



# Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

**TENTH ASSEMBLY**

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**Tuesday, 23 November 2021**

**MR ACTING SPEAKER** (Mr Parton) (10.01): Members:

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

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

This is Ngunnawal country.  
Today we are all meeting together on Ngunnawal country.  
We always respect Elders, female and male.

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

## **Leave of absence**

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

That leave of absence for this sitting be granted to Ms Berry and Ms Lee for COVID-related reasons and to Dr Paterson for personal reasons.

Motion (by **Ms Clay**) agreed to:

That leave of absence be granted to Mr Braddock for this sitting for family reasons.

## **Petition**

*The following petition was lodged for presentation:*

### **Government—complaint resolution—petition 32-21**

*By Dr Paterson, from 518 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 Assembly that although we are rightly proud of our Human Rights Act, we are concerned that it does not contain an accessible complaints mechanism. The Human Rights Act was drafted to protect individuals against violations of their human rights by government and government agencies but fails to provide an accessible way to make complaints about breaches.

Currently, there is no accessible way for people to enforce their rights under the ACT Human Rights Act. If a person's human rights are breached by ACT

Government bodies or services, the only recourse available is to take a legal action to the Supreme Court. There are significant cost barriers associated with this type of legal action, and no ability to seek compensation for the harm done.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to:

- enable a complaint about any breach of the Human Rights Act to be made to the Human Rights Commission for confidential conciliation, and
- if conciliation is unsuccessful, enable a complaint about a breach of the Human Rights Act to be made to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal for resolution.

This would transform the Human Rights Act from being a largely theoretical document, to one which members of our community can use to ensure their human rights are protected.

*The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petition would be recorded in Hansard and a copy referred to the appropriate minister for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petition was received.*

*Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having more than 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety.*

### **Ministerial response**

*The following response to a petition has been lodged:*

#### **Planning—Griffith—petition 28-21**

By **Mr Gentleman**, Minister for Minister for Planning and Land Management, dated 18 November 2021, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Lee on 3 August 2021 concerning the Manor House development in Griffith.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 2 June 2021 providing petition No. 28-21.

I note that the petition has also been referred to the Standing Committee for Planning, Transport and City Services (the Committee). While I will await the consideration of the Standing Committee, I wish to draw the Assembly's attention to statements in the petition.

Firstly, Draft Variation 375 is a proposed change to the Griffith Precinct Code for Griffith block 6, section 31. If approved, the changes to the Territory Plan would only apply to this block. The Draft Variation does not make any changes more generally to the RZ1 zone.

Secondly, with respect to the suggestion that this is a 'random rezoning', DV375 is not rezoning the site at Griffith block 6, section 31. The block will remain

RZ1. DV375 proposes changes to the Territory Plan to enable a demonstration housing project to showcase best practice in an innovative housing product and typology. The block and the project have been subject to careful selection. This is consistent with the 2017 resolution adopted by the Assembly to provide demonstration housing to showcase best-practice in a number of areas relating to housing choice.

The Territory Plan changes to allow the Manor House are proceeding in accordance with the *Planning and Development Act 2007*. The Territory Plan Variation process requires considerable community consultation, and enables the Standing Committee and myself, as Minister, appropriate consideration of both the public consultation undertaken and how to proceed or otherwise with the draft variation. Any further changes to allow a Manor House in RZ1 would be subject to a further Territory Plan variation process, requiring a separate round of consultation and scrutiny.

I thank you for referring this petition for my consideration and I trust this information clarifies the ACT government's current position in relation to this petition.

### **Motion to take note of petition**

Motion (by **Mr Acting Speaker**), pursuant to standing order 98A, agreed to:

That the petition and response so lodged be noted.

### **Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee Report 3**

**MS DAVIS** (Brindabella) (10.04): I present the following report:

Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee—Report 3—*Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022*, dated 12 November 2021, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Report 3**

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (10.05): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee—Report 3—*Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022*, dated 10 November 2021, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the third report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, and, following referral by the Assembly on 6 October, it is in relation to the relevant budget papers. The committee held six public hearings during the estimates fortnight. Twenty-four questions were taken on notice and 52 questions were placed on notice. The answers are available on the committee's webpage.

The committee made 46 recommendations on a range of matters including justice reinvestment, supported decision-making, gambling policy, the Alexander Maconochie Centre, ACT Policing, road safety, emergency services, community legal centre funding, elder abuse, and the Public Trustee and Guardian.

On behalf of the committee, I thank ACT government ministers, statutory office holders and directorate and agency officials for their contribution to this inquiry. I would also like to thank my fellow members of the committee, Dr Paterson and Ms Clay. As we are all aware, things were very compressed for time and it took quite a bit of work to get the report together in the time frames required. Again, I thank our committee secretary, Brianna, for the outstanding job that she did in organising the whole process, making sure it ran seamlessly and assisting in the drafting of the report. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Report 6**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10.07): Pursuant to order, I present the following report:

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Report 6—*Appropriation Bill 2020-2021 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2020-2021*, dated 12 November 2021, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

I rise to speak to the report by the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services on the Appropriation bill provided to you out of session on 12 November 2021. Following referral by the Assembly, the committee examined the outputs in the budget statements for the Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate, the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate and Major Projects Canberra.

The committee held six public hearings via video link and heard from many witnesses, including ministers, directorate officials and community organisations. The report makes 31 recommendations on a range of topics, including active travel, waste management, the urban tree canopy, major infrastructure projects and housing in the ACT.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank everyone who participated in, or assisted with, our inquiry. I thank my colleagues Ms Orr and Mr Parton for their collegiate work and I thank the very hardworking committee secretariat, who turned out a high quality report in such short time. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 11**

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (10.09): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 11, dated 19 November 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 11 contains the committee's comments on seven bills, 30 pieces of subordinate legislation and three government responses. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I would like to thank Stephen and Daniel and the secretary—both Anne and Julia—for all their hard work in assisting to put the report together. I commend the report to the Assembly.

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

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10.10): 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 referred petitions.

Petition 16-21, concerning Gungahlin town centre land sales, was received by the Assembly on 3 August 2021 and referred to our committee under standing order 99A. As signatories to petition 16-21, 714 residents of the ACT asked the Assembly to suspend the auction of four mixed-use sites scheduled for 12 May 2021 and the sale of any other sites in Gungahlin town centre until a number of actions were completed, including:

- the committee inquiry into draft variation 364;
- addressing the recommendations of the Gungahlin town centre planning refresh community engagement report; and

- the Assembly resolution from 10 February 2021.

The committee notes that, in his response to the petition, the Minister for Planning and Land Management noted that the standing committee released its report into DV364 on 30 September 2021, which included eight recommendations that the government will consider. The minister also stated:

- the auction of sites on 12 May 2021 proceeded and the sites were sold;
- the Suburban Land Agency has offered to work with the Gungahlin Community Council and the community on the sale of future blocks, the provision of open space and the interface with the linear park and future public realm;
- the government is in the process of developing an employment prospectus on the benefits of the Gungahlin town centre which will be provided to the commonwealth finance minister; and
- the government agreed that community engagement is important and will continue engaging with the community, and also noted the engagement to date in relation to the Gungahlin town centre planning refresh and draft variation 364.

The committee also notes that the land sales have occurred and, given the minister's commitments to engage more with the community, the committee will not be inquiring further into the matters raised in petition 16-21.

Petition 22-21, concerning Nicholls Oval upgrades, was received by the Assembly on 3 August 2021 and referred to our committee under standing order 99A. As signatories to petition 22-21, 509 residents of the ACT requested the Assembly to implement improvements to Nicholls Oval amenities, particularly for females; build a suitable centre for community events; and upgrade the fields to suit premier division sport. The committee notes that, in his response to the petition, the Minister for Transport and City Services said:

The Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) Sports and Recreation Facilities (SRF) unit has an identified program of works for the establishment, upgrade and renewal of sports grounds assets across the city. Upgrades to female friendly facilities at Nicholls Oval have not been identified as a priority for the available funding, which is being directed to other more aged and outdated facilities. However, the request by the petitioners has been noted and will be considered in future prioritisation.

Surface and soil structure and current water drainage issues have been investigated at Nicholls Oval and it was recommended that drainage infrastructure across the entire site be installed. These works are programmed to be undertaken during the 2021-22 financial year. The works will address the petitioners' concerns about the quality of the playing surface and complement the recent investment in LED lighting at this location.

In light of the minister's commitment, the committee will not be inquiring further into the matters raised in petition 22-21.

### **Statement by chair**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10.13): 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 a draft variation. The draft variation to the Territory Plan No 369 titled "living infrastructure in residential zones" proposes changes to soft landscaping in all residential areas. Draft variation 369:

- Responds to action 2 of Canberra's living infrastructure plan: cooling the city, which seeks to achieve 30 per cent tree canopy cover, or the equivalent, and 30 per cent permeable surfaces in urban areas by 2045.
- DV369 will also assist in working towards achieving these targets for urban areas by making changes related to site coverage and planting area requirements on private land in all residential zones—RZ1 to RZ5.

The committee notes that there has been considerable community interest in the proposed changes made by DV369 and has resolved to undertake an inquiry into the impact of these changes 12 to 18 months after the variation has been implemented.

### **Committees—standing Reports—government response**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (10.14): For the information of members, I present the government response to the following committee reports:

Economy and Gender and Economic Equality—Standing Committee—Report 3—*Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022.*

Education and Community Inclusion—Standing Committee—Report 2—*Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022.*

Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity—Standing Committee—Report 2—*Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022.*

Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee—Report 3—*Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022.*

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee—Report 3—*Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022.*

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Report 6—*Appropriation Bill 2020-2021 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2020-2021.*

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Report 2—*Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022—*

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

I thank the various committees for their analysis of the budget and the accompanying appropriation bills, and I further acknowledge the assistance that was provided by the secretariat teams in the preparation of each report. I thank my ministerial colleagues and government officials for their active engagement in responding to the dozens and dozens of questions that were raised during the hearings. I also recognise the Centre for International Economics for their independent assessment of the budget and their insights into not just the budget but other aspects of the territory's financial management.

The government respects and values the important role played by the various standing committees in scrutinising the proposed expenditure. In delivering the response to the matters raised, I affirm the government's commitment to open and transparent budget reporting and ensuring that our practices strengthen the integrity and accountability of public finance in the territory.

This is the second budget presented to the Assembly in 2021. I hope that we have no more years with two budgets in them. In developing this budget, the government focused on support for our healthcare system, the delivery of essential services, protecting and creating jobs, supporting the most vulnerable, and supporting local business during challenging times.

The sustained economic impact of COVID in the territory saw the government provide a significant investment in health care, education, industry support and, of course, the largest ever government infrastructure program, which across the general government sector and public trading enterprises accounts for \$6.4 billion over the next five years.

We have endeavoured to provide confidence for households and businesses through the strength of our public health response and our economic response. We are already seeing the signs of the V-shaped recovery that was anticipated as we emerge out of lockdown. Since the lockdown ended on 15 October, data from major banks on spending in the economy indicates an incredibly strong rebound, with spending now above the equivalent 2019 or pre-pandemic levels.

The budget indicates the territory's fiscal position remaining in deficit over the forward estimates period. The changes in our fiscal position demonstrate the costs associated with the additional support measures implemented during the pandemic. However, the strength of the territory's balance sheet allows us to undertake these

sorts of counter-cyclical fiscal responses which are already positioning us very well for the strong economic rebound that we are now experiencing.

As I indicated in the budget outlook, our return to balance will take place beyond the forward estimates—unless the economic recovery picks up even further pace—and will be supported of course by an ongoing strong public health response, including a world-leading vaccination program. This underpins the success of our economic recovery.

The support provided to local business, of course, strengthens the community overall and will continue to drive confidence in our economic recovery. The recovery of the fiscal position will be gradual and it will be consistent with the government's endeavour to continue to provide high quality essential services. We are not going to undertake an austerity agenda or pull the rug out from under the feet of a recovering economy.

The standing committee reports contains 196 recommendations on the various budget and Appropriation Bill matters. Perhaps to the relief of members, I will not address all 196 recommendations one by one in this speech. Of course, the very lengthy government response to all 196 recommendations, I would note, was put together in a time frame about 10 times faster than the committees generated their recommendations. In summary, the government has agreed to 51, agreed in principle to 62, agreed in part to six, noted 74, and not agreed to only three of the 196 recommendations.

In conclusion, none of the issues raised in any of the reports of the standing committees should prevent the passage of the Appropriation Bill, nor the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill. I invite those opposite to consider voting for the budget this time, not least of why is that you may deprive Minister Gentleman of some material in question time were you to do so. On behalf of the government, I commend the government's response to the standing committee reports and, in advance of the next four or five, maybe six, days of budget debate, commend both appropriation bills to the Legislative Assembly.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (10.21): I will not talk to the substance of the report, because obviously none of us have seen it. I just want to talk about what an arrogant and botched process has got us to this point. The government's response is a lengthy report, as the Chief Minister described it, with 196 recommendations, and shortly Mrs Jones is going to be standing up in this place to debate the health budget without the ability to look at the government's response to the committee report. I am going to be speaking about education, and I might get the chance to flick through it, if I am lucky, before that debate occurs.

If you think this is good process, Mr Acting Speaker, it is not. What it is is an arrogant process born of this government's desire to take shortcuts and rush and ram this process through. We have all experienced it in committees, where we did not even have transcripts and answers to questions back before reports were written in a hurried fashion. It has all been done so this government can rush to get out on holiday on 2 December and break from this place instead of actually doing this in a deliberative

fashion and taking it seriously. It just shows you that this is just rubberstamping what the Labor Party and the Greens come up with behind the scenes. They are treating the committee process with contempt and they are treating this Assembly with contempt by ramming through like this this budget response to all of those committees.

The opposition is very disappointed. We do not want to see this repeated. Yes, there have been issues this year—I do not dispute that—but we proposed a way forward that would have allowed for proper consideration by the committees and for us to have a report in time where it could be examined by members before they were required to speak on the budget. It just shows you what a farce this process is.

Let me make it very clear that next year we need to make sure that we re-instigate the process where we have a select committee. The standing committees next year are going to be required to do two annual reports as it is. We want to see committees inquiring into bills that are tabled in this place and we want to see committees conducting inquiries into other matters. We need to have a select committee that can look at the budget in its entirety through a considered process, and not this fiasco that we have this year. I will not comment on the detail of the budget. I will do that, and all the members will do that, against the various line items. But let me say we are bitterly disappointed with this process.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (10.24), in reply: In closing, to respond to Mr Hanson, the government tabling its response to whichever structure of committee inquires into the budget at the commencement of the budget debate has been standard practice for 15 years, if not longer. This is normal, apart from in previous times with the budget in June and then estimates taking place through late June, sometimes into early July, when the Assembly would resume in August to debate the budget.

We now have six sitting days to debate the detail of the Appropriation Bill, the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill and the government response to each of the recommendations from the committees. I think it is highly unlikely that we will use all six days on the budget debate. It is obviously in the hands of members as to how long they wish to speak on each part of the budget.

The suggestion is that this is an unusual approach and that we can only respond once we have received the recommendations from the committees. The time frame between the budget being tabled and now is nearly two months. We have had an extended period for committees to deliberate. I did not seek to bring forward the budget debate any earlier than now, and we are giving it two full weeks.

When I started in this place, we had three days to debate the budget and one of those days was consumed mostly with private members' business. We would often sit well into the evening. The number of hours of budget debate is in fact longer now, deliberately, because it is the most important bill that this Assembly debates each year. That is why it is given a fortnight of sittings. In the past, when things have been a little bit compacted and impacted by COVID, we had four consecutive days. But we always give time for budget debates.

There was a time in this place when there were two shadow treasurers, Brendan Smyth and Richard Mulcahy. I remember one particular budget where they both had to speak on everything. We literally were here until 5 am after 12 consecutive hours on the final day debating the budget. I do not think that is particularly family-friendly—

**Mrs Jones:** Ancient history, Mr Barr.

**MR BARR:** It is indeed ancient history, and it may be showing how long I have been in this chamber. I was not the Treasurer at the time, but I have endeavoured to both improve the process around the budget and give more time for members to debate it. It is the government's intent that the budget debate does stretch beyond one week to give all members the opportunity to contribute. So we are now about to embark on what I anticipate to be more than a week of debate.

We are very happy if the opposition wishes to give up private members' time to allocate back to the executive for more budget debate. If Mr Hanson wants to pursue that, it is not a problem. But I do not think he will. I think we will have many hours of budget debate over the next two weeks. With that, Mr Acting Speaker, let us get on with it. We look forward to engaging on the detail of the budget and hearing from the opposition—maybe even some alternative policy views, but I could be spending a long time waiting for that.

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 prevent orders of the day Nos 1 and 2, Executive business, relating to the Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022, being debated cognately.

## **Appropriation Bill 2021-2022**

[Cognate bill:

Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022

Cognate papers:

Standing Committee Reports on Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and  
Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022]

Debate resumed from 8 October 2021.

**MR ACTING SPEAKER** (Mr Parton): I remind members that, in debating order of the day No 1, executive business, they may also address their remarks to executive business order of the day No 2 and Assembly business order of the day relating to the

government response to the standing committee reports on the Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022.

**MRS JONES** (Murrumbidgee) (10.30): We are now starting the appropriation bill debate for 2021-22. In the area of health, the bill would appropriate \$973 million to the ACT local hospital network, which would then be distributed to the various health service providers in the ACT, including Canberra Health Services—\$351 million to the ACT Health Directorate, and \$67 million in capital to Canberra Health Services.

I would like to start by thanking the ACT government officials who made themselves available during the hearings to assist the committee to examine the estimates of expenditure for the forthcoming year. Being able to examine the proposed expenditure of the government is a central part of what we do here, and a cornerstone of our system of government.

As I have done in previous estimates and annual reports hearings, this year I sought the attendance of Calvary hospital at estimates. Calvary is an integral part of our public health system, and its attendance is of critical importance. Unlike prior years, this year I wrote formally to the committee, seeking Calvary's appearance. At the time of the hearings, however, I had not received an official response.

The chair of the committee, Mr Davis, did, however, during the hearing provide me with an update on the committee's handling of the issue, indicating that it had written to both the health minister and the mental health minister, seeking a response. I await the outcome of the committee's thinking on my request, but I note that it did not result in Calvary attending the most recent estimates.

This is not a minor issue, as we discovered that Calvary will be receiving \$261 million in recurrent funding and \$16 million in capital funding via this appropriation bill. This is a matter of principle for this Assembly—that we have all of the powers of a parliament and that we can and do use them—and I hope that the committee, in time, provides a well-considered response to my request.

The hearings, like 2020 and 2021 generally, were heavily influenced by COVID-19. I was pleased to hear from Dr Coatsworth that treatments for people who are COVID-19 positive have advanced hugely over the course of this pandemic. There is, as always, a need to avoid complacency, as we are all susceptible to this disease, which can strike down anybody, but it is heartening that we are getting better at treating COVID-19.

My colleague Mr Milligan inquired about the use of devices known as “medihoods” around beds in the hospital system. These, too, appear to have been of great assistance in the treatment of COVID-19 in the ACT. Congratulations to all of the staff associated with the rollout of those devices. This shows that we can get quite a bit done when there is a great desire to get outcomes in our health system. It puts to an end the idea that we cannot achieve well in our health system, and it gives me great hope that the ACT health system can and will perform better in the years ahead.

