



# Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

**TENTH ASSEMBLY**

**6 OCTOBER 2021**

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## Wednesday, 6 October 2021

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**Wednesday, 6 October 2021**

**MADAM SPEAKER** (Ms Burch) (10.01): Members:

Dhawura nguna, dhawura Ngunnawal.  
Yanggu ngalawiri, dhunimanyin Ngunnawalwari dhawurawari.  
Nginggada Dindi dhawura Ngunnaawalbun yindjumaralidjinyin.

The words I have just spoken are in the language of the traditional custodians and translate to:

This is Ngunnawal country.  
Today we are gathering on Ngunnawal country.  
We always pay respect to Elders, female and male, and Ngunnawal country.

Members, I ask you to stand in silence and pray or reflect on our responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

### **Minister for Corrections Motion of no confidence**

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (10.02): I seek leave to move a motion of no confidence in the Minister for Corrections.

**MADAM SPEAKER** (Ms Burch) (10.02): I have received your email. I note that you sent it quite early in the morning, but I received it, and I circulated it just after 9 am. I have determined by the standing orders that it will be 90 minutes from the time I received the email, and it went out a few minutes after that. It can be brought on at 10.34.

### **Standing orders—suspension**

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (10.02): I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would allow Mrs Kikkert to move a motion of no confidence in the Minister for Corrections.

The problem we have here is that Mrs Kikkert has complied fully with the standing orders. She has provided notice within the prescribed time. Then there has been a problem because of the delay between your receiving the email and you circulating it. That is not a problem of Mrs Kikkert's making.

Standing order 81A is very clear:

... copies of the relevant motions shall be provided to the Speaker for circulation to all Members 90 minutes prior to the time at which the motion is proposed to be moved.

That would be 8.30. Mrs Kikkert provided that notification to the Speaker at 7.30—an hour more than the time that is required. One would think that 8.30 is not an

unreasonable time on a sitting day. We all have remote access to our emails that allow us to look at emails and forward them on.

If that is not the way it is done, how should it be done? We are asked to provide that notice. Mrs Kikkert provided that notice to the Speaker. She provided not just 90 minutes notice but an additional hour over that time.

With respect, Madam Speaker, either there is a problem with the processes within your office or there is a problem with the standing orders. Mrs Kikkert complied fully—in fact, she overachieved, as she often does in this regard. What else is she meant to do?

I ask that we bring this on now. Mrs Kikkert has complied and Mr Gentleman is here. I cannot see why we cannot get on with this matter. It should take place as a matter of precedence. Simply waiting half an hour for it to come on seems unnecessary. This is not in accordance with the standing orders, which Mrs Kikkert has complied with.

With due respect, Madam Speaker, I ask that we bring this matter on. There is no reason for delay. If we need to look at the standing orders or processes within your office to make sure this does not happen again, we will be happy to do so.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (10.05): The rule in the standing orders is there to ensure that whoever a motion is moved against—and everybody else—has an opportunity to receive that information and prepare to respond to it.

Madam Speaker, it is budget day today. The Chief Minister is extremely busy. He received notice of this motion at 9.04. Mr Gentleman received notice of this motion at 9.04. It is only fair and appropriate that Mr Gentleman has the full 90 minutes that are accorded to him under the standing orders to prepare to respond to this motion, which is a very serious motion.

It is a very serious thing to bring a motion of no confidence in a minister, and it is important that both the minister and the Chief Minister have an appropriate opportunity to prepare to respond. It is half an hour, Mr Hanson. The motion would still be considered this morning. It is only fair that the Chief Minister and the relevant minister have an opportunity to prepare to respond to this motion.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (10.06): Madam Speaker, Minister Stephen-Smith has made a very important point. I heard Mr Hanson's remarks, and there is obviously a frustration for him and his colleagues about some procedural matters behind this. That is a matter to be resolved. Mr Hanson can take it up either in a separate motion or through the admin and procedures committee.

As Minister Stephen-Smith has rightly pointed out, the point of the standing order is to give other members an opportunity to consider the motion and prepare for the discussion. That is the 90 minutes that are set aside. I am not disputing Mr Hanson's points around possible delay, but the reality is that every other member in this place

heard about it at 9.04, or a bit after, this morning. That is the basis on which we should proceed. Therefore, we will not be supporting the suspension of standing orders. Minister Stephen-Smith made the correct point that it is only a half-hour delay.

I would hope that the opposition would have enough grace to recognise that, as frustrated as they might be by the procedural issues behind it, it is not a matter that other members have capability or responsibility for.

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (10.07): Madam Speaker, this is a matter of precedent. This is for you. When we have a member in this place who has complied fully, who has complied 100 per cent, in giving notice—in fact, as Mr Hanson pointed out, who has overachieved. That is what we are concerned about.

No-one is talking about depriving other members in this place of the ability or the time to prepare. But the fact is that Mrs Kikkert's notice of a no confidence motion against Mr Gentleman was emailed, as per the standing orders, well within the 90 minutes.

Mr Rattenbury says that the whole point of the standing orders is to ensure that every member in this place has time. There are countless times when the opposition is caught off guard because of motions that are brought by government members in this place.

Let us not pretend that this is about saying, "Oh, let us all be fair and give notice to everybody in this place." That is not how it works. Mrs Kikkert has done the right thing. This is about the members in this place saying, "Even if you comply with the standing orders, it does not matter." Madam Speaker, what if, for whatever reason, you were not able to be in the office today? What if you were not able to access your emails and get notice of something? What happens then? Does that mean that, despite having complied with the standing orders, we are deprived of the ability to bring this motion on? We need to be very careful about this.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7

Mr Cain  
Ms Castley  
Mr Hanson  
Mrs Jones  
Mrs Kikkert  
Ms Lee  
Mr Parton

Noes 14

Ms Berry  
Mr Braddock  
Ms Burch  
Ms Cheyne  
Ms Clay  
Ms Davidson  
Mr Gentleman  
Ms Orr  
Dr Paterson  
Mr Pettersson  
Mr Rattenbury  
Mr Steel  
Ms Stephen-Smith  
Ms Vassarotti

Question resolved in the negative.

**MADAM SPEAKER** (10.13): Members, without entering into debate, I will say that I am happy to raise this in the admin and procedures committee, but I would also comment that it came to my personal email address. To provide assurance, and for the processes within my office, sending it to the Speaker's address would provide a double assurance that more eyes than mine see it before or within the appropriate 90-minute period.

## Petitions

*The following petitions were lodged for presentation:*

### **Parking—Campbell shops—petition 21-21**

*By Ms Lee, from 186 residents:*

#### **To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

The following residents of the ACT draw to the attention of the ACT Assembly:

- a) The increased number of commuters parking all-day in the narrow residential streets in Campbell is creating dangerous hazards to traffic and pedestrians (including young pedestrians in three school zones) as most of these residential streets are too narrow for two-way traffic to traverse past parked vehicles;
- b) The volume of commuter traffic using minor collector roads and access streets in Campbell is increasing to an unsustainable level; and
- c) That past attempts to fix these problems on a street-by-street basis has simply moved the problems from one street to another.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT government to:

Conduct a whole of suburb review of the parking and traffic problems in Campbell with a view to implementing a parking and traffic management plan for the whole suburb.

### **Parking—Campbell shops—petition 40-21**

*By Ms Lee, from 444 residents:*

#### **To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory**

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly:

- a) the increased number of commuters parking all-day in the narrow residential streets in Campbell is creating dangerous hazards to traffic and pedestrians (including young pedestrians in three school zones) as most of these residential streets are too narrow for two-way traffic to traverse past parked vehicles;

- b) the volume of commuter traffic using minor collector roads and access streets in Campbell is increasing to an unsustainable level; and
- c) that past attempts to fix these problems on a street-by-street basis has simply moved the problems from one street to another. Your petitioners therefore request that members of the Assembly:
- d) call on the ACT government to conduct a whole of suburb review of the parking and traffic problems in Campbell with a view to implementing a parking and traffic management plan for the whole suburb.

*The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petitions would be recorded in Hansard and referred to the appropriate ministers for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petitions were received.*

*Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petitions, having more than 500 signatories, were referred to the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services.*

### **Ministerial response**

The following response to a petition has been lodged:

#### **Planning—green waste—petition 19-21**

By **Mr Steel**, Minister for Transport and City Services, dated 15 September 2021, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Cain on 22 June 2021 concerning the community green waste and landscape supplies at Parkwood Road, West Belconnen.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter dated 22 June 2021 regarding *Petition Number 19-21 Closure of CSG*, lodged by Mr Peter Cain MLA. The petition has requested to keep the community green waste and landscaping supplies open at Parkwood, as such, my response to the petition is detailed below.

The government acknowledges that a green waste drop-off service in the north of Canberra is an important service for its residents. Ahead of the petition being tabled, the government took action to extend the current service arrangements for current Canberra Sand and Gravel for the site at Parkwood Road.

The granted licence extension will allow time for the government to consider interim location options in the vicinity of Parkwood Road and to develop a longer-term solution while ensuring a continuity of green waste services. The ACT government is undertaking a feasibility study for a new Resource Management Centre in the north of Canberra. An initial analysis will be completed during this study to identify all sites in Canberra's northern suburbs where a new waste receival facility could be feasibly developed.

I look forward to updating the Assembly as a more permanent solution is developed.

Thank you for raising this matter. I trust this information is of assistance.

**Motion to take note of petitions**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Pursuant to standing order 98A, I propose the question:

That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

**Parking—Campbell shops—petitions 21-21 and 40-21**

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (10.14): The purpose and content of these petitions are an important issue facing many of my constituents living and working in Campbell. Prior to the ACT lockdown, my team and I knocked on every single door in Campbell—over 1,300 doors—and by far the most consistently raised local issue was the unsustainable volume of commuter traffic within the suburb. This is putting increased strain on the availability of parking at the Campbell shops and increased traffic flow through the narrow roads of the suburb.

Right across Canberra, we have seen substantial growth and densification in our pre-existing suburban footprint. With the substantial urbanisation of Civic and Braddon, urban sprawl is spreading out into neighbouring suburbs like Campbell. Residents have told me that the increased volume of commuters, residents and other road users is putting a significant strain on the existing road network and parking arrangements throughout the suburb.

Local shopping centres like the Campbell shops were planned and designed to sustain a certain number of residents and commuters accessing these facilities. The increased number of commuters parking all day in the narrow residential streets of Campbell is creating dangerous hazards to traffic and pedestrians, including our schoolchildren in the three school zones that exist in the suburb. This is creating significant safety risks for residential streets that are too narrow for two-way traffic to go past parked vehicles.

The volume of commuter traffic using minor collective roads and access streets in Campbell is increasing to an unsustainable level. I have heard from residents that the government's attempts to fix these persistent issues on a street-by-street basis have only moved these issues from one street to another.

Whilst I and the residents of Campbell welcome the government's plans to upgrade the Campbell shops, many residents and business owners are still concerned that parking—the single biggest issue with this shopping precinct—is not being addressed in the government's preliminary designs. Without sufficient parking at the local shops, shoppers will go elsewhere and small businesses at these local shops will suffer.

Madam Speaker, my petitioners are calling on the ACT government to conduct a whole-of-suburb review of the parking and traffic problems in Campbell, with a view to implementing a parking and traffic management plan for the whole suburb. This is an important first step to address the issues that my petitioners have raised with this petition.

I thank the Campbell Community Association, particularly Cheryl, Sarah and Margaret, for their advocacy on behalf of local residents, and I thank the more than 600 residents who signed this petition so that I could raise their concerns as their local member in this chamber today.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **COVID-19 pandemic response—update Ministerial statement**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (10.18): I rise to provide an update on the COVID-19 situation in the ACT and the actions the government is taking in response to the current outbreak to protect the health and wellbeing of Canberrans.

Since my last update to the Legislative Assembly on 16 September, we have continued to closely manage the COVID-19 situation in the ACT. Case numbers had been relatively stable over the lockdown period, until the last few days. However, the last week has seen a significant increase in cases reported. We are seeing persistent community transmission and detecting cases who have spent some or all of their infectious period in the community. We are also seeing a range of new exposure sites. ACT Health is continuing to focus on testing, contact tracing, isolation and quarantine to minimise the risk to the community.

At this time, I remind any Canberran who might have even the mildest of COVID-19 symptoms to get tested as soon as they notice symptoms start. The virus is circulating in Canberra and we need to remain vigilant. I strongly urge anyone who is eligible and has not been vaccinated to book an appointment to receive a vaccination.

I again thank all the staff from ACT Health, Canberra Health Services and right across the ACT public service for their dedicated response to this outbreak. Staff have worked tirelessly since the outbreak began, and I commend them for their dedication to their work and to protecting the ACT community.

This has been a difficult time for all of us. We know that the extended lockdown has significantly impacted on the business community; families have not been able to see their loved ones and friends; and many Canberrans have experienced challenges associated with working from home and remote learning. We recognise that this has been a trying time, and I thank the community for their ongoing support in following the public health advice.

Madam Speaker, Australia continues to see high numbers of COVID-19 cases, largely driven by the spread of the highly contagious Delta variant in New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT. In recent days, New South Wales has experienced a plateau in cases and a reduction in community transmission in some of Sydney's local government areas of concern, but there continue to be cases spreading across regional areas, including in areas around Canberra, including Queanbeyan, Cooma, Goulburn and the south coast.

Victoria has experienced a sharp rise in cases in the metropolitan Melbourne area and new cases in some regional areas. Lockdown restrictions remain in place in metropolitan Sydney and Melbourne areas, with snap lockdown restrictions taking effect in some regional areas in an effort to slow and suppress the spread of the virus.

On 30 September, Queensland also implemented stage 2 restrictions for a number of city council areas, including Brisbane, Gold Coast, Logan, Moreton Bay, Townsville and Palm Island. These restrictions are in place for a period of seven days and include reduced gathering sizes, changed density restrictions and mask-wearing requirements.

The Delta variant continues to present challenges. At this stage of the pandemic, we expect to continue to see identification of positive cases, particularly as the nation progresses plans to reopen in line with the National Plan to Transition Australia's National COVID-19 Response.

Australia's experience with the Delta variant mirrors that of other nations. This variant has proven particularly challenging, demonstrating that elimination of the virus is not feasible and that we need to expect a level of community transmission of the virus when we reopen. However, the evidence shows that vaccination has a significant impact on reducing the serious effects of the virus, including hospitalisation and mortality. That is why we are continuing to push forward with the rollout of our nation-leading vaccination program, which will play a strong role in mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 over the coming months.

As I mentioned, New South Wales continues to see high numbers of COVID-19 cases. However, cases appear to have declined from a peak earlier in September. New South Wales reported 8,553 active locally acquired cases in the state as of 4 October.

On 12 August, the ACT declared the entire state of New South Wales a COVID-19 affected area, and restrictions remain in place for anyone travelling from New South Wales to the ACT. All travellers must obtain an approved exemption prior to entry, including ACT residents. The ACT's standing exemption for New South Wales residents living in the region surrounding the ACT permits entry for the approved essential reasons under the ACT's lockdown restrictions.

New South Wales residents who live in specific postcodes surrounding the ACT are permitted to enter without an exemption. Standing exemptions have also been developed for New South Wales residents who live within the southern New South Wales local health district or in the New South Wales local government areas of Cootamundra-Gundagai, Hilltops, Junee Shire, Snowy Valleys and Wagga Wagga—parts of the Murrumbidgee local health district—to permit entry into ACT health facilities for urgent or critical health care. This standing exemption also permits a patient's carer or another support person to enter the ACT at the same time.

As of 5 October 2021, ACT Health had received 35,580 exemption requests from New South Wales travellers since the introduction of the New South Wales travel restrictions between 20 June and 5 October. Of these applications, 16,577 had been approved, 10,029 had been declined, 7,582 had been withdrawn or were requests

where an exemption was not required under the public health direction, and the approximately 1,392 remaining applications were awaiting further information or requiring processing. Our exemptions team continues to work hard to process a large volume of applications. These are considered on a case-by-case basis with careful assessment of the level of risk and individual circumstances.

We are continuing to closely observe the situation in New South Wales with a particular focus on the region surrounding the ACT with a view to ensuring that travel restrictions remain appropriate and proportionate. We expect the risk of incursion to remain high due to the wide spread of cases across the state.

Victoria's COVID-19 situation has evolved quickly, with daily case numbers having doubled in a little over a week. On 5 October, Victoria reached the highest daily local case numbers of any state or territory, 1,763, bringing total reported active cases to 12,711.

The ACT has declared all of Victoria a COVID-19 affected area, requiring all travellers to seek an exemption before entering the ACT, including ACT residents. As of 5 October 2021, ACT Health had received 1,526 exemption applications to enter the ACT from Victoria. 822 applications had been approved, 348 applications had been declined, 155 applications were awaiting processing or required further information, and 201 had been withdrawn or were applications where an exemption was not required under the public health direction.

I am proud to say that the ACT's COVID-19 vaccination program is leading the nation. The ACT continues to achieve strong vaccination coverage. To ensure that we continue our strong performance, protect our community and reach our goal of around 95 per cent coverage, the 2021-22 budget includes approximately \$22.5 million in additional funding. Our priority is to ensure that the rollout progresses in an efficient, accessible and, above all, safe manner.

As of 4 October, 94 per cent of all Canberrans aged 12 years and older had received their first COVID-19 vaccination dose, and more than 65 per cent were fully vaccinated. The ACT is on track to reach our vaccination milestones of 70 and 80 per cent fully vaccinated later this month, and we are aiming to reach 95 per cent full vaccination of the eligible population later this year. This will be a remarkable achievement and is all thanks to the outstanding work of the community in coming forward to book their vaccination appointment as soon as they become eligible.

The ACT was the first jurisdiction to reach 90 per cent first dose coverage, and we are on track to reach 90 per cent second dose vaccination by the end of October 2021. However, we are not there yet. These next few weeks are going to be critical in ensuring that we manage the current outbreak in a sustainable way until we reach this target. There are still some members of the community who are eligible and have not yet made an appointment to be vaccinated.

Last week, the mRNA vaccines Pfizer and Moderna became available to everyone in the ACT aged 12 years and older. I urge anyone who is still waiting to book their first vaccination dose to make it a priority to book an appointment. We have sufficient

vaccine supply and thousands of bookings that we can fill in the next few weeks, so please make your appointment today.

There are approximately 87 general practices and respiratory clinics and 64 community pharmacies administering COVID-19 vaccines to eligible Canberrans. The government's equity to access program continues to deliver COVID-19 vaccinations to vulnerable and marginalised community members through in-reach, pop-up, mobile and in-home settings.

In September, the ACT Health Directorate worked alongside Aspen Medical to deliver 811 doses of COVID-19 vaccines to people who have found it difficult to access health services from mainstream providers. This has included people from our culturally and linguistically diverse community, people living with disability and their family and carers, LGBTIQ+ community members, and people living in insecure accommodation.

The uptake of COVID-19 vaccines across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community has been a key area of focus for the government. While the ACT leads the nation, we still have work to do to ensure that all Canberrans are given the opportunity to be vaccinated.

As at 29 September, 78.6 per cent of eligible Canberrans who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander had received their first vaccination and 53.8 per cent were fully vaccinated. This is 11 percentage points behind the wider population of eligible Canberrans.

The ACT government will continue to work in partnership with Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Service, which is working tirelessly to support the COVID-19 vaccination program. We will also be offering dedicated COVID-19 vaccination drop-in clinics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout the month of October. Drop-in clinics will be made available on the south side on 7 and 28 October in partnership with Yeddung Mura and on the north side on 8 and 29 October at Gungahlin Salvos.

As we get closer to our target of 95 per cent coverage for all eligible Canberrans, the ACT government has decided to cease operations at the Calvary Public Hospital COVID-19 AstraZeneca vaccination clinic, effective from 8 October. AstraZeneca vaccines are still available at participating GPs across Canberra. We will continue to have three mass vaccination clinics in operation at the Canberra Airport and the Australian Institute of Sport, as well as at the Weston Creek Community Health Centre, which operates an access and sensory vaccination clinic. Additional appointments at the access and sensory clinic have been made available to ensure that people with sensory or accessibility challenges can be protected with at least one vaccination dose before we begin our path out of lockdown.

The commonwealth-led program for vaccinations in residential aged-care facilities continues to be closely monitored by ACT Health. Following the implementation of a vaccine mandate for residential aged-care staff, 99.8 per cent of residential aged-care facility staff, which I understand equates to all active residential aged-care facility

staff, have received their first vaccine dose, and 88.7 per cent were fully vaccinated as at 1 October.

On 1 October also, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, AHPPC, issued a statement recommending mandatory vaccination for all workers in healthcare settings as a condition of work. As we move closer to further easing of community restrictions, both in the ACT and interstate, we expect that there will be an increased prevalence of COVID-19 in the community, which may lead to an increase in COVID-19 hospital and ICU admissions.

Healthcare settings have a high likelihood of providing care for people with COVID-19, resulting in higher rates of potential exposure to staff and patients. While to date ACT hospitals have demonstrated the strength and effectiveness of their infection prevention and control measures, we have seen the impacts of outbreaks in healthcare settings in other jurisdictions.

Vaccinating healthcare workers is an effective way to protect them from this virus, whilst reducing the risk of transmission amongst patients and in the broader community. The ACT will therefore be looking to introduce mandatory vaccination for workers in healthcare facilities in a phased approach, commencing with our highest risk settings.

Yesterday, I announced that the government will soon be introducing a requirement for workers in certain healthcare settings to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 in order to be permitted to attend work. The mechanism for this will be through a new public health direction signed by the Chief Health Officer.

During the first phase, individuals who work in specific healthcare settings will be required to have a COVID-19 vaccination. These settings include any healthcare facility operated by Canberra Health Services; a public or private hospital; a day hospital, defined as a facility where a person is admitted for surgical or medical treatment and discharged on the same day; or a hospice. Workers who work for an ambulance or other patient transport service will also be required to have a COVID-19 vaccination.

These workers will be asked to produce evidence of vaccination to their employer within certain time frames—a minimum first dose of a registered COVID-19 vaccine by no later than 29 October 2021 and a second dose of a registered COVID-19 vaccine by no later than 1 December 2021. A consultation process is currently underway with staff, unions and other key stakeholders. It is envisaged that the Chief Health Officer will sign a public health direction by 15 October 2021.

Madam Speaker, getting vaccinated has never been more important. We are continuing to respond to community transmission across Canberra as this outbreak continues to unfold. We are now in our eighth week of lockdown and continuing the hard work to control the level of community transmission.

While the transmissibility of the Delta strain means that it is unlikely that we will be able to completely eliminate COVID-19 in the ACT, I am confident that the lockdown

restrictions have significantly reduced community transmission. To ensure that the Chief Health Officer, her team and our excellent front-line staff are supported to continue keeping us safe, we are investing almost \$65 million in additional public health funding to continue responding to COVID-19. This will mean that our brilliant public health officials have the resources they need to reduce the spread, protect the most vulnerable and ensure that we are able to follow our pathway out of lockdown.

The funding includes funding for a range of staff and operational costs for our contact tracing teams and the public health teams who are protecting us every day; additional funding for COVID testing; additional cleaning for public schools and public transport; quarantine costs; hospital services; communication to the community; and education, engagement and compliance activities.

Together with vaccination program funding, this represents almost \$90 million in additional funding to continue on the pathway to a COVID-normal life in the ACT.

We know how important that is. At this time, we continue to have a number of active clusters and over 400 exposure locations.

Transmission is currently linked to early learning centres, several construction sites and residential aged care. The team continues to investigate and respond to the infection of a staff member who works at the Alexander Maconochie Centre.

As of 5 October, there have been a total of 1,038 cases linked to the current ACT outbreak. There are 384 active cases, with 14 COVID patients in hospital, five in intensive care and three requiring ventilation. There are now 649 cases who have recovered linked to this outbreak. The ACT's total cumulative case number over the whole pandemic is now 1,162. As of 5 October, ACT Health continues to work with just under 1,600 people who have identified as close contacts.

ACT Health is undertaking extensive work to manage high-risk settings affected by outbreaks. As I said in my previous statement, our public health teams have undertaken significant planning to respond to outbreaks, including for vulnerable and high-risk settings such as public housing. We have activated plans in partnership with key agencies and worked to support residents caught in this situation.

ACT Health continues to respond to an aged-care cluster at Calvary Haydon aged care. Sadly, five people with COVID-19 have died in the ACT in recent weeks, four of whom have been residents in aged care. I extend my sympathies and those of the government to these families.

The mitigation strategies being implemented by ACT Health in aged care include on-site in-reach testing at specific locations, quarantine management, case management and contact tracing, and activation of operational protocols and plans. ACT Health has responded to a number of cases linked to the Alexander Maconochie Centre, including a staff member who worked while infectious unknowingly. At this stage, there are no further cases linked to other staff or persons within the facility.

ACT Health has also responded to cases linked to a number of disability service providers, including in workers, clients and household contacts. In addition to these high-risk settings, recent clusters in and around the ACT have centred around a childcare outbreak in Queanbeyan and a construction site on London Circuit, which affected a number of other construction sites.

An outbreak in public housing was recognised early as a high-risk scenario and was extensively planned for over the past 18 months. These plans were activated, and tenants were well supported. It is not an easy thing to quarantine in a complex such as Condamine Court or Ainslie Village, and I acknowledge and thank the many tenants who did so to protect one another and the wider community.

I would like to again recognise our partners in the response to public housing outbreaks: the Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy or CAHMA, ACT Shelter, Directions Health Services, Hepatitis ACT, the Health Care Consumers Association, Community Services #1, Community Options, Argyle Housing; CatholicCare, and others that have helped provide wraparound support. Many of these organisations, and others, including the YWCA, continue to work with the multi-agency ACT government team in supporting residents in the new quarantine facility in O'Connor.

As of 5 October, there were 3,630 people in quarantine in the ACT being supported by ACT Health, with 1,593 of these individuals identified close contacts of locally acquired cases and 1,909 individuals from COVID-19 affected areas.

Additionally, the ACT is continuing to manage the return of diplomats and government officials travelling to Canberra for official duties. ACT Health is now operating two dedicated quarantine facilities to support individuals who test positive for COVID-19 and cannot isolate at home, as well as quarantine of a small number of close contacts and secondary contacts.

In addition to the Australian National University Lazaretto facility, the Ragusa quarantine facility opened in late September. This facility has more than 130 cabins, providing a mix of one, two and three bedrooms, which can cater for larger families. Unlike hotel quarantine in some other jurisdictions, our quarantine facilities provide an option for people to go outside their rooms to a balcony or enclosed space to enjoy fresh air. These facilities are provided at no cost to those impacted by the local outbreak who cannot isolate or quarantine safely and effectively in their own home.

