and tourism businesses that heavily rely on tourism traffic, both domestic and international, as well as those Canberrans who choose to stick around during the summer months for some R&R.

The impacts are hitting home. Many local businesses are grappling with what the future now holds. For some, it means the need to restructure their finances, potentially the use of an overdraft, having to put in more personal capital or seek funding from elsewhere. Those that are doing it slightly tougher are considering laying off staff or, worse, the long-time viability of their businesses and whether or not they continue to trade.

In the last week I have heard from a couple of small businesses operating in the tourism sector who have ceased or are about to cease operating as a result of the tough trading conditions they have experienced over the summer months. I have been speaking with businesses and operators across Canberra, and everyone has a story to tell about the impact and the unique set of circumstances that they have experienced in their business over the last several weeks.

The Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum has provided a snapshot across various types of businesses which illustrates very well some of the impacts specifically in the tourism industry. A local tourist attraction in the north of Canberra has suffered losses in excess of \$200,000. All hotels across the region are reporting a dramatic increase in cancellations, with one hotel group reporting a loss of over \$500,000 across its hotel group and the venues within its precinct. The Australian Hotels Association in the ACT has reported an increase in vacancy rates above 30 per cent on previous Januarys. The Bush Capital Lodge has reported cancellations of groups that account for over \$20,000 of losses. Likewise, over \$20,000 of losses has been suffered by Leumeah Lodge in cancellations for January alone.

A local winery has reported its takings and visitor numbers are down by 50 per cent from the same period last year. Another local restaurant and function centre recorded a downturn of 70 per cent over their collective business of restaurant catering and smallgoods. A local cleaning company servicing more than 40 commercial properties in the ACT, including hotels, tourist park properties and the like, has reported a decrease in revenue of 60 per cent over the last seven weeks when compared to the previous time over the last four years.

Major national institutions have reported a significant reduction in numbers of visitors compared to last year, having a massive impact on the numbers that they anticipate achieving with some of the major blockbusters currently on show. Another privately owned major attraction has reported close to \$600,000 in lost trade for January alone. That is coupled with the cancellation of major sporting tournaments and events, such as the ACT tennis competition that was relocated, again due to the air quality that we saw. Again, this has resulted in cancellations, countless visitors not turning up to the ACT, restaurants, cafes, bars across the ACT seeing a downturn in patronage, not to mention the potential long-term reputational damage this does to the Canberra product. Our region is not alone in suffering, but we must be aware that on our doorstep there are many that are doing it much tougher than they otherwise would have done, following a January period.

We well know the impacts on New South Wales and Victoria of the extensive bushfires that have burnt thousands of hectares of national parks and caused havoc in numerous towns, the death and destruction amongst those communities. With the instantaneous world of social media, the effects of this devastation have been widely broadcast and quite obviously had a huge impact on tourism numbers in Australia at both national and international levels.

Canberra is not exempt from this either. As our air quality hit the worst in the world, it made news stories not just nationally but also internationally. For a city that prides itself on being the bush capital, with a pristine environment, clean air and great opportunities for a holiday, that is not the message that you want packaged with that product.

The response from the commonwealth government, in a national response effort, has been swift and comprehensive, recognising the urgency of this situation for so many affected, particularly in the business space. An effective relief package is on offer from the commonwealth which, for small businesses, includes an automatic deferral of BAS payments until May this year, grant funding of up to \$50,000 which is tax free, as well as two low-interest loan options of up to either \$50,000 or \$500,000 with interest-free periods and then a low interest rate beyond that, as well as some local economic recovery plans.

This has been coupled with the tourism relief package of \$76 million, which focuses on promoting and reinvigorating the tourism sector in Australia, with \$20 million being earmarked for a domestic marketing campaign to get visitors back into affected areas, funding for additional marketing in international media and tourism advertising, as well as boosting domestic tourism investment. One in 13 Australian jobs rely on

tourism and the hospitality sector. This investment is aimed directly at ensuring that this industry remains vibrant and a strong employer.

The problem that has faced the ACT is that we did not enact or advise businesses in a quick enough manner what options were going to be available for them. In fact, it took the opposition to come out and make calls publicly in the media on Monday before the government even made any mention of whether or not assistance in the ACT would be made available. That is in stark contrast to how this matter was handled in other states.

Other states, once they activated their disaster funding arrangements, did not necessarily have all the details ironed out on how businesses could access the grants, the assistance loans or the exemptions but said, “You will be eligible if you are in these areas and we’ll have more information once it becomes available.” The ACT information was non-existent. Businesses in the ACT had no idea whether or not there would be any assistance, whether they would be eligible for any assistance, let alone what was being done.

I think the strongest criticism of the government’s handling of the bushfire and weather events that we have experienced this January is that those that are in need and looking for assistance in uncertain times have not had even an indication that there might be other opportunities or options available to them. The arrangements that are now likely to come into place as a result of the government finally enacting its disaster funding arrangements will make a substantial difference to many small businesses, should they seek to avail themselves of those opportunities.

Business assistance can be provided to alleviate the financial burden that many small businesses are going to be experiencing, predominantly in managing their cash flow barriers. It is worth noting that some of the grants and funds are specifically for the replacement of capital infrastructure or livestock and the like that have been damaged as a direct result of fire. I think we have been lucky in the ACT that the number of businesses directly impacted by fire has been small, but the number that have been affected indirectly through air quality, downturn in tourism and the like is quite substantial. The grants that are available for those businesses will assist in cash flow management and keeping their viability going whilst they trade through this difficult period.

The disaster funding arrangements, when enacted, offer the state or territory government the ability then to determine where assistance is required. I look forward to hearing what more the Chief Minister might have to say about what other assistance is going to be provided. They have been quick to say that they did not enact this agreement and that it depended on meeting a spending threshold. The government say that they are in contact with businesses and are coaching some on how to navigate through this process, but those that I have spoken to, even those that are on the doorstep of where the Orroral Valley fire was, have said that there has been little to no information in this space. Whilst there was plenty of emergency information when the fire was at its worst, the business and economic side of things has been left wanting.

The National Bushfire Recovery Agency has a comprehensive website that covers every aspect of assistance on offer. In many instances it provides access to links to state or territory government agencies who are then responsible for devolving and administering the grants and the loans. On that website the ACT, until this morning, did appear anywhere. The short answer to this is that that Mr Barr and the government have been very slow off the mark in comparison to other affected jurisdictions. That has added significant and additional impact to an industry that already sees that, at many times, this government treats it with contempt. That is a contempt that has defined Mr Barr's leadership. The recovery will take a concerted effort and will require a coordinated one, both with the commonwealth doing its part and the territory doing its bit.

I welcome the announcement by the federal minister, Minister Littleproud, that the ACT has finally enacted its disaster funding arrangement and that the commonwealth assistance is now going to be available to businesses in the ACT. The ball is now in the government's court. The ball is now in Mr Barr's hands to determine what assistance the ACT government is able to offer. The ACT needs to take some action on its own.

Today the opposition are calling for a few fundamental steps to be taken that will go a long way to easing the cash flow pressures that many businesses are facing following the January period. The first is to establish a deferral scheme for commercial rates and payroll tax for affected businesses. It needs to have immediate effect. This will help enormously in managing the cash flow during this critical trading period. Second, there is the need to further leverage the tourism investment that the commonwealth is making in further promoting the ACT as a tourism destination. The opposition supports the industry call for an additional \$200,000 to be put into VisitCanberra to assist in promoting the ACT as a destination, both domestically and internationally.

We could not have controlled the weather events that struck us over the past six to eight weeks, but we can control how we respond to them: ensuring that local businesses remain viable, that jobs are secure, that there is sufficient incentive for businesses to continue, and continuing the promotion of the territory as a tourism destination.

Sadly, the bushfires are just one of a number of things that have hit our region. The hailstorm wiped out a number of critical asset and infrastructure bases for our tourism sector. I have heard reports that there are very, very few hire cars available in the ACT, both as a result of direct damage to the fleet at the airport but, likewise, as Canberrans' cars have been damaged and insurance companies have provided courtesy vehicles, those stocks have been depleted.

We need only look at the world stage to see what is happening with the coronavirus and the impact that is having on people's movements and the future for the tourism and hospitality sector. It has been through hard times and there are some more hard times to come. I look forward to hearing what the Chief Minister has to say and what further support the ACT government is going to be offering those businesses. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Social Inclusion and Equality, Minister for Tertiary Education, Minister for Tourism and Special Events and Minister for Trade, Industry and Investment) (11.53): I move:

Omit all text after “(1) notes”, substitute:

- “(a) the significant impacts on businesses in the ACT in the wake of severe weather events, including bushfires, smoke and hail in and around the ACT;
- (b) businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector have been particularly impacted;
- (c) some businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector have reported significant losses in revenue compared to the same period in previous years;
- (d) hotel providers in Canberra have reported significant cancellation rates as a direct result of air quality; and
- (e) the Commonwealth Government have announced a range of disaster assistance measures to assist eligible businesses that have been directly impacted;

(2) also notes:

- (a) the ACT Government held an initial roundtable with the tourism and hospitality industry on 17 January to hear directly from the sector about the impacts, and help inform the government response;
- (b) to quickly and directly assist the hospitality sector, the ACT Government announced an immediate 50 percent reduction in the cost of outdoor dining permits for existing permit holders, and a waiver of all fees for the first 12 months for new permit holders;
- (c) the ACT Government has been working directly with impacted businesses to individually case manage their circumstances and assist them in gaining access to both ACT and Commonwealth support;
- (d) on 29 January, the ACT Government wrote to the Prime Minister seeking confirmation of access to Commonwealth Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements;
- (e) on 12 February, the Commonwealth Government confirmed Disaster Recovery Assistance has been activated, including concessional interest rate loans for farmers and small businesses;
- (f) the ACT Government has longstanding arrangements in place for tax deferrals and payment plans in special cases. If a small business has suffered significant economic loss as a result of the recent disasters, access to these arrangements will be considered on a case-by-case basis; and
- (g) as well as not paying tax on their insurance, all small and most medium sized businesses in the ACT are also exempt from payroll tax, with the \$2 million annual payroll tax threshold in the ACT being the most generous in the nation; and

(3) further notes the ACT Government:

- (a) currently has \$3.4 million in active tourism campaigns focussed on bringing more visitors to Canberra;
- (b) is working collaboratively with Tourism Australia to maximise available financial assistance on destination marketing campaigns;
- (c) through Visit Canberra, launched the new “Holiday Here Canberra” campaign in January 2020, encouraging Canberrans, their families and their friends to support local businesses;
- (d) through Visit Canberra is working with the Canberra Convention Bureau to attract new business events to the Territory for this calendar year;
- (e) will allocate an additional \$16.4 million over the next four years to support the tourism, events and hospitality sectors through Canberra’s major venues and events; and
- (f) will continue work with industry and partners, including local businesses, national institutions, airlines and accommodation providers, to identify new opportunities to boost both domestic and international tourism to Canberra.”.

The amendments outline the ACT government’s response to date, correct many of the falsehoods perpetrated by the previous speaker in his remarks and highlight the government’s work and important announcements that I will be able to make today.

In the first instance, it is worth acknowledging the significant impacts on businesses in the ACT in the wake of the severe weather events. There have been a number of them over the course of this summer. As I think members are aware—I alluded to it in this place yesterday, and there was extensive coverage of it at the time, if Mr Wall had bothered to pay any attention—the ACT government held an initial round table with the tourism and hospitality industry on 17 January to hear directly from the sectors about the impacts. At that stage—this was before the Orroral Valley fire and also before the hailstorm—this was around the smoke impacts. That helped inform the initial government response.

We then moved quickly and directly to assist the hospitality sector by announcing an immediate 50 per cent reduction in the cost of outdoor dining permits for existing permit holders and a waiver of all fees for the first 12 months for new permit holders. We have been working directly with impacted businesses to case manage their individual circumstances and to assist them in gaining access to both ACT and commonwealth support. That has been ongoing for several weeks now.

On 29 January I wrote to the Prime Minister seeking confirmation of access to the commonwealth disaster recovery funding arrangements. That was on 29 January. Last night that approval finally came through. This morning Minister Littleproud and I were able to announce that the commonwealth had confirmed that disaster recovery assistance had been activated.

I wrote in late January, initially in relation to smoke and the hailstorm. I subsequently followed up with a further request to the Prime Minister in relation to the Orroral Valley fire. On the date I wrote the first letter, that had not escalated to the extent that it eventually did. There have been a number of trigger points over this summer to seek

to activate these particular arrangements. They are in place now. My first contact was in January. It has taken a couple of weeks for the commonwealth to agree and for a joint statement to be released. That agreement came through late last night, and a statement was issued at 6 am today.

The ACT government has longstanding arrangements in place for tax deferrals and payment plans in special cases. We do not need to establish a new scheme; it already exists. For any small business that has suffered a significant economic loss as a result of the recent disasters, access to these arrangements can be made on a case-by-case basis. Every circumstance will be different in relation to local business impact.

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I point out that, as well as not having to pay any tax on their insurance products in the ACT, all small and most medium-sized businesses in the ACT are also exempt from payroll tax already. They simply do not pay it because they do not meet the \$2 million annual payroll tax threshold in the ACT. That is the most generous threshold in the nation.

We currently have \$3.4 million in active tourism campaigns underway or about to commence. That is 17 times what is being proposed by the opposition. We have that already announced and already underway. We are working collaboratively with Tourism Australia to maximise the available financial assistance on the destination marketing campaigns. That will work through a matched funding amount between VisitCanberra and Tourism Australia. That has already been committed. I launched that campaign several weeks ago. It has been extensively reported in the local media. Members might have seen some additional reporting of that when Nick Kyrgios was involved in it. Out of the goodness of his heart, he provided an endorsement for free. We did not have to go and pay him to do that. We launched the “holiday here” campaign in January. Through VisitCanberra, we are working with the Canberra Convention Bureau to attract new business events to the territory this year.

This morning I can announce that we will allocate an additional \$16.4 million over the next four years to support the tourism, events and hospitality sectors through the budget update. That will be supported through Canberra’s major venues and events. It supports a range of new events over the next four years and also supports existing events and organisations. We will continue our work with industry and partners, including local businesses, national institutions, airlines and accommodation providers, to identify new opportunities to boost both domestic and international tourism to Canberra.

This morning Minister Littleproud and I announced that disaster recovery assistance has been activated by the commonwealth government. Eligible small businesses, primary producers and non-profit organisations who have suffered direct damage or significant loss of income as a result of the bushfires, smoke and reduced air quality will be able to apply for commonwealth financial support. Businesses who would like to inquire about eligibility and access to these arrangements can contact Access Canberra to register their details. The assistance is being provided through a jointly funded commonwealth-territory disaster recovery funding arrangements model, DRFA. Further information on disaster assistance can be found on the Australian government’s disaster assistance website.

Concessional loans for directly and indirectly affected small businesses, primary producers and non-profit organisations are available. This assistance provides loans of up to \$500,000 at a concessional interest rate to meet carry-on requirements and/or repair or replace damaged property not covered by insurance. These loans are, of course, subject to eligibility criteria. They can be used to cover direct damage and loss of income from the bushfires.

We will continue to assess the impact of the bushfires and recovery needs within the community; we will continue to engage with the commonwealth; and we will request further assistance as appropriate. This assistance is also in recognition that Canberrans have played a major role in helping the wider New South Wales region during this terrible summer. Our respite centres in Dickson and Erindale are good examples of that work.

As I mentioned, in partnership with Tourism Australia, VisitCanberra launched the “holiday here” campaign to encourage Canberrans to take a staycation or to play tourist for the day, checking out an exhibition or two in our city. We already have \$3.4 million in planned campaigns underway. This rolls out over the autumn period, which is a busy time for tourism in Canberra. This will be delivered through destination, event and international marketing, and we are looking at opportunities to partner with Tourism Australia to amplify this. As I have mentioned, as part of the budget review we are providing an additional \$16.4 million to support our venues and events and to bring more visitors into our region.

Over the next few weeks we are hosting the National Multicultural Festival and the Enlighten festival. We are the host city for this year’s Australian Tourism Awards in early March. There is the Canberra Balloon Spectacular showcase. These will all demonstrate that the city is open. Our new winter festival, which kicks off this year, focused on innovation, creativity and culture, will play a key role in our recovery as well as challenging long-held perceptions about Canberra and bringing more visitors to our city at a time of year that is often quiet.