One disturbing revelation, however, from the hearings was that, of the 20 recommendations of the *Independent review into the workplace culture within ACT public health services*, a report handed down some 1,000 days ago, only eight have been implemented.

The health minister provided a variety of explanations as to why this was the case, some of which no doubt were significant, but it is still disappointing that we have not yet got further. I understand that more progress is being made on fixing the culture in the Canberra Hospital, and that will be great news to all of our doctors, nurses and allied health staff who have taken on and sacrificed so much during the pandemic. We owe it to them to make sure that a safe and respectful workplace is provided to them. That is the least we can do for these people.

The committee's hearings were an opportunity to go over the performance data for the emergency department at the Canberra Hospital and elective surgery waiting times in the ACT public health system. Put simply, the performance data of Canberra Hospital makes it, on some measures, the worst performing in the country. Just to recap the data, the Canberra Hospital's performance on category 3 wait times at emergency—these are people who should be seen within 30 minutes—is appalling. It is 29 per cent against a target of 70 per cent. This is down from an outcome of 74 per cent when the Liberals were last in office, and now it is the worst in the country.

The number of people discharged from emergency within four hours—the health minister's preferred measure; that is, treated and allowed to go home or admitted into the hospital—which she committed to fixing in nine months in January this year, is 57 per cent, against her target of 90 per cent. When pressed on this target in estimates, the health minister said, effectively, that she really did not know why that was the target, and she only ever really intended to get to 70 per cent, which is what she committed to in January.

Repeated failures to meet either of these targets are not just symptoms of a system that is not functioning well; they are an indication that people in the ACT are having difficult clinical experiences and that the staff are having more difficult clinical experiences than they otherwise should and would. It is the most critical issue facing the ACT health system, and it needs to be fixed.

This poor performance was highlighted by the Australian Medical Association and, only last week, former independent ACT health minister Mr Michael Moore. He said:

There is no one else to blame. Just after Labor came into government in 2002-03, the ACT waiting times in emergency departments were amongst the best in Australia. They are now the worst.

He said:

Hang your head in shame, ACT Labor. Hang your head in shame, ACT Health Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith. The latest AMA report card on our hospitals is a damning indictment on poor government and the parlous state of the ACT hospitals.

We often refer to this government as the Labor-Greens government, but Michael Moore is right: since he was health minister, the portfolio has only been held by Labor ministers. It is pretty clear where the fault lies for the progressive slippage of the ACT health system from amongst the leaders of the pack to the bottom of the barrel over the last 20 years of Labor government. It lies with Labor.

These seemingly intractable problems at the Canberra Hospital stand in stark contrast to how well we have responded to COVID-19 when required, and remind us forever more that the problems in our health system are not intractable and are not unable to be resolved; in fact, they are absolutely required to be resolved for the people of the ACT, and if other hospitals around the country can do it, so can we.

The estimates hearings provided the committee with an opportunity to examine the funding arrangements for the ACT health system. My colleague Mr Milligan asked how the funding from the commonwealth interacted with funding from the territory. The response, in short, was essentially that the ACT appropriates a certain amount and, once that is expended, the commonwealth pays the rest. This stands in stark contrast to the Chief Minister—albeit with the other first ministers—writing to the federal health minister only a couple of months ago, demanding that the commonwealth pay more for health services delivered by states and territories.

Let me be clear: as health minister, I would be pursuing every cent that we could get out of the commonwealth, but I would not effectively wave a white flag by declaring that we cannot operate our health system without more and more funding from the commonwealth. The ACT does not have demographics and distance working against us, in the same way that jurisdictions like the Northern Territory and Tasmania do, but we still cannot seem to get it right.

Mental health was an area where the estimates hearings gave us greater concern than comfort. While I acknowledge that the mental health minister has recently released a useful website that assists with mapping access to mental health services, I was very concerned about the minister's apparent lack of knowledge of her own portfolio.

The minister was unable to list the two pieces of legislation that she, as minister, has been appointed by Mr Barr to administer on behalf of the territory. This was shocking, actually. More concerning was her failure to be able to explain the acute mental health system in the ACT. What is the role of the Coordinator-General for the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing and how does that interact with the Chief Psychiatrist under the Mental Health Act 2015? What is the complaints process for systemic failures in the acute mental health system in the ACT?

My office has been approached by numerous families of, tragically, former patients in the ACT mental health system, some of whom have lost their lives, saying that their loved ones have been bounced around the system for years before ultimately falling through the cracks. The minister could not, at the time, explain how patients or the families or carers of patients could raise their concerns about the ACT's acute mental health system as a whole, other than contacting her office, which many of them have already done either in this term or with the former mental health minister. This is just not acceptable.

In conclusion, the opposition will be supporting the proposed appropriations for the ACT local hospital network, the ACT Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services. As I have said on many occasions, what really needs to happen in the ACT health system is for the systems and processes to work efficiently so that the flow through our system is maximised. And you cannot operate a high-performing system with staff that are bullied, harassed and, at times, underpaid.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

### **Detail stage**

Schedule 1—Appropriations—proposed expenditure.

**MR ACTING SPEAKER** (Mr Parton): Standing order 180 sets down the order in which the bill will be considered; that is, in the detail stage, any schedule expressing the services for which the appropriation is to be made must be considered before the clauses and, unless the Assembly otherwise orders, the schedules will be considered by proposed expenditure in the order shown. With the concurrence of the Assembly, I propose that the Assembly consider schedule 1 by each part, consisting of net cost of outputs, capital injection and payments on behalf of the territory.

Part 1.1—ACT Local Hospital Network.

Part 1.2—ACT Health Directorate.

Part 1.3—Canberra Health Services

**MR ACTING SPEAKER:** I understand that it is the wish of the Assembly to debate parts 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 together.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (10.45): The 2021-22 budget not only continues the ACT government's response to COVID-19 but also sets out our health plan for a COVID-19 normal Canberra and responds to the pressures that we have been seeing across our health system for some period of time.

The 2021-22 health portfolio expense budget is more than \$2.1 billion, excluding territorial grants and health infrastructure. This represents an increase of 6½ per cent on 2020-21. The four-year budget reflects an increase of \$1.3 billion across the health portfolio, compared to the previous four years. This is a step change and reflects this government's commitment to our health system and the record investment being made to meet the challenges that we face.

The initiatives in this budget represent our commitment to improving our health system, expanding critical hospital services that are needed to respond to the short and medium-term impacts of COVID-19, and funds our plans for better care in the community and for more alcohol and other drug services.

Recurrent funding for new initiatives is \$179 million in 2021-22 and \$671 million over four years, delivering on key commitments of the comprehensive health plan that we took to the last election. The budget also represents a significant forward plan for health infrastructure, with a total commitment over the forward estimates of \$867 million. This, again, is a significant pipeline of health infrastructure investment and builds on the almost \$1.3 billion invested over the previous decade.

New initiatives will increase the number of permanent health professionals by approximately 257 FTE. This excludes the time-limited staff who are employed as part of the COVID-19 response. This 257 FTE represents 65 per cent of the four-year election commitment we made to employ 400 more healthcare workers. So in just one budget we have delivered 65 per cent of the increased number of healthcare workers that we said we would do over this four-year term of government. Fundamentally, this budget continues to ensure that our dedicated frontline workers are supported so that they can continue to protect our community.

The budget, along with previous budgets and the incredible work of Canberrans, has enabled the ACT to become one of the most vaccinated cities on earth. This budget includes more than \$85 million in COVID-19 response funding, including \$52.3 million for the health emergency response, control centre, quarantine and compliance activities, and hospital and testing services across Canberra Health Services and Calvary Public Hospital, and \$19.5 million for the continued rollout of the vaccination program.

But this budget is really about continuing the journey of improving our health system. The budget outlines our key commitments to improve the health system, delivering for our frontline workers, improving the experience for consumers and continuing our work to improve the quality, safety and effectiveness of our system.

Key to our plan is a \$50 million commitment to deliver the first phase of the nurses and midwifery ratios framework at Canberra Hospital and at Calvary Public Hospital Bruce, delivering on our election commitment. The budget also includes key initiatives to establish a patient navigation service to better coordinate care across the health system for people with chronic and complex conditions, with \$6.4 million invested over four years—again, delivering on our election commitment.

This budget supports the Stroke Foundation, with \$620,000 over four years to deliver the Follow Up program, which aims to connect stroke survivors and carers with services and support, and to implement the specialist “Face. Arm. Speech. Time”—F.A.S.T—education program, delivering on our election commitment.

This budget includes funding to design an activity-based management program to support improvement in the resource allocation and reporting of health services across the territory. This initiative is key to improving the effectiveness of our health system.

I missed a large chunk of Mrs Jones’s speech, but I am assured that there was not a lot new that was raised in her speech. I am sure she will be interested in, and is well aware of, the investments that we are making to expand critical public hospital services through this budget.

COVID-19 has put the nation's hospitals under incredible pressure, but we know that, across the country, this pressure existed pre COVID and that this pressure is not easing up now. The government has recognised this challenge, and this budget responds with significant investments focused on expanding the critical public hospital services that we need as we move out of COVID, we hope.

This budget commits \$128 million over four years for the expansion of critical public hospital services, including \$39 million to increase emergency surgery capacity and post-surgery care, providing more than 1,900 theatre hours over the year for emergency surgery, providing greater certainty for access to emergency surgery, and increasing the bed base by eight to support greater throughput for elective and emergency surgery at Canberra Hospital.

The budget commits \$15.3 million for two additional intensive care cots for the neonatal intensive care unit at the Canberra Hospital. The budget commits more than \$28 million for the expansion of the intensive care unit at Canberra Hospital by operationalising four additional intensive care beds at Canberra Hospital.

Almost \$23 million is committed to expand the capacity of Canberra Hospital's emergency department—expanding the emergency medical unit, establishing an acute medical unit and increasing the nursing and medical workforce, including the introduction of a medical navigator.

This reflects the work that has been done over the last two years to really understand the challenges that we face at Canberra Hospital. So much work has gone into the timely care strategy, improving flow through the hospital. But we recognise that we also need to make investments in the emergency department itself and in addressing some of those challenges of getting people from the emergency department admitted into the right place in the hospital. That is what the acute medical unit is about.

This budget invests \$7 million in delivering 14,800 elective surgeries in 2021-22 and to begin our plan to deliver 60,000 elective surgeries over the next four years. The budget delivers \$15.8 million to expand critical hospital services at Calvary Public Hospital in Bruce, including more emergency department capacity and the 24/7 operation of medical imaging services, which I know that the team at Calvary has very much welcomed. The bottom line is that this budget delivers more beds, more doctors, more nurses, more surgeries and more care when it is most needed.

This budget also delivers more alcohol and other drug services in our community. The ACT government continues to prioritise harm minimisation and treating alcohol and drug addiction as a health issue, rather than a justice issue or a criminal issue. We know that COVID-19 has presented immediate challenges for people with alcohol and drug issues, which is why the budget includes \$1 million to respond to the immediate pressures caused by our recent lockdown and the specific challenges faced by people who have complex lives, including those who use drugs.

In addition, we are planning for a post-COVID world and the long-term impacts by investing an additional \$10 million over four years, including \$7.6 million over two

years for continuation of the ACT Drug and Alcohol Court, \$260,000 for a fixed pill testing pilot, delivering on our election commitment, \$982,000 to reduce harm from addiction and overdoses, including expanding the existing needle and syringe program, and \$803,000, including capital grant funding, for the commencement of work on the redevelopment of the Watson health precinct. This includes \$503,000 for Winnunga Nimmityjah, for preliminary design of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residential alcohol and other drug rehabilitation facility—delivering on our election commitment.

Our election commitments were, in large part, about recognising that one of the ways that we provide better care for consumers, better support for carers and families and reduce the pressure on our hospitals is by delivering better care closer to home in the community. The government is also investing to keep people closer to home and support them in the community, building on the key initiatives in the 2020-21 budget.

To support better care in the community, the government is committing an additional \$17.3 million over four years, including \$16 million to expand services through Clare Holland House hospice. This initiative will provide additional beds at Clare Holland House, and it also funds more home-based palliative care services. This builds on the 2020-21 budget measure to deliver Leo's Place with Palliative Care ACT, helping people to stay at home for longer as they get towards the end of their lives.

\$913,000 was included in this budget over four years to address unmet need in sexual health support for people with disability—delivering on our election commitment, and closing a gap that was, unfortunately, created with the NDIS failing people with disability in support for access to appropriate sexual health education and support. And \$360,000 has been committed for the implementation of the LGBTIQ+ scoping study recommendations, including prioritising the development of a gender-focused, peer-led health service—again, delivering on Labor's election commitment.

As I mentioned earlier, this budget invests significantly in improving Canberra's health infrastructure. The budget continues our ambitious health infrastructure plan. It sets out a plan for continuous health infrastructure build and investment, with new hospital infrastructure, renewal of critical existing buildings, new community infrastructure, and delivering on the commitments we made and the plans that we set out at the last election.

The budget includes almost \$550 million over the forward estimates to continue to deliver the Canberra Hospital expansion—the biggest investment in health infrastructure since self-government. But it also includes \$32.7 million to support a range of infrastructure upgrades at Calvary Public Hospital, while we spend \$13½ million for the continuation of planning and design works for a new north-side hospital, bringing modern hospital services closer to the growing and ageing north-side population and beginning delivery of Labor's election commitment.

The budget also includes \$7 million for the construction of a cancer research centre at the Canberra Region Cancer Centre at Canberra Hospital—again, delivering on our election commitment to ensure that we are embedding research and training in our hospital system, becoming a truly learning health system, and ensuring that the

Canberra Region Cancer Centre becomes truly a comprehensive cancer centre, not only for people in the ACT but for those in our surrounding regions.

The budget includes more than \$2 million to upgrade endoscopy rooms at Canberra Hospital—again, beginning delivery of ACT Labor’s election commitment. There is \$3 million to undertake feasibility and design work for a new multi-storey car park at Canberra Hospital as part of the Canberra Hospital master plan—listening to the community as they have provided us with input on what they want to see at Canberra Hospital. Finally, there is \$1.3 million for the long-term lease of a new and expanded medical inventory warehouse.

This budget, as I said at the beginning, represents a step change in health funding in the ACT. It delivers strong plans to future proof our health infrastructure and employ more doctors, more nurses, more allied health staff and more support staff to deliver on key commitments and the plans that the ACT people voted for at the last election. It funds our plan to ensure that our health system is able to continue delivering excellent care when and where people need it. I commend this budget to the Assembly.

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Seniors, Veterans, Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health and Minister for Mental Health) (10.59): It gives me great pleasure to speak about another ACT government budget where we have put the provision of health services for our growing city front and centre. I would like to speak about a number of particularly important aspects of our mental health investment, an increase of more than nine per cent, to a total of \$218 million for mental health in 2021-22 and \$908 million over the forward estimates. This is in addition to \$3.6 million announced in September for mental health services, separate to the budget.

Health services are vital for all sections of our community and they support us all at crucial times in our lives. Health services are particularly important for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans, who we know experience disproportionately poor health outcomes compared to the general community. I am pleased to speak about our deep and ongoing commitment to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and acting on our responsibilities to help close the gap.

The health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be in the hands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. History demonstrates that government rarely knows best. This philosophy is a key feature of the investments in this budget. Money is going to Aboriginal organisations, to those who know how it should be used for the benefit of community.

We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in our prisons. A key part of addressing this is ensuring that people have access to health care that addresses their needs, and which they feel safe accessing. To support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are in AMC, there is a need to provide holistic and culturally appropriate health care for those people.

The Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services presence at the AMC commenced in 2019, as a result of recommendation 5 of the 2016 Moss

review. Winnunga has a full-time presence within the AMC. The Winnunga model of care, as a stand-alone, community-controlled service in the AMC, is the first of its kind nationally to be implemented in a correctional facility.

Winnunga provides culturally appropriate, trauma-informed and responsive health care, specifically developed to meet the complex health and social support needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at AMC, and includes health assessments, GP mental health care plans and focused psychological strategies. This is an innovative approach to investing in addressing complex underlying health, social and emotional wellbeing issues experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in AMC that have contributed to periods of incarceration.

In 2021-22, \$1.348 million will be provided to Winnunga for the Winnunga model of care at the AMC. The increase in funding for the Winnunga model of care will meet the commitment to fully implement the recommendations of the 2016 Moss inquiry. The funding will expand the current service delivery through increasing much-needed psychologist hours. The increased funding also provides for more registered nurses providing daily services to Winnunga clients at the AMC.

In the 2021-22 budget, the ACT government has invested \$2.212 million in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention service for the ACT. This is an important initiative which will focus on community-based suicide prevention, intervention, postvention and aftercare. Suicide is not only an individual issue; the impact of suicide ripples through the community, profoundly affecting people's families, friends and peers. Unfortunately, the suicide rate among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is double that of non-Indigenous people. Suicide is the fifth leading cause of death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and we must respond to this.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention service will be delivered by a community provider, with the specific aim of being culturally appropriate and able to work with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Members in this place will know that my favourite word is "co-design", so I am glad to say that this has been an integral part of the development of this service. Thank you especially to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Working Group, Winnunga Nimmityjah and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body for sharing your experiences during the consultations.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleague Minister Shane Rattenbury, the former Minister for Mental Health, who first progressed this work through the 2020-21 COVID-19 mental health support package. I am so glad to be able to further progress this service. I am proud to be able to speak in this place on this important service, which will respond to the unique needs of ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the spectrum of need from suicide prevention to postvention and aftercare.

One of the most important things we can do for our community is to ensure that our community mental health services can offer early support when Canberrans need it most. This can help people to stay as well as possible, for as long as possible. It means

that people get help before it becomes an acute crisis, they can continue important regular activities like work, study or caring for others, and people do not have to get worse before they get better. Access to the right types of services at the right time is essential to ensure that we can continue to support people's mental health and wellbeing in the community.

As Minister for Mental Health, supporting community-based care is one of my most significant priorities. This mode of delivering mental health care ensures that hospital admissions are avoided as much as possible, in turn allowing our community to access support without having to leave their homes or their families. My goal for Canberra's mental health system is that, as much as possible, we will catch people in the very early stages of mental ill-health or distress, before situations develop into crisis. Hospital care will always be available, and Canberra Health Services will continue to make this as therapeutic as possible. But caring for people in our community will always be the best long-term strategy for mental health and wellbeing.

This priority is the rationale behind the 2021-22 ongoing budget funding for CatholicCare and Parentline to deliver support to young people and families in the ACT. The ACT government will fund CatholicCare's Youth and Wellbeing program, with \$851,000 over four years, and Parentline ACT with \$169,000 over four years—two important organisations that I am pleased to support.

CatholicCare and Parentline are two longstanding organisations that support different groups of people and different stages of mental health, yet both play an integral part in the ACT government's goal to ensure early support for our community. The CatholicCare Youth and Wellbeing program supports young people aged 12 to 25 with complex needs. It offers a unique combination of case management and therapeutic intervention, to support young people to improve their mental health and recovery, with a holistic view of their lives.

The complexity of supporting young people with mental health issues was highlighted in the 66 recommendations provided by the Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs inquiry into youth mental health in the ACT and the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing review of children and young people in the ACT.