Testing remains strong, with around 3,000 tests being conducted each day. We need testing to remain at this level to maintain a sound level of surveillance across the community.

The ACT had recorded a total of 492,351 negative tests conducted as of 9 am on 5 October. Throughout this outbreak, additional testing sites have been established across the ACT to meet the demand for testing. Most recently a pop-up testing site was established at Watson due to demand for testing in that area. A range of other testing sites and options are available across Canberra, with locations and operating times listed on the ACT's COVID-19 website.

Madam Speaker, on 27 September 2021 the ACT government provided the community with the ACT's pathway forward, outlining the steps to transition the ACT out of lockdown and gradually ease restrictions on businesses and the community.

Some minor changes to the public health direction were made from 1 October, while lockdown restrictions continue. From 15 October, it is planned that the ACT will lift lockdown restrictions to align with the ACT reaching 80 per cent COVID-19 vaccination coverage of Canberrans aged 12 and above, and the nation reaching the 70 per cent milestone. This will see licensed venues, cafes and restaurants open for seated service with a maximum of 25 people across the venue or one person per four square metres, whichever is less. Other venues, such as gyms, outdoor amusement and play centres, places of worship, community centres or facilities and gaming and gambling venues are able to open with a capacity of 25 people across a venue, or one person per four square metres indoors.

Hairdressers, beauty and personal services will be able to open, with a maximum of five clients. Swimming pools will be permitted to open, with up to 25 swimmers for swimming lessons only. Accommodation, campgrounds, caravan parks and campsites will be permitted to open, subject to gathering restrictions. There will be a gradual return to the workplace where it suits the employee and their employer. Funerals will be able to have up to 50 attendees. Non-essential retail is still required to operate via click-and-collect or click-and-deliver services.

The announcement of the pathway forward also highlights the plan for schools to return to on-campus learning. Year 12 students returned to face-to-face learning yesterday and year 11 students will return from 18 October. This will be followed by a phased return for other year levels commencing on 25 October, and full return on 1 November.

From 29 October, we expect to further ease restrictions to allow activities to operate with a maximum of 25 people across the venue before density limits apply, which will be one person per four square metres indoors, to a maximum of 100 people per indoor space, and one person per two square metres outdoors to a maximum of 150. Ten people will be able to visit a household at any one time and 30 people will be able to gather outdoors.

Cinemas, galleries, museums, cultural institutions, historic sites and outdoor attractions will be able to open with restrictions. Dance classes, choirs and bands will be able to take place with a maximum of 20 people, which is also the limit for classes in gyms and fitness centres. For ticketed and seated outdoor events, up to 500 people will be permitted. Indoor venues with fixed seating can apply 75 per cent of seated capacity up to 500 people, with indoor unfixed seating areas to apply the rule of one person per four square metres up to a maximum of 150 people per space. All retail will be permitted to open with one person per four square metres. In late November/early December, it is hoped that larger events and gatherings, and higher risk events can take place with some limits or density requirements commensurate with the COVID-19 risk situation. We expect to be in a position to provide more information on this in the coming weeks.

Our pathway forward is a phased approach that balances the risk across the entire economy and community. We are conscious of the fact that there will still be many people in our community who are not fully vaccinated, or who are not able to be vaccinated at all, and we still believe in protecting those amongst us who are most vulnerable. There are a number of considerations that guide our approach to easing restrictions including, our health system capacity; our ability to test, trace, isolate and quarantine; our vaccination coverage; the case numbers; levels of community transmission; the proportion of cases infectious in the community; the regional situation; and how well the community and businesses are complying with restrictions.

Our pathway forward seeks to implement the national plan to transition Australia's national response to COVID-19 as agreed by national cabinet, and broadly aligns with reopening roadmaps announced by New South Wales and Victoria, which are also reopening in a phased manner, with capacity limits during the transition phases of their respective plans.

It is difficult to predict the future with so many competing factors to consider. If the situation worsens in our region we may need to delay easing of restrictions or tighten restrictions again. That is why the pathway forward will occur in a staged manner to reduce the risk of a rapid increase in COVID-19 cases prompting the need to re-impose stricter public health social measure on businesses and the community.

I acknowledge that the lockdown has been difficult for the community. The ACT government is aware that the first phase of reopening with respect to hospitality businesses, for example, may not be viable for all businesses. However, the government has decided to allow those parts of the industry considered to be lower risk to open up as soon as possible while continuing to provide economic support for businesses during the transition stages where they cannot viably operate.

Our decisions balance the risk to the entire community and to the broader economy and are based on the Chief Health Officer's public health advice and the national plan. Assessment of changes to public health social measures will consider vaccination coverage of both the general population and vulnerable cohorts, and I hope that in the very near future the ACT will be in a much better position to further relax restrictions in a safe manner commensurate with vaccination coverage and the COVID-19 situation here in the ACT and surrounding area. We are working to reopen in a gradual way so that our summer period and beyond can be the least restrictive possible.

When considering changes to the public health direction, there is a clear focus on the following principles: protection of public health; measures to get people back to work as soon as possible; and measures to support mental health and wellbeing. I know Canberrans are looking forward to spending more time with family and friends; however, I remind everyone that we are still in lockdown for the next week and I urge people to follow the health directions to reduce the risk of further transmission of the virus.

Section 40B of the Human Rights Act requires all public authorities to give proper consideration and act in a compatible way with human rights. Throughout the declared public health emergency, and in preparing each of the public health directions made under the Public Health Act, the Chief Health Officer has been guided by the human rights provisions and principles. In all instances, the intention of the directions has been to protect the lives and health of the Canberra community by preventing and reducing wherever possible the spread of COVID-19, while ensuring that directions are reasonable, balanced and compatible with the act.

Since early 2020, these protections have been achieved through public health directions imposing mandatory self-isolation of persons who are confirmed to have COVID-19 and quarantine for contacts of such persons; restrictions on the conduct of certain non-essential businesses and undertakings that enforce stronger physical distancing in settings in which people would ordinarily gather; restrictions on movement, including entry to settings that are at greater risk from COVID-19 due to the presence of vulnerable persons, such as in aged care facilities; and restrictions on entry into the ACT from identified COVID-19 affected areas, including quarantine requirements or limitations on movement. As a result of the most recent outbreak in the ACT, the Chief Health Officer has reviewed the statement which outlines her considerations of the human rights implications imposed through public health directions. I present the following paper:

Consideration of human rights implications of imposed Public Health  
Emergency Directions—Update: October 2021, dated 6 October 2021.

It is timely to remind Canberrans to continue to maintain COVID safe behaviours and keep up to date with the latest health advice to protect our community. This is extremely important as we move ahead with the ACT's pathway forward and as lockdown restrictions are eased later this month. Staying COVID safe means staying home if you are unwell; getting tested with the mildest of COVID-19 symptoms and as soon as symptoms start; physically distancing from people outside of your household, at least 1.5 metres; practising good hand and respiratory hygiene; checking in everywhere you go with the Check In CBR app; and getting vaccinated to protect yourself and the community.

I particularly want to thank and encourage all Canberrans for using the Check In CBR app as this is essential to our contact-tracing efforts. As of 5 October, 25,796 venues had registered with Check In CBR. Approximately 58.9 million check-ins had been recorded, and almost 9,000 Check In CBR cards had been requested. Legislation was passed by the Assembly in September which provides a greater level of security for personal information collected by Check In CBR, to ensure that personal information can only be used for contact-tracing purposes in accordance with the public health directions.

The Health Protection Service, Access Canberra and ACT Policing are continuing to undertake compliance, community and business engagement, and enforcement activity across the ACT to help protect the community as the pandemic response continues. WorkSafe ACT also has responsibility for supporting the building and construction industry to comply with industry-specific COVID-19 requirements.

In concluding today's statement, as I am sure everyone will be pleased to hear, I would like to thank all Canberrans for staying the course of this lockdown and for their response to the call to get vaccinated, which now sees the ACT with nation-leading high vaccination rates. I know the outbreak and extended lockdown in the ACT have been a significant challenge, but I am proud of the way the community has responded. Over the next few weeks and months, we will see significant developments in the ACT and across Australia as jurisdictions work to implement the national plan to transition Australia's national COVID-19 response.

With reopening and easing of restrictions, we expect to see case numbers increase. My message to the community is to stay COVID safe. The community should feel assured that the ACT government's COVID-19 response will be ongoing. Our approach will continue to evolve in line with the latest expert advice of AHPPC and the decisions adopted by national cabinet. My shout-out today is to the entire ACT community for doing their part to stop the spread of COVID-19.

I present a copy of the statement:

Coronavirus (COVID-19)—ACT Government response—Ministerial statement,  
6 October 2021.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the statement.

**MRS JONES** (Murrumbidgee) (10.48): I thank the minister for her update and detailed information about happenings in the ACT for on-the-record reporting through the Hansard process in the Assembly, and in particular for the Chief Health Officer's human rights consideration statement, which is a good start. Something that has been discussed by the COVID committee is the need for clearer and more public explanations of human rights considerations of the very strict, severe and intense lockdown measures that have come through the health orders. We have had 10 health orders, to the best of my knowledge, as of yesterday. It was discussed in last year's COVID committee that limitations on human rights should be accompanied—if not at the time, certainly soon afterwards—by human rights statements. In that committee's recommendations, from their interim report no 2, it is stated:

The Committee recommends the ACT Government direct that all delegated legislation made in response to COVID-19 (including notifiable instruments) include a statement of compatibility outlining whether and how the instrument is compatible with human rights.

I understand that it may be argued that our health directions are not notifiable instruments, but they are nonetheless notified on the legislation register. They probably should be notifiable instruments, but the parliament has not been sitting during the lockdown. That is probably one of the reasons that they are not, but they can operate even when the parliament is not sitting. Nonetheless, it is the right of the community not just to be told that these considerations are being made, but to see what those considerations are. That is the reason, when you do things in the chamber

through legislation, all of those actions and the human rights compatibility of them are scrutinised in the Scrutiny of Bills Committee, which is obviously not available when the parliament is not sitting and when processes do not go through the parliament.

Therefore, the statement that has been made today is not completely fulsome. I am not saying that the work has not been fulsome, but the public statement of the work does not include a justification for each and every action to show that it is reasonable and proportionate as per section 28 of the Human Rights Act. Section 28 in 3B says:

- (1) Human rights may be subject only to reasonable limits set by laws that can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.
- (2) In deciding whether a limit is reasonable, all relevant factors must be considered, including the following:
  - (a) the nature of the right affected;
  - (b) the importance of the purpose of the limitation;
  - (c) the nature and extent of the limitation;
  - (d) the relationship between the limitation and its purpose;
  - (e) any less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the purpose the limitation seeks to achieve.

It is so important in a human rights jurisdiction like the ACT that this is a public conversation. The whole purpose of our human rights model is that we conduct a publicly accessible conversation. If a conversation like that were a normal part of what has happened during the lockdown, then there may be less surprise about things like mandatory vaccination decisions that are being made by the government, because they could be explained under that justification. I am not saying that there is not a justification, but how that is justifiable under our Human Rights Act is not being publicly discussed. It is also why the Human Rights Commissioner has suggested that future health directives should be done through primary legislation because it is a more open and transparent process.

Certainly, there would be a great benefit in having a debate in this place on the decisions that were announced yesterday about frontline health workers. We can accept that human rights will be reduced at times, but this should be done in order to help the community cope with the fact that they are being required to do something which seems so intrusive and is not common in our system of government—for people to have a health treatment, whether they like it or not, essentially. People can leave their jobs, but the public health order to take a health treatment gets between their ability to do their jobs and their health. It restricts their self-determination about their health. So this is a really important part of our system.

I thank the minister for this initial statement from the Chief Health Officer, and I hope that we will improve in this area and have more open and publicly available statements as to the human rights justifications that have been undertaken about each and every health order as they are made. Thank you very much.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Standing orders—suspension**

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) agreed to, with the concurrence of an absolute majority:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would allow Mrs Kikkert to move a motion of no confidence in the Minister for Corrections.

## **Minister for Corrections Motion of no confidence**

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (10.54), by leave: I move:

That this Assembly expresses no confidence in Mr Gentleman MLA as Minister for Corrections.

So soon after rising to move a motion of no confidence against the minister, sadly I must do so again. When the Alexander Maconochie Centre first opened, Canberrans and the international community were promised that this would be a human rights based prison—one that would conform to modern rehabilitative ideas. As we know, this talk of a human rights compliant prison has just become a way for the Labor-Greens government to push a narrative that they care about some of the most vulnerable in our community. In reality, they are preening false feathers. The prison has been riddled with problems from its inception. Despite warnings from experts, the Labor government drastically underestimated how many beds would be needed. This short-sightedness has caused problems that have continued to cascade, from its opening until this day.

The Inspector of Correctional Services has determined that the human rights of a female detainee have been breached. Under our system of government, Minister Gentlemen is responsible for this breach and he must be held to account. The breaching of just one human right is a serious issue. Unfortunately, this is not the only area the prison is in breach of human rights or territory legislation and corrections policy. In the time I have, I will outline many more areas where the prison is operating below acceptable standards and guidelines for the treatment of our prisoners.

Before outlining the failings of this government in relation to our prison, I would first like to review a general history of human rights and corrective standards, both national and international, and how they relate to Canberra's prison. In 1955, the United Nations adopted the standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners. After a five-year review of processes, beginning in 2011, these rules were updated and became known as the Nelson Mandela rules, to honour the legacy of the late president of South Africa. They were adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015. In 1978, the first addition of the minimum standard guidelines for Australian prisons was published, based directly on the UN standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners.

These standards were revised in 2012 and again in 2018. When the Australian guidelines were revised in 2018, the Nelson Mandela rules were again considered. Additional consideration was given to the impacts of other UN conventions, such as the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, or OPCAT. The objective of OPCAT is to improve how people's human rights are protected when they are detained. It does this by providing for a rigorous process of independent inspections of all places of detention in a country's jurisdiction. Australia ratified OPCAT in December 2017 and is required to be fully compliant with OPCAT by January 2022 at the latest. Locally, our adult corrections system is governed by the Corrections Management Act, the ACT Human Rights Act 2004 and the ACT Standards for Adult Correctional Services.

To summarise, the UN first created rules around the minimum treatment for prisoners. These were updated in 2015 and named the Nelson Mandela rules. Australia has created its own standard guidelines for Australian prisons. The Nelson Mandela rules were the basis for these guidelines. Subsequent revisions also took into consideration OPCAT, which Australia ratified in 2017 and must fully implement by January 2022.

I wish to highlight the following. The objective of OPCAT is to improve how people's human rights are protected when they are detained. To ensure that this is happening, inspectors review places of detention such as the AMC to make sure they are compliant with human rights. Australia is to be fully compliant with OPCAT by January 2022. That is three months away. We ratified OPCAT in 2017 and, just this year, our Minister for Corrections has been found to be responsible for a serious human rights abuse.

A study of the Nelson Mandela rules reveals that the AMC is also not meeting several other international minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners. Consider the following. Rule 11(b) says:

Untried prisoners shall be kept separate from convicted prisoners.

This has been an ongoing problem at the AMC for years and there has been a number of instances where remanded detainees with the presumption of innocence have been accommodated with the sentenced detainees and subsequently beaten by them.

Rule 52 says that intrusive searches, including strip and body cavity searches, should be undertaken only if absolutely necessary. I will quote from the inspector's report of a strip search in January this year:

A draft searching strategy from January 2021, that the Office of the Inspector of Correctional Services has examined, states that all detainees will be strip searched on arrival to the Crisis Support Unit. Routine strip searching on admission to the Crisis Support Unit does not have a lawful basis under the Corrections Management Act 2007. In addition, the practice of mandatory strip searching is also inconsistent with the Human Rights Act.

Rule 70 says:

The prison administration shall inform a prisoner at once of the serious illness or death of a near relative or any significant other. Whenever circumstances allow,

the prisoner should be authorized to go, either under escort or alone, to the bedside of a near relative or significant other who is critically ill, or to attend the funeral of a near relative or significant other.

The escalation that led to the strip search of the female detainee on 11 January 2021, can be directly traced back to the refusal to allow this woman to attend the funeral of her grandmother and to attend to Sorry Business with her family and community. The request was declined, “on the basis of logical issues associated with the short notice of the application with full funeral details, including the date and time”. As everyone understands, deaths often happen suddenly. Funeral arrangements take days to organise and frequently come together with very short notice. Using an excuse of short notice as the reason to decline an application to attend the funeral of a close family member is absolutely disgraceful.

Here is the timeline of what happened, as outlined in the inspector’s report. The woman was informed of her grandmother’s death on Wednesday 6 January. On Thursday 7 January, she received assistance from an Indigenous liaison officer—an ILO—to fill out a leave application so she could attend the funeral. The application required the date and time of the funeral. At the time, the funeral details had not been confirmed, so the leave application could not be completed. On Friday, 8 January there were no ILOs on duty to follow-up on the application. At some point that day there was a request from the corrections officer to confirm that the funeral would be at 2 pm the following Tuesday. As there were no ILOs on duty to respond there was no confirmation. ILOs do not work on weekends.

Monday morning, 11 January, was the first opportunity for an ILO to follow-up on the leave application, which was completed and provided to the Deputy Commissioner, Custodial Operations. It was then decided that, due to staffing struggles, recent lockdowns and short notice, the application would be refused. To sum up, the detainee was told about her grandmother’s passing away on Wednesday. There were no confirmed details for the funeral on Thursday. There were no ILOs to assist with the application on Friday. No ILOs work on weekends. By Monday, when the application was completed, it was too late to be approved.

Based on this, I reject completely the attempt to blame the timing of the application, and instead suggest that the blame is squarely on the government for the short staffing and for not ensuring there were measures in place to advance an application to attend a funeral across three whole days. For a funeral far more effort should have been made to allow the application to be completed and brought to the attention of management in a timelier way. I call on the minister to detail what special or beyond-the-call-of-duty measures, if any, were taken to try to get this woman to the funeral of her dear grandmother.

Rule 95 says:

Systems of privileges appropriate for the different classes of prisoners and the different methods of treatment shall be established at every prison, in order to encourage good conduct, develop a sense of responsibility and secure the interest and cooperation of prisoners in their treatment.

In 2019, the inspector noted that an incentives and earned privileges policy—an IEP policy—was being drafted. The government said that it would be notified and implemented by June 2020. But the government pushed it back to April 2021 and then to June 2021. It is now October 2021, and it is still neither notified nor implemented.

Rule 98 says that so far as possible the work provided shall be such as will maintain or increase the prisoner's ability to earn an honest living after release. I find it hard to believe that many of the employment opportunities within the AMC will maintain or increase a detainee's ability to earn an honest living after their release. Out of 35 paid job titles available within the AMC, 15 are primary cleaning positions. These are good skills to have but not very competitive in the job market.

I could argue that the government is breaching at least another half dozen standards. It is failing the prison and everyone in it and has been doing that for so many years. This government has known that in its current state it is incapable of enacting the change necessary to be fully human rights compliant, not just with international standards but with our own territory standards. Once again, I call for the minister to divest himself of the corrections portfolio if there is to be any hope of reaching the once inspirational ideals of the Alexander Maconochie Centre. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (11.08): I refer to my remarks and those of my colleagues in this place on 3 August this year. I will continue to work with officers and stakeholders to improve the AMC and to keep detainees safe as we battle against the invasive Delta variant. Considerable efforts have been made in the past 12 months and we will continue that work.

I also ask members to read the inspector's report rather than rely on any misleading reporting in selected publications. The inspector stated in his media release that the decision to conduct a strip search was lawful, and his report identified that an explicit human rights framework needs to be built into AMC policies on strip searches. We are happy to receive this recommendation and have already commenced work on responding to it. This is unlikely to surprise anyone, as this government is committed to being a human rights jurisdiction. This commitment does not mean that no problems will ever be found in policies ever again, but it means that when they are identified we will act swiftly to fix them.

I also note the following statement from the inspector's report:

As noted above, the Minister for Corrections wrote to the Inspector to declare 'the strip search of [Detainee A] in the Crisis Support Unit of the AMC' to be a critical incident. This was the first time since the establishment of the Office of the Inspector of Correctional Services (OICS) that a Minister or Director-General had declared an incident to be a critical incident. It was not an event that fit the other categories of 'critical incident' under the ICS Act and could not have been reviewed by the Inspector had the Minister not made the declaration.

As I indicated a few weeks ago, the official government response to the inspector's report will likely agree, or agree in principle, to all of the recommendations. And I am focused on taking action in my role as Minister for Corrections. When problems are identified, we have moved quickly to fix them, time and time again. The announcement of an additional body scanner for AMC was an example of this.

The inspector's report highlighted the fact that strip searches can be distressing and traumatising for detainees. However, he also acknowledged that they are sometimes necessary in a custodial setting to ensure safety. This is the same predicament faced in every prison in the country. The solution to this is to focus on new technologies that allow us to dramatically reduce the need for strip searching, and that is exactly what we are doing. Most of the inspector's reports in my short time as minister have come about because I have referred them. These have shed light on procedures that pre-date the current commissioner and me, and we have been working together, and with staff, to improve these procedures. We have made great progress, and substantial headway has been made in getting recommendations implemented and training of staff up-to-date during my time as minister.

I also note that the Chief Health Officer has been complimentary of the COVID-19 protocols at AMC. These have helped manage what is a challenging time for staff and detainees. There is no denying that the situation at present at AMC is not ideal, but we are in a pandemic and we are responding to each new circumstance as it arises. This is the same challenge faced by every community and every state and territory in the country. I am confident that we are doing a good job and learning from each new hurdle. I thank Corrections staff for their dedication in providing care and support for detainees throughout this time. I am told that over the weekend several staff cancelled leave plans to take on extra shifts and support detainees.

The Delta variant is unprecedented. There is no textbook, there is no formula, and we need to trust the skill of our commissioner and the Chief Health Officer and their teams. What has been shown to date is that staff have been up to the challenge and have been able to respond in a timely and professional manner. I will continue doing my job supporting corrections staff in our great community groups, as they support detainees at AMC and strive to provide the best possible care.

Let us be clear: this motion is a stunt. This stunt is one of two things. Either it is a desperate attempt by the Canberra Liberals to distract from their failures—they have no real plans for our city—or it is Mrs Kikkert's way of showing no confidence in her leader and attempting to steal Mrs Lee's limelight during the budget. Let us get on with the sitting week, where the government is focused on responding to the public health emergency, recovering our economy and investing in our great city.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (11.13): I rise to speak briefly on this motion brought by Mrs Kikkert and the Canberra Liberals against Mick Gentleman, a good colleague of mine here in the ACT Labor-Greens government. He

has done quite a significant amount of work to improve the lives of detainees at the AMC, including ensuring that prison officers and staff at the AMC are cared for and understood, and that they have access to professional development to ensure that human rights of detainees at the AMC are considered in a careful manner.

Minister Gentleman commissioned a report. Nobody else commissioned that and it would not have happened, and those recommendations would not have been made, if Minister Gentleman had not stepped in and said, “We need to understand exactly what is going on here.” He had an independent investigation done of the situation at the AMC that the government could act on that—and, appropriately, has. Since that work, between January and April 2021, there have been a significant number of staff who have now been updated in a range of professional development training. That includes training around breathing apparatuses, resuscitation, CPR, fire awareness, first aid, and suicide and self-harm, as well as training in the use of force and compliance.

That compliance training has increased from 43 per cent to 75 per cent in January. I know that Minister Gentleman and the Corrective Services team have been absolutely committed to continuous improvement through all those training programs to ensure that the staff at the AMC have appropriate professional development that takes into account the seriousness of their work and the fact that they take their work seriously. It is professional development that supports staff to gain expertise to ensure that our AMC detainees are treated appropriately in that place.

I spoke last time about the work that I had done with Minister Gentleman around women in the AMC, particularly around making sure that they were moved to their own area, which was much more suited to female detainees. In addition to that, we were able to provide a return-to-work program to women in the AMC. So I was interested to hear what Mrs Kikkert said today about the work of cleaners somehow not being appropriate for detainees in the AMC. Cleaners, now more than ever, are absolutely vital in keeping us safe and secure in such an uncertain environment as we have been going through over the last 18 months or so with regard to the international health pandemic that we are all experiencing.

Without question, the ACT government absolutely values the work of our cleaners in the ACT, particularly now. I think Mrs Kikkert made a mistake when she mentioned cleaning as not being work worthy of people who were—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Members.

**MS BERRY:** But maybe she needs to reconsider, and I am sure she does respect the work of cleaners. She may need to rephrase the way that she talked about it.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Members, I cannot hear the speaker. So please, everyone, let us proceed in an orderly manner.

**MS BERRY:** As I said, I am sure Mrs Kikkert did not mean to disparage cleaners in that way and that she will reframe it in her reply. I did just want to assure Mrs Kikkert that the return-to-work program which has been extended to detainees in the AMC assisted one of those detainees with her university studies. Rather than finding the one thing that is wrong and pointing her finger at that, maybe she could have a look a little bit deeper at what is happening at the AMC. Significant work is happening out there to improve the lives of AMC detainees by ensuring that our staff and the officers out at the AMC are properly respected and trained to be able to continue with that work. In that light, of course we do not support this motion of no confidence in Minister Gentleman. We commend him for his continuous work and for his professionalism in supporting detainees and, importantly, the staff, to ensure that the AMC operates in a human rights compliant manner.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (11.19): I am rising to respond to this no confidence motion against Minister Gentleman, which is particularly focused on the recent independent review into the use of force prior to the strip search of a female detainee at the Alexander Maconochie Centre earlier this year. I do acknowledge that this is a deeply troubling incident that highlights further issues that need to be addressed at the prison.

The report is a difficult and distressing one to read. It outlines a traumatic incident involving an Aboriginal female detainee at the AMC and does so in considerable detail. Through the strength of having an inspector of correctional services, there is a high level of transparency as to what happens at the AMC. And this report is another example of that.

I would like to express my concern at both the treatment and the findings in the report and say that there clearly is more to do. I think a body scanner will help to reduce the number of incidents of this type. The technology offers opportunities for more effective ways and, I think, more compassionate ways of dealing with the very real security issues that arise in a prison environment. Nonetheless, there is more to do.

As a government, we need to work hard to improve the culture and approach at the prison and we do need to do better. From its inception, as Mrs Kikkert has outlined in her opening remarks today, we have sought to set a higher standard at the AMC, and this report does lay bare that—despite all those efforts, despite work over some considerable years—further effort is required.

I think the observations, the findings and the recommendation of the inspector make that clear, but, as Minister Gentleman has noted in his remarks, for any minister that holds that portfolio—and obviously having held it myself—the challenge is to drive constant improvement in that environment. I know Minister Gentleman is committed to that process of constant improvement.