I need to stress that, beyond the short-term activities, it is important to maintain our long-term strategic direction. That includes continuing our efforts to secure more low cost airlines to fly to Canberra and more international flights—the team from VisitCanberra have been holding meetings with airlines this week—and to support new direct domestic flights.

This has been a challenging summer and it has impacted on our city’s export sectors. We are resilient, though, Madam Speaker, and there is every reason to be optimistic about the recovery phase ahead. At the end of last year, Canberra achieved its all-time record levels of both domestic and international tourism. We smashed our tourism 2020 targets ahead of schedule. There is a lot to be optimistic about in our city’s tourism industry.

The announcements I have just made, together with the commonwealth’s agreement to extend their disaster recovery assistance to the ACT, mean that there are a number of programs in place now to assist in the short term. There is a strong focus on the

autumn and winter program of events that lies ahead of us, with significant funding, over \$3.4 million, in destination and event marketing about to hit the market, some already in market. This will see very strong promotion of Canberra.

The one remaining issue that will impact on our biggest international market is the travel restrictions in place with China. Unfortunately, it is not within my power to end those restrictions, but I certainly hope that they can be lifted as soon as possible. That will have not just significant implications for our higher education sector but flow-on implications for our biggest international tourism market.

As soon as it is possible on public health grounds for those travel bans to be lifted, I urge the Australian government to do so, because there is no doubt that it is having a significant impact on higher education and tourism, not just here in Canberra but right across the nation. It is also having a significant social impact on the Chinese Australian community. In particular, I note that there have been—not so much in Canberra but in other parts of Australia—some concerns about quite explicit racism in relation to the coronavirus. That is incredibly unfortunate. The virus does not discriminate and nor should people.

It is my hope that we can see those travel restrictions lifted as soon as possible. That will ensure not only that the thousands of Chinese students who are scheduled to study here in Canberra can arrive and commence their studies but that the tens of thousands of Chinese tourists who come to our city each year will be allowed to travel to Australia. As soon as it is safe to do so, I urge the Australian government to lift that travel ban. It will be very important for this region's economic recovery. I think it is very important for the Chinese Australian community to know that they have the full support of the ACT government at this time. I wish for this situation to be dealt with as quickly as possible and that travel can resume in a normal way as soon as possible.

I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.06 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice

ACT Health—SPIRE project

MR COE: My question is to the Minister for Health. In 2016 the Chief Minister said that SPIRE would be delivered “in around 2022”. The latest projected delivery date is looking like 2024. Minister, what is causing the delays to the SPIRE project being completed?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. As members would be aware, in May 2019 the government announced that preparatory site works for SPIRE would get underway, with decanting and site works commencing this year, and with construction set for completion in 2023-24. This remains the case and the project is not delayed.

Mr Hanson: I remember 2016.

Mr Wall: She doesn't.

MR COE: Minister, how many more times will the dates for the SPIRE project be pushed out? Can you guarantee that 2024 is the last date in which it will be delivered?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his supplementary question. As I have stated, the project is not delayed. As someone opposite noted, I was not in this place prior to the election in 2016; I was focused on my own campaign. I have had the opportunity to go back and look at some of the things that the Canberra Liberals said in 2016. Mr Hanson, as opposition leader and shadow minister for health, stated that they would be able—

Mrs Dunne: I raise a point of order. The question that Mr Coe asked was quite direct: would they change again, or words to that effect. According to Standing Order 118, the minister has to be directly relevant, and under 118(b) not debate the subject.

MADAM SPEAKER: I ask the minister to come to the point. The question is about your policies and the timing of the delivery of those.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I repeat what I said earlier: the project is not delayed.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, how can the people of the ACT trust your government to deliver the SPIRE project on time?

Mr Gentleman: I have a point of order. Standing order 117 suggests that members cannot ask questions that include bad imputations about ministers. I ask the member to retract that bit.

Mrs Dunne: Madam Speaker, the question was about the capacity of the government to deliver; it is not a personal imputation about the minister. It is about the capacity of the government to deliver.

MADAM SPEAKER: I will let the question stand. Standing order 117 covers imputations, hypothetical matters and a range of other things. "Trust" can be used to impugn somebody's honesty. I will let the question stand and perhaps both sides can reflect on how they ask questions and how they answer them in the future. The question stands, but with that caution.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The people of Canberra know that over the past decade the ACT government has delivered over \$1 billion in health infrastructure, including the new University of Canberra Hospital, the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children and the Canberra Region Cancer Centre. In terms of delivering major infrastructure projects, we delivered light rail stage 1 on time and under budget.

Planning—Coombs peninsula

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the minister for planning and relates to the Coombs peninsula. Despite an Assembly resolution on 27 November 2019 to rezone the peninsula for environmental and recreational purposes, as requested by local community environment groups, the Molonglo River reserve variation tabled by you yesterday did not include such a rezoning. Is it the government's intention to ignore the Assembly's resolution?

MR GENTLEMAN: No. In fact we have looked at what we would need to do in that particular area for rezoning. A Territory Plan variation that would have to be drafted. It was not 360; that was for the Molonglo River reserve, as I explained in my tabling statement yesterday.

MS LE COUTEUR: Minister, given that, can you give the affected residents, the community and the conservation groups a timetable for when you will start consultation on your foreshadowed Territory Plan variation?

MR GENTLEMAN: Whenever that TPV is prepared.

MRS JONES: Minister, how long does it normally take you to prepare a Territory Plan variation, and why would you not be up front with the residents about when that will be done?

MR GENTLEMAN: Nobody has put to me the time line by which they want to see a TPV for the area. The resolution from the Assembly does not have a time line in it, so I will let the directorate work on that in its normal course of business.

ACT Health—SPIRE project

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, in mid-November 2019 a group of senior officials considered a paper outlining options for the location of SPIRE. In an email of 19 November 2019 to the CEO of Canberra Health Services an official stated:

The inclination ... is ... to progress with Option 1.

The official went on to outline the advantages of proceeding with option 1, including that it "provides a hospital main entry that fronts onto Yamba Drive". For the information of members, I seek leave to table the document that I received under the Freedom of Information Act.

Leave granted.

MRS DUNNE: I table the following paper:

SPIRE—Footprint options and site options paper—Copy of email correspondence.

Minister, what specific options were outlined in this options paper? Specifically, what was option 1?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: To correct Mrs Dunne from the start, these were not options about the location of SPIRE. They were options about the footprint of SPIRE and its connection to the rest of the hospital. This is exactly in line with what I said in this place in November 2019 when I was asked by Ms Lee:

... what is the point of community consultation by the government on traffic flows to and from SPIRE after the government has already decided on its location?

To which I responded:

It is an interesting question because there are in fact a number of options in relation to traffic flows to the SPIRE building, to the SPIRE project, in that current proposed location. This is something we are working through.

Those options related to that work, not the location of SPIRE.

Mrs Jones: On a point of order, Madam Speaker—the clock was not on but that probably does not really matter now. The question was: what was option 1?

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister is in order. She has referred to discussions about the paper and the options being within the footprint, without verballing her.

Mrs Jones: There was no answer to the question: what was option 1?

MADAM SPEAKER: The answer is in order.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, can you tell the Assembly what the options were, and specifically what option 1 was? And why were any of these options rejected?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: This is work that is ongoing to inform cabinet considerations, which, as Mrs Dunne is well aware, is why the attachment was not provided under freedom of information. No, I will not inform the Assembly of what all of those options were.

What I will say is that it is exactly in line with what I said we were doing last November. Let me quote again from *Hansard*. Mrs Jones asked me:

Is there any possibility that you will move the entrance?

After many points of order and backwards and forwards, I responded:

The current proposed entrance to the emergency department in the SPIRE project is as far away from Garran Primary School as it could be on the SPIRE location.

There appeared to be some misunderstanding on that point. I continued:

So it is very unlikely that the entrance to the emergency department will be moved. But we are in the process of detailed design development, so I do not want to give any concrete yes or no answer, because that is what the detailed design development process will consider.

This demonstrates yet again that the Canberra Liberals have absolutely no idea of how infrastructure development proceeds, absolutely no idea of what detailed design development processes are and that this is when we consult with the community to identify issues and address them, which is exactly what we are doing. We are getting on with the biggest investment in health infrastructure since self-government, the biggest modernisation of Canberra Hospital since self-government, and the only people who are creating uncertainty about the future of the SPIRE project are those opposite.

MR COE: Minister, on behalf of hundreds of concerned residents, will you please advise what was option 1 in that email that you interjected that you knew the content of?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his supplementary question. It is a public document. It has been subject to an FOI request by Mrs Dunne and I understand it has been released. In any case I do have a copy—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne and Mr Wall!

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The email, I was referring to. I have read the email, which has been released under FOI. I have also said—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Can you resume your seat, please. Members, do not badger the minister when she is on her feet providing an answer. Continue.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones, be careful.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I believe that Mr Coe then misrepresented in his question what I said, and I have already answered the question from Mrs Dunne. But I will not talk about matters that are subject to ongoing cabinet consideration.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones, restrain yourself, please.

ACT Health—SPIRE project

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, on 6 November 2019 you told the Woden Valley Community Council that the location of the SPIRE project was non-negotiable. Later in November, senior officials from Major

Projects and Canberra Health met to discuss closely held options for SPIRE, with at least one of them to change the location of SPIRE. Minister, why were you telling the Woden Valley Community Council and Garran residents one thing in November when you and officials were considering other options?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think I have already been very clear that we are not considering other options for the location of SPIRE. The Canberra Liberals are very confused. They do not understand the difference between location and footprint.

MR HANSON: Minister, can you confirm that that meeting in late November, where other options were discussed, did occur?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I refer again to my previous answers. I cannot confirm that other options for the location were discussed, because that is not what the document was about. I have been clear in my public statements and at the local community forum last week that the site for the SPIRE project is settled and the government has no intention of reconsidering this question. This is not what that email was about. The chosen site is the best option and planning—

Mr Coe: Point of order on relevance. The specific supplementary question that Mr Hanson asked was: did a meeting in late November take place. The minister has not yet answered that question and it does not look like an answer is coming.

MADAM SPEAKER: There were two parts to the question. It was about the meeting and whether options were being considered or not. The minister is being relevant to the question.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The email referred to a meeting of officials and I understand it did take place.

MRS JONES: Minister, when will you admit that the footprint and location of SPIRE are wrong and are not what the community wants?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Jones for the supplementary question. As I was saying, the government is firmly of the view, after years of due diligence and after years of examining alternative options, that the chosen site is the best option, and planning to deliver the SPIRE project on this site is well progressed.

I have also been clear that the detailed project design still has a long way to go. This includes the exact footprint of the building, its connections with other buildings on the Canberra Hospital campus, and traffic and pedestrian routes. That is what this email was about. That is what the conversation between officials was about. That is partly what our conversation with the community is about. This is why we are meeting with the community to take on board their feedback, to address their concerns; their concerns about existing traffic issues on Gilmore Crescent, which I have committed to look at, and which will not be made worse by the SPIRE project.

We have established a local community reference group, the membership of which will be announced shortly, and we have already had the first local community forum,

to continue to hear that feedback from the community. That will be an ongoing process because detailed project design still has a long way to go.

Education—2020 school year preparation

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development. Minister, how does the government ensure that every child has a place that meets their needs in their local public school?

MS BERRY: I thank the member for the question. Last week 49,000 students and 3,800 educators started their year at 88 ACT public schools. The ACT government has been committed to ensuring that every public school is a great school that has the infrastructure to support high quality education. The government has been upgrading and expanding ACT public schools across the territory in preparation for the 2020 school year.

High quality air-conditioned transportable learning spaces is one way the government is making sure that schools have the facilities they need. The ACT government installed transportable learning spaces at Lyneham High School, Forrest Primary School and Telopea Park School for the start of the 2020 school year. This is part of the government's \$8.5 million investment in additional accommodation for Canberra schools, which will see up to 350 additional places in public schools over the next two years. The transportable learning spaces of today are spacious, comfortable learning environments. They are modern, fully insulated and designed to meet current energy targets, with all the same comforts and technical infrastructure as a permanent building.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how does the government ensure that every child has what they need to start school?

MS BERRY: Back to school should not be an expensive time. The ACT government believes in providing equitable access to the tools that students need to give them equal opportunity to learn. Irrespective of family circumstances, the government is helping every student to have an equal chance to learn.

The ACT government has provided Chromebooks to students entering year 7 as well as new students in years 8 to 12 who are in the public secondary school system—approximately 4,200 devices as part of this program of work. Last week I visited Wanniasa school's senior campus to hand out new Chromebooks to their new year 7 students, who were beside themselves with excitement and looking at the opportunities these devices would give them to do their homework and study at school.

All ACT government schools are resourced to assist students to access everyday essentials. This provision forms part of public education's important objective of making access to education more equitable for all students, regardless of their personal circumstances.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, how are students and staff being supported by schools after the unprecedented summer break this year?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Cheyne for that supplementary. After what has been an unusual and difficult summer for many Canberrans, the ACT Education Directorate has been working on preparing and planning for how mental health needs of staff, students and families could be supported when school returned, as well as into the year.

All 81 of our school psychologists participated in additional training on supporting children with recent traumatic experiences. Teachers and school leaders also participated in professional learning about trauma responses. In addition, a range of resources has been available to assist parents, carers and teachers through Emerging Minds, an organisation which leads the National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health and is responsible for developing mental health policy, services, interventions, training, programs and resources for professionals, children and families.

I also want to recognise that ACT public colleges were set up as evacuation and respite centres as required, and will be able to be set up should the need occur over the year. Over the summer, Dickson College was used as a relief centre, and Erindale College was used as an evacuation centre in response to the Orroral Valley fire. I again pay extra tribute to those school communities for allowing the centres to be set up in that way and for their flexible and welcoming response to people who needed that additional support.

ACT Health—SPIRE project

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer to an options paper for the SPIRE project discussed by senior officers of major projects in Canberra Health Services in November last year. Minister, which specific options have been put forward to the government for consideration?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lawder for her question. Obviously, I am not going to talk publicly about matters that are subject to consideration by cabinet prior to them being considered by cabinet and publicly announced. What I can say is that we are building a bigger, better Canberra Hospital for our city with more operating rooms, a bigger emergency department and more intensive care beds.

We are getting on with the job of doing that. We have picked the best location on Canberra Hospital campus and we are working through issues in relation to footprint, traffic and pedestrian access and all of the other issues that have been raised with us by the community. We are doing that in a considered way, understanding that detailed project design still has a long way to go. We are getting on with the job; the opposition are just creating confusion.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what discussions about this options paper have you had with Canberra Health Services, the Health Directorate and/or Major Projects Canberra?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lawder for the supplementary. I can confirm that I have discussed these matters with Canberra Health Services and with Major Projects Canberra.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, will the government advise the community of the options and give a copy of the options paper to the Assembly's planning and urban renewal committee for consideration during its SPIRE inquiry? If not, why not?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Dunne for the question. As I have indicated, these are matters that will be subject to cabinet consideration. That is why the documents were not provided in the FOI request. I will consider whether it is appropriate to provide that information both publicly and to the committee. What I do not want to do is to create further confusion in the public mind. We are getting on with the job. We are listening to the community, and we are developing options to address the issues that have been raised with us in terms of traffic and pedestrian access to the SPIRE project site. We will be releasing information as soon as it is available to the public.

We have already been having conversations. I have already said publicly that I was considering matters in relation to the interaction between pedestrian and vehicle traffic on Hospital Road, for example. But these are matters that we are still working through. As soon as we can provide further information to the public, we absolutely will. We will, of course, be making a submission to the Assembly committee inquiry into planning for the SPIRE project. We very much welcome the opportunity to do that, and I will give consideration to whether we can include that information or whether at this stage it would simply raise further confusion for the community and be inappropriate in relation to cabinet considerations.

ACT Health—SPIRE project

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, in addressing the petition on SPIRE that was tabled in the Assembly on 28 November last year, you said that traffic modelling on Gilmore Crescent and Palmer Street in Garran was underway and that the community would be consulted on the outcome of that study. Minister, why was traffic modelling not done, and why did you not consult with the community on that modelling before deciding on the location of SPIRE on the eastern side of the Canberra Hospital campus?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Jones for the question. As I have already said, a lot of due diligence was done and many years of work were undertaken to determine that this was in fact the best location on the Canberra Hospital campus for the project.