Many of the young people engaged in the Youth and Wellbeing service have co-occurring issues such as alcohol and drug use, experiences of trauma or intellectual and cognitive disability. But through its focus on trauma-informed service delivery and working with young people's strengths, Youth and Wellbeing is well placed to support these young people. The service addresses more than just clinical mental health concerns; it also supports relationships, housing, education and physical health—domains that play an important role in ensuring the longevity of mental health and wellbeing.

Parentline ACT is a phone counselling service that offers free telephone and face-to-face counselling, and phone "check-ins" with parents and carers. During the COVID-19 lockdown, calls to the service increased by 25 per cent due to the increased anxiety of parents and carers. Parentline's service ensures that, at times of

family stress, parents and carers have someone to talk to. Through this, Parentline makes an important contribution to intergenerational mental health and wellbeing and the development of positive family relationships.

Whilst it is a key priority for this government to invest in services that promote early intervention, we recognise that some people will require an inpatient stay, and we are investing in this too. I note that, from 1 July to 28 September 2021, patients staying for more than 24 hours in the emergency department reduced to two per cent, from eight per cent for the same period in 2019-20.

The emergency departments at Calvary Public Hospital Bruce and Canberra Hospital and the adult mental health unit have been experiencing ongoing and increasing demand pressures over some time. To respond to these immediate service demand issues, recurrent funding has been provided for 10 additional inpatient beds at Canberra Hospital on ward 12B and an increase in high dependency unit capacity for acute adult beds. The realignment of eight additional low dependency unit beds in the adult mental health unit, to be used flexibly, means they can be used as either low dependency unit or high dependency unit beds. This will assist with meeting the increasing demand for services while resulting in better patient experiences and care.

This is a comprehensive package which I am proud to commend to the Assembly. I will end by saying that I am so proud that the ACT government has invested in such a wide range of early support for Canberrans' mental health in this budget. Through this work, we are investing in the mental health and wellbeing of our community now, and for generations to come.

**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (11.09): In a society like ours, everyone who needs medical support should be able to access it, no matter their income or circumstances. The availability of timely and affordable low or no cost health care is a key measure of success for progressive, forward-thinking communities. This budget takes important steps towards improving services within our health system as we begin to emerge from the pandemic.

It is important to remember that our health system is broader, and even more complex, than just hospital services. This health budget has a strong focus on the provision of care for vulnerable and minority populations, who we know are more likely to experience discrimination and ostracism from the health system.

Alongside a huge infrastructure spend for health, and the introduction of life-saving nurse to patient ratios, this budget invests in tackling these problems, including harm reduction for people who use drugs, support for people experiencing distress from mental health concerns, and the implementation of the much-anticipated LGBTQIA+ health scoping study.

There is no doubt that this budget has a strong focus on the prevention of COVID-19 outbreaks. Testing, tracing, isolating and quarantine will remain a key part of the response to COVID, alongside our nation-leading vaccination program. The controlled response to the outbreak we have witnessed this financial year already is a testament to the directorate, Canberra Health Services, the Chief Health Officer, the

Minister for Health and the Minister for Mental Health. It demonstrates, too, that this budget is realistic in its understanding of how the pandemic will continue to impact our health system and how adaptive our health system will need to continue to be for some time.

We are pleased to see the government's investment in planning for Canberra's future health needs through support for continued funding towards new walk-in centres and continued work on the new north-side hospital. We know that a well-resourced public sector is an integral part of the delivery of health services, and we look forward to working within the government to ensure that the planning work for these services is transparent and collaborative, and centres the experiences of healthcare consumers and healthcare workers.

We note the implementation work that continues from the ACT Health and CHS culture review and remain cautiously optimistic that this will mean that we will observe improvements in the health and wellbeing of ACT Health and CHS staff, particularly junior doctors and nursing staff. The commitment the government has made through this budget to meet its agreement for nursing staff to patient ratios will no doubt save the lives of patients, provide safer workplaces for our nursing staff and help to retain quality nurses within our system.

As the ACT Greens spokesperson for drug harm reduction, I am thrilled to see that this budget begins to recognise the need for more funding in the alcohol and other drugs sector. I am particularly pleased to see some of this funding going to the Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy, CAHMA, a peer-led organisation which consistently performs well above its contracted expectations and which we know is integral to our harm reduction system in the ACT.

We are really proud to see that the pilot for drug testing will be funded by this budget. We are keen to see this service run continuously, with the pilot and the research to be a mechanism to tweak and pivot, not to pause and delay. This work has been a long time coming and something the ACT Greens have been advocating for for many years in this place. It builds on well-respected and evaluated work on the efficacy of pill testing at the Groovin the Moo festival.

The government's interest in and commitment to undertaking further scoping for a drug consumption room is another important step towards reducing the harm of drugs in our city. The ACT should have had a drug consumption room a long time ago, something my colleagues, family and friends seeking drug law reform pay testament to every day.

However, we are pleased that this work is moving ahead and that the government is strong enough, evidence-based enough and caring enough to make bold decisions in the face of what is sometimes a vitriolic scare campaign about people who use drugs. My colleagues and I in the Greens look forward to continuing to support this work throughout next year.

We know that COVID exacerbated existing inequalities in health care. Climate change will be the next big crisis that our healthcare system will face. We know that

climate change will lead to increased health stress through rising temperatures and extreme weather events. We also know that the healthcare system has an impact on the climate. According to the Health Care Consumers Association:

The health care sector is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, waste products and natural resource consumption. This threatens our present and future health. In Australia emissions are estimated at over 7% of Australia's total CO2 emissions.

This means that our health system needs to be responsive to the climate crisis. We would like to see a dedicated plan and approach and a workforce within the Health Directorate who are tasked with ensuring that our health system can be adaptive to this now devastatingly inevitable change, as well as working to ensure that our health system is not contributing unfairly to the emission of greenhouse gases.

The ACT Greens are pleased to support the passing of the appropriation bill for our public health system and are looking forward to continuing to work in partnership with our colleagues in the executive and from the crossbench to ensure that our healthcare system responds and rebuilds from COVID-19 so that we have a stronger and more responsive healthcare system.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Education Directorate—Part 1.4.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (11.15): I rise to comment on the performance and management of education in the ACT. I am going to go back to comments I made in this place earlier this year.

In June I was very proud to present the Canberra Liberals' vision for education in Canberra. We produced a comprehensive, considered report called *Bringing out the best in every child*. In it, we identified five key areas to achieve better outcomes for every child. One was to improve academic standards. We identified, through a wide range of independent sources, that there is a need to equip teachers with the tools and support they need to provide strong learning for every student in every year of schooling. We also need a focused curriculum, streamlined and dedicated to literacy and numeracy foundations.

The second point was to create real opportunity. That is about making equity of access a reality for every student, regardless of their background or ability, and creating environments that bring out the best in every child.

The third was reducing bullying and violence. We need to work with our schools, communities and families to make our schools safer for students and teachers, and to create positive cultures in every school. A report in the *Canberra Times* on 20 June stated that staff reported nearly 1,000 safety incidents a month in February and March. Of these, more than 800 in each month involved violence. In an ACT inquiry submission in 2019, the ACT Parents and Citizens Association told the committee that the rate of bullying had become a concern to the majority of ACT students, with

86 per cent of students agreeing that they were worried about incidents of bullying. It is not good enough.

The fourth was more support for schools through better funding and governance. This is one of the core failings we identified early—the need for more funding and better governance. We said that we need to ensure that funding is spent on what works. We noted comments from the Auditor-General on governance, and we recommended a rebalancing for a stronger government school system and building policy and programs based on evidence and review. As we noted at the time, workload expectations and stress were taking a significant toll. The ACT government school leader survey of 2019 said that school principals reported the quantity of work, lack of time to focus on teaching and learning, and student mental health as their main sources of stress.

The fifth was fixing overcrowded schools and ageing infrastructure. That is subject to an inquiry that is ongoing in the Assembly. We called for immediate attention to the problems of overcrowding and school capacity. I pointed out at the time that this is to meet not just existing but future demand proactively.

I was very proud of the document when it was published. It was fully researched and fact-checked as a proposal. I was pleased by a lot of the feedback that I got from teachers, parents and the community. In a RiotACT article headed “ACT government needs to learn from its mistakes on schools”, Ian Bushnell wrote:

The Canberra Liberals’ new Education Strategy will resonate with the many Canberra parents who have growing misgivings about the direction of ACT Government schools.

It covers many of the sore points and suspicions held by parents that all is not well despite the efforts of teachers, principals and their school communities, and calls for a review of the system.

It is disappointing that we heard comments from both the Labor Party and the Greens disagreeing and ignoring what was in the report. Ms Berry said at the time:

... every single one of our ACT public schools goes through an independent school improvement review every five years ... These reviews show that the ACT’s public schools are consistently performing at high levels ...

That is not what we heard from any of the independent sources that were saying this at the time. Let me quote what they were saying. I quote from the Auditor-General. The Auditor-General, who is one of our most fiercely apolitical and independent reviewers, made comprehensive findings in a report on teacher quality. The report said:

The Education Directorate does not centrally plan or monitor the distribution of experienced teachers across the ACT public school system ...

The teacher performance development process is not effective in supporting teaching quality, and does not effectively support teaching appraisals ... The performance management process for teaching staff is not implemented effectively ...

The report went on to say:

The Education Support Office does not formally analyse school improvement documentation to better target and improve teaching quality supports and this reduces the effectiveness of the school improvement process to improve teaching quality.

This was not the only external source raising serious concerns about the performance of the directorate and our public schools. The ACT Council for Social Service and the ACT Youth Coalition said:

Educational disadvantage in the ACT is hidden and we need to be taking steps to address the inequities in the system.

Roberts and Leonard from the University of Canberra said:

A close examination of the PISA report shows that the ACT quickly falls to near the bottom of the nation when it comes to equity in education ...

A report by the ABC said:

... the ACT still has a significant gap in NAPLAN results between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

It is clear that maintenance and infrastructure have been glaringly underfunded. Mr Assistant Speaker, you are the chair of the committee that has been looking into this. One *Canberra Times* headline read “Macquarie Primary School in ‘dangerous’ state of disrepair”. The Harrison School P&C said:

The school has been experiencing capacity and infrastructure issues since inception.

The Lyneham Primary School board says:

As a board, we are concerned that poor building maintenance increases the risk to student and staff safety and wellbeing, potentially resulting in costly repairs and litigation.

The Garran Primary School board and P&C committee said that they had been discussing infrastructure for five years.

That is what was being said by academics, the community, the Auditor-General, parents and teachers. At the time, I called for a proper and comprehensive review by a properly constituted body, a task force. I said, “I am calling for the government to establish an independent review into the ACT government education system.”

As the record now shows, my call for a comprehensive review was rejected by the Labor Party and the Greens. They were saying, “Everything is hunky-dory. It is all good. Nothing to look at here.” It was rejected in a way that was clearly politically motivated. No attention was paid to the myriad sources and contributors that provided warnings about the problems experienced at the front line of our school system. It was rejected. This call for a review to look into our school system was rejected.

Since then, the Australian Education Union has released its report. We knew things were bad; we knew that things were tough on the front lines of our schools. But we did not know quite how bad things were. If you listened to the Greens and the Labor Party, everything was just hunky-dory. But what the union revealed—and what had been kept secret from the community by the minister, and the Greens, backing her up at every step along the way—is that things are very difficult within our education system.

Let me give some results from the survey. Ninety-one per cent of schools say they are negatively impacted by lack of staff; 95 per cent of teachers think that these shortages are serious; 85 per cent believe that the directorate does not have the resources necessary to meet demand; and 98 per cent of teachers in our government schools—98 per cent, Mr Assistant Speaker—believe that staff shortages are undermining their ability to deliver high-quality education. Meanwhile, the Labor Party and the Greens come to this place and say: “Everything is hunky-dory! Nothing to see here. No, we do not need a review.”

The lack of resources has led to split and modified classes, and 97 per cent of teachers surveyed believe that students are being disadvantaged under the mob opposite, under the Labor Party and the Greens, who say that it is all good. Ninety-seven per cent of teachers think that shortages are undermining their ability to deliver high-quality education. The lack of resources has led to a range of other problems, including low morale, unsafe workplaces, fear of actual violence, burnout for teachers, and compromised learning for students.

Let me give some quotes from teachers under this government and what they are saying. Relief staff say:

“We really need to treat relief staff with the value and respect they deserve as they are actually fully-fledged teachers in their own right.”

“The school I am employed at has stated that we do not have a budget to pay for relief staff therefore splitting classes is our only option.”

Shame!

On safety:

The staff shortage needs to be fixed as soon as possible. I believe that the longer that this need is not met the more teachers will burn out, further exacerbating the problem.

That is under this government, Mr Assistant Speaker!

On split classes:

Often up to four classes per day were split, resulting in ‘classes’ over 40+ students, which contributed directly to ... occupational violence—particularly as students with special needs were forced to work with teachers (and students) they did not know well.

*(Second speaking period taken.)*

Staffing shortages have had a direct impact on the workload of teachers. Almost all respondents, 97 per cent of respondents, describe their workload as at least difficult. More than three quarters, 78 per cent, describe their workload as ranging from difficult to extremely difficult. Nearly all, 97 per cent, said that they work more than their maximum weekly hours. This includes working on the weekends, in the evenings and during periods of leave or standdown.

Let me give another quote. Come on, Greens and Labor; listen to this. This is your government; this is the Education Directorate you refuse to have a review on. You came in here and said that there was no requirement. This is what the teachers are saying:

“Teachers are drowning. We need support.”

“Please do something soon. It is getting harder all the time.”

Shame on you!

Seventy-nine per cent of teachers surveyed said that they work excessive hours every week, and 59 per cent of classroom teachers say that this happens every week. That includes 70 per cent of primary level classroom teachers. Almost all teachers report working unpaid overtime every week, with more than 40 per cent working 10 or more hours, and even more hours when weekend work is included.

Let me give another quote. Listen to this. This is the directorate that you have been governing for the last 20 years. The report quotes teachers as saying:

“I have been teaching in the ACT for 25 years. The job/expectations have changed drastically over this time, with an increase in workload, accountability, paperwork, duties, family expectations and so on AND a decrease in resources, respect, job satisfaction.”

“There have been too many increases in accountability and expectations without support and resources.”

When I presented the Canberra Liberals report that was detailed by academics, P&Cs, experts in the field and the Auditor-General, the Greens and the Labor Party dismissed it, saying, “This is just some right-wing conspiracy.” Are you going to discount this? Are you going to discount the words of the teachers, Mr Assistant Speaker? Are you going to stand up? Are the Greens going to stand up and say, “This is just some right-wing conspiracy.” This is teachers; this is the Australian Education Union; and it is damning.

Let me give you another quote from teachers on the front line through the union report:

Schools are seriously underfunded ... We often joke about how schools are the only government jobs where you ‘steal’ from home to bring to school. We do it for the love of the children ... but it’s really not ok.

And it is really not okay, Mr Assistant Speaker. Let me quote again:

“Things need to change. The amount of high-quality educators I know who want to leave the profession due to workload and occupational violence is appalling. We need to be respected and treated like professionals.”

“I feel extremely sad that myself, and so many other teachers feel this way. I feel let down by the system, all my years of hard work and experience is about to walk out the door.”

“I love my job, I think it’s the best job in the world, but in its current state it’s unsustainable.”

The report concludes:

The staffing shortage has revealed systemic issues for which a superficial solution will not suffice. It is not simply the case that ACT public education needs to recruit more teachers. It must also retain those we have, support them with adequate infrastructure, time for non-face-to-face work, provide relief so that they can take time off when they’re unwell, protect them from violence and the psychosocial safety hazard of extreme stress, and make sure their pay and overall conditions reflect their essential work.

I want to commend the Australian Education Union for having the bravery and integrity to put this report out. We have not seen it from the Labor Party and we certainly have not seen it from the Greens, but they at least have the courage to come out and confront the situation. What we have seen from the Labor Party and the Greens is continued denial. We heard it in June; maybe we will hear it again today.

Unfortunately, they are doing precious little to address this situation. This budget is an abject failure of our obligation to our education system. And the problems that I have just read out, the concerns that have been raised by teachers, unions, academics, the Auditor-General, P&Cs and parents—everybody is saying the same thing. The only people not agreeing, not accepting that it is a problem, is this lot.

The Labor Party and the Greens in this place are the only people in denial. The union is saying it; the teachers are saying it; the parents are saying it; the academics are saying it; the Auditor-General is saying it; the P&Cs are saying it. The only people not admitting to the problem are the Labor Party and the Greens in this place. They are the ones that have created it; that is why they are denying it.

Teachers are crying out for more staff. This Labor government promised 400 new teachers at the last election. Where are they? Where are these new teachers that were promised? How many teachers were in this last budget? I have asked that question about six times. We had 42 new staff, a drop in the ocean. How many qualified frontline teachers are going onto the front line to teach in classrooms? I still do not have a proper answer to that. I assume that the answer is none. We were told by the minister that there were 12 vacancies. I said, “How many vacancies are there?” “Twelve.” That is a nonsense. It is a nonsense to suggest that that is the case.

The community has been calling for maintenance. It has been crying out for school maintenance. What is this government's response? More demountables. Some of the demountables that were meant to be in schools for a couple of years have been there for decades.

Mr Assistant Speaker, you were in the estimates hearing. I do not think anyone who listened to that—I got phone calls from a number of people—had any confidence that this government either was across the issues in the first place or had an effective plan to respond.

I would like to make some final points, Mr Assistant Speaker. A lot of this has happened under this government's watch. A lot of the problems we are seeing now in terms of school capacity stem from the fact that this government and the current Chief Minister closed down 23 schools a while back, in 2006. This is a government that is burning teachers out, that has let schools fall apart, that has closed 23 schools. We have seen a real problem with academic standards, particularly numeracy and literacy, across the board. Then, when we see this budget, we see a minister who does not even seem to be across the brief and has no plan to respond to these concerns.

We have seen funding not being where it needs to be. From 2009-10 to 2018 the federal government increased its funding to ACT schools by 26 per cent. Over the same period as the increase in funding by the federal government, funding from the local government decreased by 3.2 per cent. The tables are in the paper I put out. The argument that "We are putting money in; the feds are dudding us" is not true. That is the go-to answer from this mob; it is not true.

We will continue to call out the problems here. We have put out a paper that outlines the issues. It is an honest appraisal of the issues, and it is backed up by the union report. We have provided a way forward. But there is a lot of work to do. It is clear that this budget will not address the systemic issues for teachers who are burning out. The academic standards that we have seen from the Auditor-General, the ANU, the Grattan Institute, the Australian Institute and others are not where they should be.

There is the infrastructure, across the board. I have had correspondence from a number of P&Cs who have said, "There is nothing for us in this budget." They have real problems in their schools in terms of infrastructure; there is nothing for them in the budget.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I am disappointed. I think teachers, parents and P&Cs will be disappointed. This government does not seem to accept that there is a problem. If you cannot accept that there is a problem, how on earth are you going to resolve it? I am disappointed, but on this side we will continue to fight for our frontline teachers, who we know are bearing the brunt of this government's mismanagement.