The report raises a number of issues that require careful consideration by the government. It finds that the search did not comply with the Human Rights Act, which is obviously a matter of significant concern. The report notes, of course, that

the actions taken by officers were lawful under the Corrections Management Act, but then finds that the ACT, being a human rights jurisdiction, also needs to consider the Human Rights Act. And that is where the inspector has particularly identified areas where further work is needed.

As a government, we need to respect the human rights of everybody at the AMC. There needs to be a human rights focused culture in our corrections system, from the corrections officers through to the support staff and all the way to the Minister for Corrections. I look forward to further work in response, as part of the normal government process in order to improve the operations of the AMC.

While some of these changes are simple and straightforward, like the procurement of body scanners already highlighted by the minister, others require ongoing, deliberate focus to help foster a culture of human rights in the corrections service. This involves the alignment of policy and procedures, developing staff human rights understanding and appreciation, consideration of human rights in decision-making, and building staff capability to better consider human rights. I think these are the questions and the issues that the inspector has placed a particular emphasis on in his report.

I welcome Mrs Kikkert's research and history of human rights development when it comes to the corrections system. I did particularly note her references to the OPCAT, the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. I add to her history lesson. I brought legislation to this chamber in 2017 and early in 2018 to implement that bill here in the ACT, ahead of federal government ratification, because ACT is striving to set a higher standard. I brought that bill because I wanted to ensure that that optional protocol applied fully here in the ACT and that we continue with the implementation of that and be ready for the date on which that treaty comes into force in the ACT. But of course Mrs Kikkert forgot that the Canberra Liberals actually opposed the bill to implement OPCAT when it was brought to this chamber.

Mrs Jones spoke on behalf of the Canberra Liberals then. She gave a two-paragraph speech—two paragraphs—in which she dismissed the need for this. She said—and I could probably read the whole thing in the time I have available but I will cut to the highlights:

However, the Canberra Liberals do not agree that the ACT Assembly should open itself up to an international body making requests of us at any point in time that we are to comply with it.

The people of the ACT vote for a government here. If anybody sits above us, it is the federal parliament, and I think we even resist that to a large extent.

She goes on to basically say, "Why should we subject ourselves to the oversight of the United Nations body, striving to ensure these higher standards are implemented on the ground?" I disagreed with that then, and I disagree with it now. I hope, in light of Mrs Kikkert's speech this morning, the Canberra Liberals have reconsidered their position. It certainly sounds like it, and I think that is a welcome position, because there is no doubt that having external scrutiny is incredibly important.

The report of the Inspector of Correctional Services report in this matter is that external scrutiny is needed and that sometimes it is appropriate to have international organisations, those from outside the system, come in and say, “Actually, this body of work has progressed at an international level and there is a new standard you should be striving to,” or, in fact, “you are failing to meet existing standards.”

When it comes to traumatic incidents in the AMC, particularly for our Indigenous detainees, I think the other thing this points to is the necessity to remain focused on addressing the overrepresentation of First Nations people in the corrections system. This needs to be done in a considered and systematic way, in consultation with the community, and this has to form part of our ongoing work in this space.

We have started our work on this. We have started our work on this through, particularly, a government policy commitment to justice reinvestment—the idea that we should focus our resources at the front end of the system to avoid Aboriginal people going to jail in the first place and that we should invest our effort, our funds and our focus in preventative systems into therapeutic care systems, into support systems that actually address the injustices that Aboriginal people face in Australia and help them avoid involvement with the criminal justice system.

We have made a start in this space. We have seen pilot programs; we have seen the beginnings of important pieces of work: things like the Yarrabi Bamirr program, things like bail support programs. These pilot programs are proving to be effective—things like the Warrumbul court and the Galambany court—but we have much work to do to continue and improve them, because we still see a significant overrepresentation of First Nations people in our justice system.

I will provide an update to the Assembly later this week on work that we have been doing in this space, as I undertook to do when a resolution was passed here in February. My response has been slightly delayed by the lack of sitting days, but I will give it this week. In that, I will detail the work that Minister Gentleman, Minister Stephen-Smith, Minister Davidson and I particularly—but with support from Minister Berry and Minister Vassarotti—have been doing and the conversations we have been having with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to address that overrepresentation and to look at the practical measures we can take to turn around those decades-long trends here in the territory.

Let me conclude by touching on, I think, the very important human element of this story. We as a government need to empathise with the individual who was subject to the forced strip search. The report makes for sobering and disturbing reading, and I encourage people to read it if they have not had the opportunity to do so. It does lay bare the circumstances very clearly and the difficult circumstances that sit around this matter. The trauma inflicted on the individual was significant and concerning. It of course also needs to be seen in the context of the lead-up events—and again Mrs Kikkert touched on this—because not only the history of the individual, her complex and traumatic history, but also the inability for her to attend her grandmother’s funeral and the importance of sorry business, particularly for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, should not be lost sight of in this discussion.

*Mrs Jones interjecting—*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Mr Pettersson): Mrs Jones, I can hear you from here. I will have to start warning and naming people. Mr Rattenbury.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker.

The Inspector of Correctional Services' report goes some way to affirming the experience of the individual. The ACT government's response and actions must also provide the individual with comfort that serious steps are being taken to ensure that a similar event does not happen again, because in her letter to the minister she is very clear that is a key reason, that, despite the personal difficulty, she is speaking up—so that she might be heard and that the experiences she went through might be better dealt with in the future. That is the challenge that sits before the government and before the minister now. I know that he is committed to addressing those issues.

I also recognise that these steps cannot wipe the slate clean of the trauma and experience of that individual. Therefore, on behalf of the ACT Greens, I express our sorrow to the individual. I know that this cannot take away the memories or experience but I hope it can provide some piece of comfort, no matter how small.

I thank the work of Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service in supporting the woman at the centre of this investigation and for their ongoing work, both at the AMC and in the community. I acknowledge the Justice Health staff for their work particularly in the prison and particularly around supporting detainees with their mental health and addressing the trauma that so many of our detainees have experienced in their lives prior to entering into custody.

As I made clear during my speech, the Greens will not be supporting this no confidence motion today. I welcome the words from the minister that he is committed to following through on the recommendations from the inspector. We must learn these lessons. We must take serious steps to ensure that we continue to strive for that higher standard for detainees in the Alexander Maconochie Centre.

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (11.30): I speak in support of this important motion that Mrs Kikkert has brought to this chamber. It is a motion that Mrs Kikkert is forced to bring to this chamber because of the ongoing failures of the Minister for Corrections—failures that Labor and the Greens are complicit in by continuing to prop up this failure of a minister. You will, of course, remember that Mrs Kikkert brought a no confidence motion against Minister Gentleman in August, as a result of the unfathomable failures, the litany of failures, that this minister has overseen in his time as Minister for Corrections, from riots and violence amongst our detainees, to understaffing, under-training and overwork of our corrections officers.

If you said this minister was asleep at the wheel, it would be too kind. This minister's record since coming to this portfolio is nothing short of shocking. Of all these failures, the report of the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services into a forceful and unlawful strip search conducted on a young and vulnerable Aboriginal woman as well as this

minister's heartless, gutless and spineless response are perhaps the most unforgivable and appalling to date.

**Ms Berry:** Mr Assistant Speaker, on a point of order, I seek your advice on whether the descriptive words that Ms Lee has used about Mr Gentleman are offensive and have breached the standing orders.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Pettersson):** Ms Lee, on the point of order.

**MS LEE:** No. I was just going to say I want to move on. If you to ask me to withdraw, I will withdraw.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Ms Lee, resume your seat. Ms Berry, can you just expand on the words that you think are offensive?

**Ms Berry:** The description of Minister Gentleman as being spineless, I think, would be offensive under the standing order. I seek your advice on whether it is unparliamentary or whether it is just not very nice.

**Mr Hanson:** On the point of order, this is a substantive motion. It is a no confidence motion against the minister, Of course it is going to be critical of him in the performance of his role. I think I think Ms Lee has indicated she will withdraw but I think the language is appropriate in the context of a substantive motion.

**Ms Berry:** On the point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker, in the context of a speech in this place, members in this place should show leadership on the kind of language that they use and should ensure that they comply with the standing orders, earn the respect of their community and use language that is appropriate both outside this place and inside this place.

**Mrs Jones:** On the point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker, can the clock please be stopped?

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Clerk, please stop the clock. Members—

**Mrs Jones:** I am not quite finished, if you do not mind.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Mrs Jones, continue.

**Mrs Jones:** This is a time-wasting exercise. “Gutless” and “spineless” are perfectly reasonable descriptions for a minister who stands up and gives a speech from his last no confidence motion. He has overseen a department that has seen—

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Mrs Jones, please resume your seat. Members, there is a record of “spineless” being withdrawn in this place.

**MS LEE:** And what did I say? Yes, I withdraw. Can I go on?

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Thank you. Ms Lee, the floor is yours.

**MS LEE:** As Mrs Kikkert has noted, the inspector found that immediately preceding the strip search of detainee A, as she was referred to in the report, she was subjected to a planned use of force involving four corrections officers equipped with full tactical PPE and conducted with the intent to forcibly strip search her. Following a prolonged struggle, detainee A submitted to the strip search and was handcuffed and taken to a bathroom where the strip search occurred. The inspector concluded that there was no doubt that the strip search, and the manner in which it was conducted, would have been a highly traumatic incident, particularly given her recent experience of sexual assault, her ongoing mental health concerns and her considerable pre-existing medical conditions relating to her heart and lung, all of which were known at the time of the search.

The report also concluded that there was a clear breach of the Human Rights Act, an act that Labor had promised to uphold within this facility when it was first established. When then Labor Chief Minister Jon Stanhope opened the Alexander Maconochie Centre in 2008, it was hailed as Australia's first human rights prison. It was designed to provide an experience for detainees that resembled normal life, with a unique mix of cell blocks, domestic-style cottages and a transitional release centre to provide a sense of humanity to detainees held in the facility against their will—the facility of course being named after the great penal reformer Alexander Maconochie, a former governor of Norfolk Island. The minister's inept management of this facility stands in contrast to the principles which Governor Maconochie stood for and on which the facility was founded.

When the AMC first opened, then Attorney-General Simon Corbell said that facility was a special prison that represented the denunciation of the idea that harsh conditions were part of a prisoner's punishment. He said:

The enduring idea was that everything from boredom to violent assault and rape, dreary and demoralising environment, lack of activity and isolation are all somewhat part of the sentence. The government is proud and unabashed in our denunciation of that idea. It is barbaric and inhumane.

I wonder what Mr Corbell thinks of the AMC under the management of this Labor-Greens government today!

Whilst we can only wonder what he thinks, we are under no illusion about what former Labor Chief Minister Mr Stanhope, thinks. Mr Stanhope has been very loud and very clear about his dismay at what the prison he opened has become under the watch of this Labor-Greens government and particularly under this minister. Recently Mr Stanhope said he "found it very hard to believe that such callous and tone-deaf response to such a scarifying report could have originated in the minister's office". But that is exactly what we see today.

In response to Mrs Kikkert's motion in August, the Minister for Corrections refused to apologise for, or express any remorse at, the litany of failures in our corrections system under his watch. He refused to take responsibility for his record. Instead, he chose to congratulate himself on his achievements as Minister for Corrections.

Mr Braddock, the Greens spokesperson for corrections backed in his political ally, telling us how hard it is to run the facility, how hard the minister's job is and how there are no easy fixes. He might do well to remember that, when he says that all these issues were there before his time, the minister who had the corrections portfolio was his own party leader. And he might remember that!

If Mr Braddock thinks that the minister has got it hard, let us think about detainee A. Her name is Juliann. She is not a statistic, Minister. She is a young First Nations woman. She is a victim, a survivor of sexual assault. She is a Canberran. She is far from perfect. But who of us is? She is someone who needed government support and did not get it. Instead, what she got was another cold, callous, unsympathetic response from this minister. Unlike what this minister has reduced her to, she is not another statistic. She is a human being, just like you and I, and she deserves to be treated with dignity and have her human rights upheld.

As a minister of this government with the responsibility of overseeing our corrections system, it is Mr Gentleman who is ultimately accountable for the actions, good or bad, that happen in our prisons. I implore all members of all this chamber to think about Juliann, to think about the scathing comments in the inspector's report, which clearly outlined breaches of the Human Rights Act, and to act in the best interests of our community.

Typical of the Greens when it comes to action, they are missing. It is all rhetoric, but, when there is an opportunity to actually implement on the ground, as Minister Rattenbury said, everything they say they stand for, they fail once again.

I commend Mrs Kikkert for her ongoing and tireless advocacy for Canberrans like Juliann and our corrections officers, who have been woefully let down by this minister. I call on all members of this Assembly to support this motion. As an Assembly, we need to restore the public's faith in the government's management of the AMC.

Whilst there is clearly much to do and whilst the wrongs done under this minister's watch cannot be undone, all members in this chamber standing up to say that the ongoing failures of this minister are not good enough, that they will no longer be tolerated, is something that we owe this community. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (11.41), in reply: I notice that Mr Gentleman said that this motion is clearly a stunt and a desperate move by the Canberra Liberals. I must admit I am desperate. I am desperate for things to change in the AMC, but this is no stunt. Identifying breaches of human rights in our prison is no stunt at all. The truth is every single time we bring forward to this chamber the truth of the failings of the government they say, "This is a stunt," or, "This is a political stunt," like an unstable, emotional child that cannot cope with the truth when it comes staring at them.

I am disappointed that this motion will have this outcome. I want to reiterate, though, that this serious motion has still shone a light on the failings of this government when

it comes to upholding human rights. Labor and the Greens have just demonstrated that deep down they really do not care about human rights.

To many in our community, the prison is a self-contained bubble where rules apply differently. And, to an extent, this perception is understandable. But I wish to impress on those listening and to anyone with a stake in our prison management that this prison is in our city. It is in Canberra. Canberra is our home. Canberrans can be rightfully proud of many aspects of this city. Unfortunately, we have a number of areas where we do not perform so well, and one of them is our prison. As it is only a few days since the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi it seems appropriate to note this quote from him.

The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.

The detainees in our prison are undoubtedly some of our most vulnerable members. I encourage anyone listening to see for themselves the Nelson Mandela rules, the Bangkok rules and the ACT standard for adult corrections and look at just where this government is falling short in its commitment to human rights and minimum standards. In my prior speech I only had time to name a few. But there are many more.

I am not surprised that the Greens will not support this motion, even though they pay even more lip service to human rights than Labor. It should be brought to the attention of the public that if there were not a policy framework requiring mandatory strip searching on admission to the Crisis Support Unit and if there had been a functioning body scanner this whole scenario could have been avoided. The government has committed to the procurement of two body scanners in their response to the inspector's report.

Mr Rattenbury spoke about the body scanners and how effective they are. He actually said it is an effective way and a compassionate way of treating detainees when AMC or our prisons have body scanners. But what they did not own up to—and this is very typical of them—is the fact that the AMC did at one point have a functioning body scanner but that it had been turned off in 2018 under the leadership of Mr Rattenbury. That is right. The Greens minister who loves to talk about human rights is the one who turned off the body scanner that protects human rights.

The AMC had a body scanner as early as 2010. In 2014 it was looked on favourably enough so that the Human Rights Commissioner recommended to Mr Rattenbury that its usage at the prison be expanded. But what did he do instead? He switched it off. Reflect on that for a moment! The Human Rights Commissioner recommended that the use of the body scanner be expanded. Mr Rattenbury was responsible for its deactivation and provided no replacement.

May I also mention that when he spoke about the bill that he brought to the Assembly, the OPCAT bill, and how the Canberra Liberals did not support it, it was about the oversight of the OPCAT. In my speech, we are talking about being compliant with OPCAT. They are two different things: complying and overseeing. We are asking the government to use the guidelines of OPCAT to direct the human rights issues that we are currently facing in AMC—not oversight. They are two different things.

Let us not pretend that the Labor and the Greens care about human rights. Let us stop pretending that the prison is human rights compliant. Let us stop all of this pretence.

In closing, I thank the officers and staff at the prison for the exceptional work that they do in such hard circumstances. I support the work they do. And it heartens me that in every inspector's report the officers are praised for their bravery and professionalism. I too recognise it and will continue working to improve the conditions at the AMC. Also in closing, I just want to correct Ms Berry on what I said about the cleaners. I said that 15 of them are primary cleaning positions. These are good skills to have—good skills to have. There is no denial in that! I rest my case.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (11.47): I seek leave to make a personal explanation. I feel I have been misrepresented.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Mr Pettersson): Mr Rattenbury, I think you are referring to standing order 47. You have the call.

**MR RATTENBURY**: I will be brief. Mrs Kikkert has alleged that I deactivated a body scanner at the AMC. I will acknowledge the effect of the statement that there was not a working one, but it was not a policy decision to deactivate. The machine was malfunctioning. It was no longer usable. So this was not a deliberate effort by the government to no longer use a body scanner.

**Mr Hanson**: Mr Assistant Speaker, on a point of order, this is clearly a debating point. We have had the debate and he is trying to continue on with the debate. There is no personal explanation.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER**: Mr Hanson, there is no point of order. He was speaking to the explanation.

**MR RATTENBURY**: I am trying to be brief. I think there is a material difference between a deliberate decision to deactivate and a malfunctioning machine. I acknowledge the effect is the same. But Mrs Kikkert's words seek to represent a motivation that was not present in the circumstances.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 6

Noes 13

Mr Cain  
Ms Castley  
Mr Hanson  
Mrs Kikkert  
Ms Lee  
Mr Parton

Ms Berry  
Mr Braddock  
Ms Burch  
Ms Cheyne  
Ms Clay  
Mr Davidson  
Mr Gentleman

Ms Orr  
Dr Paterson  
Mr Pettersson  
Mr Rattenbury  
Mr Steel  
Ms Vassarotti

Question resolved in the negative.

## **Standing orders—suspension**

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) agreed to, with the concurrence of an absolute majority:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent:

- (1) any business before the Assembly at 5 pm on 6 October 2021 being interrupted to allow the Treasurer to be called on forthwith to present the Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022;
- (2) where business before the Assembly has concluded before 5 pm on 6 October 2021, the Assembly shall suspend proceedings and reconvene at 5 pm to allow the Treasurer to be called on forthwith to present the Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022;
- (3) at 4 pm on 8 October 2021, the order of the day for resumption of debate on the question that Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022; be agreed to in principle, being called on notwithstanding any business before the Assembly; and
- (4) debate on any motion before the Assembly at the time of interruption being adjourned until the adjournment questions in relation to the Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022 are determined.

## **Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 9**

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (11.55): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 9, dated 28 September 2021, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

**MR HANSON:** Scrutiny report 9 contains the committee's comments on two bills, 22 pieces of subordinate legislation, two government responses, two private member responses and one national regulation. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

## **Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Report 5**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (11.56): I present the following report:

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Report 5—*Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No 364—Gungahlin Town Centre: Amendments to the Gungahlin precinct map and code* (Copy), dated 30 September 2021, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (11.56): I wish to offer my thanks to the members of the planning committee for the work they have done by inquiring into an issue that is so close to my heart. Many members of the community, including myself, have campaigned for years to create a truly liveable town centre. To read the committee's report was heartening.

During the committee inquiry, the community clearly called for more employment opportunities, a greater say for local people, and better connections with green space and Yerrabi Pond. The community, the Gungahlin Community Council and I have consistently called for a liveable, vibrant Gungahlin—one that meets the needs of the community, which include employment opportunities, green spaces, entertainment and community facilities.

The government rightly has targets to stop urban sprawl and increase affordable housing, but it has been so focused on building apartments that it has forgotten what makes a community work. The Indicative Land Release Program and the land sales process have repeatedly encouraged residential buildings to squeeze out community facilities, commercial investment and employment generation in the Gungahlin town centre.

I will continue to advocate in public, private and this Assembly for an innovative, whole-of-government approach to create a Gungahlin town centre that is a hub of commercial and community activity.

National Capital and Development Commission era thinking of plonking large federal departments within town centres is no longer viable. But that does not mean that we simply accept defeat. The ACT government needs to display imagination on how to generate commercial and employment opportunities in the Gungahlin town centre. This does not mean having the ratepayer paying commercial entities investing in Gungahlin; it is about the application of innovation and new ideas.

Attempting to drive commercial activity through demand provided by residents in the Gungahlin town centre is inconsistent with creating a town centre that is a genuine mixed-use area with a thriving commercial life during all times of the day. Based on repeated on-the-ground experience in Gungahlin, such development will lead to a dormitory suburb where residents leave the town centre in the morning via light rail to work elsewhere in the territory, returning only in the evenings.

I am happy with the recommendations of the report, and I look forward to working with the government to deliver a better future for Gungahlin. I would like to thank the

Gungahlin Community Council for their tireless advocacy on this issue. I shout out the particular names of Peter Elford, Henley Samuels, Kevin Cox, Darren Marks and Sharee Shultz.

A refrain which I have heard repeatedly in the corridors of this Assembly is that community council views are not necessarily representative of their local communities. Interestingly, and thankfully, I have not heard it mentioned in this chamber. But I will push back on lazy thinking that seeks to ignore critical voices, whatever the validity of their arguments. As a proud GCC executive alumni, I am thankful for the work of the GCC, who form a critical component of the Gungahlin community, listening closely to the community and raising their concerns. I hope they recognise their voices in the planning committee's report.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee Statement by chair**

**MS BURCH** (Brindabella) (12.00): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure.

Earlier this year, the committee commissioned a review of the committee support function. After seeking expressions of interest from a number of experienced persons, we appointed Dr Rosemary Laing, a former long-serving Clerk of the Senate, to conduct the review. The reviewer sought submissions from, and conducted interviews with, MLAs, former MLAs, committee staff, former committee staff, other Office of the Legislative Assembly staff and officers from other parliaments.

Dr Laing submitted her report to me on 17 August, and the committee has authorised it for publication. It can be viewed on the Assembly website under the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure webpage.

As the Clerk has management responsibility for the office, the committee has asked the Clerk to consider the review's suggestions and report back to the committee on how they will be implemented.

On behalf of the committee I want to thank Dr Laing for her work to ensure that the Assembly has an effective committee system to perform its important scrutiny and community engagement role. I seek leave to table a copy of the report.

Leave granted.

**MS BURCH:** I present the following paper:

Review of the Committee Support Function—Report to the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure, prepared by Dr Rosemary Laing, Specialist Adviser, dated 17 August 2021.

## **Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Statement by chair**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (12.02): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services relating to some referred petitions.

Two petitions concerning Chisholm Village were received by the Assembly on 20 April 2021 and referred to our committee under standing order 99A. As signatories to petition 10-21 and 11-21, 1,364 residents of the ACT requested the Assembly to recognise and understand continued community concerns surrounding the proposed development at Chisholm Village by Ganellen.

The committee notes that, in his response to the petitions, the Minister for Planning and Land Management said:

Many community members have expressed their views to the government about the proposed development for the Chisholm shops. In considering matters including feedback received, I have declined the developer's request for direct sale of a parcel necessary for the proposed development.

In light of the minister's commitment, the committee will not be inquiring further into the matters raised in petitions 10-21 and 11-21.

Petition 14-21 concerned Yerrabi Pond and was received by the Assembly on 23 April 2021 and referred to the committee under standing order 99A. As signatories to petition 14-21, 508 residents of the ACT requested the Assembly to support the establishment of the "Friends of Yerrabi Pond"; provide more toilet and hand-washing facilities, including at the western children's playground; improve signage on shared pathways; and upgrade areas overgrown by weeds and bushes.

The committee notes that, in his response to the petition, the Minister for Transport and City Services said:

... Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) recently sought community feedback on how people use the Yerrabi Pond recreation areas and suggested improvements. Feedback, including the matters raised in the petitions, will be used to inform relative priorities and future improvements at the Yerrabi Pond recreation area.

Noting the request for support to establish a friends of Yerrabi Pond group, TCCS staff have met with petitioners and other community members to discuss the process for establishing this and the roles and responsibilities of volunteers.

The committee notes that funding was provided to enable implementation of on-ground improvements at Yerrabi Pond. Given the minister's commitments and the budget allocation, the committee will not be inquiring further into the matters raised in petition 14-21.

**Statement by chair**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (12.04): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services.

At its private meeting, the committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into petition 31-21 and agreed to the following terms of reference for the inquiry:

On 30 September 2021 the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services resolved to inquire and report on the implementation of the revised speed limits in parts of Civic that became effective on 5 July 21 with particular reference to:

- (a) road user advice and education effectiveness prior to the 5 July implementation;
- (b) the effectiveness of warning signage;
- (c) reasons for the continued and abnormally large number of breaches;
- (d) strategies for rectifying causes of the infringement rate;
- (e) impact on the community of the new fines and whether the level of this impact justifies a fines waiver for the month of July; and
- (f) any other matter relevant to this issue.

The inquiry has been opened for submissions and this process is due to close on 18 October 2021. The report for this inquiry will be completed “on the papers”, without public hearings, due to both the time-sensitive nature of the inquiry topic and the competing demands of estimates, COVID and other committee hearings.

**Public Accounts—Standing Committee****Statement by chair**

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (12.05): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in relation to the following Auditor-General’s reports: Auditor-General’s Report No 3 of 2021: *Court transport unit vehicle—Romeo 5*; Auditor-General’s Report No 5 of 2021: *Management of closed-circuit television systems*; and Auditor-General’s Report No 7 of 2021: *Procurement exemptions and value for money*.

The committee has resolved to inquire further into these reports. Whilst the terms of reference for the inquiries will be the information contained within each audit report, the committee’s inquiries will focus specifically on the conclusions and key findings in each report, the government’s response to each report and its implementation of each audit report’s recommendations.

The committee is expecting to report to the Legislative Assembly on each of these Auditor-General’s reports as soon as practicable.

**Statement by chair**

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (12.06): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in relation to the following Auditor-General's report: Auditor-General's Report No 4 of 2021: *ACT government's vehicle emissions reduction activities*. The committee has agreed to note and not inquire further into the report.

**Statement by chair**

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (12.07): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in relation to Auditor-General's Report No 6 of 2021, which was tabled in the Assembly on 26 June 2021. The report, entitled *Teaching quality in ACT public schools*, examines the effectiveness of the ACT Education Directorate's strategies and activities to improve the quality of teaching practices in ACT public schools. The report contained several conclusions and key findings and reported 14 recommendations.

Pursuant to its resolution of appointment, the committee inquired into this audit report and resolved on 29 September 2021 to bring it to the attention of another committee of the Assembly for further consideration. Accordingly, the committee has written to the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion referring this report for that committee's attention and consideration.