In relation to traffic modelling, I can confirm that the survey data was received in early January 2020 and is currently being analysed. This analysis will establish the current traffic activity and road intersection capacity through traffic modelling. The outcomes of this activity are expected to be provided to Major Projects Canberra in early February 2020—about now-ish. We will of course be making those available and they will be part of our conversation with the community. The traffic survey data was collected for a seven-day period in mid-December 2019 of roads within and around the hospital campus. This included Yamba Drive, Gilmore Crescent, Hospital Road and Palmer Street and a number of intersections. Various survey methods have been used, including automatic tube counters and intersection and drop-off surveys, with the use of video cameras as well.

As I have said before in relation to this matter, many of the traffic issues that are being raised with us are actually existing issues in relation to how busy Gilmore Crescent is, and the intersection between Gilmore Crescent and Hospital Road. It is a very busy place. Part of that traffic is going to an existing short-stay car park that will no longer exist when SPIRE is built. We are working very closely through those issues. I want to use this process to improve traffic conditions around the hospital site. But I do not believe that the SPIRE project will worsen those outcomes. Indeed, I believe that we can work with the community to improve traffic outcomes for Gilmore Crescent and for the local community.

MRS JONES: Minister, why was the location decision made before the traffic modelling was in?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As Mrs Dunne might see from some of the documents that were released in the FOI, there has been a lot of detailed work around the pros and cons of various options and various sites over time. Mrs Dunne's FOI, I think, only dated from 1 January 2019, so the site decision had already been made.

There has been a lot of due diligence, with many considerations taken into account in choosing the site. There were pros and cons for different options, absolutely. But it is already a hospital precinct. There is already a hospital in that location. The location of the SPIRE itself on the site has been the subject of very detailed consideration over many years, considering all the pros and cons. And then you do the detailed traffic modelling to work out the detail of the design and the project delivery.

There are many issues to be considered when you are talking about building a major project on a hospital campus. When you are talking about the most significant modernisation of Canberra Hospital in the history of self-government—the most significant, the largest investment in health infrastructure in the history of self-government—you want to do your due diligence in relation to that. That is what this government has done, and now we are getting on with the job of building SPIRE in the best location.

MR HANSON: Minister, when will you be consulting with the community on the traffic modelling? Was the modelling done while the school was in operation?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank the Mr Hanson for the question. As I have already indicated, the traffic survey data was collected for a seven-day period in mid-December. I understand that that was before school broke up. If I am incorrect about that, of course I will let the Assembly know.

As I have also indicated, the outcomes of the analysis of the traffic survey are expected to be provided to Major Projects Canberra about now, in early to mid-February. Once I have seen that analysis, we will be releasing it to the public. We will also shortly be announcing the membership of the local community reference group. We have already had the local community forum, where we invited all 60 people who applied to be part of the local community reference group to a meeting and a workshop, where people had the opportunity to raise any issue that they wanted to.

We are listening to the community. We have been very clear that a lot of work has gone into this site location decision, but, in terms of detailed design, we still have a long way to go.

ACT Health—SPIRE project

MR WALL: My question, too, is for the Minister for Health. Minister, a media piece published on 30 January by former Labor Chief Minister Mr Jon Stanhope claims that the Barr government, in 2015, abandoned plans to deliver an additional 400 hospital beds that were developed by the former health minister and Chief Minister, Katy Gallagher. I quote from Mr Stanhope's article:

... the identified projects, including the master plan for the site were also abandoned by Labor and the Greens after Gallagher departed. They decided instead to proceed with a significantly watered down proposal known as ... SPIRE.

Minister, why did the Barr Labor-Greens government abandon the project developed under former Chief Minister Katy Gallagher from 2015?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Wall for his question. It is absolutely true that the 2008 capital asset development plan, that Mr Stanhope referred to, was developed for ACT Health. Many of the projects on that plan have in fact been completed: Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, the Canberra Region Cancer Centre, the southern car park and the adult mental health unit. The list goes on.

Before a point of order is called, we have also invested in some infrastructure that was not envisaged in that plan. I refer to the University of Canberra Hospital, a decision that was made when now Senator Gallagher was here in this place as Chief Minister; that is my understanding. Also, there is the very popular network of nurse-led walk-in centres, of which we recently opened the fourth, in Weston Creek.

As I have mentioned, the most ambitious element of that plan was the demolition and redevelopment of buildings 2 and 3 at Canberra Hospital. This was estimated to be a billion dollar project with very significant impacts on the operation of the hospital during the build phase. So there was significant due diligence undertaken, as you would expect. This work determined that while the original project posed significant challenges and was not actually needed in full at the time, there would be a need for more ED spaces, more intensive care beds and new operating theatres. That is exactly what the SPIRE project will deliver. In addition, the government at that time invested \$100 million in upgrading and maintaining existing ACT Health assets to ensure that they also continue to be fit for purpose.

MR WALL: Minister, why is the Barr Labor government proceeding with the SPIRE proposal, which is significantly watered down from Ms Gallagher's plans, and will it meet the needs of ACT Health?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: In relation to his first question, I refer Mr Wall to my previous answer. My response to his second question: yes.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, how can the people of Canberra be confident that the Labor-Greens government's promises on health will be fulfilled, given that you have already abandoned many of the previous commitments made on health in 2008 and 2012 and you have failed to deliver on the 2016 commitments?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Dunne for the question but I reject the premise of it. I do not believe that we have failed to deliver on many 2016 election commitments. As I have already mentioned, many projects in the 2008 capital asset development plan were in fact delivered by successive Labor governments: the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, the Canberra Region Cancer Centre, the southern car park, the adult mental health unit. We have also built an entire new hospital—the University of Canberra Hospital—and we have developed a network of five nurse-led walk-in centres.

The list goes on and on in relation to the infrastructure investments that we have made, including the expansion of Calvary hospital's emergency department which will open its new treatment spaces next month, delivering a 50 per cent increase in emergency department capacity at Calvary Public Hospital in Bruce and a 20 per cent increase in emergency department capacity across the territory-wide hospital system, because we understand that Calvary Public Hospital is also an important partner. We have also increased beds at Calvary hospital. We have also invested in new operating theatres at Calvary Public Hospital, one this year and one next year.

In short, Canberrans understand that the ACT Labor government is absolutely committed to continuing to deliver excellent healthcare for Canberrans when and where they need it. The only people in this place who are creating confusion about the future of our health system are those opposite.

ACT Health—medical training

MISS C BURCH: My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer to the medical training survey released this month. It found that trainee doctors in the ACT public health system were the least likely in the nation to recommend it as a place for doctor training. Only 62 per cent of trainee doctors recommended the ACT, as opposed to 77 per cent nationally. It also found that 41 per cent of trainee doctors had either experienced or witnessed bullying, harassment or discrimination, and that their complaints were the least likely in the nation to be followed up. Minister, why is the ACT public health system the least favoured place in Australia for doctor training?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Miss Burch for her question but reject the final part of her question: the premise, the way she worded her question.

This survey was the first of its kind, providing all medical trainees with an opportunity to participate. It was conducted between July and October 2019, only quite shortly after the government response to the culture review was tabled by the former minister in May 2019.

These results provide a valuable snapshot of trainees' perspectives on the quality of medical training and will assist colleges, training organisations and our health services to identify areas for improvement. The results provide further context for the work that is currently underway as we address the issues identified in the culture review.

The survey highlights the need to continue encouraging staff to come forward if they experience bullying and harassment. We know that there is more to be done to build an environment where staff feel safe and supported to report concerns. But even since the survey was undertaken in July to October last year, a lot of work has been done on that front. Our leadership across our hospitals is absolutely committed to seeing change. We have a three-year program of work that is being supported by significant investment made in last year's budget, and information from this survey will help to inform future initiatives specifically aimed at supporting medical trainees. I thank the survey participants for their honesty, for their willingness to share their experiences and for their feedback. Their feedback will have a direct impact on the improvements to our health services.

I would also say that those are not the only experiences we hear about. The Australasian College of Emergency Medicine shared some feedback from their accreditation inspection which indicated that "trainees feel supported by the approachable ACEM group, who are very visible on the floor. Common comments expressed that the nurturing environment makes it an enjoyable place in spite of the business."

MISS C BURCH: Minister, to what extent does the poor reputation of the ACT public health system for bullying, harassment and overall poor culture impact our ability to recruit staff?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Miss Burch for the supplementary but again I reject the premise of it. Both the ACT Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services will shortly be sharing with their staff the outcomes of the climate surveys that have recently been undertaken. We saw more than 80 per cent of the Health Directorate staff and, I think, 57 per cent of Canberra Health Services staff complete those climate surveys, so it is a great result in terms of participation. I think that we will have more cause for cautious optimism that people are seeing real change in Canberra Health Services. Our trainees also experience time at Calvary, which is also making a significant effort in this regard.

In relation to Canberra Health Services, the initiatives in place or currently underway include finalisation and implementation of the CHS values, vision and role statements. One value is being celebrated each quarter over a 12-month period. This is helping to instil the CHS values organisationally.

The integration of an employee advocate role into the business now on a shared basis with the ACT Health Directorate is giving people a third party to go to within the organisation to discuss how they can report and what would happen if they reported an incident of bullying and harassment if they did not feel comfortable going straight to HR. There has also been an updated structure in the people and culture division for

supporting the business cultural change and skill development in the organisation. That has included the successful implementation of what is called the business partner model and the integration of the director of workforce planning, manager of workforce inclusion and director of positive workforce roles. So we are really lifting up the capacity of the human resources area in Canberra Health Services to support the different areas and undertaking culture diagnostics in areas where cultural clusters have been identified. I am sure I will have an opportunity to go on.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, why after 18 years in government has ACT Labor produced a health system that is statistically the worst in the nation?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Dunne for her supplementary question. Again, I reject the premise of her question, but I will continue with some further advice to the Assembly about what Canberra Health Services is doing. Senior managers forums are being held monthly to provide an update on topical information to have this information cascade to their teams.

A consultative committee framework has been introduced and there are currently four committees in place with meetings underway, along with a regular forum conducted with relevant unions. This goes directly—

Mrs Dunne: Point of order, Madam Speaker. The question was about the performance of the health system compared to the nation. It is not an opportunity for the minister to finish the answer that she had prepared for the previous supplementary question.

MADAM SPEAKER: With a minute left to go, I believe the minister is on the topic of the performance of hospitals.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I had already rejected the premise of Mrs Dunne's question, which was, in fact, very vague. As I have said, the climate surveys have been undertaken across the Health directorate and by Canberra Health Services; Calvary is yet to undertake its survey. Obviously, those surveys will be presented to staff before they are talked about publicly, but I think that people will see cause for cautious optimism in the outcomes of those surveys.

What I can say is that we have seen really strong participation in those surveys. We have seen a lot of work to address the issues that were raised in the culture review. In doing that, we are seeing real change being made and reflected in the feedback that I have received from unions and professional organisations and that I have received directly from staff across Canberra Health Services. *(Time expired.)*

Government—fuel pricing

MS CHEYNE: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, you have recently written to discount fuel operators in New South Wales to encourage expansion to the ACT. What has been the response?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Cheyne for the question. As she would be aware, the Select Committee on Fuel Pricing found there to be a lack of competition in the ACT market and a much lower percentage of independent operators so the government is undertaking a series of measures to encourage more competition in the market. As Ms Cheyne has outlined in her question, I have written to eight discount fuel retailers to encourage expansion into the ACT. I am pleased to report to the Assembly that we have had some keen interest. Discussions are now underway with the Planning Directorate to assist in identifying a number of suitable sites.

Already we have a new independent operator in Mitchell, on the north side of Canberra, who opened just a few weeks ago. Mr Gupta joined me at the opening. New stations are providing very competitive pricing. They are about 20c a litre cheaper than some of the majors in the north Canberra area. Further to this work to attract independent operators, the government will commission the ICRC to undertake regular monitoring and analysis of the Canberra fuel market, as the evidence from last year shows that this type of scrutiny has brought down prices for consumers. I have also written to the New South Wales premier to ask her to consider coverage of the territory in the New South Wales FuelCheck scheme, which would allow real-time information to be available for motorists to shop around for the best price. This reflects the government implementing the recommendations of the select committee.

MS CHEYNE: Chief Minister, in what other ways is the ACT government helping to cut costs for Canberra motorists?

MR BARR: This month saw the commencement of the ACT's new motor accident injuries scheme, which delivers fairer, faster and more comprehensive support, protecting Canberrans if they are injured in a motor accident. The changes in legislation also mean that injured people will no longer go through a long legal process of proving fault or suffer the associated costs.

Under the old scheme, premiums set by private sector insurers have been as high as \$644 for the average passenger vehicle in 2020 dollars. I am pleased to see that with the new motor accident injuries scheme the average passenger vehicle premiums will be \$458, and they continue to fall—nearly \$200 cheaper than they would have been if the old system remained in place.

MR GUPTA: Chief Minister, are there any other new initiatives to help reduce costs?

MR BARR: Of course members would be aware that we have now achieved 100 per cent renewable electricity for the territory. This will lead to a reduction in power bills in the ACT. The ICRC has predicted that average electricity costs could shrink by nearly seven per cent in the next financial year for a typical ActewAGL customer. The average household will save around \$113 on their annual bill. ACT consumers will continue to pay amongst the lowest standing offer electricity prices in the nation.

Picking up on the theme of transition, this electricity price reduction will also save the increasing number of electric and hybrid vehicle owners money as well. The

government's foresight and our determination to switch to clean, renewable energy sources is not only reducing our city's carbon footprint but is also providing financial relief to Canberrans.

Taken together, with the reduction in car insurance and fuel costs and the electricity price drop, the average Canberra family will be saving hundreds of dollars each year.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Minister, in answer to question on notice 2843 about the intended purpose of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm, you quoted a statement from Mr Gentleman that he made in 2014. The statement was, "The farm will not be a place for medical treatment or to detoxify. Rather, it will be a place free of drugs and alcohol." This seems at odds with the recurrent expenditure appropriation made under a second appropriation bill in 2007, the purpose of which was "to provide for a culturally appropriate residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility in the ACT".

Minister, if a person addicted to drugs or alcohol goes to a place where there are no drugs or alcohol, is that not part of a program to detoxify and rehabilitate?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. There is a continuum of support that is required for people who have a drug and alcohol addiction. It is not appropriate to send somebody who would be experiencing significant withdrawal symptoms to a location remote from health services, without clinical support to detoxify, when they may be experiencing withdrawal symptoms.

The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm is operational and continues to provide a place of healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to feel safe and supported while making ongoing and meaningful changes to their lives. That is at the further end of the continuum of rehabilitation. There is not one single thing that you do to rehabilitate when you have a drug or alcohol addiction. It is a complex matter that requires a range and a continuum of supports.

The programs at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm provide clients with the opportunity to participate in a range of cultural activities such as land management, mindfulness, music, yarning circles and a healing program. The directorate is currently finalising the procurement for some providers to deliver services as part of the therapeutic programs for the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm for 2020, and planning is underway. Importantly, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation has progressed the healing framework to be delivered at the farm, with facilitation of two knowledge circles with the United Ngunnawal Elders Council to identify the healing vision for the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. This is not the same thing as detoxification.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, when did the government amend the 2007 appropriation to change its purpose from being a drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. Again I think there is some level of misunderstanding in terms of drug and alcohol rehabilitation, which is a continuum of support. The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm, in the vision of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, is about a healing framework, or a web; I think they refer to it as the “web of life”—I do not have that in front of me. That is really the part of the rehabilitation framework that the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm is focused on.

We have done a lot of work with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and particularly with the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, the Healing Foundation and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, to develop the model of care at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. We will continue to do that work and to deliver services there.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, how much of the 2007 supplementary appropriation was spent, what was it spent on and was it spent in accordance with the legislated appropriation?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take that question on notice. In relation to the previous question, it is actually the living web framework that the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm and the United Ngunnawal Elders Council look at.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Health and the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Minister, after only a year of its operation, your government announced a review of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. When the review was initiated in September 2018, it was to look at the services, program design, delivery and governance of the facility. Minister what is the status of this review and when will the outcomes be made public?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Kikkert for her question. She is right; the Health Directorate contracted Mr Russell Taylor AM, director of the Burbangana Consulting group, to review the service operations at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. The Burbangana group facilitated a Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm governance workshop on 15 April 2019 as part of the review. A total of 35 stakeholders attended and engaged in discussions, including the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, the Healing Foundation, other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders and ACT government staff.