**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (11.35): I thank Mr Hanson for his ongoing support of local small businesses like coffee shops! It must have taken an awful lot of caffeine to manufacture that level of confected outraged this early in the morning; I appreciate it.

Before returning to my prepared remarks, I feel compelled to correct the record on a few assertions made in Mr Hanson's presentation. While I trust the Canberra electorate to know that I speak on behalf of myself and that we, the ACT Greens, speak on behalf of ourselves, I think they know better than to trust Mr Hanson's articulation of what we have said or not said in this place.

I am aware—as a former public school student, as a long-term campaigner for the equitable funding and resourcing of ACT public schools, as a long-term associate member of the Australian Education Union ACT branch and as somebody who has been motivated into political activism and electoral politics by a passion for better public schools—that things are not perfect. But this budget goes a long way to addressing a number of specific concerns that have been raised by parents, students and teachers over the course of the last few years.

The glossy blue document that Mr Hanson repeatedly referred to in his presentation, which was produced earlier in the year, was essentially a compilation mixtape of other people's work that was very happy to define the education system as being in crisis without a definitive or specific play for how best to address that crisis. I was much more interested in engaging with the government from the crossbench and through my colleagues in the executive to fund specific programs and initiatives that we know will have a tangible beneficial effect in improving our public schools here in the ACT, as a direct response to what parents, teachers and students have actively lobbied for. The document was not a root and branch external review on Canberra Liberals' talking points, as Mr Hanson would propose—only a political quest, on the taxpayer's dime, to find ammunition which the Canberra Liberals could use to beat the government up with over the course of the next few years.

We are focused on very specific programs and very specific investments that respond to community concerns. One such investment that I am particularly proud to see supported throughout this budget is the teacher shortage task force. You would know better than anyone else, Mr Assistant Speaker, as an observer of what I say and do in this place, that I am not usually a fan of having a task force for a task force's sake. I am not usually a fan of a taxpayer-funded morning tea to flesh out an issue without a definitive plan for what could happen.

But, as opposed to the Canberra Liberals' alternative plan, a root and branch review of the education system without any end in sight, this very specifically addresses what is arguably the number one issue in our public school system, not just here in the ACT but across the entire country.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR DAVIS:** Before I find myself answering interjections by the Canberra Liberals—who will no doubt say that I get a bit upset when I point out that these things and these challenges exist outside the ACT borders—let me say that I accept that the government has a responsibility to address these issues from within its own directorate. That is why the minister has responded to the calls from the Australian Education Union to stand up a specific teacher shortage task force to look into that

specific issue across the course of a teacher's life. I commend the minister for doing that.

As a fellow member of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion, Mr Assistant Speaker, you will no doubt be having conversations in the new year regarding the Auditor-General's report which has been referred to by Mr Hanson in his presentation. That directly goes to teacher quality. These are some of the specific investments that we are happy to see.

It speaks to the dirt path of Australian politics that my three crossbenchers and I walk on. It is important that we be honest with the electorate and speak about things that we are concerned about and things that are not quite going well, while also commending the government for great new investments and initiatives that we are proud to see there and that we have lobbied hard for. It would be much easier to be an opposition MLA and just say that everything is completely cooked, and the only way we could possibly fix anything would be by electing the other mob. Instead, I am going to be more nuanced in my contribution and my comments.

One thing I would really like to commend the government for is responding to the long-term concerns of parents, exacerbated through the COVID pandemic, about the number of social and youth workers throughout our schools. One of the specific pressure points, I understand, from my deep consultative conversations with teachers and the union—not arbitrary quotes thrown about in this place to make a political point, but deep consultation with the sector—is that in the ACT, and in schools across the country, there are far too many teachers who are taken out of the classroom to provide pastoral care, and psychological and social worker support, for individual students who risk slipping through the cracks.

The world is getting tougher. That was the case even before the pandemic. The government has acknowledged that and has funded 25 new positions across our schools for social workers and youth workers. That is a fantastic thing. I would have hoped to have seen more positive affirmations of that funding in the presentation that we have seen so far; I am disappointed that I did not. It sends a clear message to parents, teachers and students across the ACT about what kinds of political interventions we can continue to expect to see from the Canberra Liberals on the question of public education.

I am particularly proud of the teacher task force, but in the few moments I have left I would like to speak on the importance of investing further in civics and democracy education in ACT schools. I am pleased to see that we have additional funding throughout the budget for that. I would like to think that it was a response to a number of motions and speeches I have made in this place over the course of the last year, speaking to the value of young people engaging in political processes and civic and democratic processes, engaging in peaceful protest, and being provided with the awesome opportunity that gives young people the opportunity to live out the curriculum they are learning in schools and that teachers are aptly teaching them.

Should those observing get nothing else out of this debate, as a passionate advocate for the ACT's public school system, as a long-term campaigner for better pay and

better working conditions for public school teachers, and as a proud public school graduate myself, whose activism led me to this place, let me make it clear that things are not perfect. But also let me make it clear that, as a result of direct investments in this budget and decisions that this Labor-Greens government has taken over the past six months in particular, things are about to get substantially better—better with 25 new social and youth workers spread across our system; better with a purposeful and strategic teacher shortage task force to identify and strategise how to recruit and retain a quality teaching task force into our sector; better with an increased acknowledgement of the value of civics and democracy education in our public schools and the flow-on effects of that education throughout our broader curriculum; and better because both parties of government have collaborated, in good faith, to find new and innovative funding models for specific challenges in the Education Directorate, many of which I have been pleased to campaign for over the last 12 months.

That is the way the ACT Greens will continue to engage in the debate on public education. That is the work that I will continue to do as the ACT Greens spokesperson for education. Because it is my nature, I will always have a bit of fun coming in here and having conversations with the room, but once this budget appropriation is back, I will go back to doing the substantive work with Minister Berry and her office to get a better outcome for public school teachers, parents and students. I look forward to that work in the coming year.

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (11.44): I rise to present the speech prepared by Ms Berry, Minister for Education, as she is not able to be here due to illness.

As we come to the close of this extraordinary and challenging year, I draw the Assembly's attention to the ACT government's significant financial commitment to the education of Canberra's children and young people. I want to highlight to this Assembly, and to the people of Canberra, the great importance of education as perhaps the primary tool to achieve equity and social justice in our community.

Education is not only about building a student's ability to land a great job, nurturing individual achievement and success. A good education is critical to ensuring that the next generation are fully functioning members of their society—active citizens, participating in democracy, engaging with each other, being able to effect social change and understanding the importance of public health measures for all, even when they come at some personal cost.

A strong education system is for all of us, not just the individual. All students therefore need to be supported to achieve an education that not only nurtures them but builds our whole community and civil society.

When we delivered our education budget last month, we focused on measures that make sure that students experiencing vulnerabilities are supported to engage in everything a public education has to offer. The measures are a core part of our 10-year Future of Education Strategy. The strategy acknowledges the great diversity of our students and recognises that access to educational opportunity and responding to the needs of each student are at the heart of a successful society.

Equity and inclusion sit at the heart of the strategy. As I have said in the past, access to education goes beyond being able to buy a schoolbook. It is about making sure that the internet is on at home and you can access counselling if times are tough. It is about having enough money to buy footy boots for school sport and starting the school year with a new backpack and a fresh haircut. It is about not feeling as though you are less than the person you sit next to in class.

The ACT government have committed an additional \$51 million over the next four years to roll out a series of initiatives to ensure equitable access to a great public education regardless of a student's background or circumstance. Equity initiatives include more than \$21 million over the next four years to ensure that all year 7 to 12 students have access to a Chromebook. There is another \$2.8 million over four years to provide internet access to any secondary school student who needs it, and to fund a new e-safety program. There is \$12.5 million over four years to continue the ACT's nation-leading, 10-year plan for early childhood education, Set Up for Success. Extra support for early learning services means that all three-year-old children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage can access free early learning.

We are funding 12 scholarships for an early childhood teacher degree. There is a new \$11.5 million future of education equity fund to replace the high school bursary scheme, reaching an estimated five times as many students. Canberra families will be able to apply for grants to help cover the costs of education expenses, such as school uniforms, school excursions, sporting equipment and music lessons.

There are 25 extra youth and social workers, at a cost of \$7.4 million over the next four years, to provide early intervention and support for students and their families. There is \$1.5 million for a two-year trial to provide 1,500 vulnerable students with access to free breakfast and lunch three days a week throughout the school year. There is \$450,000 over the next two years to work with young people with disability, their families and the broader community, to review how public schools deliver inclusive education. There is \$445,000 to provide free and confidential legal advice to public college students; this is particularly important as we see cases of domestic and family violence increase during the pandemic.

These initiatives will help make sure that Canberra's children and young people, regardless of background or circumstance, are better able to engage in school life.

I also draw members' attention to the ACT government's significant budget investment in school infrastructure. The ACT government will ensure that we can continue to build new schools where they are needed, and that our existing schools have the capacity and facilities to support teaching and learning for all students. We are committing new funding to capital works over the next four years which will help build the new primary school at Strathnairn in west Belconnen, complete the new Taylor high school and upgrade existing schools as the demand for a public education continues to climb.

These investments are a clear demonstration of how our government is delivering on the promise to provide a great education for each and every child in this territory, to

ensure that all Canberra's children are equipped with the knowledge and skills to prosper in what is an exciting but also uncertain future.

More than ever, we need to focus on preparing our young people so that they have the opportunity to live a full and rewarding life, to foster the creativity and resilience they will need to respond to the challenges ahead and to participate in society as engaged, thoughtful and compassionate citizens.

Education not only underpins our economy; it is the foundation stone of our culture and our society. What happens in schools happens in our community. Equity in schools will flow beyond the school gates into our lives. If we want a fairer, more equal society, where opportunity is available to all, we must deliver the highest standards of education. This is the essential purpose of our 2021-22 education budget.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

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

**Sitting suspended from 11.51 am to 2.00 pm.**

## **Ministerial arrangements**

**MR BARR:** The Deputy Chief Minister will be absent from question time today. I will endeavour to assist members with any questions in the Deputy Chief Minister's portfolios.

## **Questions without notice**

### **Schools—COVID-19**

**MRS JONES:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, in mid-November you stated that the use of rapid antigen testing was being considered for ACT schools to assist children to be back in the classroom after an exposure to COVID faster than the current 14 days. A 14-day stay-at-home is a long time for children who have already had to endure months of lockdown this year. By 20 November you had decided we would not have rapid antigen testing in schools. Since then, more than one school has had numerous students sent home to isolate for 14 days, not leaving the house, with advice being to try and remain separate to others in their household. Minister, why are you not proceeding with rapid antigen testing?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mrs Jones for the question. This was a matter that was very carefully considered by ACT Health, by the Education Directorate and, indeed, by the cabinet. The issue was that when we got to that point, we had four weeks left of the school term in which we could potentially implement a pilot. In order for a pilot to be useful it would have had to be able to be implemented over the whole two-week period. We would have had to have an appropriate school turn out to be an exposure site—an appropriate school with an appropriate class, with parents and

a school community who were willing to participate. And it would have had to become an exposure site within a two-week period.

We were also really conscious of the fact that it has been a very long year. While I recognise that some parents would certainly appreciate being able to participate in a rapid antigen test pilot, for others some of the feedback we had was, “Oh my goodness, not one more thing that I would have to think about and do!” That was certainly some of the feedback that we had from staff, as well. So, on balance—weighing up the pros and cons of a rapid antigen test pilot at this time of the year, and what we would learn from a pilot—we determined not to go ahead with it.

We will have the opportunity to look at the experience in New South Wales and Victoria, with the various things that they are doing. I note that even in the couple of days between cabinet consideration and announcement and within a couple of days after that Victoria changed its own arrangements around schools, as well. Their situation was evolving very rapidly. Really, it was about the fact that we only had four weeks left of the school term. Everyone is very tired at the end of a very long year, and there was a whole range of criteria that may or may not be met to make a pilot helpful.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, will a pilot or general availability of this testing be made available next year?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** It is certainly our intent to go ahead with a pilot for rapid antigen testing in schools in term 1 of 2022. We will be able to learn from what has been done in New South Wales and Victoria and from the experience overseas, as well, where broad-based rapid antigen testing for screening has been trialled and then abandoned but rapid antigen testing on a test-to-stay basis, where it is applied to those students and teachers who would otherwise have to quarantine, has been rolled-out. We do have things to learn from that, and that is the type of pilot we were thinking about doing here in the ACT. So we are certainly undertaking the planning work to establish a pilot program for schools in term 1 of 2022, and we will have the advantage of learning from what is happening in other jurisdictions. I also note that in New South Wales the current pilot, including in Queanbeyan West school, has not completely eliminating the need for students to quarantine, but is reducing the quarantine period from 14 days to seven days. There are various different models, and this will enable us to look at what is happening across different jurisdictions and to determine what kind of model we would like to pilot next year.

**MR HANSON:** I have a supplementary question. Minister, why, when over 95 per cent of the adult population is fully vaccinated and only have to quarantine for seven days, do we still require children who are close contacts to quarantine for 14 days?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Unvaccinated children are subject to the same quarantine requirements as unvaccinated adults.

### **Planning—Molonglo Valley**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the minister for planning. Minister, the EPSDD commissioned a report from AT Adams Consulting to outline how to proceed with the

Molonglo Valley major commercial centre. The report suggested two methods of proceeding: an estate development plan or going to a full concept plan that would require a Territory Plan variation and would delay any land release for 18 months. In last month's budget it was revealed that the government had decided to go with a full concept plan and a Territory Plan variation, and blamed the community for saying that they wanted more consultation when in fact the consultation can occur as an estate plan is developed. Minister, why was this slower option chosen?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Hanson for his question. The Molonglo Valley is an important piece of planning into the future, and we want to make sure that all of the consultation can take place in advance of that planning rolling out, especially for the estate development plan. The government is developing a draft concept plan and I look forward to tabling that draft concept plan.

The EPSDD is working towards incorporating the concept plan through technical amendment. I recently met with representatives from the Molonglo Valley community council. While they were quite up-front about how disappointed they were about some parts of the delay, they were very keen to be involved in the planning into the future. Of course, if we hear from the community that they would rather go through a full Territory Plan variation process, then that is something the government will consider, but at this stage we are working towards the technical amendment.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, given your election commitment to fast-track the commercial centre, why have you gone back on your word to the Molonglo Valley?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** That is not the case. We are consulting with the Molonglo Valley residents group. We started conversations with them. Most recently, the EPSDD are working with them on the technical amendment.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, now that this consultant's report is public and you have been shown up for unfairly blaming the community, will you use an EDP instead of the technical amendment option and make the land release faster, as promised last year?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I have not blamed the community at all. I have explained quite clearly how we are consulting with the community. We want their input as we make these changes. They have told us that they want to be involved. That is why we are going through the process.

### **Light rail—vehicle fleet**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. The cracking issue in the CAF Urbos trams in New South Wales was only discovered after the floor and a layer of noise prevention coating was removed in one of the carriages. You indicated in an email to my office on the same afternoon that it was announced that Sydney's L1 line would be out of service for 18 months that there were no issues with the LRVs in Canberra. But, Minister, how could you possibly know that given the work required to identify these cracks and given the work that is required? Has Canberra Metro removed the floor and the protective coating of one of the carriages to ensure that there are no cracks, or are you blindly making an assertion?

**MR STEEL:** I was providing the information that we have provided to date on those issues, which are being looked at very closely by the ONRSR—the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator—as well as Transport Canberra and City Services as well as Canberra Metro as well as the consortium partner CAF. The government will be responding to the Assembly with detailed information in response to its request on these issues.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, how can you be confident that there is no cracking in our LRVs if the necessary work to identify the issue has not been completed—ala the removal of the floor of one of the carriages?

**MR STEEL:** We will continue to undertake the necessary work led by the regulator and the consortium to look at these issues as appropriate. We treat rail safety very seriously, and I will be reporting back to the Assembly on the investigations that have been taking place, which have been very detailed in relation to this matter. But at this point no issues have been identified in relation to the Urbos 100 vehicles in Canberra.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, you have repeatedly said this will not be an issue in Canberra, because we have younger vehicles. That seems to beg a question: does this just seem you expect our LRVs to crack in a few years instead of now?

**MR STEEL:** I reject the premise of the question. I have not said that. What I have said is that to date no issues have been identified in relation to Canberra's LRVs.

**Mrs Jones:** No, you said they're younger. You said that last time.

**MR STEEL:** We do have a younger fleet. That is a fact. The New South Wales fleet came in in 2014-15. Ours were delivered for operation ahead of the start in April 2019. We do have a younger fleet of vehicles and there are differences in the fleet compared to the inner west light rail line. So all of those issues will be outlined before the end of the year in the government's response to the Assembly's resolution, earlier than what was proposed by Mr Parton.

### **Economy—employment**

**MR DAVIS:** My question is to the Minister for Business and Better Regulation. The Canberra Business Chamber this week asked the ACT government to develop a long-term strategy for workforce capacity in the private sector. Could the minister update us on consultation with the Canberra Business Chamber and whether the government is considering the development of such a workforce strategy?

**MR BARR:** Madam Speaker, I will take this question, as it covers multiple portfolios, and coordination across the portfolios of both the minister for business and the Minister for Skills, as well as mine—that of the Treasurer, Chief Minister and Minister for Economic Development.

The Canberra Business Chamber's call was in fact made in a document that they released in the lead-up to the 2020 territory election. It is about two paragraphs of

information, so it is not exactly clear what the Business Chamber is asking for. But what the government is working on is a framework looking at addressing skill shortages, but it is linked with education and training provision. It is linked to work that is occurring at a national level through national cabinet around a national skills reform agreement. It is also linked to the work of the National Skills Commission, and it is heavily impacted, obviously, by national population policy and migration policy settings, including skilled migration policy settings.

In summary, what the ACT government will look at is capability within our education system and our skilled migration settings, capacity issues around the ability to attract and retain workers within our economy, and it will undertake research into reasons why skill shortages exist in Australia and in the territory; then there is an element of marketing and facilitation that goes to promoting Canberra as a place for people to live, work and study, over other destinations in Australia. All of that combined is work across multiple portfolios, and it is being coordinated through my office as Chief Minister. *(Time expired.)*

**MR DAVIS:** Chief Minister, what role does the ACT Workforce Attraction Cooperative Grants Program play in the development of a long-term workforce capacity strategy?

**MR BARR:** It has a role to play, but it is important to have an understanding of what is meant by “long term” in the context of an evolving labour market. We can make some very clear observations about long-term labour market trends. There is going to continue to be a shift in the Australian economy towards higher skilled jobs. That is clear. Health, education and professional services will continue to dominate jobs growth in our region and in our nation. Occupations that were performing well before COVID-19 are likely to continue to perform well.

The structure of the labour market could well change, though. The very nature of the pandemic means that there is uncertainty and volatility in short, medium and long-term data. It means that forecasts, data and modelling, of course, need to co-exist with the lived reality and actual judgements year to year in relation to, for example, skills that would be on a priority skills list, a skilled migration program, and the nature of the education and training provision that may or may not be possible in our city, our region and our nation.