**Sitting suspended from 12.08 to 2 pm.**

**Questions without notice**  
**COVID-19—health directions**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, I refer to your announcement about mandatory vaccinations for high-risk health workers yesterday. Last year's COVID select committee recommended that health directions have a statement of compatibility with human rights, including justification that they are reasonable and proportionate. This is a recommendation that was agreed to in principle by your government and has not happened for the last 10 directions made this year, leading to calls by the Human Rights Commissioner to re-establish the COVID select committee. Minister, why is the health order to mandate vaccinations in particular health settings not going to be introduced through primary legislation, as recommended by the Human Rights Commission?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I would, of course, refer the Leader of the Opposition to the human rights compatibility considerations from the Chief Health Officer that were tabled this morning. That follows last year's tabling of a general human rights compatibility consideration for the public health directions that were being made—

**Ms Lee:** Madam Speaker, a point of order—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A point of order, Ms Lee.

**Ms Lee:** The question was specifically why the health order to mandate vaccinations is not being introduced as primary legislation, as recommended by the Human Rights Commission. I ask the minister to be relevant.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I think she is responding to your question reasonably directly, Ms Lee, and I cannot direct the minister how to answer the question.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think I was about 23 seconds in and just covering the breadth of issues that were in Ms Lee's long introduction to her actual question. In response to her question, other jurisdictions are also using their public health directions, in line with the declaration of emergencies, to do the initial mandating of vaccinations for a range of workers. This is already the case in the ACT in relation to the requirement for aged-care workers to be vaccinated. And that public health direction, which is in effect already—the mandatory vaccination for healthcare workers is not—is in line with those that have been done by other jurisdictions. Of course, we are also doing work to understand what the longer term arrangements will be, because, inevitably, the public health emergency will come to an end as we are living with COVID and we will need to look at what those longer term arrangements might look like. That work is underway.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary, Ms Lee.

**MS LEE:** Minister, will you be introducing primary legislation on this vaccination mandate? And why, except for the Chief Health Officer's statement tabled this morning, has your government not been releasing human rights compatibility statements for all the public health orders, as you had agreed to last year?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Lee for her two questions. On the second one, as I have just indicated to her, the Chief Health Officer determined that she would do a general human rights compatibility consideration statement because the same human rights are engaged in each of her directions and the same reasons applied to making those directions. Therefore, her decision was to make a general statement around her considerations of human rights compatibility. In the context of the outbreak, she has now updated and expanded on that statement, given the lockdown arrangements that have been put in place, which, again, are consistent with those in other jurisdictions and consistent with the advice of the AHPPC.

In speaking about the advice from the AHPPC, there are two issues, Madam Speaker. First, a number of other jurisdictions have already moved in relation to requiring healthcare workers, particularly those on the front line, to be fully vaccinated. The AHPPC has recommended a time line around that which would make it very difficult to do through primary legislation. So, as other jurisdictions have done, the initial response to this is through a Chief Health Officer public health direction, which is perfectly allowable under the Public Health Act and is an appropriate response in this circumstance.

**MRS JONES:** A supplementary. Minister, why have you so far failed to act on consistent pleas from the disability community for disability support workers to be included in the vaccination mandate?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** On the one hand, mandatory vaccination is very concerning and needs primary legislation and, on the other hand, we have got to rush in and do something—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** which does not really sit in our portfolio! As I indicated in a press conference today, which Mrs Jones may or may not have been watching, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee has been considering the potential to require vaccination of disability support workers. It was due to report back to national cabinet by the end of September, but, of course, the Prime Minister, setting the national cabinet agenda, did not bring on that item and did not ask for the AHPPC to expedite its consideration—in the same way that the commonwealth has been pretty much putting everything to do with disability at the back of the queue and on the backburner in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are some challenges associated with identifying the workforce in disability settings and crafting a direction that relates to work that is undertaken in a person's private home. The same considerations relate to non-residential aged-care workers, so in-home aged-care workers. The ACT government has maintained that the commonwealth should be considering using its own regulatory power through NDIS worker screening to include the requirement for workers to be vaccinated, particularly those who work in high-risk settings.

Now, we recognise that that would not capture all disability support workers, but it would cover workers who work in residential care settings, who work in day programs and anyone who is working for a registered provider and is required to be screened under the NDIS worker screening program. Unfortunately, the commonwealth has steadfastly refused to consider this option. Therefore, ACT officials are considering what options are available to

us. But, as I say, because disability support workers often provide services in a person's residential premises, this does present significant challenges in crafting a direction in this regard.

### **Schools—COVID-19**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, on 14 September your government stated—and I quote from the ACT Education Directorate website—that:

Year 12 students will return to on-campus learning from the start of term four (Tuesday 5 October). This is a critical time for year 12 students, who are completing their final weeks of school and final exams and assessments.

We have received several representations that year 12 students did not return to on-campus learning on Tuesday, 5 October but will, in fact, be forced to continue with remote learning for at least a further two weeks. Minister, did year 12 students return to on-campus learning on the date promised or will they be required to continue remote learning for several weeks to come?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Hanson for the question. Yes, as we had indicated earlier around the return to face-to-face education for some year 12 students that that was about making sure they could do their assessments that were practical assessments that they needed to do in front of a teacher or at class, and they were able to return to college, as well as year 12 students who had been invited back by their schools to prepare for their AST or other exams next week on 12 and 13 October. So that has been the case, and a number of colleges have gotten in touch with their students to understand what those sorts of assessments were, what couldn't be done remotely and what students needed to go to college to do.

So some students, like the rest of the students in the ACT, will need to continue with remote education for the time being. But the year 11 and 12 students who are doing their assessments are able to return to face-to-face education, but that will be a different case for each college, and each college will have been in contact with those individuals and their families.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, how many students will be required to continue with remote education?

**MS BERRY:** I do not have the answer to that. I understand there were some students, for example, at Lake Ginninderra College at Belconnen who went to school to attend their outdoor sports activities—to do rock climbing or abseiling—and that was part of their assessment as part of that that course. I do not know how many students attended that, but those are the kinds of assessment that some year 12 students were doing beyond and outside of their AST exams or International Baccalaureate exams—or their HSC exams, as is the case in some of our non-government schools.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, why does the education department website still state that on-campus learning commences on Tuesday, 5 October? Can you imagine how

surprised some parents were to get an email on 5 October saying that students were not to come back?

**MS BERRY:** Well, I am one of those parents and so I know the correspondence that went out to year 12 students. And the correspondence that went out indicated that unless you needed to do an assessment at school you did not need to come back to school and you could continue your education remotely.

### **Canberra—cost of living**

**MR DAVIS:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, Canberra is a wealthy city, but too many among us are slipping through the cracks and living in poverty. According to ACTCOSS, more than 38,000 Canberrans are currently living in poverty. What is the ACT government doing to eliminate poverty in Canberra and ensure that nobody is left behind?

**MR BARR:** I thank Mr Davis for the question. There are a range of policy responses that support those on the lowest incomes in the ACT, from public housing through to free public education and public health provision, as well as assistance through a range of concessions.

I have already announced an increase in the utilities concession for 31,000 low-income households in the ACT, to increase that to \$1,000 a year. That is a \$300 increase over the previous year's concession. We have also provided, through significant investment across multiple budgets, increased support for community sector organisations who provide support for lower income Canberrans. And across other areas of government service delivery—be that public transport, or be it in areas within the Community Services Directorate or Justice and Community Safety—where there are either zero or low-fee options to access particular services and supports, the ACT government plays its part in addressing income inequality.

But the single biggest determinant, clearly, is the level of income support that is provided. One thing that we saw last year was tens of thousands of people lifted out of poverty when the JobSeeker or Newstart amount was supplemented by the coronavirus supplement at a national level.

**MR DAVIS:** Following on from that, Chief Minister, what barriers exist to the elimination of poverty in the ACT?

**MR BARR:** In some instances there is intergenerational poverty. This, clearly, requires whole-of-government and whole-of-community wraparound support for particular individuals and families. Clearly, having a job and having a level of income that gets you above the Henderson poverty line is one way that we can reduce the level of poverty in our community. Having a jobs-first and secure local jobs policy approach as well as a jobs target of more than 250,000 jobs by 2025, is one way that we can lift thousands of people out of poverty. So we are pursuing that policy agenda.

Not cutting penalty rates and not supporting the cutting of penalty rates in many industry sectors is another way that we can ensure that incomes are higher, and that

those in highly casualised employment get the benefit of penalty rates applying to levels of pay. They are a couple of examples, but across all of the services that the ACT government provides, having a social safety net that is supported through the provision of public and community housing and through the provision of free public education and free access to public health care, are some of the fundamental tenets of the ACT government's responsibility. But it is a shared responsibility between our level of government and government at the national level.

**MS CLAY:** Chief Minister, what impact would the federal government raising income support payments above the Henderson poverty line have on the ACT government's commitment to the elimination of poverty in Canberra?

**MR BARR:** We saw the practical example when those payments were lifted last year. Indeed, even the COVID disaster payments now, the \$750 a week tax free, have in fact lifted the incomes of thousands of households. There is a combination of ways that we can lift more people out of poverty. There are two primary ways. One is more jobs; the other is better social security and income support. That takes the form not only of commonwealth statutory payments; it also goes to the entire construct of a social safety net that includes things that I have mentioned, including access to affordable housing, free public education, and access to free public health and concessions across a range of government services. We do see an important role, and the Labor Party will always see an important role, for well-paid, secure employment as being part of the solution to alleviate poverty.

## **Light rail—stage 2**

**DR PATERSON:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, can you please provide an update on the delivery of light rail stage 2 to Woden.

**MR STEEL:** I thank Dr Paterson for her question. It is very exciting that we have seen significant progress on this important project in recent months. In July we completed the translocation of the golden sun moth from the part of the Commonwealth Avenue median that is affected by the enabling utility works. In September, these enabling utility works commenced to relocate those utilities from London Circuit onto Commonwealth Avenue and also Vernon Circle and Constitution Avenue in Braddon.

Just last week, we released the requests for expressions of interest for a construction partner to undertake raising London Circuit to deliver an upgraded intersection with Commonwealth Avenue. This is a key first step in the procurement process. We are continuing to progress design and stakeholder consultation works for all elements of the project and we are continuing to engage constructively with the National Capital Authority.

Finally, and somewhat separately, the Sandford Street stop in Mitchell has also now been completed and became operational on 13 September—the second stop in Mitchell. This stop is providing better access for Canberrans to the growing Mitchell business and industrial hub and will also serve the future residents of Kenny.

**DR PATERSON:** I have a supplementary question. Minister, what benefits will this important project bring to the Canberra community?

**MR STEEL:** There are many benefits, and I am always happy to talk about the benefits of this important project for Canberra. It will deliver over 6,000 jobs in taking light rail from the city to Woden in the construction sector, and many more indirect jobs during its delivery. But the benefits of light rail to Woden do not stop at construction. Extending light rail will help create frequent and reliable transport that better connects our major town centres and residential and employment hubs, as well as our recreational hubs along the way.

As our city grows, light rail is providing Canberra's first mass transit system, moving large numbers of people more efficiently using a dedicated right of way. One light rail vehicle can carry 256 people, which is the equivalent of five buses, and it can be expanded in the future when we need it. It will extend the benefits that we have seen in stage 1 to other parts of Canberra, giving people on the south side more transport options. Light rail stage 1 has been incredibly successful. We have seen the benefits of that project, with more people choosing to use public transport—much more than was expected in the 2014 business case for light rail stage 1. And the city-shaping benefits along that corridor have been considerable: again, we have seen more people moving in than we predicted in the business case back then. Light rail will also improve the sustainability of our transport system; it runs on 100 per cent renewable electricity, making it one of the cleanest options for getting around.

I acknowledge that we have more work to do make sure that these and other benefits are realised through this project. That is why we committed, again, in light rail stage 2A to a benefits realisation plan, as we did in stage 1. This is a very important process, and we will work to get delivery underway as soon as possible with the next stages of the project.

**MR PETTERSSON:** I have a supplementary question. Minister, can you please outline the project's next steps.

**MR STEEL:** We are progressing stakeholder engagement for the whole of light rail to Woden. The immediate next steps in the project relate to raising London Circuit to create an upgraded intersection with Commonwealth Avenue. Enabling utility works are a prerequisite for delivering this project, and we will see the key utilities being relocated from their current position on London Circuit to Edinburgh Avenue, Constitution Avenue and Vernon Circle. This work just kicked off in the last fortnight. The compounds are up. There is work just metres away from the Assembly. We expect this part of the project will be completed early in the New Year.

We are also working collaboratively with the NCA, and we expect to submit a works approval application soon. There will be an opportunity for members of the public to provide comment during the public exhibition component of this process. The request for expressions of interest is in the market and closes on 14 October. Major Projects Canberra will evaluate the responses and shortlist the providers, which will then be invited to participate through a request for tender process later in the year. We expect

to be in a position to commence construction in the first half of next year. Throughout all of this, we will continue to engage regularly and positively with the Canberra community. We understand how important it is that everyone has a chance to shape our city's biggest ever infrastructure project.

### **Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis**

**MR PARTON:** Minister, I refer to the Auditor-General's report on the business case for light rail stage 2A. That report states that disruption costs were excluded even though expert advice suggested that an estimate of these should be included in the cost-benefit analysis. Minister, were you or were you not aware of the exclusion of the disruption costs from the cost-benefit analysis?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question and his interest in light rail. The ACT government is committed to getting on with investing in this future-focused infrastructure project, which will deliver major benefits. We have committed to maximising the benefits of this project by taking it from Gungahlin to Woden. We have shown an unparalleled transparency with this project in releasing the stage 2A business case to the public and also releasing the entire unredacted business case to the Auditor-General.

**Mrs Jones:** Point of order on relevance, Madam Speaker. The minister was asked succinctly whether he was aware of the exclusion of the disruption costs from the cost-benefit analysis. He has not said anything relatively interesting in that regard yet.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Your commentary is unnecessary, Mrs Jones.

**MR STEEL:** Madam Speaker, I might continue my answer.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Please.

**MR STEEL:** We have provided that information to the Auditor-General showing an unparalleled level of transparency so that they can undertake their performance evaluation, and the government will be responding.

**Mrs Jones:** Point of order, Madam Speaker. He has gone back to exactly the same answer as before. I know that you did not call my point of order, but—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** No, I did not Mrs Jones. Resume your seat. I will give a ruling on the point of order. He is in order. He can continue.

**Mrs Jones:** Correct, but the question I am asking is—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Resume your seat. He can continue.

**MR STEEL:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I will continue. This business case was undertaken based on best practice Infrastructure Australia guidelines for developing business cases.

**Mrs Jones:** Point of order, Madam Speaker. He has not at all answered the question. The question is very simple. It is yes or no. I know you cannot direct him to say yes or no, but it is nonetheless a very simple question that he has not answered in any shape or form. Was he or was he not aware of the exclusion of the information?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mrs Jones, I think you have answered your own question on the point of order. Mr Steel, you now have 10 seconds.

**MR STEEL:** I will continue. Under Infrastructure Australia guidance, subsequently released in July 2021, where disruption and other externalities such as noise and neighbourhood disturbances are expected to be a significant factor these “could be considered”—*(Time expired.)*

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members! Now we have silence, you can ask your supplementary, Mr Parton.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, how could you, the Minister for Transport, possibly not know about a major exclusion from a cost-benefit analysis for the biggest transport project in our city’s history? If you did know, why did you deliberately exclude it?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. I will continue to give my answer, which is that this business case was developed based on best practice Infrastructure Australia guidance in relation to business cases where disruption and other externalities such as noise and neighbourhood disturbances are expected to be a significant factor—these “could be considered” for inclusion in a BCR calculation that might be provided in a business case and economic analysis therein. It is not expected that any such cost would have a bearing on the economic analysis in this case, and that is why they were not included. If the opposition actually wanted to hear the answer, they would have given me the time to do so. They could have got the answer in the first question.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, how much will the protracted disruption cost our community in business sector productivity and our wider economy, already devastated by the COVID crisis?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. We will be working very closely with the business community. We have already been engaging heavily through Major Projects Canberra, and the Disruption Taskforce has been looking at how we can minimise—

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MR STEEL:** We are talking about disruptions that will face some businesses along the 1.7-kilometre route extension from the city to Commonwealth Park. We will be engaging with those businesses as we continue to undertake the work of the Disruption Taskforce on ways we can minimise that disruption so that they can continue to operate and trade during the period.

**Mr Hanson:** Point of order on relevance, Madam Speaker. The question was about how much the economic cost was. If he does not know, he should just say so.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I think he is responding appropriately to the question.

**MR STEEL:** In further extension of my answer, as I mentioned in the answer I gave to Dr Paterson's question, we are currently in negotiation with the delivery partner for stage 2A but also going out for an expression of interest and tender process for raising London Circuit, which will also be a significant project. Once we have the delivery partner on board, we can understand the constructability elements and what the program of work will look like, and we can work with them to make sure that we minimise that disruption.

So, no, it will not be possible to understand exactly what will happen during the project until we have those delivery partners on board, but we are already engaging with business at the earliest opportunity, because that is the feedback that they gave us on stage 1—that we needed to do that as soon as possible—to make sure that we can listen to them and their ideas as well as working out a whole range of solutions to minimise the disruption as we build this project. We are committed to building this project. The commonwealth are committed. They have chipped in \$132.5 million. It sounds a lot like the Liberals are not committed. *(Time expired.)*

### **Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, I refer to the Auditor-General's report on the economic analysis of light rail stage 2A. The report noted that Major Projects Canberra did not seek or receive spreadsheets or an economic model demonstrating the validity of the benefits. The lack of a quality assurance process led the Auditor-General to say that it "impairs Major Projects Canberra's ability to demonstrate the accuracy and appropriateness of the economic appraisal of light rail stage 2A". Minister, why are you proceeding with contracts for light rail stage 2A when its benefits are neither understood, documented nor validated?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. There were spreadsheets provided, and not the specific spreadsheets that the Auditor-General was referring to, from the consultants, who are very well regarded, who provided the economic analysis for the stage 2A business case which, as I said, has been undertaken based on Infrastructure Australia guidelines. The audit was limited in scope to the project's economic appraisal but did not review the merits of the government's decision-making processes in relation to light rail.

The ACT government understands the benefits of light rail. The reason that we do is because we have built stage 1 of light rail and we have seen the significant benefits that have been provided—the transport benefits, with high levels of patronage, and the city shaping benefits, with more people choosing to work and live around the light rail route. The significant regeneration that has occurred continues to occur.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR STEEL:** We have seen that benefit. That is the same benefit that we want to provide to the rest of Canberra and the south side. It sounds a lot like the Liberals are not committed to it.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Parton.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, what actions did you take to remedy that critical deficiency of the lack of an economic model and spreadsheets for assessing the validity of the benefits?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. Of course, we will be responding comprehensively to the Auditor-General's report, which provided just three recommendations in relation to the stage 2A business case. We will be providing a response to that. I am sure that Mr Parton will be interested in seeing that response more fully.

The government has made a decision to progress with this project. The business case was developed to inform a government decision and it is in the context of our commitment to bring light rail all the way to Woden. This is a business case that just looked at stage 2A. That is an important first step to get it to Woden where we know that there are more significant benefits for our city—transport benefits, sustainability benefits and also city shaping benefits. While there are benefits for stage 2A, we know that our ultimate goal is to make sure that we deliver this light rail backbone, this mass transit backbone, from north directly to south to Woden. It is going to be a Gungahlin to Woden route, a Dickson to Deakin route, and it is going to provide significant benefits for our city.

We do not just look at the benefits along the 30-year BCR appraisal period. This is an infrastructure project that is going to benefit our city for generations to come, for 100 years. BCR numbers are an important part of the mix when we consider business cases, but they are not the only consideration. We have seen the benefits of stage 1, where the BCR actually went up—the benefits actually went up—because we delivered it underbudget. We have seen the extraordinary benefits—the transport patronage on that project and city shaping benefits—and we expect the same benefits to be delivered when we take it to Woden.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mrs Jones.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, how can you be confident that many millions of Canberrans' taxes and rates are being well spent on the project, given the lack of a proven business case, and what is it that you have to hide?

**MR STEEL:** We have got nothing to hide. We have shown an unparalleled level of transparency in relation to this project in releasing the business case and publishing it online for the community. It has been up there for some time, but you have not asked me any questions about it. We have also provided it to the Auditor-General

unredacted so that he can undertake his performance audit of the business case. We are committed to this project. We have taken the stage 2 route to two elections. We have taken the entire project to three elections and it looks like the Canberra Liberals are determined to take it to four election-losing elections.

### **Children and young people—Safe and Connected Youth Program**

**MR PETTERSSON:** My question is to the Minister for Families and Community Services. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the outcome of the Safe and Connected Youth Pilot Program?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Pettersson for his question and his interest in welfare of young people who might be at risk. We know that young people who have serious problems at home can be at risk of disengaging from school, becoming homeless and even entering the child protection or youth justice system. The Safe and Connected Youth Program works with a child or young person and their family, offering outreach support, therapeutic case management and family mediation with the aim of reducing family conflict and ensuring a safe home environment, ultimately reducing the risk of homelessness for these young people.

The program was initially funded as a pilot in 2019 and was designed and delivered in collaboration with key community sector partners, led by the Youth Coalition of the ACT. In March this year, the Youth Coalition released an evaluation of the pilot, which demonstrated the program's impact for the young people who engaged with it, finding a reduced risk of homelessness, increased employment outcomes, increased educational outcomes, increased family communication, and improved access, integration and coordination of supports and services.

The Safe and Connected Youth Program fills a specific niche in the ACT's community services landscape by providing targeted early intervention support that works with the whole family to support young who may be at risk. That is why we were pleased to announce recently that the Safe and Connected Youth Program will be receiving ongoing government funding and, indeed, be expanded to include specific therapeutic respite accommodation.

The 2021-22 ACT budget will include \$7 million over four years for the program, including: \$185,000 for establishing the program as an ongoing program; \$157,000 for post-exit outreach services; \$2.6 million for early preservation outreach services, including mediation and case work; and \$4.1 million for the operational costs of the therapeutic respite accommodation.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, how did the ACT government partner with the community sector in developing this program?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary. The program supports young people in the middle years—generally considered either eight to 12 or eight to 15 years of age. This is an emerging area of need and focus in our community. Helping young people safely navigate this stage of life can have benefits that will extend well into adulthood.

In 2017 the ACT government supported Families ACT to conduct two middle years forums to discuss the challenges facing young people in this age group, particularly those who are vulnerable. At around the same time the Community Services Directorate commissioned the Australian Catholic University to engage directly with young people who had an experience of homelessness under 16 years of age, the lower age threshold for funded homelessness services.

In 2018 the Youth Coalition, Families ACT, ACTCOSS and ACT Shelter developed an action plan to prevent child homelessness. Included in this action plan was a proposal for a service model that would not only provide an accommodation service for young people at risk of homelessness or other harm but would seek to address the underlying causes by working with the whole family to address conflict and breakdown. This sector-led work helped inform the Safe and Connected Youth Pilot, which the government funded and delivered in partnership with the Youth Coalition, Conflict Resolution Service, Northside Community Services, Woden Community Service, Marymead and the Rotary Club of Canberra.

The pilot has been an outstanding success in demonstrating co-design and co-production with the community, and I would like to take this opportunity to make a special mention and thank Justin Barker from the Youth Coalition. Justin played a significant role in championing the Safe and Connected Youth Program, and his passion for this project, for youth workers and for the young people that they care for cannot be overestimated.

**MS ORR:** Minister, through the pilot, the Youth Coalition has identified that a purpose-built respite facility would be a valuable addition to the program's range of responses for young people. Can you please update the Assembly on the government's investment in such a facility?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. Through the Safe and Connected Youth Pilot an opportunity was identified to develop a purpose-built respite accommodation facility which could support the Safe and Connected Youth Program using a model based on the successful Ruby's Reunification Program in South Australia.

In 2020 the ACT government allocated a million dollars through the fast tracked 'screwdriver ready' program to refurbish a Housing property into a respite facility to support young people under the age of 16 who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The redevelopment which is currently underway has been informed by close engagement with young people themselves as well advice from the Ruby's Reunification Program.

These investments—firstly, in establishing a pilot program and then in extending the pilot to meet the increased need through the pandemic, in refurbishing the respite facility and, through the budget to be handed down this afternoon, in committing \$7 million over four years to establish Safe and Connected Youth as an ongoing and expanded program—highlight the Barr Labor government's commitment to supporting everyone in the Canberra community who is doing it tough. Canberrans vote Labor for a reason, and I think this is it.

**Roads—William Hovell Drive**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, I have been approached by many Hawker residents who are concerned about the William Hovell Drive duplication, including a lack of consultation and the proposed location of the shared off-road path. I understand TCCS consultation was hampered by COVID last year, but there are firm consultation guidelines in the EIS scoping document for a range of communication methods to be used with stakeholders, including face to face, email and letters, community meetings and information sessions, digital and online tools, and website notifications. Consultation must occur as early as possible with the local community, community groups, business owners, and volunteer conservation or Landcare groups. We have heard that this is not taking place. Will there be specific consultations with the Belconnen Community Council, the Woden community council and the Molonglo Valley Community Forum?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. I note the importance of this project in duplicating William Hovell Drive, a 4.1-kilometre stretch of road, to improve capacity and connections to a major area of our city which is growing—the Ginninderra and west Belconnen region. A lot of this work is happening in the road reserve corridor.

A development application was lodged some time ago—in fact, prior to those pre-DA consultation guidelines being a requirement. There has now been an ongoing process of notification where the public has had the opportunity to have their say on the plans. That has been extended for a period of time, particularly during the lockdown, to enable the community to have their say on the plans and on the environmental impact statement in relation to the project.

We expect that this will be assessed by the planning authority. The planning authority will no doubt make some comments, and any comments that have been made will be incorporated into the detailed design stage of the project, which will get underway. Indeed, any comments from the public can be taken into consideration as well.

I should say that, as part of this project—and I mentioned this in an answer to Ms Clay in the past—we are planning on building a seven-kilometre shared path link. Only part of that link is part of the DA application. The further link to Bindubi Street will be built within the road reserve, as part of a separate process.

**MS CLAY:** Can that off-road shared path be located on the other side of William Hovell Drive, so that it does not impact on the well-loved walking track that is already there?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. There are good reasons why it has to be located on that side of the road. I am happy to provide those on notice.

**MR DAVIS:** When will the online information sessions and other consultations with the local community take place?

**MR STEEL:** The DA, as I said, has been notified and it has been up on the ACT planning and land authority website for people to view the plans and give feedback. Officers from Transport Canberra and City Services have been in touch directly with residents as well and have undertaken a range of different conversations with those who reside very nearby to the project, in Hawker in particular. A range of signage was put up to alert people about the process that has been underway. I know that a lot of people have seen those signs and have been engaged in the process. Some people have been in touch with me directly, and I have put those through to Transport Canberra and City Services, to have a direct conversation with those people about any issues that have been raised through the process.