The review is now complete. The report was received by the Health Directorate on 29 July 2019. A number of the recommendations have been implemented since October 2019. That is the governance part of the review, I should be clear. Finalising other elements of the review is dependent on the work being undertaken by the Healing Foundation to develop the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm healing framework.

All stakeholders who attended the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm governance workshop held in April agreed on the importance of finalising the healing framework before fully actioning the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm review recommendations. That work is ongoing with the United Ngunnawal Elders Council and others. The Health Directorate will work with interested stakeholders, including the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm advisory board, to assess and develop a response to the report's recommendations.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, has this review engaged with stakeholders such as Winnunga or ATODA?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have listed some of the organisations and representative groups with whom this review has engaged. The review has sought to engage very widely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and organisations. It is, of course, up to those organisations to choose whether to participate in the review, in the governance workshop and in the development of the healing framework. The Healing Foundation has been engaged to lead the co-design of the healing framework to support the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm that will identify healing priorities of Ngunnawal elders and the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, balance therapeutic support with approaches that strengthen cultural identity and connection, and embed principles to guide the practice of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm and partner agencies in supporting healing for clients in line with the living web framework.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what has been the cost of this long and overdrawn process?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not have that figure in front of me. I will take the question on notice.

ACT Health—SPIRE project

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Health. Documents obtained recently under FOI reveal that ACT Health was allocated \$6.5 million in the 2018-19 financial year for the SPIRE project. The Health Directorate spent only \$520,000, or less than 10 per cent of this allocation during that financial year. The documents also reveal that, by November last year, a rollover of the 2018-19 allocation was still not completed. Minister, why was there an underspend of virtually all the funds budgeted for the SPIRE project during the 2018-19 financial year?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lee for the question. I will take the detail of that question on notice and go back to check those figures, whether that was in some way a reallocation during the 2018-19 year and how much was required to be rolled over. As I have said in answers to earlier questions, there has been a significant amount of due diligence in relation to this project because this is a major spend.

It is the biggest health infrastructure project that will be delivered in the ACT since self-government. It is the largest modernisation of Canberra Hospital in its history and

it is important that we absolutely get it right. If it were the case that there were a little more planning at the beginning to ensure that we deliver the right product at the end, that would be time well spent.

MS LEE: Minister, how much of the \$6.5 million allocated during the 2018-19 financial year for the SPIRE project will be spent during the 2019-20 financial year, and on what?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Obviously, additional funding has been allocated to the SPIRE project year-on-year. There will be millions of dollars spent this year. We are well progressed in relation to some of the early works. We are already well underway on the construction of the new building 28, which will house the administrative functions that will move from building 24 before it is demolished. That new demountable structure should be completed fairly shortly. A number of other site preparatory works and decanting works are underway.

There will be millions and millions of dollars spent on the SPIRE project this year. I will take on notice the detail of how much of them relate to the \$6½ million that Ms Lee was referring to.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, why was the rollover not completed by November 2019 and has it been completed now?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take that question on notice.

ACT Health—emergency department performance

MR PARTON: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Health. The recent Productivity Commission ROGS report on ED performance reveals that in the ACT only 46 per cent of people who presented to an emergency department were seen on time during 2018-19. This contrasts with the national average of 71 per cent. ROGS data also tells us that 78 per cent of all patients in ED were seen on time in 2000-01 and 2001-02. Minister, why is it that the timeliness of care in our EDs has declined so much and compares so badly with the national average?

Mrs Dunne: Great question.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Parton for his question and I note that Mrs Dunne does like to go back to the 2001 period. In looking back at some of Mr Stanhope's comments in the Assembly, in relation to some of the comments he has recently made, I note his frequent reference to the previous Liberal government cutting 114 beds from Canberra's public hospital system in its six years in government. If Mrs Dunne would like to go back to that period when the Canberra Liberals were in government and cutting hospital beds—

Mrs Dunne: Madam Speaker, I raise a point of order. The standing orders require the minister to be directly relevant to the question, which is about why the timeliness of care has declined so much. Also the standing orders require that the minister not

debate the subject, under standing order 118(b). Would you ask the minister to be directly relevant and not debate the issue.

MADAM SPEAKER: I do not think she is debating an issue. A statement of fact may stand. But she is relevant to the question.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: In relation to the current performance of the ACT's emergency departments, I absolutely accept that the timeliness we are seeing is not where we want to be, not where Canberrans expect us to be. That is why we have significantly invested in the expansion of Calvary's emergency department with 50 per cent more emergency department treatment spaces at Calvary; 20 per cent more treatment spaces for emergency departments across the territory; an additional two senior staff specialists for Canberra Hospital's emergency department; 12 additional medical beds at Canberra Hospital to reduce the bed block that can add to ED wait times; the hospital in the home program; the geriatric rapid acute care evaluation program, or GRACE, that Calvary hospital has established, which is now being rolled out to all residential aged care facilities, which aims to treat people closer to home: frail older people who are putting significant—*(Time expired)*

MR PARTON: Minister, why is it that our performance in timeliness of emergency care is not only the worst in the nation but the worst in the nation by a very clear margin?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I know that when Mrs Dunne was talking about this on radio the other day she did make the point that it is not appropriate to compare our emergency department performance for the ACT with the whole of New South Wales, for example. She was actually quite clear about that. But I accept the point that in relation to peer hospitals, we are not performing where we should be. There is a lot of work going on at Canberra Health Services, Canberra Hospital and at Calvary Public Hospital Bruce, particularly at Canberra Hospital, in relation to the timely care strategy.

The leadership at Canberra Hospital have spent the past 12 months making sure that they respond in a really meaningful way to the culture review, making sure that they create an environment of trust among staff, and they are now very focused on ensuring that staff are able to work together to improve the efficiency of the hospital.

Things are being done in terms of the timely care strategy, which I know Mrs Dunne has been briefed on, a multidisciplinary approach to the initial assessment and treatment, ensuring that more patients commence care as soon as possible. It includes earlier physician engagement in the care provided, as well as expanded nurse protocols and approved pathways. That is just starting now or is about to get underway. There is work to streamline the admissions processes, including emergency physicians being able to make faster decisions to admit patients to wards across the hospital, and a sharper focus across all divisions of admission from the emergency department and on discharge, as well as diagnostics and support services. There is a sharper focus on supporting more timely patient flow. We are also exploring an expansion of rapid assessment models of care, including the emergency medical unit.

We know there are things that we can learn from other jurisdictions. We are doing that and putting those lessons into practice.

MRS DUNNE: Noting that the minister has not answered the question why is it so bad, minister, why is it that our target in the ACT is 70 per cent of peak patients to be seen on time, which is close to the national average, but over the 19 years of a Labor government, we have moved further and further away from the national average and further and further away from that target?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I refer Mrs Dunne to my previous answers.

Government—support for seniors

MR GUPTA: My question is to the Minister for Seniors and Veterans. Can the minister please outline how the government is supporting Canberra seniors with the cost of living?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Gupta for the important question. The ACT government has a suite of measures to ensure that we are looking after the most vulnerable in our community, including seniors on fixed incomes such as the pension.

The government's concessions program targets those Canberrans who need a helping hand. We provide a range of concessions and schemes across government to help with the everyday cost of living. We have invested in the pensioner duty concession scheme to make it easier to move to housing that is better suited to seniors' needs as their needs in life change. We have also invested in the life support rebate; we have expanded the seniors card eligibility; we provide free and discounted public transport; we subsidise spectacles for some senior Canberrans; and we provide rebates on utilities.

We have also rebuilt the assistance.act.gov.au website to make it easier to use and more intuitive for people of all ages, including our seniors, to find information on all of the concessions and rebates that they may be eligible for. This is in addition to the more generalised supports like our recent additions to help provide cheaper fuel prices to all Canberrans, including our seniors.

This government is committed to providing cost of living support to Canberrans in a targeted and meaningful way. We do this because we value our seniors and the contribution that they make to this wonderful city.

MR GUPTA: Minister, can you outline how changes to the seniors card which were recently announced will assist older Canberrans?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Gupta for the question and I am delighted to be able to explain this more fully. I was pleased to announce late last year that we would be changing the age of eligibility for the seniors card. As of 1 July this year the age that you will be able to start qualifying for the card will be 60.

The scheme had originally been changed to raise the age to keep it in line with other schemes such as the New South Wales seniors card and the federal changes to the age pension. However, other states and jurisdictions have recently been lowering the age of eligibility for the scheme, and the change in the ACT will bring us back into line with New South Wales.

This is important because the scheme is reciprocal. It means that Canberrans who are 60 will be able to access subsidised government services such as public transport at a reduced rate, not only here but also across the border in New South Wales. It means that Canberrans from the age of 60 will be able to access hundreds of discounts at businesses across Canberra, helping to ease the cost of living here. And I thank businesses for their generosity in being part of the scheme.

I also want to take a moment to thank COTA ACT for all the hard work that they do in administering the scheme and promoting it to local businesses to get them to participate in the scheme. COTA ACT is an integral part of raising awareness amongst both businesses and older Canberrans.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what other financial assistance does the ACT government provide to older Canberrans?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary question. The government provides an array of financial assistance to our senior Canberrans. The pensioner rates rebate provides a 50 per cent discount on your rates, up to \$700 a year. The general rates deferral scheme allows certain people over 65 to defer all or part of their rates, allowing them to use the equity in their home to ensure that they have more money week to week.

The pensioner duty concession scheme provides a rebate on conveyancing duties for those looking to downsize. The utilities concession covers electricity, natural gas, water and sewerage, providing \$700 to ease the costs of these essential utilities. We provide free off-peak travel on buses and light rail for those who are over 70, and discounted travel at all times for pensioners and seniors card holders.

Pensioners receive a 100 per cent discount on their car registration for their primary vehicle and seniors card holders receive a 10 per cent discount for regular cars and a 28 per cent discount for gas or electric cars. Pensioners also receive a 100 per cent discount on their drivers licence. This is in addition to the many other assistance services we provide for our seniors, like wheelie bin assistance and the flexible bus service.

This government is committed to aiding our seniors with the cost of living in a meaningful and targeted way to ensure that they are able to be active participants in the city's life.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

ACT Health—SPIRE project

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I was asked earlier whether the traffic survey in relation to the SPIRE project was done during term time. I indicated that I believed it was, and I have had confirmation from Major Projects Canberra that the traffic survey was done during term. I have also received advice that the—

Mrs Dunne: During term hours?

MS STEPHEN SMITH: It was a seven-day analysis of traffic models. Major Projects Canberra has not yet received the analysis of the traffic modelling, so I present that information for the information of the Assembly.

Planning—Coombs peninsula

MR GENTLEMAN: I would like to add to and clarify an answer that I provided to Ms Le Couteur and Mrs Jones on the Molonglo River reserve. I refer to yesterday's tabling statement that I provided in relation to variation 360 to the Territory Plan, in particular, the appropriate way to remove a future urban area overlay, and to confirm that the final zoning for land is through the estate development plan assessment process, which includes public consultation. I also draw members' attention to the petition response tabled by the Clerk yesterday, and in particular to the following part:

Now that the Molonglo River Reserve Management Plan is in place, a development application for an estate development plan can be lodged with the independent planning and land authority. It is at this stage of the process that the final zoning of land is determined (and therefore no longer indicative) in accordance with the *Planning and Development Act 2007*.

When a development application is lodged, the application will be determined taking into consideration the requirements of the Territory Plan, the outcomes of environmental and tree surveys, stormwater management measures to protect the Molonglo River and environmental values within the river reserve, the requirements under the EPBC Act, and recommendations of a bushfire risk assessment. The authority will also take into consideration submissions received during the development application's public notification. The public notification process will provide the community with a further opportunity to comment on the proposal.

I hope that clarifies that matter and the next steps.

Transport—driver education

MR RATTENBURY: Yesterday I took some questions on notice in relation to changes to the ACT's driver licensing scheme for learner and provisional drivers that commenced on 1 January this year. Miss Burch asked me about current P-platers now having to change over to green plates. She asked:

... why haven't you informed them of these changes, and is it appropriate that they are first notified of this by police officers when on the roads?

I can inform the Assembly that provisional drivers who were issued with their licence prior to the changes do not have to change their P plates. It has been recommended that those who are under the old scheme transition to green P plates to distinguish themselves from new red P-plate conditions.

A two-stage provisional licence scheme was introduced on 1 January. P1 drivers—the first stage—must display red P plates and are subject to late-night passenger restrictions, and P2 drivers must display green P plates. Information provided on the JACS website clearly states that the change is advisory. If police are informing people roadside, it would be in an advisory manner.

Miss Burch also asked me how many incorrect logbooks were already in circulation. I am advised by Access Canberra that 341 logbooks were distributed to learners with the error in them between 1 January and 14 January 2020. From that date a sticker with the missing competency was added to the logbooks which contained the error until a next-version logbook was printed and distributed to Access Canberra service centres on 28 January 2020. Providing a sticker removed the need to destroy printed logbooks that were otherwise useful.

I can also inform the Assembly that Access Canberra was notified of the missing competency on 9 January. The next day they emailed all ACT-accredited driving instructors that they may come across new logbooks missing the competency. The accredited driving instructors were informed that until the issue was rectified they could add information in handwriting with their stamp at the bottom of the page—page 36—and they were also asked to reassure students that this evidence would be accepted when students presented their logbooks.

Mrs Dunne asked me why, in the driver competency section of the new logbook, there was no place to mark if the competency was achieved in a manual or an automatic vehicle. I am advised that the current version of the logbook includes a space for recording whether a competency was completed in an automatic or manual vehicle. The certificate of competency issued by a driving instructor once a person has successfully completed all of the competencies and final assessment states whether the final drive was completed in a manual or automatic vehicle. This certificate must be presented to Access Canberra when a person applies for their provisional licence.

Miss C Burch: Madam Speaker, with your indulgence, may I seek further clarification from the minister on that response?

MADAM SPEAKER: It is unusual. Perhaps you can write to him with a QoN.

ACT Health—SPIRE project

Order to table

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (3.14): I seek leave to move the motion circulated in my name in relation to the release of documents under standing order 213A.

MADAM SPEAKER: Before I put that question, you will recall that back in 2017 we made changes to standing order 213A which, in a sense, were to provide more time and consideration for members. 213A(a) says:

A Member may lodge a notice of motion seeking the Assembly to order a document or documents to be tabled in the Assembly. If agreed to, the Clerk ...

It goes on to talk about the process with that. That order was put in to ensure that consideration and timeliness of some of these matters were allowed. In response, Mrs Dunne, you accepted the potential need for that, but you also went on to say that a motion to suspend standing orders or seeking leave on the floor were also possible in that regard. I remind everybody that we have had an extensive review. This is quite a serious matter. But the Assembly is always in the hands of the Assembly. Mrs Dunne, you have sought leave to move that motion?

MRS DUNNE: I am still seeking leave.

Leave granted.

MRS DUNNE: I move:

That, in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly orders the tabling of the options paper for the SPIRE Project discussed by officers of Major Projects Canberra and Canberra Health Services in November 2019 and referred to in the public release of documents under the Freedom of Information Act (reference request 1977).

This motion is quite straightforward. It calls on the government to prepare for tabling the documents that were referred to in question time and were redacted from freedom of information request 1977, from the health department, that I received earlier this year.

The minister has said, and the department has said, that there are reasons why these should be redacted, but this standing order creates a mechanism for an independent person to determine whether or not that information should or should not be provided to the Assembly.

It is now a well-travelled path. Standing order 213A is an initiative of the Greens. I think that, over time, it has been used quite well. The application of this has developed. I commend the motion to the Assembly. It calls for the government to prepare and provide the documents as outlined in the motion. If the government finds that they are privileged, there is a mechanism in the standing order to deal with that.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Health, Minister for Urban Renewal) (3.17): I thank Mrs Dunne for the motion. The government will not be opposing this motion. Mrs Dunne is right; this is the appropriate way of having consideration. The considerations in relation to this matter are different and are made in a different context than decisions made by my officials

in relation to freedom of information. This is the appropriate mechanism for it, so we will, of course, not be opposing this motion.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Business—disaster recovery

Debate resumed.