Ultimately, in terms of private sector jobs, the key thing, particularly in our economy, where 99 per cent of businesses are of a small or medium size, will be the employer-employee relationship. That is about wages and salaries, and conditions—that, and the firms themselves providing specific training for their own employees in the specific needs of that business. That is a key factor here. The government alone is not the solution to this problem. We do live in an open-market economy. *(Time expired.)*

**MS CLAY:** Minister, are we placing a gendered lens on these policies and programs to help women in the private sector?

**MR BARR:** Yes. Clearly, there has been a massive shift in terms of education and training outcomes and skill needs across the economy. It was the case that 30 years ago only around 12 per cent of women held a tertiary qualification. It is now 50 per cent. That is a change delivered by federal Labor government policy, starting with the Whitlam government and accelerated by the Hawke government, which has seen a massive shift in who undertakes and who benefits from public education and secondary and vocational—

**Mrs Jones:** A point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Resume your seat, Mr Barr.

**Mrs Jones:** The question was whether we were putting a gendered lens on things, not if former Labor governments have in the federal parliament.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The Chief Minister is responding in an appropriate manner. There is no point of order.

**MR BARR:** We have already seen a massive structural shift in the Australian economy, in terms of where new jobs are being created, the types of skills that are necessary and access to education and training, particularly for those who were not the beneficiaries of that over the last 50 or 60 years. That has changed dramatically.

Locally, the ACT has a higher proportion of its population with post-secondary education qualifications and a higher level of skills attainment by women than anywhere else in Australia—50 to 100 per cent more. There is a massive amount of investment occurring across our education and training system to ensure better outcomes for groups who have not always had access to education and training.

The challenge over the next few decades is not so much around female participation; it is disadvantaged groups, and particularly Indigenous men. (*Time expired.*)

### **Roads—speed limits**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, during estimates we asked about the number of accidents that occurred in the new 40-kilometre zone in Civic in the 12 months preceding and the months following the implementation of the reduced speed limits. Given the heavy focus on the safety of pedestrians in the government's spin on this issue, we were surprised to learn that, in the 12 months before the speed cameras were turned into cash cows for the ACT Treasury coffers, there was only one injury to a pedestrian, just one. What is your actual justification for the reduced speed zones, given that pedestrian safety does not appear to be one of them?

**MR STEEL:** I reject the premise of the question. One person injured or one person dying on our roads is one too many, especially with a population of our size. We know that nationally and in the ACT we have not seen the pedestrian road toll come down. It has been relatively static over a period of time; whereas we have seen the

road toll come down for motorists over time because of the range of things that we have undertaken as part of our commitment to Vision Zero, which means zero serious injuries and zero deaths on our roads.

That is what our government has committed to do. That is why, under the road safety action plan, we committed to undertake changes to introduce 40-kilometre speed zones in the city and town centre and group centres around Canberra. We were very clear about that. We consulted on the strategy and then we implemented the actions that came out of that strategy. It was also a key part of the city and urban gateway design framework to have places, particularly in our city centre and also in Braddon, that are people-focused—that actually put people first, not cars, and that is what we have implemented, particularly on Northbourne Avenue, and in the design guide that was provided for Northbourne Avenue. We have reduced the speeds in those areas and in other town centres around Canberra. The changes were announced in March 2021. There was a grace period which we used to educate the community about these changes. There was very clear signage put up—variable message signs, changes to the speed signs—in accordance with Australian standards. There was a significant social media campaign, with 170,000 impressions for that campaign. Significant changes have been made— (*Time expired.*)

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Milligan, your supplementary.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, do you care more about road safety or filling Treasury's coffers with millions of dollars every year from speeding fines?

**MR STEEL:** I reject the premise of the question. We are committed to Vision Zero. It appears that the opposition would be the only government in the country, if they ever came into power, that would not.

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

**MR PARTON:** Minister, has there been any discussion at any level of government about just how much extra revenue you could get from Canberrans if you reduced the speed limit in that zone down to 30 kilometres an hour, or even 20?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. He is quite right to point out that many jurisdictions around the world have actually reduced their speed limits to 30k an hour in urban areas. We have a consistent speed limit of 40k an hour. We have made sure that we apply that to areas where there is high pedestrian activity, particularly in areas like Northbourne Avenue, where we have people crossing the street to get to the Alinga Street station. We are seeing people cross from the western side to the eastern side of the city across Northbourne Avenue. We are seeing people cross from the ANU to the inner north in Turner. This is an area of high pedestrian activity and it is appropriate that we have lower speeds in place to protect pedestrians and encourage the vibrant city that we want to build, a place where we have outdoor dining where people feel like they can go and frequent businesses—

**Mr Parton:** A point of order—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Parton.

**Mr Parton:** on relevance. The question was: has there been any discussion about reducing the speed limit down to 30 or 20? I am not sure that he is being relevant to the question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I believe he is being relevant to that question.

**MR STEEL:** There has been a recommendation—I think it is a World Health Organisation recommendation—for 30 kilometres per hour. Our view is 40 kilometres an hour is appropriate at this time. That is the consistent speed limit that we have applied across our town centres and group centres now for some time. We have extended that as appropriate based on the actions that have been outlined in the road safety strategy and the NCA and ACT government draft urban gateway strategy, which is now being finalised following consultation with the community.

### **Planning—ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project**

**MR PETTERSSON:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management: can you update the Assembly on the ACT's planning system review?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Pettersson for his interest in planning for the future of the ACT. The Planning System Review and Reform Project is making excellent progress. As members would be aware, I released a suite of project direction papers in November last year. These papers set the scene for the drafting and implementation of the next stage of planning reform. These papers won an award earlier this month from the Planning Institute of Australia for improving planning processes, and I extend my thanks to the hard-working staff across EPSDD who contributed to these papers. I acknowledge their passion in making sure we have a great city to live in into the future.

COVID, of course, interrupted some of the stakeholder consultation, but I am pleased to advise the Assembly that stakeholder working series is back up and running. The group of community and industry representatives is providing valuable policy feedback to inform our legislation.

We are also building on input from our traditional custodians of this land. We want to respect the knowledge, customs and traditions of the traditional custodians, through the planning system as well. So the Dhawura committee made up of Ngunnawal representatives have provided this input. I look forward to releasing a consultation draft of the new legislation early next year.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, what outcomes will the review deliver?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** The planning review will deliver a planning system that provides certainty and flexibility, better outcomes for our buildings and public places and a connection between our strategic planning and localised outcomes. The planning system will also be better able to respond to our changing world. At the

moment changing the Territory Plan can be cumbersome and can also duplicate processes across government. The planning review will deliver improved legislation and an improved process. It will also implement a new level of planning, being at the district level. This will be a mixture of maps and Territory Plan instructions and will replace our existing multitude of precinct codes.

Our district strategies are being informed by what the community has told us as well as by government strategies such as the housing strategy, transport strategy and climate change strategy. District strategies will provide Canberrans with a spatial plan for their local communities. It will be a shared vision for what we want to see and value about Canberra and broken down at the district level. I am expecting to release draft district strategies in the middle of next year for future discussion and consultation.

**MS ORR:** Minister, how is the ACT government delivering sustainability through the planning system?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Orr for her long-term interest in planning, particularly in the Yerrabi electorate. The planning system has a critical role to play in ensuring we maintain a sustainable city. The government's focus on building up rather than out will continue to protect the sensitive landscape that surrounds our city, as well. One of the key features of the government's plans for density is that we want to limit our density to town centres, group centres and along major transport corridors. Of course, the Canberra Liberals want to build a city of unchecked urban sprawl accompanied by rampant dual occupancies. We would see houses in every backyard, congestion in our suburban streets and a loss of biodiversity that we will never get back.

The government is introducing new requirements for more trees and more green spaces for private blocks in our residential zones. More living infrastructure means fewer hard surfaces and reduced heat island effect as well. The government is focusing on delivering a range of housing choices for Canberrans. By limiting our density to these pockets we can make sure that our low-rise suburbs maintain their suburban character while also providing choices for people who want lower maintenance housing closer to the action.

### **National Multicultural Festival—COVID-19**

**MRS KIKKERT:** My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, late last week you announced the cancellation of Canberra's 2022 Multicultural Festival. Reasons cited for the cancellation were that the departmental staff who run the festival were deployed on other activities supporting the multicultural community during the COVID lockdown, thus losing crucial organising time. Minister, Events ACT runs many public events in Canberra. Why were they not brought in to assist to get the event off the ground for 2022?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mrs Kikkert for the question. I appreciate her interest in the Multicultural Festival and how much it means to all of us in this place and the broader community. The ACT National Multicultural Festival is proudly community led and

is supported by a small team in CSD that has deep relationships with our multicultural communities, organisations and showcase leaders. This is a team that also has experience in delivering the National Multicultural Festival. The Events ACT team has its own full calendar of events and had continued with the work on that.

**MRS KIKKERT:** How many cultural groups were involved in the 2020 festival, when it was last held and how many of these groups will be given the chance to fundraise via our other territory government events in 2022?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mrs Kikkert for the supplementary question. I will take on notice the exact number of organisations and communities that were part of the 2020 festival, but I am pleased to tell Mrs Kikkert and the chamber that we are looking forward to supporting as many multicultural community groups and organisations as we can—both with our existing calendar of events, first with Australia Day and then Canberra Day, and we are also starting to look at opportunities within Enlighten. We have agreement that applicants for the National Multicultural Festival grants, which were applied for earlier this year, if they are eligible and successful, can use them to support their participation in the existing Events ACT calendar of events or with their own activities or fund-raising opportunities that they might like to pursue.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, will the 2023 festival go ahead as has been the regular practice for 25 years?

**MS CHEYNE:** It is difficult to know what Mrs Jones might mean by “regular practice”, but we are committed to having a celebration that is fitting of a 25th anniversary. We do want to do this properly. That is what the multicultural communities have told us, as well. Understand that it takes time to have a celebration that is fitting of the 25th anniversary. We do appreciate—and I think members are aware—that there are some challenges regarding the footprint, particularly due to some of the changes that have occurred in City Walk. We are working through those, but it does add some complexity. We look forward to engaging with the community.

As members know, we have established a community panel reference group made up of leaders in our community of multicultural groups, and also Jenny Mobbs from the Council on the Ageing. I am looking forward to meeting with them to start discussions about the 25th anniversary festival in 2023, but also about how we are going to support our local groups later this week.

### **Jamison shopping centre—traffic management**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the minister for city services. Minister, Jamison is a busy group centre near a school with a thriving trash and treasure market on Sundays, but the community is concerned about traffic and pedestrian access. In April, TCCS completed an investigation on Bowman Street between Redfern and Wiseman streets. The study recommended the installation of at-grade zebra crossings on either side of the bus stop, a pedestrian refuge island near the Redfern Street intersection and a children’s crossing next to the school. TCCS also completed an investigation on Bowman Street between Redfern and Catchpole in June 2021, following community

inquiries about cars driving too fast. That study recommended installing two additional speed humps to reduce speeds.

Minister, when might the government be able to implement these recommendations?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Clay for her question. I know that she has been raising this issue with my office in recent months.

The ACT government is committed to making our roads safe for all road users, whether they are driving, cycling, using an e-scooter or even walking. Bowman Street is, indeed, a very busy road in the heart of Macquarie that supports the Jamison group centre, an important community hub, as well as the nearby Canberra High School, the Canberra Southern Cross Club and the Big Splash Waterpark, amongst other uses in the area.

To support safety, there are a range of pedestrian refuge islands and a set of speed cushions installed on the road. A significant stretch of Bowman Street also has a speed limit of 40 kilometres per hour, including the area closest to the shops and the busy intersections that allow entry and exit to the car park. This was implemented in 2015, when the ACT government extended the 40-kilometre speed limit program to include all group centres, including Jamison.

Several studies have been undertaken about further improvements to this stretch of road in recent years. The government will consider the recommendations of these studies for implementation.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, what is the standard time frame between undertaking a traffic investigation and the government approving the recommendations, the work starting, and the works being complete?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Clay for her supplementary. The ACT government will consider the findings of a range of different traffic studies that we undertake around various locations in Canberra, based on priority and road safety. We will need to assess what the priorities are right across the ACT before we make budget decisions about whether we are going to invest and make improvements to those areas.

In this case, the ACT government undertook a survey investigation on improvements on Bowman Street between Redfern Street and Wiseman Street in April 2021. The study recommended a series of potential interventions that could be installed to improve safety in the area, including the installation of an at-grade zebra crossing either side of the bus stop interchange and a pedestrian refuge island as well as a children's crossing adjacent to the school. These interventions will be considered further for implementation based on the context of road safety priorities in the ACT.

**MR DAVIS:** Minister, when can the community expect any works to be commenced at the Jamison shops?

**MR STEEL:** We are undertaking a range of works at the Jamison shops, including recent upgrades to improve the health of the trees at the shops and reconfiguring the

car parks. We have also undertaken further works, together with the local community, around Jamison.

We will continue to consider what has come out of these reports before we make decisions about implementation based on a set of road safety priorities that we have right around the ACT. There are a number of roads in the ACT that have major road safety concerns. That is why we are investing a significant amount of money in the Monaro Highway, for example, to remove at-grade dangerous signalised intersections along that route. That is why we are investing in other roads around Canberra to improve road safety. We will continue to look at what the priorities are in each region.

### **Planning—housing affordability**

**MS LAWDER:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. In last Monday's edition of the *Canberra Weekly* you were quoted as saying:

Providing increased housing choice will not only help us create diverse and attractive communities but also provide affordable housing in established communities.

On the same page the CEO of ACTCOSS was highlighting a housing and rental crisis with the ACT having the highest rate of rental stress in the country and at least 1,600 people experiencing homelessness each day. Minister, why are you treating people in the ACT with contempt by saying we have increased housing choices when the present conditions clearly demonstrate this to be utterly false?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** It seems extremely odd that the Canberra Liberals are willing to take up the simplistic old argument about land supply. We have just witnessed the federal parliament also try to blame the states and territories for planning and land supply issues. But, of course, the Reserve Bank keeps telling them that the issues are in the tax and transfer system.

The upcoming ILRP is forecast to supply dwellings for around 41,000 Canberrans at a time when our population is only expected to grow by 17,500. So the RBA has been very clear that the overall housing supply is not an issue affecting house prices in Australia, and they mean here, too.

We have provided written and verbal evidence to a federal parliamentary inquiry on the topic of housing supply and affordability. Luci Ellis, Assistant Governor of the RBA, said just last week that in Australia additions to the housing stock have run ahead of population growth for a number of years. She also said that the combination of negative gearing and concessional capital gains means that it is very attractive to leverage into investor property.

So we are supplying an ILRP that will provide housing for the future of Canberrans. We want to make sure that that is appropriate and, where we can, affordable too into the future.

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, is the CEO of ACTCOSS wrong?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank the CEO of ACTCOSS for her strong advocacy for those Canberrans that are looking to try and get into the housing market. Wherever we can, we will assist her in that work.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, what immediate steps will you take in the planning area to relieve our housing crisis other than blaming things that are way outside of your sphere of influence?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** In my sphere of influence I have the ILRP. As I said, we are providing housing for 41,000 Canberrans in the ILRP when the growth expected is 17,500. You can see the clear levers that we have are being pulled by us as a government in that sense of housing availability for blocks across the territory and ensuring that we do not have urban sprawl into the future, costing Canberrans even more.

### **COVID-19—testing centre fees**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Many MLAs have received emails from Canberrans planning to travel who are realising that, when asymptomatic, free COVID tests are not available. However, private pathology is able to conduct tests for around \$150. As of yesterday, the EPIC and Garran testing centres offered a fee-for-service test at just over \$110. Was it ever considered to provide this service to tax-paying Canberra residents for free?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Castley for the question. The availability of free COVID-19 testing in ACT government clinics has been consistently, throughout the entire pandemic, related to eligibility criteria that are determined on public health grounds. The eligibility criteria are around having symptoms, being identified as a close or casual contact or having been directed or asked to get tested by a health authority such as ACT Health or New South Wales Health. That has been consistently the case throughout the pandemic.

I certainly know people who have been turned away from testing centres because they have gone, as a matter of a lot of caution, when they did not have any symptoms and they had not been to a close contact exposure location—they had just been to a regional area that they thought might have cases, and they have been turned away from testing sites. Those criteria have been very clear throughout the pandemic.

**Mrs Jones:** A point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** A point of order?

**Mrs Jones:** It is on relevance. The question actually was whether it had ever been considered to be provided for free; that is all.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The minister is in order, but she has time to get to that point.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Given some of the requirements in relation to testing, in terms of both accessing health services and for travel, there is some work currently

underway to consider whether arrangements could be put in place to enable those, particularly for people who are accessing health services.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, how was the current fee arrived at?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I will take this question on notice because my understanding is that we are not actually charging fees at free government testing sites. I have heard a number of times that people have been told that they can get their test result if they pay for it, but that is not the advice that I have received. I think there are some mixed messages here, and I will take the question on notice so that I can come back to the chamber with some clear advice about that. I know that we are working on setting up some arrangements that would enable people to pay in certain circumstances, and that we are also looking at those arrangements for people who are being asked by health facilities to get a test before they undertake a planned admission.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, is it your intention to provide a fee-free COVID test service for those people who may be travelling interstate or who may not have symptoms?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** We do not currently have any intention of providing a free service for people who are not being asked to go and get tested or are not being tested for a public health reason in the ACT.

### **Access Canberra—services**

**MR CAIN:** My question is to the Minister for Business and Better Regulation. Minister, in answer to a question following recent estimates hearings, you confirmed that Access Canberra currently has 105 telephone and face-to-face service delivery staff out of a total of 705 full-time equivalent employees. Of that total, only 54.5 full-time equivalents are delivering services face to face. These shopfronts have reopened recently and there has been a surge in demand from Canberrans who need to complete transactions in person, with very long wait times at Access Canberra shopfronts. Minister, it seems that you did not do any planning or preparation in anticipation of high levels of demand when Access Canberra reopened. Please explain why you did not do that.

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Cain for the question. We did cover this quite extensively in yesterday's select committee hearing, but I appreciate Mr Cain was not present. I reject the premise of the question, Madam Speaker. Access Canberra has done an incredible amount of planning, pivoting, reorganising and moving resources to where they are needed. We did do an enormous amount of preparation for our shopfronts, noting that the shopfronts are still subjected to the density limits. That was previously one per four-square metres when they reopened. It is now one per two. At Gungahlin, where we have a much bigger footprint, or floor print, that does mean that all of our counters are able to be open, but at our other shopfronts it means that some of the counters are closed to accommodate that.

We have been advising the community that if they do not need to attend a shopfront, there are many transactions—hundreds—that they can do online. There are only a

handful that people are required to be at a shopfront for. But if people do want that extra assistance or do need that face-to-face assistance, for whatever reason, of course we are there to assist them. We have been working with the community and providing advice about wait times. We have also put into place mobile queuing to assist people where they have been waiting in line for perhaps a longer period than they would have expected. We have been offering them seating inside if they have needed it or water.

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

**MR CAIN:** Minister, have you provided more resources to Access Canberra over and above the 54.5 full-time equivalents, rather than moving the staff around, to meet the extra demand?

**MS CHEYNE:** There are a lot of demands on Access Canberra's services right across its functions. Mr Cain would be aware that in the recent budget there is actually a significant investment in Access Canberra in a number of functions that it does. We are supporting Canberrans at the shopfronts and, as we discussed in the select committee yesterday, Access Canberra is actually servicing more people each day than it was this time last year when the requirements were not there. Access Canberra is meeting its responsibilities to the community.