### **Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, I refer to the Auditor-General's report on the economic analysis of the light rail stage 2A project. The report noted that the economic analysis excluded the cost of a federal government requirement for wire-free operation of light rail vehicles. Minister, on what date did you become aware of the requirement for wire-free operation of light rail vehicles, given it was first reported in the *Canberra Times* on 23 July 2019?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. At the time that the business case was developed and put before government it was not an explicit requirement of the project to have wire-free running and other elements. Those were recommended by a joint parliamentary inquiry, but they were just a recommendation of the inquiry. It was noted by the Auditor General that it was not an explicit requirement at the time, and that was why it was not included in the business case. However, the government did know that there was a potential for that, and later on the commonwealth government contributed \$132.5 million to the project, which significantly contributed to those extra costs which are estimated to be in the realm of 17 per cent additional costs.

A lot has moved on since the light rail stage 2A business case was considered in 2019. A lot has moved on, and we know that there is now an explicit requirement for those things. The commonwealth has fronted up with the money and we are getting on with the project and getting it delivered. This is a project that we are committed to, to maximise the benefits of bringing it to Woden. We are looking forward to getting on with that work and realising the benefits that have been outlined.

**MR HANSON:** Why did you decide to continue excluding these costs for the economic analysis calculation, once you knew, as the Chief Minister has acknowledged, in 2019, that “one of the biggest determinants of the cost will be the extent of the wire free operation”?

**MR STEEL:** It was not an explicit requirement at that stage. But I can say that since then we have undertaken further discussions with the National Capital Authority about what requirements they will put on the project. It has since been determined through a formal process that they would require those things. So we will be including

those in the project, and the commonwealth has fronted up to fund it. At the time, in 2019, the business case was developed in order to inform government decision-making. It was developed in 2019 and a lot has changed since then in relation to the project. Those requirements are now known, and they have been paid for.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, what have you got to hide regarding the full costs of stage 2A of the light rail project?

**MR STEEL:** Nothing. We have shown an unparalleled level of transparency in relation to this project. We published the business case for stage 2 of the light rail. For other light rail projects around the country, governments have not published their business cases. We did that because we wanted to show that level of transparency, and we provided it to the Auditor General in order for them to undertake their performance audit of the business case. We have shown an unparalleled level of transparency, but we also want to achieve value for money for the project. As we continue to undertake our procurement process for the project, we want to make sure that, as part of that process, we achieve value for money. When we can make the final cost available, once that process has concluded, we will.

### **Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis**

**MRS JONES:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services and refers to the Auditor-General's report. The report provides a lengthy catalogue of omissions, methodology failures and seemingly arbitrary assumptions to create the appearance of a robust business case. There were "costs that were excluded" and a "lack of documented methodology and process for the quality assurance of the cost-benefit analysis". Minister, how will you assure Canberrans that they are getting value for money from the hundreds of millions of dollars being spent on light rail stage 2A?

**MR STEEL:** Because we have seen it on stage 1, Madam Speaker. We have delivered stage 1 of light rail, which has now shown itself to have provided greater public transport benefits and greater city shaping and land use benefits, and it was delivered underbudget. We did it very successfully. It has been seen to be a huge success. We are committed to taking this project to Woden. Of course, the first step to do that is to take it to Commonwealth Park. That is why the business case and the Auditor-General's report have focused on Commonwealth Park. It has to go via Commonwealth Park. Our ambition is to take it to Woden, and it does not sound like the Liberals are committed to that objective.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mrs Jones.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, when will you give the Assembly and Canberrans a proper and comprehensive business case that shows the true picture of costs and actual benefits, rather than discussing our views?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for the question. We will be comprehensively responding to the Auditor-General's report within the necessary time frame. We are

committed to bringing it to Woden. We have taken this to two elections. We are going to get on with the job of building this project. We are currently already underway on early works, literally just a few metres away from the Assembly, in building this project.

A lot has passed since 2019. Business cases are there to inform government decision-making. Our government has made the decision and we are getting on with the job of delivering a better public transport system for Canberra that will benefit our city not just for 30 years of an appraisal period but for 100 years and beyond.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A supplementary, Mr Parton.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, given the many concerns with the current business case, will you properly consult the community before finalising that updated document? And what do you have to hide on this project?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. We are getting on with consultation on delivering the project. I said that in my answer to Dr Paterson earlier. We are consulting on all elements of the project to take it to Woden, not just to Commonwealth Park. Our ambition is to take this all the way to Woden so that everyone in our city can benefit, from north to south. As we do that, we want to make sure that we maximise the benefits of the project.

We will continue to work with all members of the community to make sure that, as we design the project, both stage 2A and the final design, and as we go through the environmental impact statement consultation process and design for stage 2B as well, we will be working with the communities right along the route, often on a stationary basis, looking at how we can maximise the benefits for each community where there will be a stop, how they can access the stop, and how we can ensure that more people benefit from this project, which is going to be city shaping and future-focused in delivering major transport benefits for years and decades to come.

### **Schools—air quality**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is to the minister for education. Whether it be smoke or COVID, clean, fresh air is important for our students when they are in the classroom. What is the government doing to ensure that our students can breathe easily and safely when they return to school?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Braddock for his question. I can say that the ACT Education Directorate has been working very hard with our school communities to ensure the safe return to our schools, when it is time to do so, and acting on the health advice in that space. The health advice is that as much good ventilation and fresh air that can occur throughout the school and throughout the classrooms is the best way to mitigate the risk of contracting COVID.

Our ACT schools have been working on making sure that our ventilation systems have what they need in place to ensure that those ventilation systems can increase the amount of fresh air that is brought into the school communities. It also involves

making sure that we open doors and windows that have been previously sealed to allow that fresh air to come in. In some ways, the fires last year created some challenges and some conflict with what we now face with COVID-19, but it also gave us a greater understanding of how our ventilation systems work across our ACT public schools.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Braddock, a supplementary.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Will the government prioritise work for those schools whose students are unable to access vaccinations—that is, the under-12 age group?

**MS BERRY:** All schools will have a ventilation plan in place before students return to school, which is what occurred for the year 11 and 12 students returning to colleges. They had a ventilation plan in place to ensure that that fresh air was able to flow through the school communities.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Ms Clay, a supplementary.

**MS CLAY:** Will the implementation of the ventilation plans be complete before students return to school?

**MS BERRY:** Yes, they will be.

### **Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. I refer to the Auditor-General's report on the economic analysis of light rail stage 2A. The report noted a high degree of reliance on the light rail project stimulating development of the Acton waterfront and other wider economic benefits to demonstrate a convincing economic argument. In the absence of this assumption, the economic benefit dropped from 56c per dollar to only 21c per dollar. Minister, how can you possibly argue that a tram stop in Acton, only a short walk from Civic, is going to stimulate a massive residential development in that area?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. And the benefits of stage 2A are weighted towards city shaping and land use benefits and the wider economic benefits. And this is unsurprising given that the route—1.7 kilometre route—extension goes to Commonwealth Park with three light rail stops adjacent to City Hill the Acton waterfront and West Basin. There is a lot of potential in this area. The approach taken by the ACT government's economic advisers was to quantify the city-shaping benefits within the stage 2A business case as an assumption that development of the Acton waterfront would be accelerated by two years compared to the base case without the impetus of the stage 2A project.

So light rail projects are a proven catalyst for urban renewal and development across the globe. If we had not included those benefits in the business case we could have been seen to have erred in our duty by not quantifying properly the benefits of this project. And we have seen in stage 1 of light rail the very significant land use and city-shaping benefits that have accrued in that project, far beyond expectations in the

2014 light rail business case with stage 1. So I think it is reasonable to assume that there is going to be some city-shaping benefits with this stage 2 extension.

We actually think the benefits of stage 2A are small in comparison with the extension to Woden, which is what we are intending to do to maximise the benefits. And there will be further city-shaping benefits as part of that, particularly in the Woden town centre. Indeed, we are already starting to see that occur even before the light rail project starts construction, off the back of our government being committed to it. It is very clear that the Liberals are not.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, what specific evidence and analysis have you seen to justify the assumption that Acton's development is dependent on light rail, and will you table that evidence?

**MR STEEL:** That is provided in the business case, that analysis of the benefits, both in terms of the city-shaping benefits and also in relation to what we expect around wider economic benefits. But, importantly, the business case looks at a whole different range of scenarios to test what those assumptions might be, in terms of excluding wider economic benefits and with them—there are a whole range of BCR numbers in there to look at the different permutations, if you exclude certain benefits. Ultimately the government has made the decision to get on with this project because we think this is important for Canberra's future in providing a mass transit system that is sustainable and that connects our city from north to south. We are committed to making sure we deliver it to Woden. And the stage 2A business case of the project should be seen as just that—a stepping stone to get us to Woden. We are committed to it, and you are not.

**MR DAVIS:** Minister, can you assure my constituents in Brindabella that the government's long-term ambition is to connect all Canberrans to a city-wide light rail network, particularly the Tuggeranong town centre?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Davis for his question. Yes, we want to see the transport benefits for our city. And that is why we have outlined the light rail master plan, demonstrating future connections of our light rail network to places like Belconnen and Kippax through to the airport as well as places like Tuggeranong. And when we deliver light rail stage 2 it will benefit people in Gungahlin as much as it will benefit many people in Woden. There are many people in Gungahlin who work in the Parliamentary Triangle, who need to go through Barton. They will be using this route. There will be many people connecting from buses in Calwell and Wanniasa who will be connecting with light rail to go into work in the city as well.

So we expect that this extension for stage 2 will benefit all Canberrans through our integrated public transport network, connecting with buses and other modes of transit like e-scooters and like active travel.

### **Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, I refer to the Auditor-General's report on the economic analysis of the light

rail stage 2A project. The report noted a consultant's advice that the demand model should be revised to reflect light rail stage 1 performance. It seems that this advice was rejected and reliance was placed on the figures for south Queensland, Sydney and Melbourne. Minister, why was the decision made to use a demand model for light rail stage 2A based on Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, when we have our own data from stage 1?

**MR STEEL:** Because light rail stage 1 was not operational then. The whole point about this business case is that it was developed a couple of years ago, before light rail had actually become operational. What we have seen since then is that patronage figures were higher than what we were expecting in the 2014 business case. We saw over 15,000 people using it each weekday. That is incredible—much higher than what was expected when we originally agreed to develop that very successful project.

I think we have shown a very strong track record of delivering the transport benefits, and I see no reason why we will not be doing that with stage 2. I expect that more people will be using public transport as a result of that. Indeed, that is the objective of this whole project.

**MR HANSON:** Have you questioned the validity of the patronage assumptions that have used Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne? Has the business case been updated to reflect stage 1?

**MR STEEL:** As I said, we have seen significant benefits from people using public transport and stage 1 of light rail, and that has informed the decision-making process on the stage 2A business case. We want to continue those benefits by extending the line down to the south side so that more people can catch it on the south side as well. Those assumptions are something that we are not planning on unpicking. They have been delivered in a business case that has already informed the decision to move forward with this project. We have seen since then, through the benefits realisation plan that was delivered for the stage 1 project, the significant extra benefits that have accrued from delivering light rail, and we expect those to continue in the second stage.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, when can the people of Woden and Tuggeranong expect to see the first trams rolling into their respective stations?

**MR STEEL:** As I have outlined, there are some significant milestones for this project which we are moving through. Work is underway on the early works, and now we have to get work underway on raising London Circuit, which will be an important project for the southern end of the CBD, and which will also help to facilitate light rail stage 2A. Many of those decisions are not in the hands of the ACT government. Of course, we also need to go through a procurement process. It is contingent on that procurement process being delivered, and the outcome and program delivery time line will be available once we go through that important process over the coming months.

### **Arts—Statement of Ambition**

**MS ORR:** Minister, you released a Statement of Ambition for the Arts late last week. Can you update the Assembly on what the ambition is for the arts in the ACT?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Ms Orr for the question. The Statement of Ambition for the Arts proudly aims for Canberra to be recognised as Australia’s arts capital. What this means in practice is that no matter who you are, no matter where you are, you will want to be creating, participating or engaging in the arts in Canberra. This ambition is drawn from the many conversations I have had with our city’s beloved artists, creators, arts workers and organisations about the value and potential of the arts to our economy and to our way of life.

This is a bold step, but it is not a leap. Canberra has always been a place for people who embrace arts, culture and creativity. This is about taking it to the next level. This ambition and its associated strategies will guide short- and medium-term decisions, acting as the framework and context to craft our ACT arts policy and ACT arts funding model, in partnership with the community. The ambition also includes two significant announcements along the way. The ACT will host an arts expo—a festival likely to be held in 2023-24 showcasing “Australia’s Arts Capital” to locals and interstate and international visitors, and, secondly, a commitment by the ACT government to formally explore how to position the ACT internationally as a “city of design”.

**MS ORR:** Minister, can you please detail the three key strategies which underpin your Statement of Ambition for the Arts?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. Canberra will become recognised as Australia’s arts capital through three core strategies. The first is to create amazing art and culture—everywhere, at any time, for everyone. The second is to develop arts, cultural and creative industry, practice, and facilities—supporting creation and culture at all levels, via any path. The third is to promote our arts and culture to attract artists and creators, arts workers, visitors and investment.

These are distinct but related; each strategy supports the others. Creation of amazing art and culture is supported through investing in artistic capacity and capability, and in our arts and cultural facilities. By relentlessly and proudly promoting our arts and culture, we attract artists, creators, arts workers, visitors and investors—and they, in turn, enhance and increase our industry, practices, and creations. This ambition and the strategies which support it will be the lenses through which our short- and medium-term decisions will be made.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, what funding initiatives support your Statement of Ambition?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Dr Paterson for the question. One of the first steps of the Statement of Ambition is a range of significant funding initiatives. To be truly recognised as Australia’s arts capital, the ACT needs to compete on a national level and beyond. The ACT government is investing more than \$10 million in additional arts funding for the growth of opportunities and outcomes for our local artists and arts workers, and in the arts organisations and cultural facilities that can further enable Canberra’s artists and arts workers to thrive.

Our investments will grow the sector through creating local jobs, building our region's capacity and capability to create, develop and celebrate art and culture, and attracting visitors and investments in our world-class offerings right here in the ACT, which, in turn, creates more opportunities and more support for artists and more jobs. A rising tide lifts all boats, and our ambition aims to do just that by supporting the entire Canberra arts ecosystem, ranging from small-scale arts and crafts hawkers to big-production tours and concerts.

Just some of our initiatives include: more than \$4 million to progress site investigations and planning for an expansion and redevelopment of the Canberra Theatre Centre, and for upgrades to it in the short-term; \$2 million for the Tuggeranong Arts Centre theatre upgrade; \$960,000 for the expansion and activation of Canberra Museum and Gallery; \$350,000 for HOMEFRONT 3; \$246,000 to support training of theatre technicians at Canberra Theatre Centre; \$200,000 for a new public art commission, where the subject and artist are female or non-binary artists; and abolishing hawker permit fees.

**Mr Barr:** Further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

## Papers

**Madam Speaker** presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to subsection 17(5)—Auditor-General's Report No 8/2021—Canberra Light Rail Stage 2a: Economic Analysis dated 24 September 2021.

Bills referred to Committees, pursuant to the resolution of the Assembly of 2 December 2020, as amended 11 February, 30 March, 22 April and 16 September 2021—Correspondence—Not inquired into—

Financial Management Amendment Bill 2021—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, dated 27 September 2021.

Operational Efficiencies (COVID-19) Legislation Amendment Bill 2021—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 24 September 2021.

Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Act, pursuant to subsection 20(2)—Independent Reviewer—Report for the period 1 January to 30 June 2021, dated 27 September 2021, prepared by Professor Dennis Pearce AO.

Inspector of Correctional Services Act, pursuant to subsection 30(2)—Report of a Review of a Critical Incident by the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services—Use of force to conduct a strip search at the Alexander Maconochie Centre on 11 January 2021 (CIR 01/21)—Corrigenda, dated 17 September 2021.

## Supplementary answer to question without notice Light rail—stage 2 economic analysis

**MR STEEL:** In question time I was asked about spreadsheets being provided to the government in relation to the economic analysis for light rail stage 2A. The

cost-benefit analysis was undertaken on behalf of government by EY, a reputable consultant, with analysis supported by workstreams including Arup, another very distinguished consultant in infrastructure, Turner & Townsend, and Veitch Lister. EY provided an economic appraisal report for light rail stage 2A, setting out the methodology parameters and results. MPC did obtain relevant technical spreadsheets in relation to the capital operating and maintenance cost estimates, and transport and land use benefits for the project.

## **Gender inequality—gender pay gap**

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (3.10): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) gender inequality, including inequality of pay, has been impacting women in Australia and around the world for centuries;
- (b) reducing gendered inequality in the workplace and more broadly is ongoing and will require many different initiatives and responses;
- (c) as a transparency and accountability tool, the gender pay gap has provided a headline measure of how equally men and women have or have not been remunerated for their work;
- (d) in Australia, the national gender pay gap has reduced from a high of 18.5 percent in November 2014 to 13.4 percent in November 2020, although there has subsequently been an increase back up to 14.2 percent as of May 2021 and, in the ACT, the gender pay gap is 7.9 percent;
- (e) the ACT Government has done effective work to reduce gender inequality within its own workforce which is reflected in its high female participation rates and low gender pay gap;
- (f) as a result of the good work by the ACT Government and public service, the ACT Public Service (ACTPS) has an overall gender pay gap of one percent or less, with 65 percent of ACTPS employees being women;
- (g) to build on the work already undertaken, starting in the 2022-23 financial year, directorates will be directed to report on gender action plans and gender impact assessments in their annual reports;
- (h) while this is an overall excellent outcome, there remains a lack of reporting available on the breakdown between directorates;
- (i) there is also a lack of reporting on the difference in outcomes between executive and non-executive levels; and
- (j) these details are useful in identifying areas where further gains in gender equality and equal remuneration can be focused; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) undertake more detailed reporting on the gender pay gap in the ACTPS;
- (b) include in this undertaking a breakdown of the gender gap between:
  - (i) directorates; and

- (ii) executive and non-executive levels in the ACTPS; and
- (c) identify possible reporting mechanisms that capture:
  - (i) gender gaps between full-time, part-time and casual employees; and
  - (ii) a breakdown of the pay gap experienced by women from diverse groups (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, and people with a disability).

I cannot stress enough the importance of this motion. Since the first attempts at legislating equal pay for equal work in this country, our understanding of the gender pay gap has evolved into a complex phenomenon with many branches, matching the growth of our now similarly more mature and complex economy. It is therefore the responsibility of governments—state, territory and federal—to remain alert to the gender pay gap and the manner in which it presents, and to respond appropriately.

The best place to start to gain an understanding of how the gender pay gap presents in 2021 is UN Women Australia’s own definition of “equal pay for work of equal value”. UN Women Australia note:

Equal pay means that all workers have the right to receive equal remuneration for work of equal value. While the concept is straightforward, what equal pay actually entails and how it’s applied in practice has proven to be difficult.

UN Women elaborated by saying:

Work of equal value can mean a job that is the same or similar, as well as a job that is not the same but is of equal value. This distinction is important because women’s and men’s work may involve different types of qualifications, skills, responsibilities, or working conditions, yet be of equal value and therefore merit equal pay.

For instance, a career in the still male-dominated construction sector pays well over a career in the early childhood education sector, a largely female-dominated sector, despite both professions presenting an equally high value of service to the economy. This is not to criticise the value of a construction worker’s labour, which is indeed significant, but rather to point out the severe and, frankly, cynical economic and social devaluation of early childhood education and its predominantly female workforce.

Many of us here would be familiar with some of the key reasons as to why the gender pay gap might persist. But for those who require a refresher, UN Women Australia identifies the main culprits, and reports:

The lasting impacts of restrictive, traditional gender roles are responsible for creating and sustaining pay inequalities. Gender stereotypes steer women away from occupations that have traditionally been dominated by men and push them toward care-focused work that is often regarded as “unskilled”, or “soft-skilled” and therefore, lower paid.

The motherhood penalty is another reason for the pay inequity. On average, working mothers are paid less than non-mothers, and the disparity increases as

the number of children a woman has increases. Lower wages for mothers may be related to reduced working time, employment in more family-friendly jobs which tend to be lower paying, hiring and promotion decisions that penalise the careers of mothers, and a lack of programs to support women's return to work after time out of the labour market.

There are also discriminatory hiring practices and promotion decisions that prevent women from gaining leadership roles and highly paid positions that sustain the gender pay gap. We also see that migrant women in particular are over-represented in the informal sector and around the globe. There will be a lot of domestic workers, cafe staff and other roles that women fill. These jobs are often informal and fall outside the domains of labour laws, trapping employees in low-paying, unsafe working environments, without social benefits, and further perpetuating the gender pay gap for women working in these conditions.

Lastly, another key cause of the gender pay gap's persistence is women's over-representation in unpaid work in addition to their paid work. UN Women Australia report that women do three times as much care and domestic work as men, globally. This includes household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, household errands, and taking care of children and the elderly. An almost inconceivable amount of capital is produced daily from this work—work without which none of us would be able to survive. It is therefore extraordinary, but predictable, that this labour is both socially and fiscally undervalued.

The gender pay gap impacts not only on women's daily lived experience. In Australia, the amount of money a person earns over their lifetime directly correlates to their financial outcomes in retirement; that is, quality of life in retirement is explicitly linked to how much money you earn throughout your career. According to Australian Super, women retire with 42 per cent less super than men on average. Many factors influence this outcome, but the gender pay gap remains a very large one and perhaps the most significant.

As noted earlier, industries with a predominantly female workforce will pay workers significantly less, on average, compared to industries with a predominantly male workforce. An early childhood educator will accrue a lot less super than a construction worker. Their contribution to the economy is equal, but at the end of the day the early childhood educator has the double whammy of less pay from week to week and less superannuation on retirement. Consequently, Australian women are made to disproportionately rely on the inadequate public pensions provided by the commonwealth. In fact, as of June 2021, approximately 60 per cent of the 25,000 people reliant on the age pension in the ACT were women.

We know that women perform a much larger share of unpaid labour in our society—child care, domestic chores and other caring tasks. This means that they are again expending their labour not only without pay but also without superannuation. When women take parental leave—and it is still usually women who do take parental leave—they miss out on superannuation. I note that there are advances in the number of men taking parental leave in lieu of their partners. This is great, but there is a long way to go.

While I am on the topic, I would like to point out the superannuation guarantee threshold. This rule in our employment law means that employers only have to pay superannuation if an employee makes more than \$450 per month. Women, due to the factors I have just discussed, are far more likely to be long-term part-time employed and fall under this threshold, therefore receiving no superannuation for the work they do.

As I have already referenced, before the pandemic, employed women were still doing more than their fair share of unpaid domestic labour. Worryingly, since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen this phenomenon skyrocket, with Australian women, according to the Grattan Institute, “doing an extra hour each day more than men, on top of their existing load”. The Grattan Institute has found:

... the gender gap in unpaid and paid work was already bigger pre-COVID in Australia than the UK, US, Canada, and New Zealand. Despite strong increases in female workforce participation in recent decades, Australian women still do about two hours more unpaid work each day on average than Australian men. Conversely, men typically do about two hours more paid work each day than women.

In Australia the national gender pay gap has reduced, from a high of 18.5 per cent in November 2014 to 13.4 per cent in November 2020, although there has subsequently been an increase back up to 14.2 per cent as of May 2021. In the ACT the gender pay gap is 7.9 per cent, which is clearly a lot better than the average across the nation.

As of March 2021 Australia ranked 50th in the World Economic Forum’s 2021 *Global Gender Gap Report*. As an aside, I find it of both concern and interest that our GDP of \$US1.6 trillion, or \$US62,000 per capita, puts us at ninth in the world by this measure, yet Australia is still coming in so low, in 50th place, when it comes to the gender pay gap. Despite the rhetoric that our nation is wealthy, we are exceptionally poor at sharing it.

When we are lucky enough to be paid for it, women are still earning less for labour of equal value than men, in addition to managing an unfair share of unpaid domestic labour. This injustice categorically harms women and children, especially those of us with intersections of wealth, race, language and ability, which also attract economic and social discrimination.

Adding insult to injury, we have seen the federal government functionally leave women out of the pandemic recovery packages. It is therefore with great relief that I note that the ACT government has done effective work to reduce gender inequality within its own workforce. This is reflected in our high female participation rates and low gender pay gap. As a result of the good work of the ACT government and the ACT public service, we have an overall gender pay gap of one per cent or less, with 65 per cent of ACT public service employees being women. Indeed, to build on the work already undertaken, starting in the 2022-23 financial year, directorates will be directed to report on gender action plans and gender impact assessments in their annual reports. This level of participation also has a positive macro influence on the gender gap in superannuation.

While the ACT has better reporting compared to other jurisdictions in Australia, we can continue to improve reporting here, increasing the average level of reporting across the country. In my motion I have identified some data gaps which we can begin to fill. There remains a lack of reporting available on the breakdown between directorates. There is also a lack of reporting on the difference in outcomes between executive and non-executive levels.

These details are useful in identifying areas where we can focus on increasing gender equality and equal remuneration. Consequently, I ask that this Assembly call on the government to undertake more detailed reporting on the gender pay gap in the ACT public service; include in this undertaking a breakdown of the gender gap between directorates; and include in this undertaking a breakdown of the gender gap between executive and non-executive levels in the ACT public service. Additionally, my motion calls on the government to work on identifying methods of reporting on gender gaps among employees working either part time or casually, and the experience of women from diverse backgrounds or women living with disability.

I would like to note that I have deliberately left the method of reporting open in my motion. There are a variety of ways to report this data and I have left it to the discretion of the responsible ACT public servants to ensure that the most appropriate method is utilised.

Wage discrimination remains one of the most precise measures of gender inequality that we have. However, gender inequality is multifaceted, and any serious attempts to understand and respond to it by government need to reflect that. By creating an environment in which data is more refined, this motion aids in addressing the gender pay gap. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (3.21): I am pleased to rise to speak to Ms Orr's motion today, and I thank her for bringing forward this important motion which seeks to recognise the ongoing struggles that women face in being treated equally at work. It is right and proper for this Assembly to note this struggle because these actions are vital to ensure continued progress on this gendered issue. Ms Orr's motion assists in this quite practically by changing the reporting requirements for the public service by increasing the detail of gender pay gap reporting.