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) (3.18): It has been an interesting discussion that Mr Wall has triggered today. Even since he tabled the motion on Monday there has been some development in this space.

We will be supporting the government amendments to Mr Wall's motion that are in circulation. Mr Wall's motion and the subsequent amendments speak to the very real impact on the ACT of the national disasters we have spent some time talking about this week. As we all know, the smoke from the bushfires in New South Wales and Victoria has dramatically affected the ACT over many months. Some of us may have seen the social media posts illustrating the magnitude of the smoke, where it has affected New Zealand. There were some quite strong images circulating of the cloud arriving in New Zealand. I think I have even seen reports further afield of it showing up in South America and the like. There has been no question that the smoke has had a significant impact locally but, from a scientific, nerdy point of view it was fascinating to see the global impact.

The smoke has seen public institutions close, and I have no doubt that it has greatly affected the revenue of some local businesses, shops and retail outlets. We have seen the cancellation of events at the height of the summer holiday season, and I certainly appreciate the issues that Mr Wall has brought to the chamber today. There were days, particularly in December, when I paused to check the air quality before heading outside. I know this has also been a very real concern for families—particularly for families with young children—and for other vulnerable groups, such as those with heart and lung conditions, elderly folks and the like. As I flagged this morning in the earlier discussion, the smoke has been an issue for many members of our community. The road closures affecting the South Coast, from the Clyde to the Brown Mountain routes, have also impacted on our tourism, albeit not as great an economic shock as that suffered by the coastal areas.

The amendment of the Chief Minister clearly responds to the issues that Mr Wall has raised but goes further. As we all saw this morning, the ACT government has, in fact, been working diligently on securing commonwealth government funding support. I will briefly touch on Mr Wall's call (2) about tax relief. The most obvious point is that most of the affected hospitality and tourism businesses already pay no payroll tax. Small and medium businesses are already below the threshold, so I do not believe that payroll tax deferral would offer any practical benefit for these businesses.

The second point is that the Chief Minister has already announced fee relief for hospitality businesses, with a 50 per cent reduction in the cost of outdoor dining permits. Whilst it is fee relief, not tax relief, I think the practical effect is the same. I hope that those businesses will see that as a benefit, and that it will provide some material benefit to them and help them close that gap that they may have suffered in recent times.

It is a pertinent time for Mr Wall's motion to be voted on, with the ink still drying on the Chief Minister's joint media release with Minister Littleproud on these issues. I hope that the agreement that has been reached between the ACT and the commonwealth gives the Canberra Liberals and the broader community some confidence that the government has been methodically working through the complexities of these unprecedented times.

From smoke to bushfires, hail to floods, we are not immune from the climate emergency here in Canberra. I am pleased the government has been working closely with the local tourism and hospitality industry—

Members interjecting—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Members, the member will be heard in silence.

MR RATTENBURY: to hear directly from the sector in order to tailor the responses we need to support businesses of the city. I think that that will be an ongoing discussion. I am pleased that the government has had these round tables. It has taken the opportunity to listen firsthand to the businesses that are affected. As the Chief Minister has outlined, there is obviously a range of mechanisms there. I encourage any business that has not done so already to seek support through Access Canberra, to seek some advice and some of the solutions that are available. If those solutions are not meeting their needs I suggest that businesses make a case, perhaps where there are unusual circumstances, about where the government might need to give these matters further consideration.

It is valuable to discuss these matters here in the Assembly. Hopefully, this will raise the awareness of those who are not aware of some of the mechanisms available to them. To those who do need to seek support, I encourage them to do so.

MR COE (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (3.23): I am very pleased that my colleague Mr Wall has put forward this very important matter for discussion today. As Mr Rattenbury just said, Mr Wall has triggered this debate today, which is so important for so many small businesses in the territory. The reality is that the past few months have been very tough times for these key employers in Canberra. At a time when so many people in the city would be enjoying our hospitality venues the reality is that many people have been staying at home.

We would love to see more Canberrans go out and enjoy our hospitality and tourism venues, but the reality is that that has been difficult for the past couple of months. Consequently, it is incumbent upon the ACT government to show some support and

compassion for these employers, who do so much to support our economy. It is particularly the tourism and hospitality sectors that have been affected, but there are so many other industries where the hailstorm, the smoke and the bushfires have had significant consequences on their businesses.

The commonwealth government quite quickly made available significant support for businesses in the ACT, and we are pleased that finally the commonwealth government assistance is going to be available for businesses in the territory. I congratulate Mr Wall for his continued advocacy for this, particularly for all the local businesses in the territory that do so much for our community and so much for employment in the territory. What is being proposed in this motion is never going to be enough for many of these businesses. It has been an extremely tough time. What Mr Wall is proposing is some immediate relief, particularly by way of cash flow, so that at least these businesses can survive this period, come out of it and therefore build some growth going into the future.

Unless there is very real cash-flow support here and now, the reality is that many businesses that were operating before this summer may not be operating for much longer. I am disappointed that the Chief Minister has been so dismissive of many of the things that Mr Wall has been advocating. Mr Wall is advocating for these things because he knows that they will make a difference and because he has consulted with the business community. These are very real, practical, tangible things that could be delivered right away by this government if it chose to do so. Instead, Mr Barr and the Labor government, a tired Labor government of 19 years, has pretty much dismissed much of what needs to take place here in the ACT.

The Canberra Liberals will continue to advocate for the local businesses of the ACT. We are on the same team as business in the ACT. We want them to thrive, we want them to survive and we want them to continue to employ Canberrans, so we are going to do everything we can to ensure that they get through this tough time. Given the quality and calibre of the businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector it is in all our interests to ensure they get through this tough time.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (3.27): It is ultimately a good outcome that the commonwealth assistance that has been on offer across the border to businesses impacted by the fires and the weather disasters over the past six weeks is now going to be available for businesses in the ACT. That is a good outcome.

It is disappointing that we have a chief minister who is always quick to point the finger at the commonwealth and say that the commonwealth is not doing the heavy lifting in the territory—not doing enough to support the ACT—but when the ball is in his court and there is an opportunity to do more to support our hospitality and tourism sector, an industry that he claims to be passionate about, there is silence from the Chief Minister and it is the commonwealth doing all the heavy lifting.

This assistance will go a long way to helping those in the hospitality and tourism sectors, who have borne the brunt of much of the weather events that we saw in January, but it will also be open to other businesses in the territory. That is important because almost every business that was seeking to trade, and which relied on

direct-to-the-public trade, was impacted through that January period. I was speaking to a local businessperson down at the Chisholm shops. He was down 50 per cent on trade for the January period when compared to last year in his key-cutting kiosk and shoe repair business. Across the territory, regardless of the sector, during January people stayed home in Canberra or did not come on holidays here to the ACT.

Likewise, I was speaking to the Tharwa Valley Forge. The operator there indicated to me that before the Orroral Valley Fire ignited and became such an incident he had experienced a 70 per cent cancellation rate over the December-January period simply because people were scared of what might come. The most important message from here on in is, “Canberra is open for business. Canberra is ready to take your booking; Canberra is ready for you to come to try a new experience. Visit one of our local attractions, one of our local museums or galleries, or go on a tour.” A holiday where you live is a great opportunity to see the city through a whole different lens. That is certainly the cry that all of us should be echoing to our constituents from here on. Certainly, I would like to see the government doing more to support local businesses, but the proof will be in the pudding, come October, as to how they feel about that package.

I will conclude my remarks there, but my statement contrasts with what the Chief Minister said. He did write to the Prime Minister in January but, after speaking with Andrew Colvin, Senator Cash and Senator Seselja over the past couple of weeks about where the ACT was tracking in regards to establishing this package, I have learnt that as of Friday afternoon the ACT government still had not taken the decision as to whether it would enact the disaster funding agreement and whether these opportunities would be made available for Canberra businesses. I believe that without the actions taken by me and the Canberra Liberals this week to promote the need for Canberra businesses to have access to these supports and these subsidies, there would have been a continued silence on the government’s part.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Lawson—parking

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (3.31): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) stage one of the new suburb of Lawson includes 19 blocks of medium-density multi-unit developments, primarily located in the vicinity of Wanderlight and Stockman Avenues;
- (b) according to the Lawson Estate Plan, stage two of the suburb has been zoned for more medium-density multi-unit developments as well as high-density multi-unit developments; and
- (c) dozens of current Lawson residents have contacted the Canberra Liberals to complain that the suburb lacks adequate designated parking for both

residents and their visitors, resulting in cars being parked where they should not be; and

- (2) calls on the ACT Government to
- (a) increase the amount of designated parking in Lawson stage one for residents and their visitors; and
 - (b) provide adequate designated parking for both residents and visitors in Lawson stage two in order to avoid replicating this problem from stage one.

I wish to amend this motion; therefore, by leave, I move:

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

- “(d) residents of Lawson Stage One are able to utilise bus stops on Baldwin Drive to catch the Route 30 bus service to Belconnen or Dickson before connecting to the City and other town centres via the Rapid bus network, or the Route 31 bus service to Belconnen, Dickson, Braddon and the City; and
- (e) the Government is committed to providing bus services through Lawson once Lawson Stage Two is complete; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) review parking in Lawson Stage One with a view to increasing and improving parking options for residents and their visitors;
- (b) review current parking issues in Lawson with a view to avoiding similar problems in Lawson Stage Two; and
- (c) review options for providing walking and cycling paths from what is currently western Lawson to suitable points along Ginninderra Drive.”.

Amendment agreed to.

MRS KIKKERT: I am grateful to be able to bring this motion before the Assembly today. Lawson, which will be located in my electorate of Ginninderra from this year, is one of Canberra’s newest suburbs. The first blocks for single residence were auctioned off only six years ago. Canberrans spent \$80 million buying those blocks and others that were sold a few months later. Across the same period, medium-density sites were sold to developers for a further \$42 million.

Lawson stage 1 consists of 184 detached dwellings and more than 500 units. The plan is for up to 1,850 dwellings to be built in Lawson, with many of these in the next stage of the suburb, which was offered to developers as an en globo release. Unlike its predecessor, Lawson stage 2 has been zoned for no detached houses. Instead more medium-density developments will be joined by high-density apartments near the shore of Lake Ginninderra, along with a small section of mixed-use development.

According to the ACT government’s Lawson concept planning study:

The vision for Lawson ... is to achieve a liveable, sustainable ‘urban village’ that minimises impacts on the surrounding environment and maximises the positive

attributes of the suburb ... planning for Lawson ... envisages a well connected, integrated and compact neighbourhood, where residential densities are higher than in surrounding established suburbs.

Higher residential densities have certainly been realised in Lawson stage 1 and will be an even greater reality in Lawson stage 2. Residents of Lawson, however, have serious concerns about whether this government's promise that Lawson would be liveable has been achieved.

Over the past two years or so, the Canberra Liberals have heard from dozens of residents who have raised with us serious complaints about how poorly the Labor-Greens government has planned their suburb and how they have been treated with disrespect by the government since buying their blocks or units and moving in.

My motion today addresses just one of those issues, and one that more Lawson residents have complained to us about than all the others combined: lack of adequate public parking. This is a persistent problem that affects both residents and their guests. The results are easily seen firsthand if one visits Lawson. It is reaching crisis levels especially in the evenings and on weekends, when most people are at home.

Parking is of increasing importance in suburbs and cities. Sometimes people spend longer parking than they do driving. So, when planning, it is common sense to set aside adequate land for parking. Traditionally governments have believed that generous parking allocations provide benefits to residents.

However, this has fallen short in Lawson. There are far too few public parking places for all the homeowners and renters who live in Lawson, let alone for the people who want to visit those residents. This has created a situation of genuine desperation and disruption. The daily difficulty of finding parking has been enough to make living in Lawson an exercise in sustained frustration for many residents. Beyond this, many Lawson residents have said to us that their friends and family have given up on visiting because they simply cannot find a place to park if they do.

I want to point out here that, frustrated as Lawson residents are, overwhelmingly they are not frustrated with each other. Instead nearly everyone has concluded that the chaotic situation in Lawson is a result of lack of appropriate planning in the suburb, a deliberate act of a tired old government that cannot be bothered to provide an adequate amount of parking or, worse, an intentional attempt to force people to give up their cars and be dependent on public transport instead. Yet there are currently no bus services within Lawson. So now the government seems to expect people not to have cars and not to have a bus but just to walk everywhere.

In answer to a question on notice last year, Deputy Chief Minister Berry stated that bus services will not commence until sometime in 2021 or even 2022. In the meantime, the nearest bus stop for many Lawson residents is located on the University of Canberra campus, but they have no formal footpath that allows them to safely get to Ginninderra Drive to cross it. This is hardly the well-connected, integrated neighbourhood that this government sold to the buyers who handed over their life savings. Therefore I call on the government to provide that much-needed

footpath for residents of Lawson to walk to the bus stop on the other side of Ginninderra Drive.

One Lawson resident pointed out that although she lives in a development with 43 units, there are only two parking bays for visitors. Meanwhile on-street parking has been intentionally limited, with parking spaces in streets such as Narrambla Terrace, Pipeclay Street and Solong Street separated into two pairs rather than continuous.

Another frustrated resident talked about how many of the dwellings in Lawson are being used as share houses with three, four, or even more adults living in each one. Share housing inevitably increases the need for parking. This is not a surprising circumstance, as Lawson is next door to the University of Canberra. At the same time, a quick search of the Allhomes website earlier this week revealed the following in Lawson, to give just a few examples: a four-bedroom house for rent with parking for only one car; a three-bedroom townhouse for rent, also with parking for only one car; and several houses for sale, each with six or seven bedrooms but private parking for only two cars.

Lawson residents are deeply frustrated. Just last week I spoke with a family who told me frankly that they regret building a home there. The Labor-Greens government was happy to take their money, they said, but now the government does not want to hear from them about any problems they are facing, including insufficient designated parking.

Lawson residents are also worried. Bad as things are now, their fear is that this government will allow Lawson stage 2, with its even greater densities, to multiply the problems readily apparent in Lawson stage 1. If residents and guests already cannot find anywhere to park, what will happen when close to another 1,000 dwellings are added to the mix?

My motion today is a straightforward response to these frustrations and fears. Lawson residents expect their government to increase the amount of designated parking in their suburb to alleviate the nightmare they are currently facing every single day.

That adequate parking was not planned for in the first place is a universally acknowledged failure that desperately needs to be addressed. Beyond that, Lawson residents want an assurance that the current ACT government will make sure that adequate designated parking will be provided for both residents and visitors in Lawson stage 2.

These are not outrageous demands. Canberrans rightly expect their government to provide the basic services that make life reasonable and liveable, and when mistakes are made they expect their government to acknowledge and then fix the problem. A government that refuses to do so is no longer fit to govern. I therefore commend this motion to the Assembly.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Minister for Advanced Technology and Space Industries, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (3.41): I thank

Mrs Kikkert for the motion today pertaining to parking in new suburbs with medium-density and multi-unit developments, including Lawson.

The government has on many different occasions spoken to its vision for Canberra as a sustainable, competitive, and equitable city that is a great place to live not just today but for the community of tomorrow. As Minister for Planning and Land Management, I recognise that getting the balance of parking for new residential developments right is important. I am committed to making sure that convenient transport and parking options are provided for residents and their visitors, in consideration of a range of other factors that make our city liveable and sustainable as well.

Mrs Kikkert quite rightly acknowledges that getting parking provision right is critical for the convenience of the residents and their visitors now and into the future. This is clearly not a task that this government takes lightly. We consider this in a broader transport and land use planning context and in the context of long-term sustainability for Canberra.

In the past, residents of Canberra's many low-density residential suburbs have had a plentiful supply of parking, with two or more parking spaces provided per house, plus ample free on-street parking. In effect, many suburban homes could accommodate several vehicles per resident. However, as the city grows and more of the Canberra community choose medium and high-density living and other options for travel are available, the same provision of parking per residence is no longer feasible.

On a very practical level, the cost of providing basement or structured parking is many times that of providing a surface car parking space. To provide three or four basement or structured car parking spaces per apartment would substantially increase the cost of constructing housing, and this in turn would affect housing affordability. This would disadvantage many households, including those that do not own or cannot afford to own multiple vehicles, and that is simply not fair.