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

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, if the current level of demand continues, will you be permanently increasing the front-line service delivery staff at Access Canberra?

**MS CHEYNE:** The work health and safety of our front-line staff is a priority for us. We have been engaging with staff on how best to support them. What I am pleased to say is that we have been tracking demand very closely and demand is going down. We did see a peak where wait times were around two hours, but those wait times have been coming down. At one point last week Tuggeranong service centre had the lowest wait time of nine minutes, but generally it was hovering around an hour. It is still continuing to come down. We have also implemented, as I mentioned, mobile queuing. So someone can use a mobile phone to scan a QR code and then get advice about when they are due back when they are at the front of the line, which assists them in going about doing other things or perhaps resting in the shade.

### **Municipal services—shopping centre upgrades**

**MS ORR:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services: how are upgrades to local shops supporting lively suburbs in our region?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Orr for her question. In a week where we are debating the ACT budget and its record investments in health, education and the overall territory economic performance, it is also important to outline projects that are small but make a real difference to benefit Canberrans at the local level.

Local shops are important hubs in the community, providing services, jobs and often acting as the heart of a neighbourhood. That is why our government is helping to

make popular local shops even better, with funding in the budget to upgrade 11 of Canberra's 90 shopping centres over the next four years with upgrades at Campbell, Narrabundah, Gwydir Square in Kaleen, Duffy, Evatt, Kippax, Macquarie, Monash, Calwell, Lanyon, Brierly Street at Cooleman Court as well. These investments will benefit eight of Canberra's 66 local shopping centres and three of Canberra's 19 larger group centres.

We know that Canberrans love their local shops, and this will help to stimulate economic activity right across Canberra, whilst renewing infrastructure in our suburbs. Not only will the upgrades boost local construction and support local jobs but they will lead to improved local shopping precincts which will benefit the small businesses there as well as the residents that regularly use them.

**MS ORR:** Minister, what upgrades will the ACT government be considering for local shops?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Orr for her supplementary. We understand that local shops are community hubs and we want these upgrades to respond to community priorities and needs. Residents in Duffy, Campbell and Kaleen have already provided their feedback on upgrades in their suburbs. This has helped to inform the final designs for those shops. For example, feedback was provided on the importance of landscaping, tree planting, the need for accessibility, safety and spaces to allow the community to gather and spend time with friends and family. With that in mind, designs for the upgrades were released around a month ago which incorporated that feedback.

For Gwydir Square in Kaleen, the government will provide a new public toilet, more car parks, better landscaping, more seating and a shade infrastructure at the playground. Upgrades at Duffy shops will also include a new public toilet as well as improved landscaping, a new playground and more active travel connections with new paths. At Campbell community feedback has emphasised making the shops more accessible by improving paths, car parking and landscaping.

With Campbell, Duffy and Kaleen the first shops to have construction commence, community consultation will soon begin on the remaining eight shops, which will give residents in those suburbs the opportunity to have their say on the upgrades and amenities that they would like to see at their local neighbourhood hub.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, when can the community expect construction to begin?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Pettersson for his supplementary. I am very pleased to say that the first round of tenders for Campbell, Duffy and Kaleen have already been released, and given the designs for these upgrades are shovel-ready we anticipate the successful tenderers will be in a position to commence construction on these three centres early in the new year.

We then hope to progress community engagement with the remaining eight communities to get their views on the types of upgrades and amenity that people would like to see at their local shopping centre. The feedback from this engagement

will assist the government in undertaking feasibility and design works and get proposals to a shovel-ready state in those locations as well so that they can get underway with construction and create jobs and better communities.

Exact dates will be informed following consultation and detailed design, but these projects will be delivered in this term of government. I look forward to keeping the community up to date as we make our local shopping centres across the city even better with these upgrades.

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

### **Supplementary answer to question without notice National Multicultural Festival—COVID-19**

**MS CHEYNE:** In response to the question on notice I took from Mrs Kikkert about participants in the 2020 National Multicultural Festival, there were over 300 stall holders at the 2020 festival, with approximately 80 different multicultural groups represented.

### **COVID-19—testing centre fees**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I have received confirmation from Canberra Health Services that they will test people at EPIC and Garran who need it for travel but will then send those individuals an invoice. This is obviously a bit of an inconsistent practice at the moment and I have asked both the Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services this morning to work together to provide very clear information for the community.

I would say that I am surprised to hear that the shadow minister for business is encouraging the ACT government to compete with private businesses for testing that is not required for a public health response in the ACT and to provide that service for free when it is not, obviously, provided for free by private businesses and to be undermining the business of private businesses in the ACT.

## **Papers**

**Madam Speaker** presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to subsection 17(5)—Auditor-General's Reports—

No 10/2021—2020-21 Financial Audits—Overview, dated 16 November 2021.

No 11/2021—Digital Records Management, dated 18 November 2021.

Bills referred to Committees, pursuant to the resolution of the Assembly of 2 December 2020, as amended—Bills—Not inquired into—

Civil Law (Sale of Residential Property) Amendment Bill 2021 (Government bill)—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 17 November 2021.

Civil Law (Sale of Residential Property) Amendment Bill 2021 (Private Member's bill)—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 17 November 2021.

Emergencies Amendment Bill 2021—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 17 November 2021.

Government Procurement Amendment Bill 2021—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality, dated 18 November 2021.

Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2021—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 17 November 2021.

Remuneration Tribunal Amendment Bill 2021—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality, dated 18 November 2021.

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Report 2—*Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022*—Speaker's response to Recommendations 20 and 21, dated 15 November 2021.

Standing order 191—Amendments to the Planning and Unit Titles Legislation Amendment Bill 2021, dated 15 November 2021.

**Mr Gentleman** presented the following papers:

Civil Law (Wrongs) Act, pursuant to subsection 4.56(3), Schedule 4—Professional Standards Council—Annual report 2020-2021.

Freedom of Information Act, pursuant to section 39—Copy of notice provided to the Ombudsman—Freedom of Information request—Decision not made in time—Community Services Directorate (HOU-21/3), dated 22 April 2021.

## **Animals—animal-friendly netting**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (2.58): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) climate change, bushfires, smokepocalypse and urban development have all increased the pressure on habitat and wildlife;
- (b) ACT legislation recognises the sentience of animals and the ACT Government should take steps to protect animals;
- (c) loosely-draped netting of certain gauges on household trees and plants causes injuries to wildlife in the ACT, such as cuts, strangulation and death. The nature of these injuries to wildlife often result in a long recovery time;
- (d) native species are harmed by backyard netting in the ACT, such as birds, snakes and flying foxes. Some of these species are protected under specific legislation;

- (e) in the ACT, the grey-headed flying-fox is listed as a vulnerable species and is protected under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth). It is also listed as a vulnerable species and is protected under the *Nature Conservation Act 2014* (ACT);
  - (f) ACT Government conservation advice for the grey-headed flying-fox acknowledges that “entrapment in wide-gauge netting loosely draped over backyard fruit trees” is a threat to this species;
  - (g) the ACT Government’s proposed management actions include “improving public attitudes toward grey-headed flying-foxes, promote the recovery program to the wider community and encourage participation in recovery actions”;
  - (h) animal-friendly netting is netting with a mesh size of 5mm x 5mm or less at full stretch and is widely available and performs the same function without injuring wildlife;
  - (i) some major vendors, such as Bunnings, have already ceased to sell inappropriately gauged netting in recognition of the harm it does to wildlife and only sell animal-friendly netting; and
  - (j) protection of flying foxes and native birds is important to ensure their continuing contribution to a healthy environment. Native birds and flying foxes both play an important role in pollination and dispersal of seeds;
- (2) further notes that:
- (a) on 1 September 2021, the Victorian Government amended their animal cruelty laws to limit the type of netting for household use; and
  - (b) Victorian legislation limits the sale and use of netting for household use to netting that has a mesh size of 5mm x 5mm or less at full stretch; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government, by 1 January 2023, to:
- (a) in consultation with local businesses and other stakeholders including ACT Wildlife, develop and introduce and, if possible, pass legislation equivalent to that in Victoria that allows only the sale and use of netting of animal-friendly netting with a mesh size of 5mm x 5mm or less at full stretch;
  - (b) develop an educational program for the ACT community on the dangers and risks of inappropriately gauged netting on our wildlife;
  - (c) develop a program to help residents replace old netting with animal-friendly netting; and
  - (d) report back to the Legislative Assembly on these measures.

I have fruit trees in my backyard. We put nets on them to keep the possums off. The nets also help protect our apples from the Staffy, which is a problem I suspect most people do not have. Plucking the dog from the branches of the apple tree is a pretty regular pastime in my house but, other than sweeping those fruit nets out of the way to do it, I never gave the nets much thought. Recently I learned about a big problem that all of us share, though. There are lots of different types of household netting and some of this netting harms our wildlife. This is really upsetting and it is so unnecessary.

We Greens and the ACT government understand that animals are sentient beings. They deserve to be free from direct and indirect harm caused by people, and we have made a lot of progress in the ACT on this front. We have ended battery caged hens and sow-stall farming, we have regulated puppy and kitten farms, we have banned greyhound racing, we have given people the right to have pets in their rental properties and we have legislated to have written definitions of cage, barn-laid and free-range eggs displayed in retail outlets. It is time now to help our wildlife.

ACT Wildlife has told me about the injuries and often fatalities that our fruit tree netting can cause. They have shown me some truly heart-wrenching photographs. Our wildlife carers do wonderful work removing injured wildlife from household netting and then nursing the animals back to a full recovery when they can.

I was out visiting a little baby flying fox called Roper today. But the problem is that our wildlife does not always survive entanglement and our wildlife carers are really, really tired. They have been caring for injured wildlife from the Black Summer fires and from climate change migrations and from the gradual loss of habitat that is bringing the wildlife into our city. And it is our responsibility to do everything we can to protect the animals and avoid further injury.

I will explain the problem to you with that particular victim in mind, Roper, whom I visited today. He is a grey-headed flying fox. I showed his picture to my daughter and she had one response: "Adorable." These flying foxes are recognised as a vulnerable species in the ACT, New South Wales and Australia wide. Grey-headed flying foxes are threatened because their numbers are declining due to the loss of roosting habitat by development and other pressures. Conflict with people, electrocution on powerlines and entanglement in netting and barbed-wire fences are causing their numbers to decline, along with climate change.

Like most things, flying foxes are also impacted by changes in our weather. Heat exhaustion, hailstorms and fires have all decimated their numbers. As a recent example, our February 2020 hailstorms resulted in the death of over 600 flying foxes in Commonwealth Park alone.

Grey-headed flying foxes play a really important role in our environment. They feed on flowering trees and fleshy fruit trees. Traditionally this has been rainforest fruits and the flowers of eucalyptus, banksia and melaleucas. They scatter the seed and they pollinate our bush. But, over time, with the destruction of their habitat, they have moved on to feed on whatever is available.

Feeding on fleshy fruit trees means that sometimes the flying foxes like to munch on the fruit trees in our backyards, particularly as they are searching for food in these hard times. Flying foxes and other wildlife do this too; so people are using netting draped over their trees and their crops to stop the animals taking their food.

Protecting your crop is perfectly understandable. We all do it. But what I have learnt is there is a right way to do it and a wrong way to do it. The wrong way kills animals like little Roper, the flying fox. The right way to use netting stops animals from taking

the fruit but it does no harm to them. To do this, you need to pull the netting tightly over the trees and fix it to the trunk to stop animals coming in underneath. Sometimes netting is used to protect particular branches full of fruit, rather than the entire tree.

But it is also really important to use the right kind of netting. Animal-friendly netting has a very small mesh size, small enough so that you cannot stick your pinkie finger through it. This means creatures cannot get in through the holes. It is also white in colour so that nocturnal animals can see it and it is designed with a cross-weave. All of these elements make it animal friendly.

The wrong way to use netting has devastating consequences. Netting with a wide aperture allows the animals to get trapped and tangled in the holes. And they also get trapped by netting that is hung too loosely or netting that is allowed to lie loose on the ground. It is not just flying foxes; it is reptiles, snakes, birds. A lot of creatures get hurt this way. When animals are caught in netting, our wildlife rescuers have to climb the trees to cut them out and netting often continues to cut deeply into the entangled, struggling animals.

The healing process can be incredibly slow. It is also really expensive. The cost of medication is high, and flying foxes consume half a kilo of fruit a day when they are recovering. Sometimes they are trapped in netting overnight and they are not discovered for hours or days, and that can result in a long and painful experience, and death sometimes.

It is not just flying foxes. In 2020, 1,483 birds came into the care of ACT Wildlife, many of them from fruit tree netting injuries. We are harming lots and lots of wildlife in our netting in our backyards and it is a really easy problem to fix. I do not have an easy fix for habitat loss or climate change, but I do for this one.

Earlier this year Victoria amended their Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 2019 to introduce a requirement that netting used to protect household fruit trees, vegetable gardens and other fruiting plants must have a mesh size of five millimetres by five millimetres or less at full stretch. I am calling on the ACT government to make these same amendments to our legislation here. This will mean that only animal-friendly netting is available to be bought and sold in the ACT.

It is not a huge ask. A lot of shops have already made this simple switch. I know Bunnings now only sells animal-friendly netting in the ACT, and our motion would ensure that that is consistent across the ACT. But we do not just need legislation to prevent the sale of harmful netting. We also need to help our households switch to the right netting. So my motion also calls for an education program to be developed to help Canberrans understand the consequences of dangerous netting. Lastly, we want to help our residents who have got the old netting in place to replace it with new, animal-friendly versions. I am asking for a program to be developed to do all of this and be implemented by 1 January 2023.

In our last election platform the Greens had a vision. We wanted to ensure that Canberra was a sanctuary for diverse and threatened wildlife. We still want that, and this motion is crucial to achieving it. By protecting our birds, our flying foxes, our

reptiles and our mammals, we are creating a safer space for biodiversity for all those animals who are vital to pollination and other ecosystem functions and for the animals themselves.

We really value animals as sentient beings and we understand that they deserve to be free from harm. We want them to enjoy their lives, and we want to remove any obstacles that threaten their safety. So when considering this motion, please remember that we are responsible for protecting that wildlife in our backyards. We are responsible for protecting it from the avoidable injury and from the avoidable deaths. Replacing old netting with animal-friendly netting is a really, really simple way to do that. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

**MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.05):** I seek leave to move the amendments circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

**MS CASTLEY:** I move:

1. In paragraph (1)(b), following “protect animals”, insert “and ecosystems”.
2. In paragraph (1)(g), following “actions” (first occurring), insert “of May 2019”.
3. In paragraph (1)(j), omit “a healthy environment”, substitute “our ecosystems”.
4. In paragraph (3), omit “1 January 2023”, substitute “30 June 2022”.
5. In paragraph (3)(b), following “develop”, insert “and implement in 2022”.
6. In paragraph (3)(c), following “develop”, insert “and implement”.
7. In paragraph (3)(d), add “by 30 December 2022”.

As shadow environment minister, I am pleased to respond to this motion and express the Canberra Liberals’ support for protecting the grey-headed flying fox, which is listed as a vulnerable species. There are sound reasons why this megabat has been listed as vulnerable and it follows that, as legislators, we put in place actions to protect it. So let us get on with it; let the government get on with it.

While the Canberra Liberals support the proposed measures to protect the grey-headed flying fox, including new laws for animal-friendly netting and an education program, why do we need to wait more than one year for this to happen? We should not. The motion rightly states that backyard netting injures our precious wildlife, causing cuts, strangulation and death. Clearly, we want to stop that. There is tripartisan agreement to stop that. So let us stop that as soon as we can. Let the wheels of government and bureaucracy spin to bring in these new laws by 30 June next year and no later.

The amendments that I have moved today bring forward new laws to protect the grey-headed flying fox so that, instead of waiting until 1 January 2023 for this legislation to be introduced, we move faster and have these measures in place by

30 June next year. As I said, let us get on with it. These measures must be in place before next year's visit of the flying foxes. Victoria has done it. There is legislation there to show us the way; so why the delay?

It was 2½ years ago, in May 2019, that the grey-headed flying fox was listed as a vulnerable species. They are a keystone species and it is important to recognise their ecological significance. Grey-headed flying foxes are the largest of Australia's megabats, social animals which form colonies and congregate in camps. One website I came across delightfully referred to our flying foxes as:

... hardworking little Aussies. They are the FIFO—

fly in, fly out—

workers on the night shift—flying out from their camps at dusk to feed on flowering or fruiting plants and trees.

ACT Wildlife tells us on their website that flying foxes:

... pollinate flowers and disperse seeds as they forage on nectar and pollen of eucalypts, melaleucas & banksias and the fruits of forest trees and vines.

And what super little pollinators they are, up to 60,000 seeds each along a 50-kilometre stretch of land every single night. When their work is done they head back to camp before dawn to sleep through the day, ready for their next shift. Their contribution to the health of our native forests cannot be overstated.

While I am speaking about ACT Wildlife, may I take this opportunity to praise our hardworking ACT Wildlife volunteers, who do so much to care for Canberra's injured, sick and orphaned wildlife. The Canberra Liberals salute their commitment and advocacy on this issue, reflected in their evidence to the May 2018 inquiry into nature in our city led by the Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services. I know this issue is important to ACT Wildlife and its membership and want to assure them of the Canberra Liberals' support.

The proposed management actions that this motion refers to came from the government at that time, in May 2019, when the flying fox was listed as vulnerable. This begs the question: why has nothing been done since then? What is the point of having a Labor-Greens government—and in this Assembly, we now have six Greens MLAs—when so many issues concerning our environment fall by the wayside? The Greens do not show the backbone that is needed to get results.

Why has this government not done anything already to implement these proposed management actions to protect the vulnerable grey-headed flying fox, when straightforward measures were proposed back in May 2019? The question has to be asked: how many of these flying foxes are we happy to lose before action is taken? How does it work in government: we list an animal as a vulnerable species and then forget about it?

While on the subject of government inaction, I am incredulous that the action plan for the grey-headed flying fox is not finalised and has not even gone out for public consultation. The 2019-20 environment directorate annual report states, on page 386, that a draft action plan has been drafted; so why has it not been released for public consultation, as required by the Nature Conservation Act 2014?

That makes me wonder: is it appropriate for the Assembly to be directing the government to take action on the vulnerable grey-headed flying fox with sensible and non-contentious measures when the proper process has not been followed? We know what the proper process is, so why has the government not followed it? We know an action plan has been prepared, and proper process is that it should be released for public consultation, with a final action plan approved by the ACT Conservator of Flora and Fauna, Ian Walker, and implemented.

It is unacceptable that the processes in place, which achieved tripartisan support way back in 2014, have not been properly implemented by successive Labor-Greens governments. These measures were designed to protect our important ecosystems and their species, and they are being let down by government inaction. While we do not oppose the measures outlined in this motion, the Canberra Liberals call on the ACT government to follow, in a timely fashion, the legislative requirements set out in the Nature Conservation Act.