The issue of the gender pay gap is a fight that has been going on for a long time. Since at least the 1970s Australian women have been pushing for the right to equal pay for equal work. While there has been progress, there is still a long way to go. As the motion notes, there has been a reduction in the gap from November 2014, from 18.4 per cent to 14.2 per cent. The situation in the ACT is even slightly better, with the gap being lower, at 7.9 per cent. However, in 2021 women, on average, still have to work an additional two months to make up the gender pay gap.

Just imagine two people doing the same job for pretty much the same length of time—he gets to sit on the beach or by the pool for two months drinking cocktails and reading a book and having a lovely time while she has to continue working to make up the gender pay gap. Any gap is unacceptable. Women work just as hard and deserve to be compensated as such.

There are some reasons why the gender pay gap continues to exist and, of course, the primary factor is discrimination based on gender. This could be conscious or unconscious, through hiring decisions or the undervaluation of careers, who are traditionally seen more as feminine. As we heard from Ms Orr, these may be categorised more as the unskilled or soft-skilled careers and occupations.

Another factor is that women traditionally take on the lion's share of society's unpaid caring and domestic work. One issue which an increase in data collection could help to identify is where there is a need for more flexible or family friendly policies that could be implemented to accommodate women who may take the major caring role in their families and to encourage men to participate more and undertake an equal distribution of this work.

It is important to note that there has been a slight increase this year in the gender pay gap nationally, primarily because the growth of wages of men has outstripped that of women for the second time since 2014. Women have also been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and this can also be reflected in the gender pay gap. We have heard from many sources that COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on traditionally female-dominated industries and working patterns such as casual and part-time work. There must be recognition of this impact and steps taken to mitigate it.

Female-dominated industries have often been seen as less valued, and the pay reflects that. But we must value these professions to the same standard as male-dominated professions and ensure that they are supported as such. An example of this, I will move from the public service, which is the thrust of Ms Orr's motion, to mention the community sector, where women make up more than 70 per cent of the workforce in an industry with one of the largest pay gaps at almost 35 per cent.

I recently read an article by a senior policy officer from ACTCOSS, Gemma Killen, which detailed the story of Jane, an ACT woman who moved to the community sector because it aligned with her values. Reflecting on her experience, Jane said:

The whole underfunding of the sector creates this inflamed feeling like everything is squeezed and on fire and the scarcity mindset from widespread competitive tendering means there is not much room for empathy in the workplace. Under-resourcing took so many forms, not enough workers, not enough pay, lack of robust conditions to keep you safe and well and competent. It is not just money, it is architecture, the lack of robust HR systems or ergonomic setups, not enough space or natural light.

Despite the ACT having one of the lowest gender pay gaps in the country, when Jane, in this example, left the community sector and entered into employment in a male-dominated workplace, her annual salary increased by \$15,000, her super contributions doubled and she was provided with reasonable working hours and study leave. As I said, as Ms Orr's motion specifically relates to the ACT public service, I thought it would be prudent to highlight other sectors where we still have a way to go on reducing the gender pay gap.

There must also be recognition that the gender pay gap does not just affect those who identify as male or female, but non-binary and gender diverse people are also affected by the gender pay gap. There is not a lot of data on this, so I wonder what steps may be taken to find out more about what the situation is for this cohort. This motion calls on data to be collected on women from diverse groups who are often more disadvantaged, and this is very important, as I have said. But we could also think about greater understanding of how gender diverse people experience the pay gap. Like women, they often experience disadvantages in the workforce. In order to better solve these issues, it is vital to understand what those issues are.

Nevertheless, this motion requests an important expansion of data collection, which I hope will assist in better understanding the issues surrounding the gender pay gap and inevitably moving towards closing the gender pay gap. You cannot fix it if you do not know what you are trying to fix, if you are not measuring it and collecting data, so reporting is important. That is why the Canberra Liberals are pleased to support Ms Orr's motion today.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (3.28): I am pleased to support Ms Orr's motion, too. This motion requires the ACT government to keep better data on the gender pay gap. This data is really important because you cannot fix what you cannot see. That is why the Greens asked to include some extra data in this motion, and I am really pleased to see that we will be getting future methods that will collect intersectional data on women in diverse groups. We need to make sure that we are considering those who are twice vulnerable—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, and women with a disability. We will also be getting future data on how women's pay is impacted by part-time and casual working arrangements.

We know the gender gap is there; this motion makes it really clear. The gender pay gap in the ACT is 7.9 per cent. This is better than the national gender pay gap, but it still does not look like equality to me and it does not draw attention to the fact that women are much more likely than men to be accessing flexible work or part-time hours. Women work fewer hours due to caring responsibilities. Nationally, if those reduced hours were included in the calculation the gender pay gap would be over 30 per cent. I do not know what it is in the ACT because we do not yet report on it.

In CMTEDD almost 85 per cent of part-time employees are women. Part-time hours and flexible work are fantastic, and it is crucially important that our employees have access to that. I have worked flexible hours for most of my career, but in practice many women take on fewer hours not because they choose to but because they have higher caring responsibilities than men.

That has been particularly true during COVID and remote schooling. This means that women's take-home pay, the dollars actually going into their accounts each fortnight, is much less than our standardised data shows. This also has implications for superannuation. Thanks to the wonder of compounding interest, women are penalised twice—once when they earn less money to take time off to care for their families and once again when they retire and find they have 47 per cent less superannuation than men.

Why do men not access flexible work and share the burden as much as women? It is partly a cultural thing. They do not because they never have. That is a consequence of our male breadwinner model of industrial regulation. Our workplaces were historically hostile to flexible work, and that meant a key support was missing for working parents and carers. Because of this hostility many people, including men, do not even ask for flexible work.

That could be one good thing that comes out of COVID—workplaces have been able to see that our workers can be productive at home and men can see the benefit of flexible work which allows them to spend time at home with their families. They can share more of the housework and more of the child care and they can spend more time with loved ones.

That has certainly been the case in my family since I became a politician. My partner has switched to part-time work so that he can look after our daughter, he can do the cooking, and he can take care of our house and garden. It is the only way I could manage this job that I have right now, and it has brought a father and a daughter closer together. Equality really does help everyone.

So let's pass this motion and collect good data on our employees, but let's not stop there. We need to change our culture. We need to encourage men to access flexible work and put in workplace policies and a culture that supports them. Let's make shared housework and shared child care the norm at home. Let's support women to earn, work and play, as well as caring for their loved ones and doing the housework. That is when we will really start to see the gender pay gap close.

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (3.32): I thank Ms Orr for her motion and for her commitment to continuously improving the gender pay gap in the ACT public service. This is an important motion, and the government is dedicated to furthering gender equality in our community. The full participation of women and girls in all aspects of society is critical to the wellbeing of our whole community.

As an employer, this government leads by example. We are committed to furthering the cause of gender equality in our workforce. This is demonstrated in a range of activities and initiatives. For example, from 2022-23 it will be a requirement that agencies report on gender action plans and gender impact assessments in their annual reports. Tangible action and transparent reporting are key elements in advancing this goal.

Within the ACTPS, the Office for Women runs the ACT Public Service Women's Mentoring Program, which was launched in 2019. The second iteration of the program is currently underway. The program contributes to fostering a culture within the ACT public service that values shared knowledge, learning from each other, collaboration and building confidence in women. This program prioritises women from diverse backgrounds. Programs like these are concrete action that the

government has taken to address the gender pay gap in the ACTPS by actively building the skills of women and improving their opportunities for professional development.

This important work is being led by my colleagues, including the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister. I acknowledge Minister Berry's dedication to this work—it is admirable. Together we are working to support a public service that provides equal opportunity for everyone.

The government has made significant progress in reducing the gender pay gap for its workforce. As Ms Orr notes, 65 per cent of the ACTPS workforce is female and the gender pay gap has reached a low of 0.9 per cent. This compares to 7.9 per cent in the ACT labour force and 14.2 per cent in the Australian labour force.

The ACT public service is a frontrunner in providing a workforce where the contributions of people of all genders are valued and paid equally. The importance of this achievement cannot be overstated. However, while much good has been done, there remains much to do. Although the gender pay gap is very low across the ACTPS, differences remain in the experiences of female public servants.

Women at different classification levels in different directorates who identify with different diversity groups may face different outcomes in the workplace. Women in part-time and casual employment may also experience different challenges from women in full time ACT public service employment.

There is more to be done to remove barriers and decrease the gender pay gap for all employees. Better data capture, as we have heard, which identifies more clearly how different groups are affected by the gender pay gap, is crucial. The government is committed to improving outcomes for all women, including women with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Improving reporting on relevant data is important in ensuring that there is continuing progress against the gender pay gap for all women in the ACTPS. The government is considering improvements to how gender pay data is reported on in the *State of the service report*.

In a time of fast-paced transformational change, where wellbeing, agility and flexibility will contribute to high performance and sustainability, our future focus will be not only on workforce capability but on embracing new directions on work design, work-life balance, strategies that harness potential and rethinking how we work in teams. This will be crucial in changing how we think about work for all employees, including women, going forward.

The ACTPS has been increasingly adopting flexible work practices since 2015, and the public service continues to drive its aspiration to be the most progressive jurisdiction in Australia with regard to flexible working, for the benefit of our employees and the ACT community.

Embedding flexible work arrangements has created more opportunities for workforce participation, including for women at a different life and career stage. Where possible, we have removed barriers for staff to work from home. For office workers we have moved away from desktop computers to mobile devices to maximise options for staff to choose the working location that best supports their task.

Women in the ACT public service have access to a wide range of flexible working options across various sectors. For many, the ability to work remotely or from a location of their choosing means that there is much more flexibility in when and how women can engage with work.

The implementation of the hub-and-spoke office model across the territory, and the creation of flexi-offices in our regional town centres, presents further opportunities by providing fully equipped working locations in the regions where our employees live. Combined with access to remote working, the accessibility of these flexi-offices can reduce the time spent commuting and better manage combinations of work, school, caring and other responsibilities.

For those who are unable to undertake flexible working arrangements, such as those working in health care, education and other frontline services, we are committed to ensuring that workplaces are as accommodating as possible and that women are given equal opportunity to succeed.

The government also recognises that secure employment is crucial in ensuring women's economic security. The ACT government has an ambitious program of reform designed to implement more secure employment within the ACT public sector.

The government is committed to providing a secure employment framework, which is a key deliverable of the government's election campaign commitments regarding the use of privatised services and plays a role in shaping how we deliver the work of the ACT public sector into the future. This complements the work of the Insecure Work Taskforce within the ACT public sector enterprise agreement, favouring internal employment. I am incredibly proud of the work we have already achieved through the Insecure Work Taskforce, and I am looking forward to delivering this key legislative commitment of a Labor government.

Across the Australian workforce, women are disproportionately affected by insecure work. This work is crucial in addressing the gender pay gap. Work undertaken by the government to reduce the gender pay gap is, of course, not limited to the ACT public service. This government is working across the community to decrease gender inequality.

The Second Action Plan 2020-22 of the ACT Women's Plan includes a number of actions focused on increasing workforce participation, particularly in traditionally male-dominated industries. Supporting more women in construction roles is currently a major focus. Data from the last census tells us that women made up only 2.4 per cent of people working in carpentry, plumbing, electrical, automotive and telecommunication trades in the ACT. Data like this is why increasing the

participation of women in the construction industry is so important and why it is a focus of the Second Action Plan.

The Office for Women is currently working collaboratively across directorates, as well as with industry, peak bodies and unions, to deliver actions focused on women in construction and to make progress against the target for 10 per cent female employment in the construction industry in the ACT, which was set as part of the Second Action Plan.

The government is also helping women who have experienced a break in work to gain secure employment. The ACT Women's Return to Work Program is an ACT government initiative that assists women to achieve increased financial independence by helping them to prepare for and obtain and maintain employment. The program is targeted towards women who have been away from paid work for an extended time due to caring responsibilities and who may experience significant barriers when they try to re-enter the workforce. Individual grants of \$1,000 are available for women who meet the eligibility criteria. The program is designed to provide funding for training and education, to develop job research skills and to access related resources to support women to return to work. This can include childcare expenses.

We all know that the gaps also contribute to problems later in life for women who are looking to retire, as we have heard, with little superannuation. I am committed to ensuring that our public servants receive equitable access across superannuation.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (3.42): I start by thanking Ms Orr for highlighting the impact and pervasiveness of the gender pay gap. This is especially important during the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as many of the sectors that are most essential and at the forefront of the pandemic response are dominated by women who are also bearing the brunt of increased unpaid work and responsibilities. Also relevant in this context is the concentration of women in undervalued and insecure work such as cleaning and hospitality.

This year's ACT Woman of the Year, Sonam Choden, reminded us all of the reality as she protested alongside other United Workers Union members for fair remuneration for women employed as essential workers at Calvary Public Hospital during the pandemic last year. Sonam is an incredible woman who has brought about awareness that women have been disproportionately affected by COVID and who has advanced gender equality and respect for migrant women in her own workplace.

I was really pleased to hear Ms Lawder refer to community service workers in the ACT, particularly around the equal remuneration order that was put in place by the Fair Work Commission to provide better pay for women working in that sector, acknowledging that it was and is a female-dominated sector. The ACT government was one of the first governments to implement that pay and continues to provide that pay in the ACT to ensure that those workers get more equal pay.

The same could not be said for those in the early childhood education and care sector, who, unfortunately, have been fighting for decades to have their work recognised, respected and valued. It has been important for the economic viability of this country for the early childhood workforce to continue to work during a health pandemic so that the rest of us could go to work while our children were in care and education within those services. Not only are the wages significantly lower than a male-dominated workplace with the same kinds of qualifications but the regulatory work, the administration work, the work they do and how much they have to implement within their early childhood education and care spaces is just not recognised or valued through their wages.

I am continually disappointed that that workforce, which is so obviously female dominated, with something like 98 per cent of the workforce being women, can still not be recognised as valued in our community as early childhood educators. These are not childcare workers who wipe noses or bottoms; these are dedicated, experienced, qualified workers who do important work so that the rest of the women and families in our community can go to work as well.

Unfortunately, because of low wages, they have to make decisions that mean they leave the sector, a sector that is crying out for more workers, because not only can they not afford to live in their own homes but they cannot even afford to have their own children in the services that they provide the early childhood education and care for. I continue to stand beside those workers and implore the federal government and the Fair Work Commission to consider those pay cases and resolve the inequality of the wages in that workforce.

As Minister Gentleman as pointed out, the ACT government is absolutely committed to reducing gender inequality, including in its own workforce. Ms Orr notes in her motion that this is reflected in the higher female participation rates and lower gender pay gap.

Minister Gentleman referred to some of the work that the ACT Office for Women is doing around construction. Making sure that we have more women in construction is one thing, but making sure that there is a significant culture change within that workforce as well so that female workers are accepted and welcomed into those workplaces, one that recognises that they can do the work and are paid appropriately for that work, is important. The ACT Office for Women is working with unions and across government and with employers to make sure that that becomes a reality for young people to see what they can be one day.

We have been working, through the ACT Women's Plan, around the range of actions and objectives in that space, fostering gender equity in Canberra workplaces, which includes improved gender equality in leadership as well as workforce participation. Our year 1 reporting on the status of actions as at December 2020 stated that all of the actions under this objective are already underway, so that is really good news for the action plan and the ACT.

Some of the actions included in the plan include to investigate options for a pilot project to deliver an ACT capital works project worth more than \$5 million where tenderers must have a 100 per cent female site management team, and female participation in each trade subcontractor undertaking work on that project. That is a significant challenge, but what a great outcome if we can achieve that together.

Other actions include improving the representation of women on governance bodies that receive ACT government funding, through a set target of representation for boards receiving artsACT funding, similar to the program we put in place for sports boards, where there must be at least 40 per cent of female representation, otherwise their funding will be affected. One hundred per cent of our sports organisations have been able to achieve that target, despite some people saying that it could not be done and that women could not possibly have the experience or the expertise to be in those roles.

Another action is to develop and promote a series of e-learning modules on workplace rights, unconscious bias in recruitment, flexible working for women and men, gender impact analysis and gender equality strategies.

There is a lot of work to be done to address gender inequality in our community, in this country and in the world. I welcome the conversation we have had in the Assembly today and I continue to support that work, as I know Ms Orr's motion further commits to. The journey for gender equality is a long one, but we have already proven that it is not impossible.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (3.49), by leave: I move:

Add:

“(iii) a breakdown of the pay gap experienced by non-binary and gender-diverse people from diverse groups (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, Culturally and Linguistically diverse and people with a disability).”.

During my previous comments I noted that it would be very interesting to ensure that gender diverse people in the public service and those who identify as non-binary could also have data collected, because we hear, anecdotally, that they also have lower pay rates. My amendment asks that this be included in the data reporting of Ms Orr's motion.

It is new paragraph (2)(c)(iii); it is very similar to paragraph (2)(c)(ii) and asks for a breakdown of the pay gap experienced by non-binary and gender diverse people from diverse groups, including Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, culturally and linguistically diverse people and people with a disability.

It just adds one more facet to the data collection. Again, you cannot fix what you do not know. Collecting this data will give us more information to determine what may be happening for this cohort and, therefore, what steps could be taken. I commend the amendment to the Assembly.

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (3.51): I thank members for their contributions. It is really positive to see all of us furiously agreeing—that is always a pleasant experience in this chamber. I also thank Ms Lawder for her amendment, which, of course, I support. It is a positive to be looking at how we can start to identify more ways that we can improve pay and ensure that everyone is getting equal pay for the equal work they are doing. I will leave it at that.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Cost of living—government programs**

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (3.52): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) 2021 Cost of Living Report, which highlights steep increases to cost of living as a driving factor for high rates of poverty in the ACT, including:
  - (i) 27.7 percent increase to electricity costs over five years;
  - (ii) 26.2 percent increase to gas costs over five years;
  - (iii) 18.6 percent increase to health costs over five years;
  - (iv) 18 percent increase to education costs over five years; and
  - (v) 15.7 percent increase to housing costs over five years;
- (b) that ACTCOSS estimates 38 000 Canberrans are living in poverty, including 9300 children, which equates to nine percent of the total population;
- (c) that the loss of work due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ACT lockdown have disproportionately affected the Canberrans living in poverty; and
- (d) the last review of the ACT Concessions Program was in 2017; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) recognise that many Canberra families have, for many years, been subjected to increased cost of living pressures that have been exacerbated by the economic impacts of COVID-19;
- (b) recognise the significant economic value and direct role the community services sector plays in improving the wellbeing of all Canberrans;
- (c) undertake a full review of the purpose, adequacy, fairness and impacts of the ACT Targeted Assistance Strategy to ensure concessions are targeted to need, by June 2022; and
- (d) report to the Assembly on progress of the review in March 2022.

12 August 2021 was a big day in Canberra. With very little warning, we were plunged into a short, sharp, seven-day lockdown that we are, of course, still in.

On the same day, the ACT Council of Social Service, or ACTCOSS as they are better known, released their annual cost of living report which tracks changes in the cost of living for low income households in the Australian Capital Territory over the previous 12 months. This report did not receive the attention it deserved due to the chaos and panic generated by the lockdown announcement. My motion in this place today is to shine a light on the ACTCOSS report and the shocking statistics it contains regarding people living in our community.

Whilst Canberra does continue to seemingly have the highest average indicators for income, education and employment, the report identified that more than 8,000 Canberra households are experiencing poverty now than before the pandemic. Over the last five years of this ACT Labor-Greens government, Canberrans have seen the prices of several essential goods and services increase significantly and at rates above the overall CPI for Canberra and nationally. These include: electricity, a 28 per cent increase; gas, a 31 per cent increase; health, an 18.6 per cent increase; medical and hospital services, a 28 per cent increase; education, an 18 per cent increase; housing, a 15.7 per cent increase—with the ANZ forecasting Canberra house prices are expected to grow at the highest rate of any Australian capital city this year, at a staggering 24 per cent—meat and seafood, a 13.4 per cent increase; and fruit and vegetables, an 11.6 per cent increase.

Behind these statistics are some even more distressing facts. We now have over 38,000 people categorised as living in poverty, including over 9,000 children, which equates to almost nine per cent of our total population. We have rough sleepers on a regular basis, some within metres of the Legislative Assembly. We have over 25,000 people in low income households who are experiencing food stress, around 43 per cent of low income rental households that are in rental stress and about 9,000 children living in low income households who routinely go without many essentials in schooling, food and social activities.

Behind these statistics, Mr Assistant Speaker, are real people, real Canberrans, who are forced to make tough decisions about how and when they heat their homes, how often they access medical and health services and on what days they have to skip meals so that they can afford to pay their energy bills. One of my constituents in Braddon wrote to me and said:

I am an aged pensioner. I have reduced my electricity plan as much as possible. I pay by direct debit and check that I have all appropriate concessions. I am careful with my use of electricity; mainly heating one area of my unit. I only heat my bedroom if I am ill. Currently I am on a frugal plan, being \$16 per fortnight. Upon receiving the letter about the changes, I estimated my new payment could be as much as \$68 per fortnight. I was shocked at the amount of likely increase, which will of course have to come out of my age pension.

Letters like these are enough to break anyone's heart. Imagine your mother or your grandmother having to sit shivering on the couch under a blanket because her electricity prices have increased by almost 30 per cent. It is shameful. In response to the increase in energy prices, a constituent in Chisholm contacted me to say:

It's okay, I will just not turn my heating on for a few nights per week and sit here freezing to death, or maybe just miss a few meals each week so I can afford my energy bills.

And another:

While most other states are enjoying decreases in the cost of electricity, we are to suffer an average increase of \$200, with the cost to businesses to increase by an average of \$1000 per annum. The cost of living in the ACT is becoming prohibitive. It's basically going to push me away to New South Wales.

Canberra has the unenviable title of being the most expensive city in Australia to rent. ACTCOSS's analysis of consumer price index data showed Canberra rent costs rose by 10.1 per cent in five years whilst rent costs rose by one per cent nationally. This time last year we were discussing the fact that the ACT was the only state or territory across the nation where rental affordability declined—another unenviable title that Canberra holds.

Anglicare's annual rental affordability snapshot of April 2021 found that, of 1,085 advertised rentals in Canberra and Queanbeyan on a random weekend, just five properties met the criteria for a family receiving JobSeeker payments; four properties for a single parent with two children receiving parenting payments; seven properties were affordable for a single person on a disability support pension; and zero affordable properties for a single person receiving youth allowance, including a share house.

Canberra's median house price is now the highest in our history, cracking the \$1 million mark in July this year. One of my constituents in Griffith wrote to me, saying:

I am a lifelong Canberran who would love to buy a home and start a family here. What is this government going to do to make sure people of my generation stand a chance at the kind of life that previous generations of Canberrans have enjoyed?

We know that there are members of our community who are more at risk of poverty: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans; people from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds; people with a disability; older people over 65; women; people experiencing unemployment; Canberrans on income support; people who rent their homes; single parents, particularly single female parents; and low paid workers or people in part-time work.

As I stated in this chamber earlier in the year when I called on this government to establish the poverty task force, much of what I have talked about this afternoon has been known for decades. There has been a steady increase in the number of people experiencing poverty and disadvantage in the two decades under this ACT Labor-Greens government.

They introduced the ACT Targeted Assistance Strategy in 2011 and it has not been updated or reviewed appropriately since. The strategy is designed to ensure that those who are vulnerable and in need receive the support that they need to reach their full potential. Canberra should be a socially inclusive, fair and equitable community. However, the facts outlined above indicate that we have a long way to go before we live up to that vision.

A review of the strategy should cover the purpose, adequacy, fairness and impacts of the strategy so that Canberrans can be sure that their taxpayer dollars are going to those who need it most and those who need it most are getting the support that they need. I note that Mr Braddock has a similar motion on the notice paper for tomorrow, so I look forward to receiving the Greens support for this motion.

Before I conclude, I personally acknowledge the incredible contribution the community sector has made on the front lines of the COVID-19 outbreak, supporting so many Canberrans in need. The Canberra Liberals welcome the government's long overdue funding boost to this critically important sector, but as is always the case, of course, we will need to delve into the detail to ensure that that boost is genuinely that, a boost, and not old money rehashed and repackaged.

Our community sector organisations have seen an enormous increase in demand for assistance during the current COVID-19 outbreak. This much-needed funding will support the sector that has been trying to do much more with too little for too long. Whilst the additional funding will go some way to ensuring the sustainability of the sector, more needs to be done. That is why I bring my motion to the Assembly today. Mr Deputy Speaker, I commend my motion to the Assembly.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (4.02): I move:

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

- “(a) Canberrans enjoy, overall, a high standard of living, with access to free high-quality healthcare, free quality public education, and well planned and delivered infrastructure;
- (b) the ACT unemployment rate remains one of the lowest rates in Australia;
- (c) the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a growth in inequality around the world, and Australia and the ACT have not been immune to this global trend; and
- (d) the Commonwealth Government's refusal to reinstate the JobSeeker scheme in 2021, and its insistence on imminently halting COVID-specific support payments despite an ongoing COVID-19 outbreak in the ACT, have and will hurt many Canberrans reliant on them to cover essential living costs;

(2) also notes that, over the past year, the ACT Government has focussed on:

- (a) protecting the health of the community through a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic and a significant local outbreak of COVID-19;
  - (b) running an effective and efficient mass vaccination program to reach as close to 100 percent COVID-19 vaccination rate for the eligible ACT population as possible;
  - (c) supporting our most vulnerable through the pandemic and its associated economic effects; and
  - (d) fostering a strong economic recovery to create more secure and well paid jobs, as one of the best ways to address inequality in the community;
- (3) further notes the ACT Government is directly addressing inequality and hardship through the pandemic by, amongst other measures:
- (a) establishing the largest business support grants program in the ACT's history to keep local small businesses afloat;
  - (b) introducing a rental eviction moratorium for impacted residential tenants as well as additional rental support for residential and commercial tenants and landlords;
  - (c) increasing the utilities concession by over 40 percent, from \$700 to \$1000 a year;
  - (d) making thousands of free training places available so that school leavers, the unemployed, and those looking to upskill are able to train for a new job;
  - (e) funding for community and support groups to keep more Canberrans who are at risk of homelessness, or handling mental health issues, in secure and safe accommodation, and provide the support they need;
  - (f) investing \$100 million to increase and improve affordable and public housing, one of the single largest housing investments in the ACT's history;
  - (g) providing additional funding to legal aid and community legal centres to support the crucial services they provide to disadvantaged members of the community;
  - (h) providing funding to establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner to help end the adverse experiences of young First Nations people in ACT child protection; and
  - (i) providing additional funding to community sector organisations providing emergency food relief for those in need;
- (4) further notes, the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement commits the ACT Government to a range of measures to target the complex and intersecting causes of poverty, including:
- (a) reviewing and increasing funding for the community sector;
  - (b) increasing emergency accommodation funding;
  - (c) expanding specialist homelessness service capacity;
  - (d) improving the extended care system for 18 to 21-year olds in the out of home care system; and

- (e) amending the Rental Tenancies Act to end no cause evictions and to make other improvements for people who rent;
- (5) finally notes that, over the past five years, the Government has instituted a range of measures to reduce daily costs on homebuyers, households and businesses, such as:
  - (a) continuing the expansion of the Nurse-Led Walk-In and Health Centre network across the ACT, to provide free medical treatment for Canberra families;
  - (b) establishing the \$150 million Sustainable Household Scheme so that Canberrans can access interest-free loans to install solar panels and heat pumps and reduce their electricity bills;
  - (c) abolishing stamp duty for eligible first home buyers;
  - (d) setting the payroll tax threshold at the highest in the country, meaning most ACT businesses pay no payroll tax;
  - (e) continuing to provide Chromebooks to ACT public school students in Years 7 to 12, saving parents and carers hundreds of dollars; and
  - (f) establishing the Motor Accident Injury Scheme to drive down premiums and improve access to support for injured drivers; and
- (6) calls on the ACT Government to:
  - (a) use every tool at its disposal to foster a strong and fair economic recovery from the pandemic-induced economic downturn, while continuing to address day-to-day cost stresses; and
  - (b) review and update the ACT's Targeted Assistance Strategy in the first half of 2022, with potential measures to be considered as part of the 2022-23 Budget."