As an alternative to costly basement or structured parking, three or four parking spaces per apartment could be provided at ground level. However, there is simply not the land available in medium-density suburbs. To do this would result in very poor urban design and land efficiency outcomes, as I am sure you would all agree.

In our endeavours to provide housing choice, consideration must be given to options with space for households to park three or four vehicles in some cases. Indeed, there are many options in Canberra for households with three or four cars in certain areas. However, this is not something that can be provided for every medium-density or multi-unit development in Canberra.

This is why my government aims to strike a balance in the provision of parking in new suburbs. Recognising that there are many households with one to two vehicles outside of major centres, the Territory Plan requires specific minimum parking to be provided in medium-density and apartment developments. However, as the Territory Plan's parking provision requirements are minimum, they do not restrict a developer from delivering above these requirements where there is a demand for more parking. Many houses in Canberra, including in new suburbs, do offer three or four on-site

parking spaces, some in garages and some in driveways, providing an option for households with multiple vehicles.

The ACT government is also working hard to improve sustainable travel across Canberra and in new suburbs—including public transport, walking, and cycling, which have many added health and sustainability benefits—as an alternative to private car use.

In summary, the government takes a holistic approach to the provision of transport and parking options in our new residential suburbs and we continue looking at ways we can best cater for the lifestyles and transport needs of Canberrans now and into the future. This includes a balance of parking options and housing choices. I thank Mrs Kikkert for her constructive amendment to her motion. This will be considered as part of the planning processes for future developments in this suburb.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (3.45): I move:

Add new paragraph (2)(d):

“(d) review options for providing better public transport until a standard bus service can be provided, such as using a minibus-sized vehicle to introduce a temporary shuttle bus from Lawson to the University of Canberra and Belconnen Town Centre.”.

I am not surprised that the people in parts of Lawson are having parking problems, because they are also having bus problems and walking problems and cycling problems and these problems, of course, go together. Basically, they are having transport problems. Households need more cars when they do not have other good transport choices. The root cause of these transport problems is that Lawson is a suburb which is only two-thirds built. Development started on the eastern, or Kaleen, side and people have reasonable transport links in that direction.

There are two bus routes on Baldwin Drive, the 30 and the 31. There are okay path connections down to two sets of traffic lights in Ginninderra Drive, so that people in this area can walk to eastern parts of the University of Canberra, although obviously crossing Ginninderra Drive is noisy and a fairly unpleasant and possibly sometimes even challenging experience. One of these traffic lights also connects to a bike path through Bruce to the city or Dickson. There are also straightforward car connections in an easterly direction; however, the unbuilt final third of the suburb includes an important set of transport connections to the south and the west, including the road link through the Aitken Drive, Ginninderra Drive intersection and important path connections.

The impact of these missing connections on public transport is that there is a large part of the suburb without a bus route because a full-size bus cannot get in and around the suburb until Stockman Avenue is finished through Aitken Drive. For people who want to walk or to cycle there are similar problems. To get to the University of Canberra from the middle section of the suburb there is no reasonable option at all. This is actually significantly important, because many people living in Lawson are University of Canberra students.

For people who want to walk or cycle along the lovely Lake Ginninderra path network to get to work or facilities in the town centre there is also no reasonable option to get down to that path. Both of these options are obvious on the ground or, I might point out, from aerial photographs such as you can see using ACTmapi. There are several goat tracks where fit and adventurous people cut through Solong Street. At the western end the goat tracks go to the lake and Aitken Drive intersection via a watercourse and electricity substation. At the southern end of Solong Street, people follow a sealed path in the middle of some open space, but then they have to cut down to a little dirt path alongside a block of apartments.

It is far from ideal for a walking and cycling network to require Lawson residents trying to get to work or uni to be fit, adventurous and willing to cross what we hope will be a muddy watercourse, that is, there will be some water around without a bridge. The minister has emphasised that these transport problems are temporary, and I understand that the government's belief is that when the suburb is finished these problems will be fixed. I am very hopeful that this is in fact the case. But temporary in this case probably means years and years.

People have already been inconvenienced by poor transport options for several years now and it will be several years more before key road and path connections are built. It is not just the inconvenience, which would be one thing, but there are spillover problems, like the parking problems that Mrs Kikkert's motion raises. There are also problems potentially with injury risk certainly with erosion where people have to walk on the goat tracks and goat tracks get bigger.

There is also the longer term problem for the government for Canberra as a whole, given our ambitions to become a zero net emissions community, because once people get used to their transport habits, they tend not to change them until they move. In Lawson we are actively discouraging a source of transport that the government has said it wants to encourage to reach our climate change ambitions. What we are doing is locking in car ownership and driving habits, which are counter to the government's goals.

What is the solution? Mrs Kikkert's original motion addressed only one symptom of the problem: too many cars for the available car parking. Her amendment is better, but still I do not think does it all. I must admit, I was quite surprised at her amendment point (e):

the Government is committed to providing bus services through Lawson once Lawson Stage Two is complete;

It is great to see the Liberal Party announcing government policy commitments, and possibly we do not need to have to worry about the formality of having an election later this year; that is possibly a snide comment.

I do not think that we can tackle problems by addressing only one symptom. If we are going to solve the problems for Lawson, we actually have to look at investing in the transport system in that area and we need to think about what kind of transport system

we want in the future. It should be clear from everything I have been saying, including this morning about parking, that we want people to have high-quality and highly competitive non-car options. We want to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We want people to be able to walk and cycle for transport and for recreation and to benefit their mental and physical health. All these things point to investments in options other than parking, so I am very pleased that Mrs Kikkert has changed her original motion, which was purely about parking.

Second, in one of the southern parts of Lawson, the parking problem looks to me like it is possibly the students from the University of Canberra trying to avoid parking restrictions on campus. This comes back to our earlier discussion today about parking restrictions. This is the area at the southern end of Wanderlight Avenue, which is just across Ginninderra Drive from the uni. This is not the same transport issue as faced by the hundreds of residents in the middle of the suburb. I would hate to see the ACT government waste a large amount of money on this and, if this is the case, there are other solutions, such as what has been adopted in other parts of the ACT. I am someone who used to live in Garran and, probably about 30 years ago, I found outside my house was a sign saying, “No parking”. This was because my house was very close to Canberra Hospital and people were trying to do anything rather than park at Canberra Hospital. There was no suggestion that we should build more parking in Garran.

Finally, Mrs Kikkert’s original call (b) would have required changes to the territory’s parking and vehicular access code, and this would need a Territory Plan variation and would take years. The parking code is a particular bugbear of mine. I have been pushing for changes on that for a very long time, well over a decade, and there has been no progress on that so far. It is one of our real problems in terms of urban intensification that developments are forced to put in parking, even if they are in locations which are very close to good parking and transport infrastructure. In some instances, they are putting in parking which is really not going to be needed by the residents.

If we are going to have more cost-effective affordable housing one of the things that we have to do is let people say, “I actually am living 100 metres from a light rail station. I don’t need a second car. I possibly do not even need the first car.” That is an option which we do not let people have. From the look of the parking code, many of the drawings and diagrams are from the days when computer graphics were done on a mainframe. I am afraid I seriously doubt that the changes to the parking code could possibly be in place for the second stage of Lawson, much as I would like changes to the parking code.

As should be pretty obvious, from the Greens’ point of view, we need a holistic solution to the whole transport problem. Mrs Kikkert’s amendment to her motion has addressed one part of this bigger picture—walking and cycling paths—and I applaud that part of her amendment to her motion.

What is missing is the public transport, and that is what my amendment has. We need some alternative public transport running because right now the full-size buses cannot go through the middle of Lawson. We do not have to wait for Stockman Avenue to be

built so a full-size bus can run there. While a full-size bus cannot fit down there, a minibus could. It could run up Stockman Avenue, down Solong Street, through Bellbird Loop, into Pipeclay Street and back out then through Stockman Avenue.

If we do this, it would have an added benefit that Lawson could be an excellent test location for the kind of last-mile demand responsive services that we need to get across Canberra to solve problems like services for older people, who cannot walk 400 metres to their nearest local bus stop. I urge members to look at all of the parts of Lawson's transport problems by supporting my amendment to Mrs Kikkert's amendment.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for City Services, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Recycling and Waste Reduction, Minister for Roads and Active Travel and Minister for Transport) (3.56): I am very pleased to have the opportunity today to speak to Mrs Kikkert's motion in relation to access to parking and public transport for residents in Lawson, and I acknowledge her amendment to her motion.

It is important to note first and foremost that, when it comes to getting to and from work and to other places around our city, residents of Lawson stage 1 are benefitting from access to the ACT's bus network. Locals can utilise bus stops on Baldwin Drive to catch the route 30 bus service to Belconnen or Dickson before connecting to the city and other town centres via buses and light rail. Alternatively, they can catch the Route 31 bus directly to Belconnen, Dickson, Braddon and the city. Residents can also utilise nearby bus stops at the University of Canberra campus, and I understand that they are doing that quite a lot. That is one of the reasons why there is a focus on providing better pedestrian access, which I certainly acknowledge.

I also want to reiterate that the government is committed to fully servicing the suburb of Lawson through the bus network in future, and I thank Mrs Kikkert for acknowledging that commitment in her amendment. Mrs Kikkert's amendment also touches on foot and bike paths in Lawson and highlights missing connections in the active travel network in this region. The amendment also highlights some of the desire lines that have been created as a result of people walking to and from where they want to go, which I think we will be able to look at in further detail and see what solutions might be available to address these issues.

The government has been taking a proactive approach to improving walking and cycling connections in Lawson and will continue to do that, including the issues raised today. One of the examples recently was that Transport Canberra and City Services installed bicycle racks at the bus stops at the intersection of Baldwin Drive, Stockman Ave and Maribyrnong Avenue to make it easier for Lawson residents to connect to the bus network. We are also undertaking design and construction of a path connection to the underpass of Baldwin Drive at Kaleen High School to help students travelling to and from school.

In August last year, a new three-metre-wide shared path was opened to pedestrians and cyclists, providing access to a missing link in the community path network on the south side of Ginninderra Drive between Aikman Drive and Allawoona Street. This path can be accessed by residents of Lawson via Wanderlight Avenue and provides

access to the Belconnen town centre from Allawoona Street via the University of Canberra and the University of Canberra Hospital connecting to the existing path network along the eastern side of Aikman Drive.

This path also provides connectivity to recreational facilities at Lake Ginninderra to the west and the suburbs of Bruce and Lawson to the east. In addition, the Belconnen bikeway, which is currently under construction, comprises both shared and separated cycling and pedestrian facilities, to make it easier for people to move around Belconnen. This active travel infrastructure will improve accessibility and provide safer and faster connections to places of work and recreation.

As members are aware, the suburb of Lawson is new. As with any new and developing suburb, this means that certain infrastructure components are also under construction and so sometimes it will be the case that there might be missing links in the path network. For this reason, I will also ask TCCS to investigate the linkages of paths within Lawson to the town centre to address the issues raised in today's debate earlier in the motion from Mrs Kikkert.

Lastly, on the topic of access to sufficient parking for the current residents of Lawson, the government acknowledges these concerns and I will be asking TCCS to review the existing parking situation. This will include consultation with local residents, with a view to seeing how parking can be improved. I certainly acknowledge the comment by Ms Le Couteur in relation to parking by University of Canberra students. The parking review will examine all of those issues in consultation with residents and look at the best solutions for improving the parking situation in the suburb of Lawson.

Ms Le Couteur, I understand, has moved an amendment to the motion that focuses on improving public transport in Lawson. The government is committed to providing Canberrans across the city with options when it comes to getting around. These options include active travel, walking and cycling, more buses through an improved bus network, off-road cycle paths and other shared paths around the city and in suburbs like Lawson.

The government will not be supporting Ms Le Couteur's amendment to Mrs Kikkert's motion. The reason why we will not be supporting that today is that I am very happy to investigate what public transport solutions might be available until such time as we put in the standard bus services for stage two of the development. But we will not be agreeing to the specific wording of Ms Le Couteur's motion at this time, which goes to looking at specific types of buses and specific routes.

I cannot commit to doing that but I will commit, in the debate today, to investigating what public transport options might be able to be improved in the suburb of Lawson, in addition to the existing routes that I have mentioned, servicing the outside of Lawson, which people can currently walk to or access via active travel means and other means of transport. I will also look at the parking issues and the active travel connections.

On that basis, I am very thankful to Mrs Kikkert for bringing this forward and raising these issues with me. I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate and we will

certainly consider all of the issues that were raised by all members in the Assembly in relation to the issues that Lawson residents are experiencing.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra) (4.02): I rise briefly to underline my support for the amended motion that Mrs Kikkert has put forward and for the sentiment expressed by the ministers and Ms Le Couteur. I think that most visitors to Lawson, let alone residents, are struck by the few available parking spots compared to some of the older or more established suburbs across Belconnen. While this has not been a key issue raised with me personally by residents, it is certainly something that I have experienced, and I support Mrs Kikkert in bringing it forward today on behalf of those people who have made representations.

I also note the issue that Ms Le Couteur brought forward—that, while buses go along Baldwin Drive and service Lawson, there is not a bus which goes through Lawson. For some residents who live on the western side of Lawson particularly, it is a bit of a walk to get to the bus on Baldwin Drive. In saying that, Lawson is not yet complete. It is still in stage 1, with stage 2 on the way, so some infrastructure components are under construction. I was very pleased to hear Minister Steel's commitment that he will look closely at those desire lines being created, which may give an indication as to where footpaths and other linkages should be.

I also put on the record how well received the missing link on Ginninderra Drive between the University of Canberra and Aikman Drive has been. Hopefully, with some more consultation there, those ongoing improvements in Lawson will mean the infrastructure gets to a stage where Lawson will look like a completed suburb, rather than just stage 1. I am also very grateful to hear that the minister will see how parking can be reviewed not only for stage 1 residents in the short term but also for the development of stage 2 and in completing Lawson as a whole, to make sure it is perhaps a little bit more consistent with what Canberrans have come to expect.

With Ms Le Couteur's amendment, while I understand the intent, I think the specificities of it are probably just a bit too great, and it may in fact hamstring the government in identifying what might be appropriate transport means in the short term. I think that Minister Steel is very true to his word, and he has stated pretty clearly today that he will be having a good look at that. I am sure that members for Ginninderra, and indeed the members for Yerrabi, where Lawson still is located, for the next few months at least, will be holding the minister to his word on that. Ultimately, though, this was about parking issues, and I am very pleased to hear about the developments today. I thank Mrs Kikkert for bringing the motion forward.

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (4.06): I reiterate how grateful I am to have been able to bring this motion before the Assembly today. I take seriously my responsibility to bring the voices and concerns of everyday Belconnen residents to this chamber. In this case those who live in Lawson have asked me to make sure they are heard. They have all spoken about car park and footpath issues. I have not heard anything about bus issues. That is why we could not support Ms Le Couteur's amendment. Having regard to the variety of different people that I have spoken to in Lawson, none of them made mention of transport issues. If that is the case, I would welcome a discussion with any residents in Lawson who have that issue.

I also want to thank Minister Steel, Minister Berry and Minister Gentleman and their staff for working with me to design a motion that most of us in this chamber can support. Along with the residents of Lawson, I look forward to seeing the outcome of the agreed-to reviews and, more importantly, the much-needed improvements that will make Lawson a better place to live.

I want to comment on Ms Le Couteur's reference to the policy commitment to bus services through Lawson. I remind her that, as I mentioned in my speech, in answer to a question on notice last year, Deputy Chief Minister Berry stated that a bus service would not commence until sometime in 2021 or even 2022. We knew it was the case that Lawson would have better bus services. We found that out by way of the Select Committee on Estimates last year. We did not really want to delve into the bus transportation issue because once stage 2 is constructed they will have that bus service going through Lawson.

I want to thank everybody who participated in this debate.