I also note that, unfortunately, this is not the only action plan that is outstanding. The Canberra Liberals have previously asked why other action plans, such as the action plan for the loss of mature trees, under the list of key threatening processes, have taken so long. The environment directorate annual report 2019-20 reveals that, as a result of new listings in 2019, action plans have been drafted for the loss of mature trees, under key threatening processes, the high-country bogs and fens ecological community, the eastern bettong and the grey-headed flying fox.

Before concluding, I want to explain that the Canberra Liberals have moved other amendments today to highlight the importance of ecosystems and their intrinsic value. The Canberra Liberals believe that this motion should be broader than just protection of a particular species or a healthy environment which is more human-centric. If we as an Assembly are genuinely committed to protecting our vulnerable species then let us put our words into action and get the job done. Let us be clear: this measure is to protect flying foxes and there is tripartisan agreement to do so.

I urge the government to get on with the job and bring forward the protection of our vulnerable grey-headed flying fox to 30 June next year. If the Greens, in particular, do not support this measure, so much for the Canberra community electing six of them to this place in the belief that environmental management and protecting our vulnerable wildlife would be prioritised.

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (3.14): I am really pleased to rise today to support this motion. The ACT Greens believe that, where humans interact and come

into contact with animals, we should ensure the highest standards of care. Practical changes, the ones that are not big asks, can make life or death differences to our native wildlife. As my colleague Jo Clay MLA has described, the Labor-Greens government have made a lot of progress here in the ACT to protect both our domestic and our native animals.

One of the accomplishments that I would also like to highlight is leading the nation in 2019 to ban opera-house traps in all ACT waterways. These traps posed a high risk to our native animals such as freshwater turtles, water rats and our iconic platypus. So we absolutely are getting on with the job of protecting our native wildlife.

As Minister for the Environment, I would like to focus for a moment on the impact that fruit tree netting entanglement has had on the grey-headed flying foxes. Grey-headed flying foxes are, as we have talked about already, listed as vulnerable under the EPBC Act 1999 and, in the ACT, under the Nature Conservation Act 2014. While other threats in the ACT include climate change, leading to increased heat stress events, protecting these creatures by changing to animal-friendly netting is one that we would refer to as low-hanging fruit.

In 2020, ACT Wildlife rescued a total of 71 grey-headed flying foxes from fruit tree netting, of which 11 died. Sadly, this is just a sliver of the impact. The figure does not include birds trapped in netting, animals that have either freed themselves or died in netting or animals removed by the owner of the netting. ACT Wildlife, as we have all acknowledged here, do an incredible but what must be an exhausting and stressful job, responding to calls for help from the community to cut native animals out of fruit tree netting. While I was delighted that in this budget I was able to secure long-term funding for ACT Wildlife so that they can focus on their important work, this change will help both native wildlife and our wildlife carers by preventing many of these incidents.

It was earlier this year that Victoria amended their Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 2019 to introduce a requirement that netting used to protect household fruit trees, vegetable gardens and other fruit plants must have a mesh size of five millimetres by five millimetres or less at full stretch.

Education needs to be a core part of the solution, too. I am really pleased to report that the ACT government has already been working in collaboration with ACT Wildlife on community education. We are starting to work on the strategies outlined in this motion already. This motion provides a wonderful opportunity to build on the foundation that we have started.

We warmly welcome the leadership of major retailers who have already made the decision to sell only animal-friendly netting. I look forward to learning from and building on the work of the Victorian government to restrict the use of fruit tree netting that poses a risk of entanglement to our native wildlife. I can really assure the opposition that we are working right now to ensure that we implement the details of this motion as soon as we possibly can.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (3.18): I thank Ms Clay for bringing this motion to the Assembly today and I rise to speak briefly on the topic of animal welfare and to support Minister Vassarotti in her capacity as Minister for the Environment, with responsibilities for native animal welfare. I note the advocacy of Wildlife ACT that has brought the community's attention to the types of harm that netting on fruit trees can cause to birds and animals such as possums and flying foxes, and their advocacy that they have been making to the government, including in other jurisdictions, on the need to take action on this product.

As Minister Vassarotti mentioned, the Victorian government has already taken action on this product. We support the need to also look at whether we can ban the sale and/or use of this product in the ACT, and to make sure that we educate the community on the use of acceptable netting in the ACT that reduces the harm to native animals.

Minister Vassarotti also mentioned that we have previously had discussions in the Assembly on the banning of other products. In 2019 Minister Gentleman, then Minister for the Environment and Heritage, banned the sale of enclosed opera-house-style yabby traps under similar provisions under the Fisheries Act. That is actually quite an involved process. Any ban on the sale of that product triggers the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Agreement, which requires goods that are sold in any Australian or New Zealand jurisdiction should be legally sold in all other jurisdictions, unless an exception is granted. Minister Gentleman at the time had done an extensive amount of work to raise this issue at the national level with other jurisdictions in order to seek their agreement under the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act and framework.

That is the reason why this is not as easy as it seems, and the wilful ignorance of the opposition to claim that this can be done in a heartbeat just ignores the fact that we have this commonwealth piece of legislation in power that actually requires us to engage with the federation when we look at these matters. That is the reason why it takes a period of time to do this, and I have absolute confidence that Minister Vassarotti will advocate on this issue to get it done, as Victoria has. The fact that Victoria has done it, taking a leadership role, I think will probably make it easier for other jurisdictions that follow in its path.

I really appreciate the fact that Ms Clay has moved this motion and has added to it the prioritisation of education over enforcement. Whilst we constantly strive to improve animal welfare outcomes in the territory, there are a number of avid gardeners who may have been using these nets for a number of years, and we need to educate the community on alternatives before we penalise people.

I thank Ms Clay for bringing this motion to the Assembly, and I am very happy to support it.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (3.22): It is really good, as an ACT Green, to be able to bring such a positive motion forward in the Assembly. I am really, really happy that

we are obviously going to get this motion passed today. I think it is really important for our habitat, for our healthy environment, for all of Canberra's ecology and for a lot of our wildlife as well. It was lovely to hear an update from my colleague the Minister for the Environment, Minister Vassarotti, about all of the other works that have gone before this and the work that is ongoing, and also from my colleague Minister Steel.

This is part of an ongoing program in the ACT. The ACT government is actually on the front foot with a lot of this work. We have banned opera-house traps; we have secured long-term funding for ACT Wildlife and for our wildlife carers and volunteers—and that was a really welcome piece of news for them—so that they no longer have to be in that constant grant cycle. We have got a lot of education campaigns on foot, and I think it is really important when we are bringing in new measures that we do take the time to do the consultation and make sure that we get it right.

I have done that; I have had a chat to my ministerial colleagues; I have had a chat to ACT Wildlife. I have included in this motion that we do some community consultation because what we do not want to do is rush in some law that does not do what it is meant to do, that maybe has unintended consequences, that maybe breaches some of our commonwealth obligations. It is not a good idea to bring it in too quickly.

I have set a time line on this motion that is a realistic time line that we can achieve. It sounds like we are probably going to get quite a lot of the measures ahead of January 2023, and I think that is fantastic. I am really looking forward to hearing some updates about that. I have just set a time line that is realistic for our forward legislative development, to make sure that we are doing that work properly, and I think it is not a good idea to be too hasty on these things. We need to get it right, rather than get it fast.

I am really pleased to hear that the Canberra Liberals do not oppose this motion. That is great to hear. I have had a look at the amendment circulated by Ms Castley, and I am actually really happy to support 1 to 3 and 5 to 6. The only one that we will have a problem with is No 4 because that is the one that would rush through legislation before it has been properly developed. We may well get that legislation earlier but we cannot guarantee it, and we need to make sure that we are going through the correct process to do the job properly.

I commend my motion, as amended by Ms Castley, but I am proposing that, pursuant to standing order 133, we divide the question and look at those amendments in separate parts so that we can decide on separate parts, and which of those should pass and which of those should not.

*Ordered that the question be divided.*

Amendments 1 to 3 agreed to.

Amendment 4.

Question put:

That amendment 4 be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 5

Noes 12

Mr Cain  
Ms Castley  
Mr Hanson  
Mr Milligan  
Mr Parton

Ms Burch  
Ms Cheyne  
Ms Clay  
Ms Davidson  
Mr Davis  
Mr Gentleman

Ms Orr  
Mr Pettersson  
Mr Rattenbury  
Mr Steel  
Ms Stephen-Smith  
Ms Vassarotti

Question resolved in the negative.

Amendment 4 negatived.

Amendments 5 to 7 agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Australian Defence Force—funding**

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (3.31): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the ACT is home to the Australian Defence Force (ADF) headquarters and approximately 8000 ADF and 7000 Australian Public Service Defence personnel;
- (b) the ACT is home to approximately 26 000 ADF Veterans;
- (c) the economic contribution of the Defence industry to the ACT and surrounding region is \$4.3 billion Gross State Product and 25 000 defence-related jobs;
- (d) Australia faces an uncertain security environment;
- (e) the Greens have pledged to cut defence spending by \$300 billion over a decade which would halve the Defence budget;
- (f) defence cuts of this magnitude would place ADF personnel at significantly increased risk in future conflicts and compromise the ability to defend Australia;
- (g) defence cuts of this magnitude would be devastating to the ACT economy and cause thousands of lost jobs; and
- (h) the Greens plan to form coalition government with the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and hold the balance of power in the Senate and will “be pushing for it [ADF cuts] as much as possible”;

(2) further notes the:

- (a) Federal ALP has described the Greens’ plan as “delusional”; and
- (b) Government has described the plan as “dangerous”; and

- (3) calls on the leaders of the three parties represented in the ACT Assembly to write to all Federal Greens representatives and express their concern for the safety and lives of ADF personnel and oppose the economic and job losses the planned defence cuts would cause.

I have got to say that it is important, I think, that, as members of this place, if we see a threat to Canberrans, to their jobs, to our economy and to their health and wellbeing, it behoves us to speak out and to take action. At the heart of this motion today is the federal Greens' policy to cut \$300 billion from our defence budget, which would do great harm not just to our national security but to the employment and welfare of thousands of Canberrans and to our economy. That is the nub of this motion. I notice that there is an amendment from those opposite that is going to try and avoid speaking about that and distract and deflect, which is shameful but perhaps not surprising. It does, in many ways, sink to a new low.

Federally, it is encouraging that both the government and the Labor opposition have had the guts to stand up and actually condemn this and call it out for what it is. It is important that they do that, but it is also important that we, locally, talk about the damage that this policy would wreak on our community and our jobs, and the amount of money it would rip out of our economy.

The federal government has said the policy shows “just how dangerous they are and the threat that they pose to the safety and security of our country”. The federal Labor Party, who seem to be a million miles away—they are just up on the hill but they are a million miles away from this mob locally who are in coalition with the Greens—describe the policy as delusional and say that it fails to fully appreciate the national security challenge that Australia confronts. What we know and what we are going to see as this debate unfolds today is that, even though the federal Labor Party will stand up to it, the local Labor Party, in cahoots with the Greens, will conspire with them to deflect, distract and do everything they can to stop debate on these cuts.

It is very important that we understand that this policy, if enacted—and the Greens are going to be very clear that they are trying to push for this—would impact on Canberra more than anywhere else in Australia. We are, in many ways, home to the ADF. We have got the Australian Defence Force headquarters. We have got approximately 8,000 men and women in uniform, 7,000 Australian public servants and all of their families. The economic contribution of the defence industry to the ACT and the surrounding region is about \$4½ billion, or \$4.3 billion, and there are 25,000 defence-related jobs.

The Greens' policy that they are pushing federally and, I assume, locally—they all love it locally as well—would result in massive job cuts across Canberra and all of the establishments, all the men and women in uniform and in the public service, and contractors in Russell offices, the Royal Military College, the Australian Defence Force Academy, the Australian Defence College at Weston, Brindabella Park, Campbell Park offices, HMAS *Harman*, and bases in our region like Headquarters JOC just outside Bungendore. Those job losses would be devastating not just within the defence establishment but within the defence industry sector.

In fact, the ACT government, once upon a time, used to believe in actually trying to build up the defence industry in our territory and recognise the important role it plays in our economy. Back in 2017 the ACT government released a defence industry strategy called *Established, Capable, Skilled: Growing the defence industry in the Canberra region*. There it is. Let me quote from the Chief Minister, back in 2017, when he had not quite sold his soul completely to the local Greens:

The ACT is a well-established and well trusted partner in developing Australia's defence capability, skills and services. We are strongly positioned to both support and benefit from the planned \$200 billion investment in defence capability over the next 10 years.

We recognise that collaboration between the Australian, state and territory governments and defence-related industry is essential to strengthen our nation's security. We are ready to strengthen and grow existing partnerships and show leadership in promoting state and territory collaboration to enhance defence capabilities.

Are they still, or have they sold their soul completely to the Greens when it comes to defence? This used to be the goal—and maybe Ms Cheyne can tell us whether it still is—to grow and sustain the defence industry in the Canberra region. Do you still support that? Does the Labor Party still support that? Will they be supporting my motion today? Ms Cheyne said she still supports that; so she will be supporting our motion and she will not be supporting the Greens' amendment that does everything it can to distract and deflect from what we are putting here today. Their strategy used to be about outlining how we will maximise the ACT's strengths and capacity to support defence, while building a significant and globally competitive industry, and so on and so on.

They made the point in this strategy that, for every extra billion dollars you spend on defence operations in the Canberra region, gross state product will grow by around \$1.4 billion and add 8,000 jobs. But the Greens want to rip all that out. That is their stated policy. It will be very interesting to see whether the likes of Mr Rattenbury and Ms Davidson are going to stand up and say, "I do not support that. I do not want to rip out thousands of jobs from Canberra, as my federal colleagues do," or are they actually going to say, "No, no, I am doubling down. I want to scrap all those jobs. I want to see all the defence people sacked and the ruin that that would cause their families"? Will they agree with that policy? Will they actually stand up for Canberrans and our defence personnel here?

I also worry about the impact on veterans. Veterans are not stupid. They will not be taken for a ride by this mob. They understand, if you rip \$300 billion out of defence, what that will mean for our servicemen and women next time there is a conflict. If you want to get rid of submarines, jets and destroyers and replace them with what they have got, a peace spokesperson, if the spokesperson says, "We are going to replace that with effective communication that will work. In these uncertain strategic times, we will get rid of our defence force, all the bits that will actually keep us safe, and replace it with effective communication," the problem is that those who would do harm to our nation and to our neighbours and to those who share our values are not

deterred by effective communication. That is not going to stop them from doing what they want to do.

History is littered with naive politicians who rely only on appeasement and communication as deterrents, rather than a capable military. We saw it, probably in its most horrific, in the strategy of Neville Chamberlain, you will recall, in the lead-up to WWII. “Peace in our time” was his message. That is now the same strategy that the Greens are pushing federally, at the expense of jobs and the Canberra economy. It is bizarre that the veterans affairs minister in the ACT is one of the proponents of this policy that would devastate our defence force.

I spoke earlier this year about the real impact of these sorts of cuts and what they would do. I spoke about an example from my own service, the Bushmaster vehicle. Bushmaster vehicles are protected mobility vehicles, designed to be able to move people around a battlefield and survive hits by IEDs and other weapon systems, RPGs and the like, so that they can survive. Despite those Bushmasters being hit in Afghanistan and in Iraq on numerous occasions, the number of soldiers who died in Bushmaster vehicles is zero.

That is the sort of capability the Greens want to get rid of. They do not want to see this local defence industry in Australia, they tell us. Those who make the Bushmasters in Bendigo—they would not want to see that around. They would prefer, I am sure, the policy of the Brits, who sent their soldiers to war in Land Rovers, and 37 soldiers were killed. That is the real-life impact of that, well beyond the impact directly on our economy and our jobs.

Veterans get that. All the veterans from Afghanistan, all the veterans from Iraq and earlier conflicts, understand that when you are standing up there and saying, “Halve the defence budget, get rid of all the things that soldiers say there is an extra need for, to keep them safe,” the price that will be paid for that is on them. There are no people that will be more affected than those that are in Canberra, the 8,000 service personnel and their families and the 7,000 public servants who stand with them and support them.

I think it is important that we stand up and say, “This would be harmful not just to Australia’s national security but to the ACT.” If you say that this is just one of those kooky Greens’ policies that are never going to come to fruition, that it does not really matter because it is just airy-fairy stuff, the problem is that the Greens are pushing to have the balance of power in the Senate. They have said on the record, from Senator Steele-John who is their peace spokesperson, that the Greens will be pushing for it, talking about the defence cuts, as much as possible.

They have also said that they are going to be in a power-sharing agreement, a coalition federally, just like they are locally, and they are targeting local Canberra seats. A seat in Canberra, I think, is one that they are targeting so that they can try and get into a coalition with Labor federally, and then they can roll out this policy. They have said that they are going to make it a priority, they are going to be pushing for it, and they are going to try and make this a reality.

I think a lot of people that serve in defence, that work in defence, that work in the defence sector, and their families, would want to know that the local Labor Party is not in cahoots with the Greens on this. They would want to know that, no, locally, it is all right because the local Labor Party does not support this either; they have not jumped the shark and gone so far to the extreme with their Greens colleagues that they would support a policy like this. They need to be definitive. That is why, in my motion, I am saying that, as leaders of the party, we need to write. I am not expecting that the Greens will. To be frank, I would be surprised, because they are clearly in favour of this.

But surely, the Labor Party have not gone so far to the extreme that they are not prepared to say, “We do not support cutting \$300 billion from defence and we understand the negative impact this would have on Canberrans”? There are a lot of people who would be nervous out there. Let me tell you, between now and the next election, we will be making sure that everybody that goes to the ballot box understands: “You think you are voting for flying foxes but you are actually voting for a mob that want \$300 million in defence cuts, that actually want to strip the defence force by 50 per cent.” That is going to cut thousands of jobs across all the sectors, and there is the impact on their families.

I suppose it is useful that people understand that about the Greens. But what they probably want to see is a Labor Party here that has not gone completely loopy.

**Mr Parton:** They want backbone.

**MR HANSON:** That has got some backbone—exactly right, Mr Parton—that actually, once in a while, when they have gone a bit too far, will actually say, “Yes, okay. There is still a compromise you have got to make to keep this government going. We get that, but we are not going to go out there and rip the guts out of our defence force and support a policy that does that. That would lead to massive defence cuts.”

Let us make sure that we stand up against this threat to the ACT. If the Labor Party is not prepared to, if the Labor Party is going to support this Greens’ amendment that aims to distract and deflect and avoid talking about the substantive issue, if the Labor Party is not prepared to support the motion as it stands today, then I think there will be a lot of people out there—and I know there will be because I will be telling them, don’t you worry—who I will be telling at every opportunity, “You think you are voting for flying foxes. What you are actually supporting is a mob that wants to rip the heart out of the defence budget, that wants to not just compromise our national security but rip the jobs from the defence sector and damage our economy to the extent of billions of dollars.” I commend my motion to the Assembly.

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Seniors, Veterans, Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health and Minister for Mental Health) (3.45): I would like to thank Mr Hanson for bringing forward this motion today. I move the revised amendment circulated in my name.