I am speaking to this motion partially on behalf of the Chief Minister, who is getting ready to deliver his budget this afternoon, and I will add some comments of my own at the end if I get time. I think we all recognise that Canberra is a great place to live. It is a great place to work and raise a family. Over the last 20 years, the ACT government has made a significant contribution to ensuring Canberrans enjoy some of the highest living standards anywhere in the world. Canberrans earn above average household income, and our unemployment rate is among the lowest in the country at 3.5 per cent.

Our focus has and will continue to be on creating more well-paid and secure jobs, whatever occupation people want to enter, because getting people trained and into a good job is a great way to reduce inequality. But we recognise that that does not tell the full story and that there are many Canberrans doing it tough. Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a growth in inequality around the world. Australia—and, of course, the ACT—has not been immune to that. COVID-19 outbreaks and associated lockdowns here and interstate have created job losses and closures of businesses across Australia, as well as here in the ACT.

Our focus through this time, and particularly during our lockdown, has been to do everything we can to keep Canberrans healthy and safe. That means listening to

expert health advice and investing in our vaccine rollout and health system, not paying attention to inexpert senators or members demanding that we put Canberrans at risk.

We are also continuing to deliver the infrastructure and services that our city needs and, while doing that, creating thousands of local jobs. We have a world-class public healthcare system, which we are growing and improving with the Canberra Hospital expansion, the recruitment of more healthcare professionals and increased resources in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are continuing to make significant investments in our public education system, including building and upgrading our schools and supporting our most vulnerable students. We successfully built the light rail line from Gungahlin to the city and we are getting on with extending the light rail network to Woden so that more Canberrans can benefit from our public transport network.

We are continuing to invest in new and refurbished public housing, with the ACT investing the greatest amount per capita of any state or territory in Australia, including a \$100 million investment announced today. We are also investing in climate action, including the ACT government's sustainable household scheme, so that more Canberrans can share in the cost-benefits of a zero emissions future. We are delivering a range of other infrastructure investments, big and small, across our community.

We recognise that Canberrans are struggling with their health and finances. The ACT government will continue to provide support to those who need it most, including those Canberrans significantly impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak in the ACT. The ACT government has delivered a range of cost-of-living measures, including utilities concessions. The government is providing additional support to those households most in need, including an additional \$250 rebate to the around 31,000 low income households that receive the utilities concession, to bring the total concession to \$1,000 in 2021-22, and an ongoing \$50 increase to the pensioner rates rebate.

In relation to residential tenancy relief, the government is also providing a land tax credit of up to \$100 a week to residential landlords who provide rent relief between 1 August 2021 and 31 December 2021 to tenants impacted by COVID-19. With rates deferral, assistance is available for eligible home owners experiencing financial hardship as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown, commencing on 12 August 2021. Eligible ratepayers can defer their first instalment payment for the 2021-22 financial year interest-free for up to three months on their principal place of residence.

The ACT government will extend contracts for over 110 staff in the Jobs for Canberrans program. This highly successful program has supported our COVID-19 response and provided employment opportunities for over 500 people to work in the ACT public services in areas like City Services, Access Canberra, Health, and Education. The government has also extended for a further six weeks all other public sector temporary employment contracts due to expire.

Canberrans unable to work while in isolation and awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test may also be able to access the \$270 COVID-19 test hardship isolation payment. For businesses, the ACT government and the commonwealth government are jointly funding COVID-19 business support grants of up to \$20,000 to eligible employing businesses and \$7,500 to eligible non-employing businesses, plus grant extension payments for eligible businesses and top-up payments for businesses.

Mr Deputy Speaker, we are continuing to fund a range of community and support organisations so that they can accommodate and support more Canberrans who are particularly vulnerable, including those at risk of homelessness or experiencing mental health issues. All these measures are making a difference to the lives of Canberrans. Of course, the most immediate way that we can lift people out of poverty in the ACT and around Australia would be for the commonwealth to significantly increase its base support payments.

It is now time for the Canberra Liberals to join with the ACT government to get the coalition government to reinstate the JobSeeker scheme this year and to make sure that the payment for JobSeeker remains at the rate it was last year so that people can have a chance to broaden their horizons, lift themselves out of poverty and have a decent crack at happiness like the rest of us have a chance to. Our call today to Ms Lee and the Canberra Liberals is to join us to lobby their federal colleagues, including the federal Treasurer, because the federal cut-off has and will hurt many more Canberrans who rely on this extra support to cover essential living costs.

The ACT government will continue to use every single tool that it has at its disposal to foster a strong, fair, economic recovery from a pandemic-induced economic downturn while continuing to address the day-to-day costs and stresses that Canberrans are facing. We have seen the ACT government's pre-budget announcements with regard to support and equity payments within ACT government schools around providing a trial for free meals in schools which, I might add, the Canberra Liberals scoffed at during the election when we made that commitment. Further to that, we are increasing an equity payment for students and families who need that essential support for school uniforms and other supplies.

We are continuing the provision of free Chromebooks to senior secondary students from year 7 to year 12 to assist them in their schools, to remove the financial burden from families and to relieve the troubleshooting that teachers have to do across a number of devices. The pre-budget announcement included wi-fi access for those families who need it, which will not just support the young person in their education but also the family in being able to access wi-fi as well.

We have also announced \$80 million in maintenance for our public housing. We are continuing to grow and renew public housing all across the ACT, as progressive governments do. I think that the penny might just have dropped for the Canberra Liberals: this is what progressive governments do, and this is what the ACT government is delivering on. It is delivering on our housing strategy to make sure that we renew, grow and maintain our public housing and, in addition to that, make sure that our public education system supports young people and their families,

particularly those who do not have the same chances as the rest of us, so that they have an equal chance at a great education in their life, and what flows from it. I commend my amendment to the Assembly and I look forward to hearing future contributions to this conversation.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (4.12): I welcome Ms Lee bringing this discussion forward this afternoon because it is one that this Assembly should be thinking about. Ms Lee is right that poverty is a critical issue for this Assembly to focus on and take measures to address. We have between about five and 12 per cent of people in the ACT living below the poverty line. These are mostly people reliant on social security payments and the variation in the rate occurs primarily based on the level of their social security payments.

These are people that have their opportunities in society significantly limited. They can struggle to access the basic needs of life that most of us take for granted. There are a range of concomitant effects, such as worse health outcomes and the passing of an intergenerational disadvantage. This issue, of course, is a key focus for the Greens as a party, and you will see this ethos in our election commitments, our policy platform and the initiatives we have brought to the parliamentary and governing agreement and that we have always brought to this Assembly.

The ACT government has a range of initiatives and programs that are designed to assist people living in poverty—everything from social and health programs, programs that support housing options and programs focusing on disability and mental health. Poverty is a complex issue. It is multifaceted, and it is hard to tackle from one angle alone. Poverty intersects with a range of issues like health, gender, violence and issues affecting First Nations community members.

When it comes to initiatives that can make the most significant difference to poverty, this is quite clearly through income support. Income support has a direct impact and supports people to have choice and control over their lives in a more direct manner than many other government programs. That income support is the responsibility of the commonwealth. This is an issue that Ms Lee's motion does not recognise. Social security payments and other support payments are critical to the levels of poverty and housing stress faced by people in the ACT.

The biggest levers of poverty in our city are actually controlled by the commonwealth government. Inadequate policies on JobSeeker and other welfare payments, capital gains tax discounts, negative gearing, inadequate funding for primary health care through the Medicare benefits scheme and inadequate funding for the specialist homelessness sector are all in the federal government's control and have significant impacts on the extent of poverty and social inclusion in Canberra.

This is a view well-supported by experts. We have all heard the Chief Minister mention the work done by the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods, which examined the impacts on poverty and housing stress of different policies. It found that the poverty gap lowered significantly when the COVID-supplemented JobSeeker was at its maximum rate. Similarly, it found that increasing the social security payments

had the greatest impact in lifting people out of poverty for people on Newstart or youth allowance.

ACTCOSS finds essentially the same in its cost of living report. During the period from 27 April 2020 to 24 September 2020 the Australian government introduced the coronavirus supplement at a rate of \$550 per fortnight, which was effectively doubling the rate of the JobSeeker payment, lifting it above the poverty line. It was estimated that, alongside JobKeeper, the \$550 per fortnight coronavirus supplement saw the ACT's poverty rate drop to 5.2 per cent in June 2020, well below the pre-COVID poverty rate.

ACTCOSS points out that, by October 2020, JobSeeker had returned to below the poverty line as the coronavirus supplement was reduced to \$250 per fortnight. It was estimated that the poverty rate in the ACT subsequently increased to approximately nine per cent, representing an estimated 38,300 Canberrans. That is an extraordinary change in just a couple of months of only four percentage points. That key issue of social security payments of a person's income has the most direct and significant effect on the poverty rate in the ACT and on tens of thousands of people's opportunities in Canberra. This is why you will see us, and so many others who work with the community and particularly with disadvantaged people, fighting to raise the rate.

It is the reason my federal colleagues are talking about the need for tax reform in this country. We are a wealthy country. We have the means to provide a decent income for everyone in this country. It is a matter of political choice. At a federal level we need to take decisions not to give those on the highest incomes tax cuts but to actually tax them at a fair rate and use that as an opportunity to help lift so many Australians out of poverty.

Of course, the ACT government can and should take actions. I will briefly touch on some of the many actions that this government is taking to address the difficult issue of poverty through the parliamentary and governing agreement between Labor and the Greens, as well as a range of specific new measures in response to the pandemic and the recent requirements for lockdown.

Addressing inequality is a major focus of the parliamentary and governing agreement and the government's actions in this Assembly. My colleagues have talked to me similarly about these before. Let me just list some of those PAGA items. They include a plan to review increased funding for the community sector; increased emergency accommodation funding through OneLink; expanded specialist homelessness service capacity; expanding the number of properties that can access assistance under the affordable community and housing land tax exemption pilot; and an improved extended care system for 18- to 21-year-olds in the out of home care system.

As Minister Davidson discussed in the Assembly recently, these are policies that reflect the nuanced understanding of the intersecting causes of poverty in the territory. They include the relationships between poverty and health, gender, violence and issues affecting First Nations community members.

Since the last time we discussed this issue, there have been several significant announcements made about initiatives to assist people suffering poverty or at risk of poverty. As has been announced by the Chief Minister, Minister Berry and Minister Vassarotti, this budget will contain a \$100 million investment in community and affordable housing. This is one of the single largest investments to increase and improve the amount of affordable and public housing in the history of self-government.

The intent of this package is to provide essential housing for low income Canberrans at risk of homelessness. This, of course, reflects the parliamentary and governing agreement, which has captured a key plank of our election campaign, which was housing and a home for all. The package includes investment in public housing maintenance, growing and renewing the public housing program and the development of long-term rental accommodation options through the build-to-rent model.

We are currently out for consultation about how we can ban no-cause evictions and also to put in a legislative ban on rent bidding. The insidious process of rent bidding can prey on people's desperation to get them to pay more than a landlord considers their property is worth. We think that is inappropriate, so we are engaging with the community as to how we can encourage more respect and equality of expectations in the rental market. Similarly, no-cause evictions can take away the security of having a home that everyone needs. It also puts renters at a significant disadvantage when it comes to negotiating and asserting their rights.

I also want to mention the millions of dollars in investment the government recently announced to invest in community legal centres and in legal aid. As Ms Lee has said before in a motion she brought to the Assembly, these are critical services that make a very important contribution to helping vulnerable people in the community.

Through the funding we have announced in the budget, the ACT government is actually extending COVID emergency level funding that the federal government has failed to continue. Some members might remember that debate we had earlier this year in the budget process, but this is a key priority. We have actually filled the gap that the federal government backed away from, because the COVID pandemic has not finished but the COVID funding from the commonwealth did. The demand at Canberra Community Law has not dropped. The federal government dropped its funding.

One of the terrible things about this pandemic, amongst so many terrible things, is that it highlights and exacerbates existing inequalities in society. If you are a person who is struggling, under this pandemic the chances are you are now struggling even more. The ACT government have used every lever and mechanism available to us to assist Canberrans on low incomes, from significantly increasing food relief to the eviction moratorium to more funding to temporary accommodation and homelessness services, as well as using all the mechanisms we have to provide some ongoing financial relief, such as electricity concessions.

Finally, I will just talk about the targeted assistance strategy. This is an incredibly important strategy that seeks to implement strategies for families and households facing financial pressures, particularly those not normally in receipt of government support. It was originally developed by an expert panel and it covered a range of different areas in which these families and households face pressure. In fact, the Greens—my former colleague Ms Bresnan—passed legislation implementing one of its recommendations. That was a recommendation to have flexible payment options for fines, recognising the potentially devastating and spiralling impact they could have on a person already in financial hardship. Ms Bresnan passed legislation introducing that scheme for traffic fines. Members will remember my other former colleague Ms Le Couteur also introduced legislation, which was passed, to implement the same for other offences.

We agree that it is time to review and renew that strategy. It is one of those funny quirks of a private members' business week that Mr Braddock has a motion, I think to be debated tomorrow, which also asks for this update to occur. Of course, we are supportive of that, particularly that element of Ms Lee's motion.

In agreeing with Ms Berry's amendment, we agree with the relatively fast time line in that amendment, which is to update the strategy leading up to next year's budget, with the option of funding new initiatives through the budget. I think 10 years is an appropriate amount of time to review that strategy. I look forward to that work being completed and measuring what has been achieved, contemplating, perhaps, measures that have not been completed and also looking at new measures that might be needed a decade down the track.

As I have indicated, we will be supporting Ms Berry's amendment. We welcome the discussion today. I think it is important that we reflect on these matters. I think this will be an issue, going forward, and we have to reflect very heavily on the fact that the pandemic has exacerbated inequality. Particularly in this country, those who have not been impacted have seen a range of measures that showed that they are in some ways, at least financially, better off, but those who are struggling have really had that pressure increased on them during the pandemic. That is something we all need to be mindful of as we think about the economic recovery and the social recovery as our lives start to get back to something that resembles what we are used to.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (4.24): I just want to take a moment to reflect on the fact that often we have our policy differences within this place but here we have an actual agreement. I would like it recorded as documented evidence that there are ideas that the Canberra Liberals and the ACT Greens can come to an agreement on and a targeted assistance strategy is that. I do not want to pre-empt my speech for tomorrow, although I have noticed that some of it just got stolen by my leader. I also wish to say that I have no issue with being pipped at the post as long as we achieve the outcome that we are seeking, which is the review of the targeted assistance strategy. I am fine with that. I look forward to seeing the results of the review and any follow-on government actions that come through as a result in the 2022-23 budget as well.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (4.25): I rise to speak to Ms Lee's motion and thank her for bringing it forward today. It touches on something that is very important to us all. It aims to recognise that the cost of living challenges that Canberra families are facing have only been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms Lee has put her case very well, and some other great points have also been raised. What I would like to talk about specifically now is the impact of poverty and the pandemic on older Canberrans with regard to my role as shadow minister for seniors. I note that, in her ministerial statement this morning, Minister Davidson mentioned the alarming fact that one in four older Australians is living in poverty. Mr Deputy Speaker, if you take the numbers from ACTCOSS of about 38,000 Canberrans, that gives you about 9,500 older Canberrans—the same or very similar numbers to the number of children in the ACT living in poverty.

The thought of children living in poverty is deeply distressing, I am sure, to us all. The thought that, with respect to our older Canberrans—those who have built Canberra into what it is today, who have given their working lives and a lot of their volunteer and private time to making Canberra the city it is now—many of them, one in four of them, may be living in poverty, is also very disturbing.

We often hear that older people, older Canberrans, are asset rich and cash poor. I do not like to see older people, older Canberrans, forced to sell their family home. I have heard from older Canberrans who have told me how they moved into a family home, a marital home, after their wedding. They have lived there for their whole life. One of the partners may have died and they can no longer live there. They thought they would live there forever and die in that home—a home full of memories, joyous occasions and many family events. They thought they would be able to stay there and age in place, with the support of their families and a range of government programs.

Ageing in place is something that we talk about a lot these days. The fact that this is no longer possible for many Canberrans is something that I find to be really sad. They are forced out of their family home because of the high cost of living. Many of these older Canberrans may be on a pension; they may be self-funded retirees. We are also talking about ex-service people, for example, and I know Mr Hanson will have spoken to many of them. They are often on a fixed income, but their fees and charges and their cost of living are going up all the time, and they cannot sustain living in that family home.

Mr Rattenbury talked about federal assistance, but if you read Ms Lee's motion, over the last five years there has been a 27.7 per cent increase in electricity costs. Over the last five years there has been a 26.2 per cent increase in gas costs, an 18.6 per cent increase in health costs over five years, an 18 per cent increase in education costs over five years, and a 15.7 per cent increase in housing costs over five years.

Recently, the federal government increased the pension rate, boosting the annual pension paid to a single pensioner to \$25,155, and \$37,923 for a couple. This is the largest single increase since 2014. We could call on the government to increase the pension even more, but does that help? If these costs are going up at far more than

CPI, average wage costs or whatever measure you want to use, it is never going to keep up. Older Canberrans will have to sell off their belongings or sell their family home in order to just keep living, and it is not really fair.

The statement from the minister today also acknowledged that, as lockdown has continued, older people have faced increased challenges, such as social isolation, additional health and wellbeing concerns, and financial difficulties. Of course, we have heard many times—I have heard it since at least 2010—about the impact of housing costs on older people, and the incoming tsunami of older women’s homelessness, for example.

If you are a single older woman or a divorced older woman, and if you have been renting, when you retire, how on earth are you going to be able to afford to keep paying your rent? The rents are so high here in Canberra. Housing costs are so expensive here in Canberra. Even if you are not renting, as I have already outlined, you may no longer be able to stay in your own home because of the other government fees and charges. These challenges highlight the need to prioritise the needs of older people in our community.

It is well known that the ACT has a high cost of living. We speak about it very frequently. This only worsens the hardship of separation and isolation that older Canberrans are experiencing. The ACT government should be supporting older Canberrans by reducing the cost of living, not making it harder and harder for them. As the cost of housing, energy and utilities increases, this only places more and more stress on older residents in our community.

It is a few years ago now, but I will always remember a presentation by Actew at the Tuggeranong Community Council. A pensioner spoke about how they could not afford to put the heater on during winter. They rugged up in their own home in their ugg boots, jumpers and blankets because they could not afford to feed themselves, buy the occasional birthday present for grandchildren and keep the heater running during winter. That has stuck with me for years.

We have also heard over time—and I guess they are the worst possible examples—terrible stories about pensioners who have eaten cat food because they cannot afford to buy decent food. These things do happen. I know that at my local shops there is someone who buys all of the spoiled fruit and vegetables when they are on sale because they are so much cheaper. Mr Deputy Speaker, they cannot afford to buy what you and I would think of as average quality fruit and vegetables.

ACTCOSS have spoken about the fact that, as Canberra’s population is ageing and growing, the support services available must increase to meet that demand. The ACT government needs to get to work for seniors and undertake a review of the ACT Targeted Assistance Strategy to ensure that concessions are targeted to those who need them, not just pay lip-service to valuing the experience of older Canberrans. The policies have to support that, not just talk about it. Driving up the cost of living does not value the experience of older Canberrans.

Once again I would like to thank Ms Lee for bringing this motion today and supporting Canberrans that are doing it tough, many of whom are seniors. Canberrans, I feel, are being left behind and forgotten by this Labor-Greens government, and I welcome any support for the motion today.

**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (4.34): I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing forward an important motion to discuss poverty in Canberra. It is very important, in the context of the amount of money that the ACT government, in partnership with the federal government, is giving to business, that we look at all parts of our community that have been affected by the pandemic.

We know that the pandemic has exacerbated poverty and shone a light on those who were always doing it tough pre-pandemic. I want to join my Assembly colleagues in quoting the ACTCOSS cost of living report. I found particularly stark the quotes on page 3, where ACTCOSS found that with the increase in JobSeeker last year to \$1,100 per fortnight, there was close to a 50 per cent drop in people who were living below the poverty line in Canberra.

The section of the report from which the Leader of the Opposition has drawn her figures for this motion discusses how last year, when the federal government cruelly dropped JobSeeker again in October, the number of people in poverty in Canberra shot right up. JobSeeker remains well below the poverty line. It is cruel, it is completely ineffective, and it is an unfair form of punishment that the federal government inflicts on poor people across this country, including in this city.

It only reinforces the long-held and strongly prosecuted campaign by the formidable Senator Rachel Siewert and the Australian Greens to lift JobSeeker above the poverty line. Eighty dollars a day has been a long campaign fought by the Greens, along with stakeholders such as the Australian Council of Social Service, the Australian Unemployed Workers Union and the Australian Medical Association, as well as over 150 more community organisations in this country that have been consistently calling on the federal government to lift Australians out of poverty—150 organisations.

Put simply, Mr Deputy Speaker, if you are a national, subnational or local government leader and you cannot bring yourself to talk about the correlation between federal income support payments and poverty, you are being intellectually dishonest with the community that you serve. The single biggest lever that parliamentarians and policymakers have to bring people out of poverty and onto a living wage is to raise the rate.

I am seriously troubled that the Leader of the Opposition has failed to publicly advocate to her federal colleagues on this issue, despite coming in here and falsely accusing this government of not helping people living in poverty. I am also troubled by what seems to be a little bit of selective quoting by the Leader of the Opposition in order to justify the motion. She failed to mention, when quoting ACTCOSS in her motion, that the council contextualised the rising cost of living with the context of entrenched poverty that the federal government forces people into with inadequate income support payments.

Canberrans should know that the leading voice for the community sector, who support those who are doing it toughest in Canberra, also advocates to raise the rate. So, too, do the ACT Labor Party and the ACT Greens.

Another day has passed while discussing poverty in this city—another motion, another sitting day—and we still have not seen any indication from the Canberra Liberals that they are prepared to reconsider their position and join with us, in a tripartisan effort, to ask our federal government to fulfill their constitutional obligations and drag people out of poverty.

Many members have spoken of individuals that they have met and that they serve in their communities who have experienced varying degrees of poverty and economic injustice while living in a wealthy city, and I get that. Canberra is a rich city and it is probably the hardest place in the country in which to be broke. But it is important to stress that the evidence lays clear that while the cost of living pressures in the ACT do continue to increase—and I do not shy away from that—raising the rate of income support payments to the level that over 150 community sector organisations campaigned for would see those living in poverty much better off, in spite of increases to those cost of living pressures. It is about context, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is about reflecting on those levers that we as parliamentarians can pull.

I do not want to be too unfair to the Leader of the Opposition and sound like I am getting up here and just beating the Liberals, because I must say that, to be honest, I found the Chief Minister's response to a question during question time today on the subject of poverty to be a little bit disappointing as well. I understand the commitment of government to want to get people who can work into work, and job creation should be a high priority of any progressive government. Once again, a non-partisan, evidence-based approach to the numbers shows that that is statistically impossible.

According to the labour market information portal by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the ACT currently has 9,971 people unemployed, yet only 6,200 jobs are available. If you assume from that, Mr Deputy Speaker, that every single person currently unemployed is adequately qualified to fill the 6,200 jobs, you will still see a shortfall. You will still see thousands of Canberrans who are unable to access the workforce.

I raise this point because I am always frustrated by what I call the *Current Affair* narrative—hashtag dole bludgers—from some in our community and some that dog-whistle to that point of view. I am not suggesting any of those people are in here, before anybody gets upset, but it exists. There are those who will call me a bleeding heart leftie wanting to run up the debt and make it harder for government to build things and run things because I just want to give people money. “Hand out that blank cheque,” they will say about raising the rate. But even if every single person who could work filled every single job that this economy has created thus far, thousands of Canberrans still could not work. Every day that the federal government make the choice to keep federal income support payments, their constitutional obligation, below the poverty line, that is a political choice to keep thousands of people in our city doing it tough.

All of the evidence that I have heard today, anecdotal but I trust true, from members who speak of the individual experience of constituents they have served who have faced substantial cost of living pressures while living in a wealthy city, bears out that a just and equitable rise in all of these income support payments would be greater than the increases to cost of living. That is using ACTCOSS's own numbers, which are the basis of this motion. It grows frustrating. I do want to end on a high note, though, because I do not want to sound like I am complaining too much.

**Ms Lee:** Too late.

**MR DAVIS:** Thank you, Ms Lee. In a few moments the budget will be tabled, and I am incredibly excited about that budget, because it is the greenest budget in the country, coming from the greenest government in the country. Hundreds of millions of dollars will go to social and community housing, which we know will help people who are doing it tough. Over \$26 million has already been earmarked for the community sector organisations that we have spoken about at length in this place, who provide invaluable supports to Canberrans doing it tough. There is the first real-time increase in specialist housing services funding in over a decade—\$8.6 million.

I do have hope that, in spite of the federal government's dereliction of duty, and in spite of the impassioned pleas by the Canberra Liberals to do something about poverty while managing so conveniently to miss the elephant in the room, we are doing all that we can in this Labor-Greens government, putting the budget millions of dollars into the red, because the government has made the decision that investing in supports for those doing it toughest, in housing, in health, in education and in community services, is more important than a budget bottom line. That speaks to the value that Canberrans can enjoy in having elected a progressive Labor-Greens government.

I cannot wait to get out into the community and celebrate the hundreds of millions of dollars of new money in tonight's budget. More importantly, I cannot wait to see the real and tangible benefits that that money will have for people doing it tough in our community.