Question put:

That **Ms Le Couteur's** amendment to the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 2

Ms Le Couteur
Mr Rattenbury

Noes 19

Ms Berry	Ms Lee
Ms J Burch	Mr Milligan
Ms Cheyne	Ms Orr
Mr Coe	Mr Parton
Mrs Dunne	Mr Pettersson
Mr Gentleman	Mr Ramsay
Mr Gupta	Mr Steel
Mr Hanson	Ms Stephen-Smith
Mrs Kikkert	Mr Wall
Ms Lawder	

Question resolved in the negative.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Long service leave—portability

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra) (4.13): At the request of Ms Cody, and in accordance with standing order 127, I fix the next day of sitting for the moving of the motion.

Auslan—use during emergencies

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

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is the language of the Deaf community in Australia;
- (b) over the summer period smoke, bushfires, hail, dust and coronavirus impacted the lives of many Australians;
- (c) the ACT Government instigated a State of Alert and a State of Emergency;
- (d) ACT Emergency Services provided an outstanding response, along with volunteer organisations, government agencies and directorates in protecting life and property, in providing recovery centres, evacuation centres, assistance of all sorts to residents and evacuees, and communication and information resources;
- (e) initially, up to around 2 January 2020, no Auslan interpreter was provided in briefings, media conferences and the like;
- (f) this meant that the Canberra Deaf community was left at times without important and potentially life-saving information and communication access; and
- (g) the Deaf community mobilised and complained, and called on the Government to provide an interpreter, which they then did whenever possible;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) in some cases an Auslan interpreter may be present, but is not visible to the viewer because of decisions made by media personnel;
- (b) obviously, members of the Deaf community cannot use the radio for information updates; and
- (c) live news sometimes does not have captions because of the fast moving and immediate nature of situational updates; and

(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) develop, or if already available, table communication policies and procedures for emergency situations such as a State of Alert or Emergency, and explain why this communication access was not provided from the outset;
- (b) if not already included, ensure these policies and procedures include briefing media representatives (such as cameramen) or including the Auslan interpreter in picture;
- (c) report back to the Assembly by end of June 2020 as to what policies, procedures, or other changes have or will be made to ensure communication access is not withheld in future emergencies; and
- (d) investigate other ways to provide our Deaf community in the ACT with better communication access.

It appears that once again the deaf community have been neglected in the provision of information. This time it started with the heavy smoke haze over Canberra in December. There was a failure to provide Auslan interpreters during broadcasts earlier this summer for what many were seeing as an emergency situation. I mean that

in layman's terms, Madam Deputy Speaker: what was going on in our community, not "emergency" from an ESA point of view. I am talking about the pub test: what is going on? There were numerous broadcasts by ministers, the Chief Minister and the ESA commissioner, but no communication access was provided for our ACT deaf constituents. It was a highly serious oversight. There were people wondering what was going on.

These types of emergency broadcasts provide important information for our residents to keep them safe, keep them healthy and, in the very strongest case, save lives. When a threat is imminent, emergency broadcasts are the most accessible and reliable source of instruction and information available—or such is the intention, but that is only if you can access and understand these broadcasts.

I have talked about this many times in this place over the years. English is often a second language for deaf people. Without providing access in their primary language, their first language—Auslan or Australian sign language—the deaf community simply may not be able to understand what is going on. I should not have to state the obvious, but deaf people cannot listen to the radio, which is one of the prime sources of information in an emergency. Missing these broadcasts can mean enormous danger to the deaf community. But, just as importantly, missing information, lack of information and failure to provide information are a source of enormous stress. The mental health impacts of not knowing what is going on in your community cannot be underestimated. Unfortunately, there were some failures this year.

I fear that this is a broader reflection of this government's neglect of the deaf community. It is a broader pattern of neglect. Time after time we have come into this place to point out the need for better communication access for our deaf community. I am sure there are some people saying, "Here is Ms Lawder going on about the deaf community again." If it happened properly, if it happened as it is meant to happen, I would not have to stand up here and bring these issues to the Assembly time after time.

Let us look at a bit of history. We had an issue this year about an Auslan-competent psychologist, a mental health professional able to communicate in Auslan. The deaf community was blocked from accessing those mental health services. I had to bring a motion here in the Assembly calling on the government to provide better mental health services to get some action happening on this issue.

There have been other times I have spoken in this place about access for deaf people. Over this summer, members of the deaf community contacted me to say, "We are not getting interpreters provided on these media broadcasts." It is not good enough. The deaf community activated. They complained. They used the avenues available to them. This was not a time for me to write a letter to the minister and wait however long to get a response. This was not a time to put in a question. This was a time for the deaf community to step in and act themselves, to make sure that this was provided sooner rather than later. They did that. They contacted the department and the minister to say, "What is going on?" It is an unacceptable pattern. It is discriminatory. And it is not reflective of what I believe should be the inclusiveness of Canberra.

It seems that this government did not already have communication protocols that included engaging an interpreter for events of this type—not waiting until it was at a serious level but doing it right from the outset. It was about smoke and the health impacts. It was about not doing it just when a bushfire was potentially on your doorstep or just down the road but doing it beforehand so that people knew what was happening.

If the government do not have these types of procedures—some kind of checklist to say, “Quick, book an interpreter for the media conference later today or tomorrow or the next day”—this should be standard practice. Members of the deaf community and members of this Assembly should not have to remind this department—this government, this machinery—that it is their job to inform, educate, support and protect citizens. It is what they should be doing as business as usual; they should not be waiting to be reminded. Being reminded is one thing, but having to remind someone over and over again is tiresome for all concerned.

It should not be an incidental afterthought or an accidental afterthought. It should not be because someone has asked for it. It should be standard. It should be in your communication protocols, policies, procedures or whatever you want to call them. The term is irrelevant; the important thing is whether the information about having an Auslan interpreter is in there.

Another important point, and I have tried to acknowledge this in my motion, is that sometimes these broadcasts and what is shown to the public may be slightly out of the government’s control. I know from many years experience that sometimes camera operators zoom in on the speaker and may not show the interpreter even if an interpreter is there. I know that is the case. But I know that many organisations have worked with Free TV, ASTRA and other organisations to try to bring in guidelines.

When you have changing personnel, changing camera operators, what is the one way you can make sure that this happens? It is that the media adviser or whoever is organising and running the media conference says up-front at the start, “This is what will happen. You will include the interpreter in the frame.” Then everyone’s expectations are set right from the outset. It is a pretty simple thing. It is not something that requires a huge amount of work. You have called the media conference. You can manage it. And you should be managing it better.

When I spoke with members of the deaf community about the motion today, they were at pains to say that once they had made their requests or complaints, access was provided and they were deeply grateful.

I would like to acknowledge the main interpreter that we saw day after day, Mandy Dolejsi, who has appeared here in the Assembly as the interpreter. She is the only level 3 accredited Auslan interpreter that lives in Canberra, and she is a tremendous asset for our deaf community. But she cannot do everything. She cannot do every single piece of work herself. Sometimes we bring in people from interstate, and that is fine. Sometimes the government may be forced to use a level 2 interpreter rather than a level 3. That is better than not having any interpreter at all. Mandy goes on holidays.

She might be sick. In one instance she was delayed by traffic during the Beard fire, when some roads were closed and she was trying to get in for a media conference. These things happen. I understand that, and the deaf community understand that. They are deeply grateful, and they wanted me to express their gratitude.

I will say what they will not say, what they would never say. As a marginalised community, they are often afraid to complain; they are afraid to make a fuss. They want to express their gratitude for the little crumbs that are thrown their way. They would never say that, but I am going to say that. Just because you throw them an interpreter every so often does not absolve you of the responsibility to provide the interpreter from the outset and as often as possible.

Thank you, Mandy, and other interpreters, for your work to keep Canberrans safe over the summer. As it ended up, it was smoke, fires and then hail. We have had an extraordinary summer so far. Of course, the bushfire season has not yet ended.

I look forward to a future Canberra where deaf people and people with disability more generally do not have to fight the same battle time after time to be acknowledged in this community and be acknowledged by this government, so that they do not have to fight the same battle every couple of years. At some point, surely the government will learn. Surely people will say, “This is our failure and we will learn. We will write it into our procedures and we will make sure this does not happen again.” When will that day come? I do not think it is good enough.

We talk about inclusivity. We talk about respect. But where is it on the ground? Where is it in action? I want action rather than words, especially in areas where we should have learned our lesson long ago. We should not have to fight the same thing over and over again.

I applaud the deaf community for taking matters into their own hands and making complaints to the government to get that communication access provided, I think from around 2 January. This is what they have to do. It is so tiresome and tiring when you have to say the same thing over and over again. Sometimes they feel: “Why should I bother? Why do I have to keep doing it time and again?” I can see that. It should not be up to them. It should be up to the government to fix it. They have been told over and over again.

Please, either provide the procedures you have now so that we can see if it is included, or develop procedures, policies, guidelines or protocols. Again, I do not care what you want to call them, but make sure they are there, and make sure that, next time we have serious events like this, you take the first step and do not wait for the community to come to you and ask for what should be provided as a matter of course.

I ask members to support my motion today.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Minister for Advanced Technology and Space Industries, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (4.28): I begin today by taking the opportunity to thank the Auslan interpreters who supported

Commissioner Whelan, the Chief Minister and me, and our other government spokespeople during the recent state of alert and state of emergency.

As we have already noted many times in this place, the tireless efforts of our team of teams ensured that the Canberra community remained well informed and well prepared throughout this bushfire season. The Auslan interpreters who have been supporting the ESA—Mandy, Alana, Bek, Rhonda, and Susan—have done a terrific job over the past few weeks, and I join the Canberra community in commending them for their excellent work.

The ACT Emergency Services Agency has the responsibility for communicating information about emergency events to the public via the ESA's website and social networking platforms as well as media outlets. Providing effective messaging to all sectors of the community, including the deaf and hard of hearing community, is vitally important to ensure the safety of the public.

Australian sign language, more commonly known as Auslan, is used to convey communications in a visual way. The most important thing for Auslan interpreters, as well as the ESA, during an emergency is that deaf people receive the exact same message that people of hearing do. And I will say in regard to Ms Lawder's comments on instructions to media camera operators that they are instructed, of course, to include wide-framing of the Auslan interpreter to ensure the message does go through.

The ESA has an MOU and a partnership agreement with the Deaf Society of New South Wales for the provision of Auslan translators to attend media conferences during major emergencies and disasters in the ACT. The step is already in place. The Deaf Society of New South Wales is the peak body for the deaf and people with hearing impairment in New South Wales and the ACT. However, the issue faced by the ESA was a lack of suitably qualified interpreters available. Ms Lawder has spoken on that today. I understand other states may have similar issues. I thank Ms Lawder for an opportunity to set out to the Canberra community the lengths that ESA went to in the face of this potentially national issue.

ESA was adaptive and took immediate action to address feedback on the use of Auslan interpreters and captions during broadcasts to the community during the recent state of alert and state of emergency. All efforts were made to ensure that appropriate interpretation or captioning was provided during press conferences, announcements and briefings so that members of our deaf community remained well informed. It should be noted that the Auslan interpreters are relied on heavily during emergencies such as Australia's bushfire crisis and are in high demand when such widespread events occur.

Most Canberrans will now be familiar with the territory's only fully certified Auslan interpreter, Ms Amanda Dolejsi, as we have heard, better known as Mandy. Mandy has been in high demand this summer and there were many days when she was needed at Parliament House before joining us at the ESA headquarters. Given that there are a minimal number of trained interpreters available in the ACT and New South Wales and only one level 3-trained interpreter in the ACT, the ESA actively made arrangements for alternative methods of messaging for the deaf and hard-of-

hearing community during the state of alert. When the New South Wales Deaf Society could not provide an interpreter the ESA would re-record the press conference with a remote interpreter and publish this a short time later.

The ESA Commissioner and emergency controller during the ACT state of alert and state of emergency, Ms Georgeina Whelan, actively thanked the interpreters after each broadcast, formally and informally acknowledging the work that they had undertaken in support of the ESA and the deaf and hard-of-hearing community in the ACT. Commissioner Whelan also worked proactively with interpreters prior to broadcasts to ensure that messages were clearly expressed and the importance and the tones of each message were clearly conveyed. The lack of Auslan interpreters with appropriate accreditation and training is a national problem that requires a national response.

Once again, thank you to the Auslan interpreters who assisted the ESA—Mandy, Alana, Bek, Rhonda and Susan—over the past weeks. I believe the ACT government and the ESA have demonstrated to the community that we have learned a lot from 2003 and used those lessons to implement actions for improvements. Part of these improvements has been the communication with the public, and the ESA has done an outstanding job throughout the bushfire season, particularly with the recent Orroral Valley fire in Namadgi National Park, in communicating with our community.

As the ESA do with all major incidents, they will review what they did with this bushfire and storm season and what they can improve on. They will do this in the knowledge that the time will come for them to be put to the test again. Their aim is to perform even better next time for all members of our community, including the deaf and hard of hearing. I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all text after paragraph (1)(d), substitute:

- “(e) Auslan interpreters with level 3 accreditation are in short supply in the ACT and Australia, resulting in an interpreter not being available during a video produced by the ACT Emergency Services Agency (ESA) in relation to smoke hazards prior to the announcement of the State of Alert on 2 January 2020;
- (f) all efforts were made to ensure that appropriate interpretation or captioning was provided during press conferences, announcements and briefings following the announcement of the State of Alert on 2 January 2020; and
- (g) the ACT ESA has a memorandum of understanding and a partnership agreement with the Deaf Society of NSW for the provision of Auslan interpreters to attend media conferences during major emergencies and disasters in the ACT. The Deaf Society of NSW is the peak body for the Deaf and people with a hearing impairment in NSW and the ACT;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) in some cases an Auslan interpreter may be present, but is not visible to the viewer because of decisions made by media personnel;
- (b) obviously, members of the Deaf community cannot use the radio for information updates; and

- (c) live news sometimes does not have captions because of the fast moving and immediate nature of situational updates; and
- (3) calls on the Federal Government to:
 - (a) address the lack of Auslan interpreters with level 3 accreditation in the ACT and across Australia;
 - (b) provide any additional funding and support required to increase numbers of interpreters with level 3 accreditation; and
 - (c) report back on progress against (a) and (b) by June 2020.”.

This is, rightly, something that the commonwealth should be leading on. However, I welcome the suggestions from Ms Le Couteur that she will be making when speaking to the amendment that she is circulating.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (4.35): I thank Minister Gentleman for moving the amendment to Ms Lawder’s motion, to which I will now move my amendment:

Add:

- “(4) calls on the ACT Government to:
 - (a) ensure that all communications policies and procedures for emergency situations include provision of Auslan interpreters on screen and live captioning as well as briefing of media representatives, including camera operators on the needs of deaf and hearing-impaired people;
 - (b) continue strategies, incentives and potentially scholarships to assist people to become NAATI accredited in Auslan to build local capability; and
 - (c) report back on progress against 4(a) and (b) by June 2020.”.

The Greens are supporting all the other bits of the chain—Mr Gentleman’s amendment to Ms Lawder’s motion and an additional amendment to that amendment. Although we know the federal government has a significant role in ensuring national accreditation of interpretation, including Auslan interpreters, the ACT government also has a role to play in enhancing Auslan capability in the Canberra community.

I begin by stating that, as the motion indicates, the ACT Emergency Services Agency, along with their partners, provided an outstanding response to the bushfire threats experienced by our community—all our community, including of course our deaf community. I have no doubt that our learning from the 2003 Canberra bushfires contributed to enhanced preparedness and saving lives and properties this time around. It is always useful to reflect on such circumstances once they have passed in order to ensure that we do even better next time.

Whilst I am sure the ACT government did the best it could in the circumstances, the issues Ms Lawder raises regarding successful communications in the time of impending emergency of course are very valid. We must ensure that, in times where all Canberrans need to be aware of what is going on around them, in fact all Canberrans are aware of and can understand the messages that are being delivered, because these messages can literally be lifesaving. Further to that, I would add that we

must ensure accessible communication for all significant announcements, not just those occurring in a state of alert or a state of emergency.

You may have noticed that the use of Auslan interpreters is expanding both across the nation, for significant announcements and emergency updates, and also in different contexts such as cricket matches, theatre interpreting and even, I understand, the upcoming Rod Stewart tour at the end of this year. What this does say is that there is increasing awareness of the needs of people who are deaf and the need to take additional steps to ensure that they can understand the messages being delivered. As a society, we must get better at including everybody, regardless of their ability, and we must understand that people with a disability do not need to adjust; we do!

I do not think there is any lack of will in this regard, but there is definitely a lack of suitably qualified interpreters, and that is where the problem and solution lie. The lack of suitably qualified interpreters has been raised by the Greens previously in this Assembly, and I remind members that there is a specific item in the parliamentary agreement for the Eighth Assembly in that regard. It calls on the ACT government to introduce 10 new interpreter scholarships to assist people to become NAATI-qualified interpreters in languages with identified shortages—NAATI being the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters. At that time, languages with identified shortages included Dinka and Urdu. If that agreement item were still in play today I am sure we would all agree that there is a distinct lack of Auslan interpreters.

Additionally, the government response to the HACS report on annual and financial reports 2014-15 agreed with the recommendation that CSD should develop a strategy to attract more interpreters, particularly where there is a demand but a lack of available interpreters. That year the community interpreter preparation program in CSD provided scholarships for members of emergency community groups to train as interpreters and translators in NAATI, and 19 students were enrolled. I have not been able to find any further evidence of the ongoing nature of this work, except that in 2018-19 CSD reported on the development of the ACT language services policy that was tabled in October 2018 as part of responding to the HACS recommendations made in 2014-15.

It does take a while. But it does show what can be done when there is a deliberate strategy or program in place. Without it, the community relies on chance to find a suitable interpreter, and that is why I have included it in my amendment. We need to get back to having a deliberate and targeted local strategic action to ensure that there are enough Auslan interpreters in the ACT and that more work needs to be done to continue over and above the development of the language services policy.

Do not get me wrong, the language services policy is good. It is designed to be inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, migrant and deaf communities and individuals with multiple and complex communication needs. The policy recognises that ACT government directorates have responsibilities and obligations under local, national and international legislation, agreements and policies, to ensure that all Canberrans are treated equally and have the same opportunities regardless of their English proficiency. That is my point. We have obligations under

local, national and international legislation, agreements and policies, and we must ensure that we meet these obligations.

I realise that this is easier said than done. Auslan interpreters are in scant supply. In order for them to interpret for major alerts and emergency announcements they must possess the highest level of language competencies and interpreting skills. And of course we need more than one of them. It is tiring work, and the national OH&S standards for interpreters mandate that in many settings two interpreters must work in tandem to reduce physical and mental fatigue, and their welfare is also an important consideration.

I take a moment at this point to acknowledge and thank the Auslan interpreters who worked alongside the Emergency Services Commissioner over the past weeks. I reckon that their contributions were vital and valuable. I thank Minister Gentleman for mentioning them by name, which is obviously more than I am able to do. This is why I have insisted on including an actionable item in the calls in my amendment to the amendment to this motion.

We need to proactively continue strategies, incentives and potentially scholarships to assist Canberrans to become NAATI accredited in Auslan, to build local capability so that next time we are in the midst of a state of alert or emergency we can all be assured that deaf people are getting the same information as everyone else and that Auslan interpreters are not overworked and at the risk of burning out.

I recognise that the ACT makes financial and other contributions towards NAATI and that accreditation lies with this federal entity, but that does not mean that the ACT government should not be doing anything in this regard. It is our community, our own deaf community, that is being served or not served, and we have a role to play. Can I respectfully suggest that we can do more than simply identify suitable people in the community who are willing to be trained and accredited. We could consider scholarships or other financial assistance to support them to do this.

I note with interest that one of the aims of the language services policy is to provide continued funding for 24-hour emergency interpreter service Auslan speakers, and of course we cannot do this without a sufficient number of Auslan interpreters. If the government is serious about achieving this aim, we need to subsidise their training and accreditation. This is actually an issue that has come up in the maternity services inquiry that I am part of on the HACS committee. I am aware that it is a significant issue.

I also note with interest that the Community Services Directorate will work with all directorates to develop practical guidelines in the implementation of language services policy and that each directorate was to have a specific language services plan by November 2019. I trust that this in fact has been the case. At any rate, I look forward to reading each directorate's plans in their annual reports.

As I have said, I thank Ms Lawder for highlighting the needs of the deaf community, particularly in major emergencies and disasters, and I appreciate that all efforts were made to ensure appropriate interpretation or captioning over the summer. But I

believe that we now need to work proactively to ensure that there are enough Auslan interpreters in our community in the future to ensure that we can meet our obligations under law but, more importantly, to people in the Canberra community who are deaf.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Community Services and Facilities, Minister for Disability, Minister for Employment and Workplace Safety and Minister for Government Services and Procurement) (4.45): Thank you, Ms Lawder, for raising this important topic in the Assembly today. I rise today in support of Minister Gentleman’s amendments to Ms Lawder’s motion. The ACT government, through the Community Services Directorate, understands the importance of ensuring that all members of our community can access information relevant to them in a timely manner.

This bushfire season we have experienced extreme weather patterns, which have resulted in several state of alert declarations and one state of emergency here in the ACT. The Community Services Directorate, along with many other parts of the government, works to ensure that deaf and deaf-blind people are appropriately supported to receive information.

The Emergency Services Agency has consistently considered those in our community who require additional supports when it comes to sharing information throughout the bushfire season. The interpretation provided during the crisis was instigated by the ESA, which partnered with interpreting services to ensure as much coverage was provided as possible.

The Community Services Directorate provided advice to disability service providers to ensure that, if they were working with people with disability in preparing bushfire survival plans, they were mindful of the needs and requirements of these people in the event of an emergency. To further support vulnerable members of the community, the Community Services Directorate contacted the National Disability Insurance Agency and received the most up-to-date list of NDIS participants in the ACT. This information was provided to ESA to allow for further inquiries to be made, which determined the kind of support these people would require in the event of an evacuation.

Further to the recent support we provided during the bushfire crisis, the government has undertaken work to ensure that those who are deaf or deaf-blind in our community have access to the interpretation they need. I acknowledge there is more work to be done to ensure that we increase the number of Auslan interpreters. However, I do believe all governments need to work together to deliver a national response.

In 2018, the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters, or NAATI, replaced NAATI-accredited courses across Australia with endorsed qualifications. These are diploma-level or higher translation and interpreting qualifications provided by educational institutions that have received NAATI endorsement. This government is committed to assisting Auslan interpreters by providing annual funding to enable NAATI to set and maintain national standards in the interpreting and translation sector.

NAATI enables the supply of appropriately credentialed translators and interpreters who are responsive to the changing needs and demography of the Australian community. Furthermore, NAATI provides detailed advice and support to people on translator and interpreter certification requirements, as well as information on ACT institutions with endorsed qualifications.

I support Minister Gentleman's call for the federal government to address the lack of Auslan interpreters and to provide additional funding to increase the number of interpreters here in the ACT and across the country. The most recent bushfire season has shown us the importance of effective communication during emergencies. It is crucial that the federal government invest in strengthening the capacity to deliver Auslan-supported programs to ensure these services are more readily available, and this will ensure that states and territories are positioned to deliver fundamental supports to the members of our community who need it most.

In addition to working on increasing the number of Auslan interpreters, the ACT government recognises that people who speak a language other than English also require interpreters across all government communications. Through the eighth parliamentary agreement, which Ms Le Couteur has made reference to, the government delivered on our commitment to increase the number of interpreters. This was actioned under the ACT Multicultural Framework 2015–2020 *First Action Plan (2015–2018) Report*, which called for the ACT to identify people who are willing to undertake accreditation as formal interpreters to build a large pool of local interpreters.

As outlined by Minister Gentlemen, the ESA had a strong focus on delivering information in the most accessible way possible throughout the most recent state of alerts and state of emergency. This is a characteristic of the culture embedded in the work carried out by the ESA, which in fact received an ACT Inclusion award in 2019 for its ongoing support to people who are deaf in the community and its commitment to ensure that at least one SES troop was learning Auslan.

As a government we will continue to work with people with disability and their advocates to ensure all our services are accessible and inclusive. I commend Minister Gentleman's amendment to the motion and thank everyone for bringing forward this topic today.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (4.50), by leave: I move amendments to Ms Le Couteur's amendment to Mr Gentleman's amendment:

1. In paragraph (4)(c), after "report", insert "back to the Assembly".
2. In paragraph (4)(c), after "by June 2020", add "and present the Government's communication protocols or policies/procedures".

I would like to thank all the speakers today for their general support of the importance of providing communication access for people who are deaf. Back in March 2015, that is, just about five years ago, I asked the minister for education, I think, in questions without notice on 19 March 2015:

Minister, does your government have any interest in providing communication access for deaf people?

That was five years ago, and yet I still stand in this place and talk about communication access. Even further back, in November 2014, I presented a petition to the Assembly about Auslan courses at CIT. I think that the actions of this government have contributed to us reaching the point where we are today, because five years ago those opposite started talking about—and then later actually did it—cutting Auslan courses at CIT.

Mr Doszpot, our former colleague who was the shadow education spokesperson at that time, and I spoke about this issue time and time again in estimates and in annual reports hearings in this place. At that time, we talked about the longer term impact on the ACT's deaf community which cutting the Auslan courses at CIT would have. I acknowledge that another provider in the ACT is now providing those courses, but I can assure you that the price differential is a deterrent to many prospective students, which is not in any way to undermine the quality of that training, which is excellent.

A course provided at CIT when I did it was two nights a week for two years to get a certificate IV in Auslan. It is a major commitment of time and it also takes money to do that course. If you are talking hundreds of dollars versus thousands of dollars, you are going to really weigh up whether you go on to do more with your Auslan course later in life. For those people who might think, “Oh, it might be nice to be an Auslan interpreter,” when they look at the cost of the training, this can be a major deterrent.

At that time, in 2014, when we spoke about the cancellation of the Auslan classes at CIT, there were few interpreters in the ACT. Mandy Dolejsi at that time, more than five years ago, said she thought it would be a good idea for CIT to merge Auslan with other courses on offer. She said, and I quote from a *Sydney Morning Herald* article of 22 November 2014:

I want someone to be able to come and learn Auslan as well as their psychology degree, or nurses to come and do Auslan, so when a deaf person goes to hospital their family does not have to sit there 24 hours a day to communicate for them.

There are many other quotes, but I guess in summary the Deaf ACT president at that time again quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* article says:

We are desperate to have more interpreters and people to understand Auslan better in Canberra ...

Mr Gentleman said, quite rightly, that Auslan interpreters, especially level 3 accredited NAATI interpreters, are in high demand, and they went to great lengths to get an interpreter. But it comes back to the root cause of why there are few interpreters in the ACT. As with many things with this government, we now are reaping the rewards of what the government has done in the past. We are now seeing the problems of its previous decisions.

The course at CIT ended in 2015. I am going to accept Mr Gentleman's amendment but, as with many things in this place, he is trying to make it a federal government issue. The ACT used to provide these courses at the CIT and now the government is trying to say that it is the federal government's problem to find more level 3 interpreters here. It is a shifting of blame, a shifting of cost. It is those opposite abrogating all responsibility for their own residents, their own citizens, their own ratepayers and taxpayers, if you like.

You are dismissing our colleagues, our friends, our family members and saying it is someone else's problem to provide interpreters. I just do not think that that is good enough. But in the interests of getting something on record, of getting a result, of trying to get action to make sure we do not have to go through this over and over again, I am accepting of Mr Gentleman's amendment and Ms Le Couteur's amendment, despite this reference, for example, to the federal government, despite the fact that Mr Gentleman in (1)(f) of his amendment is trying to make it look like they chose to start providing interpreters following the announcement of the state of alert on 2 January. I disagree. I believe that, as a result of complaints from the deaf community, they then realised they should be providing interpreters.

This is not the place to quibble over the how or why, because I want the what. I want the result and the outcome for our friends, our colleagues, our family members here in the ACT who are deaf and use Auslan as their primary language. Whatever it takes, can we just do it? Can we get on with it? Can we make sure it happens without them having to feel like they are complaining? They feel that they are treated like they are whingeing although, under local, national and international law and other articles like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability, communication access is a right under the UNCRPD. Why it is so hard for this government to do it as a matter of course, I simply do not understand.

What I do understand is that the decisions they have made in the past are coming back to haunt them. The saddest part about that is that not only are you now seeing the results of your short-sighted decisions in the past but some members of our community, some vulnerable members of our community, may be the ones who suffer as a result. I find that appalling, and I ask you—I beg you—to make sure that this type of oversight does not happen in the future.

Ms Lawder's amendments to **Ms Le Couteur's** proposed amendment to **Mr Gentleman's** proposed amendment agreed to.

Ms Le Couteur's amendment, as amended, to **Mr Gentleman's** proposed amendment be agreed to.

Mr Gentleman's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Canberra—*Our Bush Capital*

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra) (5.01): Yesterday the minister for early childhood and education spoke about the recent release of *Our Bush Capital*, written by Samantha Tidy and illustrated by Juliette Dudley. I want to take the opportunity to echo the sentiment she shared. *Our Bush Capital* is a children's book, but it is so much more than that. It is an ode to Canberra, a testament to our city, a reflection of our people and our community's fabric, and a collection of memories for children and adults alike.

Our Bush Capital started with Samantha as a gem of an idea. She knew what she wanted to do and she knew she wanted it to be high quality, from the words to the illustrations to how the book feels in our hands. With crowdfunding and by teaming up with Juliette Dudley, she made that happen. *Our Bush Capital* was launched on 1 February on what was a dark and nervous day for Canberrans, a day of extreme heat and with the Orroral Valley fire so close. But the mood, while cautious, was warm and generous at the National Capital Exhibition Centre.

Crowd funders like Minister Berry and I were able to receive our copies. We were also treated to a reading from the author, as well as hearing her and Juliette explain the story from this gem of an idea to the realisation. Not only are there many notable names among the list of crowd funders; it was obvious that many Canberra personalities had promoted this book as so important to our region and to our history. Samantha and Juliette's spirit was on full display as they made sure everyone who had helped was acknowledged.

In the days since, the book has been read to children in our ACT libraries, and copies have been given to our federal parliamentarians, reminding them that while a parliamentary bubble might exist, a Canberra bubble certainly does not. I am confident that the book's sense of fun and exploration and the striking imagery will play a big role in encouraging politicians who are not from this territory to get to know our extraordinary city and the region just a little better.

For those of us who are not parliamentarians, *Our Bush Capital* has had an equally strong effect. Samantha has told me that people have said the book has helped them to fall back in love with Canberra after a very difficult summer. There are people in other states and even other countries saying that they are buying it to remind them of home. I do not think you can find stronger endorsements than those.

What Samantha and Juliette have done is so special and we are so lucky as a community now and into the future to have had such a talented author and such a brilliant illustrator capture the many gorgeous aspects and experiences of our city so expertly. I truly hope that is just their first collaboration celebrating our home.

Weston Creek—bank closure

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for City Services, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Recycling and Waste Reduction, Minister for Roads and Active Travel and Minister for Transport) (5.04): I am standing today to raise an issue that has come up in relation to the closure of the Weston branch of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia. On 6 February I received a letter from the Commonwealth Bank notifying me as the local member that the branch would be closing on 13 March this year and that the branch would effectively become part of the Woden branch of the Commonwealth Bank.

Understandably a number of people in my electorate are very concerned about the branch closing, particularly because the area of Weston Creek is the oldest in Canberra—according to the ABS it has a median age of 41—and this will impact on access to banking services. Many people in the area have to go to use banking services in person and do not have access to the internet. It also seems at odds with the growth of the Weston Creek and Molonglo region. Molonglo has currently over 7,000 residents. We are expecting that to grow to around 45,000 residents in the next 15 years or so.

At this point in time, Cooleman Court is the major shopping centre for people in Molonglo. Even once the Molonglo town centre is built, we expect that Cooleman Court will remain a place that is heavily used by Molonglo residents as well. I have written to Matt Coleman, the CEO of the Commonwealth Bank, to raise my concerns about this. A petition has been started, which is being supported by the community. We are calling on the Commonwealth Bank to reconsider their decision to close the branch on 13 March, given the growth of the region and also the social equity issues in making sure that older people who live in the region can continue to access services.

As a customer of the Commonwealth Bank myself—I have been for pretty much all of my life: my parents opened a bank account before I was born—I know that some basic services actually require you to go into the bank and fill in a hardcopy form, particularly around home loans and the like. So all people will be impacted by this decision if the closure goes ahead.

I hope the Commonwealth Bank reconsiders its decision to close the Weston branch.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.07 pm.