**MS LEE (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (4.43):** I will speak to the amendment and close the debate. I thank all members for their contributions to this debate, including Mr Davis, because I think it is a great opportunity for the community to see what type of rubbish comes out of his mouth. I think it is great that he can contribute to this debate.

Mr Rattenbury, in his contribution, said that there is existing disadvantage and inequality that has been exacerbated by the pandemic, and that is true. It has been echoed by ACTCOSS. But what he conveniently forgot to mention, of course, is that this existing poverty, these existing challenges for our most vulnerable Canberrans, have been happening and are being allowed to happen under the government in which he is a minister.

Minister Berry outlined all and everything that the current government is doing. Instead of reassuring the community, in fact, it is worse. The fact is that they have outlined in great detail everything that they are doing to support and help people in poverty and, clearly, it is not working. If it was, we would not see over 38,000 Canberrans living in poverty, including 9,000 children.

If this government are using everything in their toolkit, you have to ask: why do we in 2021 have over 38,000 Canberrans living in poverty after 20 years of this government? In fact, it is a clear indication and confirmation that they either do not care and will not do anything, or they have run out of ideas. Either way, the people who pay the price are the most vulnerable members of our community.

This, of course, is a government that continues to blame the federal government and absolutely refuses to take any responsibility. Our community, the Canberrans who are facing these challenges of not being able to put food on the table, pay the bills or turn on the heater in winter, are the ones who are being cheated by this government.

The amendment moved by Ms Berry attempts to scrub the disadvantaged of Canberra who have been left behind by this government. It attempts to scrub the Canberra that is continuing to be left behind by this government. I say to the Deputy Chief Minister that she might be able to scrub those words from my motion and she might be able to turn her back on the Canberrans who are struggling, but we will not. We will always stand up for Canberrans who have long been forgotten by this government.

I do note, however, that paragraph (6) of the amendment calls on the government to—and I quote:

- (a) use every tool at its disposal to foster a strong and fair economic recovery from the pandemic-induced economic downturn, while continuing to address day-to-day cost stresses; and
- (b) review and update the ACT's Targeted Assistance Strategy in the first half of 2022, with potential measures to be considered as part of the 2022-23 Budget.”.

There is at least a call to action which does include some of the intent that is contained in my original motion. For that reason, pursuant to standing order 133, I ask for the question to be divided into a vote on paragraphs (1) to (5) and a vote on paragraph (6).

*Ordered that the question be divided.*

Question put:

That paragraphs (1) to (5) be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 14

Noes 7

|              |                  |             |
|--------------|------------------|-------------|
| Ms Berry     | Dr Paterson      | Mr Cain     |
| Mr Braddock  | Mr Pettersson    | Ms Castley  |
| Ms Burch     | Mr Rattenbury    | Mr Hanson   |
| Ms Cheyne    | Mr Steel         | Mrs Jones   |
| Ms Clay      | Ms Stephen-Smith | Mrs Kikkert |
| Ms Davidson  | Ms Vassarotti    | Ms Lee      |
| Mr Davis     |                  | Mr Parton   |
| Mr Gentleman |                  |             |

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Paragraph (6) agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

*At 4.55 pm, the sitting was suspended until the ringing of the bells.*

*The bells having been rung, Madam Speaker resumed the chair at 5 pm.*

## **Appropriation Bill 2021-2022**

**Mr Barr**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement, a Human Rights Act compatibility statement and the following supplementary papers:

Explanatory statement to the Bill, incorporating a compatibility statement, pursuant to section 37 of the *Human Rights Act 2004*.

Budget 2021-22—Financial Management Act—Pursuant to section 10—

Budget Presentation Speech.

Budget Outlook.

Budget Statements—

A—ACT Electoral Commission | ACT Executive | ACT Integrity Commission | Auditor-General | Office of the Legislative Assembly.

B—Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD), together with associated agencies.

C—ACT Health Directorate | Canberra Health Services | ACT Local Hospital Network.

D—Justice and Community Safety Directorate | Legal Aid Commission (ACT) Public Trustee and Guardian for the ACT.

E—Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate | City Renewal Authority | Suburban Land Agency.

F—Education Directorate.

G—Community Services Directorate | Housing ACT.

H—Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate | Transport Canberra Operations | Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority.

I—Major Projects Canberra.

Indicative Land Release Program 2021-22 to 2025-26.

Financial Management Act—Pursuant to subsection 62(1)—Statements of Intent—2021-22—

ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority, dated 6, 21 and 22 September 2021.

Long Service Leave Authority, dated 6 May and 9 August 2021.

Title read by Clerk.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (5.00): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

### **Introduction**

This is a pandemic-response budget. It has three clear priorities: to protect the health of our community; to turbocharge our economic recovery; and to deliver on our election commitments.

This budget is the next stage of the government's plan to support Canberrans through the pandemic and recover from this once-in-a-generation crisis.

It is a budget guided by the principles that have underpinned our response over the last 18 months:

- investing in health care and essential services;
- protecting and creating jobs; and
- protecting our most vulnerable.

The budget sets out our recovery and rebuilding effort.

This is a full-throttle budget to get Canberra's economy moving again.

It backs the public sector, the community sector and the private sector to work together to drive a stronger economy and to improve community wellbeing.

Through this budget we will continue to build and staff the health system necessary to keep Canberrans healthy and safe. We will create and protect thousands of good, secure, Canberra jobs. And we will continue to drive our transition to a zero-emissions future.

There will be challenging weeks and months ahead as we deal with the spread of COVID-19 in our community.

It is something that is part of our lives now, and probably will be for a long time to come.

But there is a path to return to the life that we want, where we can visit family and friends, where we can go to the theatre or the footy, or throw a party. A path to rebuild our economy and protect the most vulnerable.

As a city and a community, that path is vaccination.

We hope to get as close to 100 per cent vaccination coverage as we can.

Canberrans have been rolling up their sleeves and getting vaccinated. More than 95 per cent now of the 12-plus population have had a first dose of a vaccine. We are getting vaccinated to protect our older loved ones, our vulnerable and valued community members, and those otherwise active, healthy people whose immune systems struggle against this disease.

I have said it before and I will say it again: a highly vaccinated Canberra is a safer and more confident Canberra.

There is very little vaccine hesitancy, complacency, or conspiracy in this city—we are responding to this virus together by getting vaccinated.

And the ACT government's role, through today's budget and over the coming year, will be to support a return to the life we want for ourselves, for our families and for our community.

### **Impact of COVID-19**

There is no doubt that the current outbreak of the Delta variant has created one of the toughest periods in our city's history.

After more than a year COVID free in the ACT, with no significant public health restrictions and a relatively normal social and economic life, the lockdown that was imposed, whilst absolutely necessary, has been extraordinarily difficult for everyone.

It has been a tough couple of months—and taking into account the bushfires and the first wave of the pandemic, it has been a really difficult few years.

During this time the ACT government has stepped up to respond to the challenges and to invest in our community's safety and future.

This budget invests over \$90 million to continue our COVID-19 public health response. This will get even more jobs into arms and ensure that the Chief Health Officer has the support she needs to contain the spread of the virus.

Beyond this, more than \$500 million in additional funding will be provided over four years to boost our public health services.

Over the course of the pandemic, we have invested over \$475 million through direct payments and tax relief measures to support local businesses.

We have supported our most vulnerable 31,000 households through a series of measures, including in this budget an increase in the utilities concession from \$700 to \$1,000 in this current fiscal year.

### **Budget overview**

Our strong economic foundations—achieved through increased and efficient expenditure, regulatory and tax reforms, and continued support for local jobs and the most vulnerable—have placed the territory in a position to be able to respond and recover from this outbreak.

It is a position from which we can grow strongly again.

As the ACT approaches world-leading double vaccination rates, the territory government will turbocharge our contribution to support our economic and community recovery.

Today's budget, and our longer term fiscal strategy, is designed with a simple purpose: to invest in essential services, to protect and create the maximum number of jobs across our city, and to continue to support the Canberrans who need that support most.

The jobs that we aim to create will be across the private sector, the community sector and the public sector. This is what we need to recover as quickly as possible.

We want to see a strong economic recovery leading into the Christmas and summer holiday period, and for this to be sustained into 2022 and beyond.

This emphasis now on significant fiscal stimulus, support for the most vulnerable, job creation and economic recovery is reflected in our headline net operating balance over the short term.

This fiscal year we are forecasting a deficit of \$950 million. Across the forward estimates, the one-off expenditure that is required this year will not be needed—it will be tapered down—and the government is projecting improved revenues, with deficits reducing in each financial year down to below \$500 million in 2024-25.

We are acting on the principles that:

- by investing today to support the economy, we are avoiding a bigger loss of economic output and jobs that would damage our economy and our community for years to come, and in fact place a larger strain on the territory budget;
- the territory's balance sheet entering this crisis was in a strong position after decades of good economic and fiscal performance by the territory; and
- it is worth noting that the ACT's financing costs have never been lower, with interest rates being the lowest since Australia federated in 1901.

This fiscal strategy is a continuation of what we outlined in August last year, and again in the 2020-21 budget delivered in the unusual time frame of February this year.

At this point in time it is important that governments at all levels across Australia continue to drive demand in our economy by embracing expansionary fiscal policy and increasing spending and investment. This is what we are seeing at the national level and what we anticipate seeing across state and territory budgets through this fiscal year and next.

Our decision to invest in Canberra at this point in time gives the private sector the confidence to also invest and to keep people in jobs.

And our ongoing health response to the pandemic gives every employer, and every worker, the necessary confidence to take the next steps forward in our recovery.

### **Infrastructure Investment Program**

The budget sets out the largest ever infrastructure program in the territory's history, at \$5 billion over five years. This is a program that will make Canberra an even better city to live in that is also going to create thousands of good local jobs.

The government's investment priorities continue to be in health, education, public transport, public housing, climate action and urban renewal.

This includes large, medium and small-scale investments across the city, including:

- \$870 million invested in the health infrastructure that we need for a growing population, including the delivery of the Canberra Hospital expansion;
- more than \$950 million invested in TAFE and school infrastructure, CIT and education infrastructure that will not only maintain and improve existing schools and plan for future school infrastructure needs but also progress the development of new schools in growth areas across Canberra;
- a \$1.4 billion investment over five years to upgrade and expand our city's sustainable and connected transport network, which includes undertaking a city-wide package of better bike paths and footpaths, many road projects and, of course, taking light rail to Woden;
- we will also be spending nearly \$20 million in suburban shopping centre upgrades, \$10 million, nearly, to progress the Throsby home of football, and over \$5 million for new and upgraded playgrounds around Canberra—from the big to the medium to the small infrastructure projects right across the city; and
- we will continue to invest in community facilities and build more green spaces, play spaces and dog parks to make Canberra suburbs even better.

We will measure our success not only through economic growth but how well we do as individuals, as a community, and as a place in which to live, utilising our wellbeing framework.

Today's budget is the first where the wellbeing principles are embedded in budget decision-making.

### **Record health investment**

In a global pandemic the strength of a jurisdiction's health response directly contributes to its economic resilience.

The speed and the breadth of the territory's vaccination rollout, the willingness of our community to get vaccinated, our ability to quickly stand up the most efficient bar none mass vaccination hubs in the nation, and our extraordinarily efficient 100 per cent utilisation rate of vaccine doses available to us, mean that the only factor limiting our 95 per cent first-dose coverage has been vaccine supply delays. But now that we have the vaccines, we are delivering an incredibly efficient program that is streets ahead of any other state or territory.

But our health system's strengths go beyond vaccination.

At its core, our health system is made up of the doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and support staff who have been there when we have needed them most.

This budget delivers record investments in the territory's health system, with over half a billion dollars in new funding to provide better health care where and when Canberrans need it.

Alongside the nation-leading vaccination rollout, we continue to invest in COVID-19 health initiatives such as the Health Emergency Control Centre, quarantine facilities, compliance activities, hospital and testing services, additional cleaning of public schools and public transport and, of course, the pandemic response and public information teams that have been keeping Canberrans informed throughout the pandemic.

The budget also modernises our Ambulance Service, provides support to our hardworking paramedics, and keeps our community safe by hiring more personnel, upgrading ICT systems, and purchasing five new low-emissions vehicles for the fleet.

In this budget we fund the hiring of 90 more nurses and midwives as the first stage of a phased introduction of minimum nurse-to-patient ratios at Canberra and Calvary public hospitals.

This \$50 million investment means we will have more nurses on wards helping those who need them most.

And we are expanding the Canberra Hospital's intensive care unit and emergency department; establishing an innovative cancer research centre; increasing endoscopy services; delivering more elective surgeries; and planning for a new surgery centre at the University of Canberra.

## **Investing in Canberrans**

This budget protects the health and welfare of Canberrans, creates jobs and reduces everyday cost pressures on households.

Investing in our essential services is vital to ensure that the economy and our community can recover as quickly as possible.

These investments do not just demonstrate sound economic management; they are also a key to improving the productivity, opportunity and quality of life as we resume a growth path.

Each of these investments creates and protects local jobs so we can reach our target of 250,000 jobs in our city's labour market by the end 2025.

It is why, in this budget, the ACT further increases our highest per capita spending in the nation on public housing, through our \$100 million investment in new and refurbished homes right across the territory.

This is the single largest investment to both increase and improve affordable and public housing in Canberra in the history of self-government.

It is why, in this budget, we will fund free training places to allow Canberrans to upskill or reskill in a range of fields.

The pandemic has been particularly tough for younger people starting out in their careers and those who have lost employment.

The expansion of the JobTrainer program in the ACT will see up to 2,500 additional training places made available and delivered over the next two years.

Supporting strong communities is more important than ever.

We are delivering over \$75 million in additional funding to support those most in need, including new funding to expand homelessness services, increased community and multicultural sector funding, and more support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans.

In one of the toughest periods in our city's history, people must be able to reach out and get help when they need it. Support is available.

We know that young people in particular are suffering in the face of this pandemic, global uncertainty and separation from friends and loved ones.

That is why we are funding integrated face-to-face and digital mental health care for young people through an online platform, and supporting active outreach and treatment programs.

### **Investing in public education**

The government is committed to delivering the best possible education for all Canberra students, empowering teachers and learning professionals to thrive, and working with school communities to ensure the best possible outcomes for families.

The 2021-22 budget provides over \$50 million in additional support for our public education system, with a focus on improving equity and inclusion. We believe that every child should be given the opportunity to thrive and succeed in ACT public schools. I know this is an area of deep passion and commitment for the Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Yvette Berry, and we are delighted to deliver on this commitment in this budget.

### **Real climate action and environment protection**

We also continue our world-leading climate action agenda. Action is needed now. With more than \$70 million in additional investments to deliver on our climate action goals and protect Canberra's unique environment, this budget delivers in spades. Funding is also provided for the extension of the ACT Healthy Waterways project.

We have opened the \$150 million Sustainable Household Scheme to all eligible households so that more Canberrans can share in the benefits of a zero net emissions future.

I take the opportunity to thank Minister Rattenbury for his partnership and collaboration across these portfolio areas as we continue to deliver a very significant reform agenda.

### **Conclusion**

Almost one year ago—and hasn't the year gone fast!—Canberrans overwhelmingly voted for a progressive agenda for our city.

And over this past year, despite many, many challenges, we have delivered—protecting Canberrans' health, rolling out a nation-leading COVID vaccination program, taking real action on climate change, and creating and protecting local jobs.

We recognise that a good job is about more than money. It provides security, meaning, opportunities and advancement in life.

That is why, over the past 18 months, we have fought to protect every Canberra job, support every worker and every business.

And that is why we are now seeking to turbocharge our economic recovery.

Over the coming months we will re-emerge as a regional economic powerhouse.

We will face challenges. COVID is throwing a lot at us, and I fear that there is still more to come. There may well be setbacks.

But today's budget is another step towards coming out of this difficult time stronger and together. I commend the budget to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Lee**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022**

**Mr Barr**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement, a Human Rights Act compatibility statement and the following supplementary papers:

Explanatory statement to the Bill, incorporating a compatibility statement, pursuant to section 37 of the Human Rights Act 2004.

Budget 2021-22—Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 20AC—Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-22—Departures from Recommended Appropriations—Statement of Reasons.

Title read by Clerk.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (5.24): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am very pleased to be able to table the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022—and I promise this will be a much shorter speech! The bill is the mechanism for the appropriation of moneys for this coming fiscal year for the Office of the Legislative Assembly and officers of the Assembly—the Integrity Commissioner, the Auditor-General and the Electoral Commissioner.

The bill provides for appropriations for the Integrity Commissioner, the Auditor-General, the Electoral Commissioner and the Office of the Legislative Assembly in relation to net controlled recurrent payments, capital injections and payments to be made on behalf of the territory.

The bill contains appropriations of \$20.1 million to the Office of the Legislative Assembly; \$4.1 million to the Auditor-General; \$6.6 million to the ACT Integrity Commissioner; and \$4.7 million to the Electoral Commissioner.

I commend these appropriations to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Lee**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Amendment Bill 2021**

**Ms Berry**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (5.27): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Amendment Bill 2021. The amendments being introduced in this bill today are administrative in nature. However, they have an important objective of providing future options for the government's response to ensuring housing choices for the continued growth of Canberra as a major regional city.

Land is one of the most important resources we manage as a government. The Suburban Land Agency and the City Renewal Authority were established to ensure that land management meets the expectations of this city. The government does not just buy and sell land. Our aim is to ensure that all our decisions about land result in fantastic new neighbourhoods and more diverse housing choices for Canberrans. The SLA and the CRA exist to help build the infrastructure that makes our city a great place to live.

Supply is central to delivering on this community's expectations for housing. The ACT government is committed to ensuring that there is an adequate supply of land to meet the demand from Canberra's growing population and economy.

Under the ACT Housing Strategy the government has committed to an equitable, diverse and sustainable supply of housing for the ACT community. This goal focuses on a range of outcomes, including how the ACT government will provide land and opportunities for housing development for a growing population, provide housing choice and enable high quality housing that meets the needs of ACT residents. Many objectives underpin this goal, including providing land and housing development opportunities to meet demand, maintaining a healthy land and housing development pipeline and providing a diverse mix of housing types and choice.

As published in the ACT Housing Strategy year 2 report card, excellent progress has been made against this goal, including publishing the annual indicative land release program, publishing the *ACT Land and Property Report*, Territory Plan variations and requests for proposals for demonstration housing projects and studies of urban intensification areas.

As members will be aware, the Suburban Land Agency plays a critical role in providing continuity of land supply for development and release on behalf of the ACT government, which includes land for residential, commercial, industrial and community purposes. The agency is also pivotal in securing greater public and private sector investment and ensuring social inclusion and better neighbourhoods are reflected in development. In this sense the Suburban Land Agency works to balance growth between a dynamic city centre and flourishing suburbs, maintaining the Canberra we love and making it even better by preparing for the future.

The Suburban Land Agency envisages development projects which connect residents with their suburb and community. This involves land that supports a diverse mix of housing to support the changing needs and preferences of the Canberra community. The agency is also critical to ensuring a sustainable supply of land so that all individuals and families have an opportunity to live in a home which meets their needs. These needs are not limited to the block and section but extend to the accessibility, available services and sense of community and connectedness.

Recent greenfield developments have provided land for purchase, with an emphasis on open space, access to nature reserves, a network of recreational facilities, proximity to schools and central services and transport access. Aligned with the ACT government wellbeing framework, these single residential blocks provide an opportunity to join a growing neighbourhood and participate in a vibrant and connected neighbourhood community. This is critical to the sense of social connection.

As has been demonstrated in the work which informed the ACT government's wellbeing framework, having a secure, suitable and affordable place to call home remains one of the essentials for a good life. At a fundamental level, housing offers physical shelter. But there is also a deeper relationship between an individual or family's housing conditions and their wellbeing outcomes. Our wellbeing indicators work demonstrates that a sense of home can offer feelings of consistency in people's material and social environments and, by extension, furthers our degree of control over these aspects of our lives.

For some Canberrans that will be a centrally located apartment, but for others it will be a larger suburban block with a backyard for entertaining or space for the kids to play outdoors. To support such choice in housing options, continual development and release of greenfield sites is a crucial part of delivering a supply of new and affordable housing choices for Canberrans. This renewed supply ensures that home ownership of suburban blocks, with access to open spaces and community infrastructure, is futureproofed.

Greenfield sites provide the opportunity for a clean canvas of possibilities for Canberrans looking to build a new home, to design bespoke landscaping and to establish a garden for leisure or to yield a seasonal home crop of fruit and vegetables. For some Canberrans this will be an opportunity to buy and build their first home. For others it might present the chance to downsize to a home of their own design or to invest in the market to realise their future opportunities. Critical to this sense of ownership and connection to place is the community, neighbourhood and concept of

place, a familiarity or surrounds, consistency, and shared experiences derived from communal space, repeated contact and interactions over time.

The majority of the future growth within our city will be within our existing urban footprint, through a range of future developments. The parliamentary agreement sets a target of 70 per cent of new housing development to be within the existing urban footprint. This development will span projects with a range of density options, from multi-unit, high-rise buildings to townhouses and new suburbs. Critical to futureproofing greenfield development sites, however, is the consideration of possible extensions beyond the limits of the ACT's borders.

In noting this potential option I note the extensive regional relationship the ACT has with our bordering New South Wales townships; for example, with neighbouring Queanbeyan, Jerrabomberra and Murrumbateman. There is a great flow of residents across the border each day for work, training, leisure and commercial reasons. This relationship of interconnectedness between our communities has been highlighted quite recently with the pandemic response public health measures implementing border restrictions which have outlined all the essential reasons people move between the ACT and New South Wales each day.

The Canberra region is a strong, growing economy, with Australia's most geographically diverse natural environment. It encompasses the south-western slopes of New South Wales, the Southern Tablelands, the nation's capital, the South Coast, the Snowy Mountains and the New South Wales high country. Our vibrant regional economy is underpinned by transport connections to Canberra and Sydney, offering diverse agricultural and tourism opportunities as well as collaborations between public and private sectors.

In this regional context, the concept of place-making in building neighbouring or cross-border communities holds new opportunities for the role of the Suburban Land Agency in establishing inclusive neighbourhoods and communities with best practice urban design which pays particular attention to the physical, cultural and social identities that define that place and support its ongoing evolution.

This bill provides for a renewed concept of community for future planning development. In this direction, place-making is defined by new concepts of participation and design, with a focus on sustainability and civic participation in meeting the variety of needs and demands for housing suitability.

In considering this future possibility, it is relevant to consider that when the Suburban Land Agency was created in 2017 it was only empowered to purchase leases of land in the ACT. The primary amendment in this bill removes the word "leases" from the provision that authorises the Suburban Land Agency to buy and sell land on behalf of the ACT government. Most land in New South Wales is held by its owners under freehold title. As members of the Assembly will no doubt be aware, this system of title ownership is different from the leasehold system we use here in the ACT.

This amendment will ensure that the Suburban Land Agency has the legal capacity to enter into contracts to purchase or sell land outside the ACT, in New South Wales, if

the government chooses to do so in future and pending arrangements being made between the ACT government and the New South Wales government or local shire representatives.

A related second amendment introduced in this bill clarifies that the proceeds from the sale of the land and not just leases of land made by the Suburban Land Agency will be the income of the Suburban Land Agency. Following the first amendment, this will ensure that the income from any land sales outside the ACT will be returned to the SLA.

Lastly, the bill amends the definition of land in the dictionary of the City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Act so that it is explicit throughout the act that land purchased by the Suburban Land Agency may include land located in New South Wales.

In summary, the amendments in this bill will provide the legal capacity for the Suburban Land Agency to purchase and sell land outside the ACT's borders, should the government seek to explore this option in the future to provide more greenfield sites and housing choices for Canberrans. This will ensure that choices for future housing stock include greenfield residential blocks which are supported by integrated place-making infrastructure. We will keep looking to deliver land in a way that builds community social connection.

This bill is another step forward towards ensuring that the government's framework for managing land keeps on delivering new housing options for Canberrans. As a government, we are committed to doing more than just offering land for sale. We want the Suburban Land Agency to build great new neighbourhoods that are affordable, sustainable and connected. This government will keep working hard over this term to deliver on that commitment and to deliver more housing options for Canberrans into the future. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Cain**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Leave of absence**

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

That leave of absence be granted to Mr Milligan for today's sitting for personal reasons.

## **Adjournment**

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## **Economy—employment opportunities**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (5.39): I would like to highlight something that I have been invested in and have worked on for quite a while since being elected—that is, world-class work for Canberra. Canberra’s economic and employment environment is enhanced by many things, including the very strong presence of the commonwealth public service. That has been the case since Walter Burley Griffin was appointed as the federal capital’s director of design and construction on 18 October 1913.

Along with being the bush capital and the garden city, the plan for Canberra designed by Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony centred on making a home for the commonwealth public service. Times are evolving, and Canberra needs to acknowledge the new market. A responsible approach to meeting the threats and opportunities presented—remote work, decentralisation and automation—would be to recognise that at its core Canberra is a natural hub for world-class work.

We have already seen the risks the ACT Labor-Greens government is running with an unfriendly approach to business and entrepreneurship. Opportunities like remote work and decentralisation have become risks, with people looking to work in regional New South Wales to follow the relocation of commonwealth departments. Look to the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority for an example. There has even been mention of a second Canberra.

To make Canberra a world-class and diverse job environment the ACT Labor-Greens government should recognise more highly the value of private sector jobs and economic growth and shed its complacency towards the gift that is commonwealth government employment and procurement. Sensible approaches to bring this about would include promoting and supporting Canberra’s private sector, attracting and retaining ideas and talent, fostering a strong culture of entrepreneurship and creativity, and undertaking a serious red tape reduction program.

Unfortunately, retention is another problem we face with our educated population leaving for broader horizons for fear of lack of choice in the employment sector here. The approach our government currently pursues does not adequately celebrate Canberra’s many advantages—top-ranked universities, national cultural institutions, a highly educated population, natural and man-made beauty, and an enviable lifestyle.

It is frustrating to see a lack of real action from the Labor-Greens government in the budget announced today towards creating and facilitating a diversity of jobs and opportunities for all Canberrans. The Leader of the Opposition has been calling for this as a priority. My commitment as shadow minister for jobs and workplace affairs is to keep an open mind when it comes to thinking about what the jobs market will look like in one, five or 20 years. I will continue my discussions with the private sector to explore their needs and investigate what inhibits their growth.

I also want to investigate what keeps businesses away from Canberra and work to encourage them to bring their capital and expertise to our great city. Canberra can and

should be a city of diverse, world-class work. Last week I completed an op-ed on this topic which was published by the *Canberra Times*. I look forward to continuing this conversation in my role as shadow minister for jobs and workplace affairs.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 5.44 pm.**