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

“(1) notes:

- (a) the ACT is home to the Australian Defence Force (ADF) headquarters and approximately 8000 ADF and 7000 APS Defence personnel;
- (b) the ACT is home to approximately 26 000 ADF veterans;
- (c) the economic contribution of the defence industry to the ACT and surrounding region is \$4.3 billion GSP and 25 000 defence-related jobs;
- (d) and expresses thanks for the ADF’s recent contribution towards the ACT’s COVID response;
- (e) that the ACT Government considers the skills and experience of veterans as a valuable asset to the ACT community;
- (f) that the ACT Government has been very successful in implementing strategies to attract and retain veterans in the ACT Public Service, with the number of veterans employed increasing from 102 in 2017 to 235 in 2021;
- (g) that, in recognition of the steps the ACTPS has taken to support veterans in transitioning to civilian life, the ACT Public Service was awarded the 2020 Veterans Employer of the Year for Public Sector Organisations in the Prime Minister’s Veterans’ Employment Awards;
- (h) that the ACT Government will continue to advocate for the ACT, noting its relatively large veteran population, to be a location for a Commonwealth Government-funded Veteran Wellbeing Centre;
- (i) the valued ongoing work by the diverse members of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Veterans and their Families; and
- (j) the leaders of the three parties represented in the ACT Legislative Assembly may choose to write to the Australian Greens, outlining their feedback on Australian Greens Defence Policy and perceived implications for ADF personnel; and

(2) calls on the:

- (a) Chief Minister and the Minister for Veteran Affairs to write to the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Minister for Veteran Affairs to advocate for the ACT to be selected as a location for a Veteran Wellbeing Centre, and build on the successful work to date on career transition pathways for veterans into the ACT Public Service; and
- (b) ACT Government to continue investing in programs and services aimed at supporting the ACT’s veteran community.”.

It is not every day that I hear someone use language like “dangerous” about the way I do my work. May I just say that just because someone wants to start a fight does not mean that you have to join it. Mr Hanson may interpret that as dangerously as he wishes.

The responsibility to protect and promote the interests of our fellow Australians who have served their country is one that, as minister for veterans, I take very seriously. As Mr Hanson has already mentioned, the ACT has around 26,000 veterans and, along

with places like Townsville and Darwin, it is one of the places in Australia with the largest veterans population. Within that 26,000 there is great diversity, reflecting a wide range of people and needs, with different backgrounds, experiences, employment pathways, and at different stages of life. In promoting and protecting the interests of veterans in the ACT, it is important that this diversity is appropriately recognised and supported.

One of the things that have been emphasised to me, as minister for veterans, is the importance of the transition of people into civilian life, to find a new purpose. Our veterans have a wide range of skills that are highly valuable to many private and public sector employers.

On this matter, I am pleased to be able to speak about the outstanding work that the ACT government has done, and continues to do, to attract and retain veterans in the ACT public service. The ACT government Veterans' Employment Strategy was developed in 2018, which aims to make the ACT public service a leader in the recruitment and retention of veterans and their partners.

In September 2020 the strategy was updated to target increased recruitment, networking and information-sharing for veterans. This is a win-win. Veterans develop new and exciting pathways, enabling them to use their considerable skills and, hopefully, develop new ones. The ACT public service, and therefore the Canberra community, gain talented and committed public servants.

There is strong evidence to indicate that the ACT public service is an employer of choice for veterans and that the ACT government Veterans' Employment Strategy has been successful. Recent data indicates that 236 ACT public service employees, or one per cent of the total ACT public service workforce, identify as a former ADF member. In fact, employment data shows that veterans are 49 per cent more likely than non-veterans to be successful in gaining a job in the ACT public service.

Employment data shows a significant rise in the employment of veterans over the last two years, correlating with the implementation of strategies to attract and retain veterans in the ACT public service. In the past year, 2.6 per cent of all people commencing employment in the ACT public service were veterans. Over the last five years, employment data shows conclusively that veteran employees have a higher retention rate than non-veteran employees.

It is not just the data that supports the idea that the ACT government has made great progress in attracting and retaining veterans. In recognition of the steps the ACT public service has taken to support veterans in transitioning to civilian life, the ACT public service was awarded the 2020 Veterans' Employer of the Year for Public Sector Organisations in the Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Awards.

I believe we should all be proud of this work. However, it is far from job done. We can do more, and we can improve on this positive start to further strengthen our position as an employer of choice for veterans. I was discussing this with the federal Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Andrew Gee, only last week.

We all know that service can present challenges and leaves a long-lasting impact on our fellow Australians who have served. The mental health impact of serving is clearly one of those issues and this has only been exacerbated during the pandemic, with many veterans and support organisations demonstrating their adaptability and resilience to find new ways to support each other while physically isolated. It is also worth noting that events in Afghanistan have been particularly traumatic for our veterans community and their families.

The ACT government provides and funds a range of clinical and non-clinical mental health, suicide prevention and postvention support services that are available to veterans as members of the ACT community. Targeted mental health support for veterans in the ACT includes the Canberra Hospital Veteran Liaison Officer, free inpatient psychiatric care through the Calvary Bruce private hospital, and an identified lounge at the Canberra Hospital specifically for veterans and their families. The ACT government recognises, however, that some veterans prefer to access services that are specific to their needs.

In 2019 the federal government announced a \$30 million investment for the development of a national network of six veterans wellbeing centres. So far, the ACT has not been identified as a location that will receive funding to open a wellbeing centre, despite its significant veterans population, as recognised earlier in this debate. Veterans wellbeing centres provide a one-stop shop for veterans and their families to connect with like-minded people, access services and receive advice. I will continue to advocate on behalf of our community for funding to be allocated to the ACT for a wellbeing centre, and I would value Mr Hanson's support in so doing.

Again, I raised this issue with Minister Gee last week and I look forward to continuing our constructive conversations focused on the wellbeing and support of veterans. When the federal government spends \$122.2 million per day on defence, I am confident that there must be room in the federal budget to better resource wellbeing and support services for our veterans.

I cannot speak about this topic without also mentioning the members of the Ministerial Advisory Council for Veterans and their Families. The council has been an invaluable source of advice for me in the last year, across a range of topics, and I would like to place on record my sincere thanks. I particularly thank them for their flexibility in extending their term for a few months as a result of the recent disruptions caused by COVID.

The diversity of skills and experience in our advisory council members, as veterans and as family members, is reflected in the diversity of views contained in their advice on a wide range of issues. Diverse thinking is a valued asset in any group within our community but particularly when we are working together to find better ways to serve the wellbeing and support needs of such a large number of veterans and their family members in our Canberra community.

In conclusion, I am enormously grateful to the ACT veterans community for their service and acknowledge the variety of needs within that community. I reaffirm my commitment to promote their interests at every available opportunity.

I am proud of the work that we have done to date to provide transitional pathways into the ACT public service and I look forward to expanding this work. I also commit to advocate for the ACT's veterans community to have access to their own veterans wellbeing centre and I would invite all members of this place to join me in doing this.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (3.52): I rise in support of Minister Davidson's amendment, and I thank Mr Hanson for the opportunity to acknowledge the significant contribution the defence industry and personnel make to the ACT economy and that of the Canberra region.

For someone who I know genuinely believes in the value of defence and its personnel, Mr Hanson did his own argument a disservice by not reading the amendment, doing literally no research about the ACT's engagement with this industry or perhaps just ignoring it to assist his own argument. It has, regrettably, become a common theme for Mr Hanson that he just says anything, based in fact or not, so long as it supports his confected outrage.

In 2017 KPMG reported that the total economic contribution of the defence industry to our region is \$4.3 billion. In the same report it was estimated that for every \$1 billion spent on defence operations in the Canberra region, gross state product grows by \$1.4 billion and adds around 8,000 jobs. The defence industry is broader than the department and the Australian Defence Force. The defence service industry, which includes a wide range of supporting services, everything from engineering to health care, contributes a further \$854 million to gross state product and supports an additional 5,900 jobs.

The ACT government does continue to work hard to raise the profile of Canberra's defence, space and cyber capabilities. We are proud to facilitate a range of activities under our Team Canberra approach, promoting Canberra as an attractive place to do business, forge relationships and identify new opportunities.

In partnership with the industry and our tertiary institutions, we are collaborating with other states and territories. We are working to build a high-performing skilled workforce, attracting investment to grow the industry in the Canberra region—yes, Mr Hanson—and fostering new ideas and growing research and industry partnerships. Continuing to grow our defence industry will play a key role in our achieving our aim of 250,000 secure local jobs by 2025. But, of course, it is important to note that the defence industry contribution to our region is not just economic.

Minister Davidson has gone to this at length, but it is worth underlining just how important it is with the defence force, in that it instils in its members skills and values that do serve people well throughout their lives. We thank serving members and veterans for the broader contribution that they make to our community and the care, the support and the defence that they provide. I support Minister Davidson's amendment.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (3.55): I rise to speak on Mr Hanson's motion, which clearly aims to attack the policy of the Australian Greens in a way that really is quite strange. I am not sure what, if any, policy of the Australian Greens it is that Mr Hanson has read in full, but every important matter he touches on is one where he has deftly missed the point that is articulated in the policy document.

We, as the Greens, are proud of this policy. It is a policy that takes a sensible and evidence-based approach to this nation's security. It recognises that conflict is bred by poverty and injustice and that climate change is one of our greatest security threats. It aims to target those effectively, rather than wasting money to showboat ineffective weapons of war and rub shoulders with arms dealers.

The motion makes mention of the number of ADF and APS defence personnel living and working in the ACT, as well as the economic contribution of defence spending to the ACT and the region. While, certainly, government expenditure supports jobs and promotes economic activity—it is a simple law of economics—the fact is that there is no proposal to simply delete that money from existence. That is not the Australian Greens' policy position. The proposal is, in fact, to spend it more effectively, in a way that maintains our security, while diverting some funding to improve the wellbeing of Australians in other ways.

I thought it might assist the chamber if we ran through the detailed and carefully considered policy. I would even be willing to send a copy to Mr Hanson because it is not clear to me that he has read it. He probably read the report of it in the *Australian*, but I am not sure he has read the actual document.

The headline of the policy is to reduce defence spending levels to be more in line with long-term trends. Before the coalition government came to power, defence spending had been trending down towards one per cent of GDP. It has now increased to sit at two per cent, a position supported by both Labor and the Liberals at a federal level. But it would be a mistake to conflate increased spending with either increased safety or increased jobs availability for Canberrans. That is a long bow, but it is the one that Mr Hanson has sought to draw today.

Has that increased spending made us safer? I think that is a very debatable question. The Greens' policy articulates plans clearly intended to make us safer. What is clear is that the money that has been allocated has allowed Australia to ink deals for defence assets that will be obsolete by the time we deploy them. That is the kind of strategic leadership that is currently on offer. Of course, the cash-splash approach made us able to afford such vital strategic interests as elaborately deceiving the President of France. But, beyond that, it is not clear whether this expenditure has actually made us any safer.

The Greens' policy is clear on where that money does need to go. We do not need to be spending money on turning ourselves into an arms dealer for nations with a chequered past of human rights abuses. The policy at the moment is to sell arms to anybody that will take them from us. This comes with a tremendous human cost. While the federal coalition is wasting money on plans to turn Australia into an arms

exporter, the Greens' view is that the money can be used to more effectively solve our dire housing shortage in this country, improve our education systems, enable more people to get to university or bolster our health systems.

We are talking \$300 billion over 10 years. Imagine the alternative uses we could put that money to. Just allow yourself that moment of imagination, that moment of careful thought. Rather than simply rolling out a line about how we have got to spend more money to make Australia safe, just imagine for a moment what we could do for Australians with that money. When we are talking about jobs in Canberra and more effectively protecting the wellbeing of ADF personnel, this money that is currently being spent, this push towards two per cent of GDP, is contributing exactly zero to either of those causes.

Our policy also proposes to disentangle us from simply following the United States and to restore the sovereignty of parliament as the body to decide whether Australians should go to war overseas. That is not a democratic decision at the moment; it is a decision purely of the executive, and we see very little—and we certainly heard nothing from Mr Hanson—about whether Australia should even be participating in those wars. That is a fundamental question.

There is this sort of circular argument here. We should go on these military missions; therefore we need more money; therefore we should go on these missions because we have got the capability. It is a circular argument that puts more Australians in harm's way. If we are having a conversation about how we look after our military forces, let us at least have a moment to pause and think about whether we should be putting Australians in those places in the very first place. We do not need to be spending more money and simply making ourselves another arm of the United States military.

The aim of our policy is to ensure that Australia has, quoting from the policy document, "a light, readily deployable and highly mobile force that is commensurate with our size and location". That is an eminently sensible goal, which goes some way to explaining why Mr Hanson has decided he would rather argue against what he guesses the policy could be than what it actually is.

We heard today a lot of speculating and a lot of extrapolating about what Mr Hanson thinks our policy is. He never quoted from the document; he just went for the vibe of the thing, in his mind. He talked about how we need to make sure we have got Bushmasters to protect Australian troops that go overseas. That is a really important discussion to have, and one that I think is interesting. Our policy does not say that they will not be available but it does question how much we should spend on defence, and that invites a prioritisation discussion. If Mr Hanson thinks that Bushmasters are one of the most important things, let us have that conversation. But let us not just have lazy analyses that say we need to spend this much per cent of GDP.

Maybe Mr Hanson thinks we need to spend three, four or five per cent of GDP on defence. What will we not fund then? Where will that money come from? Will it come from the health budget? Will it come from the education budget? Will it come from addressing issues of Indigenous over-representation? They are the questions you

have to seriously ask. We did not hear any of that sophisticated analysis. All we heard was jingoism and slogans from Mr Hanson.

This policy and other Greens' policies set out where government expenditure would be better directed. The policy itself highlights key areas where redirecting money would actually result in improved defence outcomes. An increase in foreign aid spending, especially in the area of climate resilience, will assist in reducing regional pressures. The policy proposes to increase our aid spending to 0.7 per cent of gross national income, an amount equivalent to what other developed countries such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Denmark spend. This fulfils our moral responsibility as well as our obligations and strategic interests to provide support to disaster areas that need it most.

The Greens recognise the need to act on the threat of climate change in our region, to alleviate suffering and solve human problems before they become military matters. This is why the policy also proposes to commit \$1.6 billion per year in climate finance and, in recognition of how important aid is to many of these issues, the policy also proposes to establish an independent oversight agency and to reinstate a minister for international development and the Pacific. It is a plan with a clear purpose and pathway.

I did crack a wry grin when I read Mr Hanson's motion because I have lost count of the number of times he has walked into this place and critiqued me particularly, but the Greens generally, for bringing forward matters that canvass national issues but also have a local impact. He has been so derisory in commenting on those notions. He has never entered into the content of the discussion; he has just come in here and poured scorn on us for daring to raise these issues. So I hope this is a turning point, where Mr Hanson recognises that it is relevant, because I think this is a matter that should be discussed in this place and I look forward to this not being a political stunt today but a recognition that these are relevant matters.

Let me touch on one other matter: jobs in Canberra. One of our other policies proposes to create 17,000 more public sector jobs over four years. It is the Liberal Party that has gutted the public service. It has hollowed it out with recruitment caps, efficiency dividends and siphoning the money off to the big four firms who now get so many more consultancies. Coincidentally—perhaps not coincidentally, but it is an interesting reckoning—their donations to the Liberal Party at a federal level increased dramatically in light of this hollowing out of the public service. So when it comes to protecting jobs in Canberra, it is the Greens who have got the clear policies to do so. *(Time expired.)*

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (4.06): At the outset I say, "Well done," to Mr Rattenbury, because he has recognised that this is a relevant debate, and he has recognised this is an important debate. I think it is fair to say that he and I are on very different sides of this debate, but he has had the guts to back the policy of the Greens and to advocate for it. Whether we agree or disagree—and I obviously disagree—he actually did that. So without relitigating the substantive issues that Mr Rattenbury has raised, most of which I disagree with, I say good on him for having the fight and for

coming in here and making the point. That stands in stark contrast to the contributions from Ms Davidson and Ms Cheyne, which did not even mention the policy.

This is a substantive debate. As Mr Rattenbury said, this motion today is a substantive debate about the Greens' plan to cut military spending. I have read the policy. That is what it says. It is going to cut military spending by, it is estimated, about \$300 billion. That is a substantial debate. Well done to Mr Rattenbury for getting that and for not hiding from the debate, as the other members did. They did not even mention the Greens' policy and the amount that it is going to cut. How shameful.

What they have done is moved an amendment that is distracting. In the army, if you found yourself in a position where you were in a bit of trouble, you would do a thing called 'throw smoke'. You would pop a smoke grenade and throw it to try to obscure and distract from what is going on. This amendment, which is going to be supported by those opposite, is exactly that: it is throwing smoke. At least Mr Rattenbury had the guts to stand up and defend the policy, while Ms Davidson and Ms Cheyne are doing everything they can to distract from what is happening, and they are using a really important veterans' issue as a political shield.

It is pretty shameful that instead of debating the issue, as Mr Rattenbury did, they decided, "No, no. Let's not talk about the cuts, let's not talk about the substantive issue; let's have a motion over here that completely distracts and tries to obscure. We'll hide behind veterans' issues." They are using veterans' issues as a political shield. There really is no depth that those on the other side of the chamber will not sink to, to avoid scrutiny on the policy. When you go through the amendment and look at what the amendment does and what it removes, you see that they have deleted, "Australia faces an uncertain security environment." They do not believe that we face an uncertain security environment, apparently.

The motion notes that the Greens have pledged to cut defence spending by \$300 billion over a decade, which would halve the defence budget. They got rid of that, even though it is true, and it is the substance of the debate. They deleted the part that says that cuts of this magnitude would place ADF personnel at significantly increased risk in future conflicts—they would, and I went through that—and that the cuts would have a devastating effect on the ACT economy and cause the loss of thousands of jobs. I have the defence industry strategy, here, Ms Cheyne. I have read it in detail.

In fact, the policy comes from a National Press Club announcement I made in 2016. The Labor Party copied and pasted it and rolled it out. Just like the veterans affairs minister, which was first announced by the Canberra Liberals in 2009, and the Labor Party and the Greens had to be dragged kicking and screaming for six years before they implemented it.

The motion reads:

- (h) the Greens plan to form coalition government with the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and hold the balance of power in the Senate and will "be pushing for it [ADF cuts] as much as possible";

Those opposite did not want to talk about the fact that the Greens' plan is to hold the balance of power in the Senate and push for this policy. They have removed that from the motion. The fact that the federal ALP described the plan as "delusional" has been removed in this amendment. Ms Cheyne is going to support that. She is going to support the removal of that from the motion, so she does not support what the federal Labor Party is saying about their plan, and that the government has described it as "dangerous".

The amendment also removes from the motion the fact that we are asking the leaders to write about the concern about the economic impact of this policy. It puts forward what is actually a veterans' affairs motion; it is not about what Mr Rattenbury said, in his speech, was the substance of what we are talking about. Mr Rattenbury gets it. He gets what we are talking about here. He is prepared to have the fight. But the rest of the members over there just seem to want to distract, to throw smoke, and to hide from what is going on, so as not to confront a real threat, not just to national security—the whole "peace in our time" message—but to effective communication and spending more money elsewhere.

Of course we want to spend money on health and education, but there are people out there in the world who would do us harm. We do not know who and what they are, yet, but if you read history and if you follow history you know that it is inevitable. What this government wants to do is rip the heart out of our defence force, much of which—as Ms Cheyne admits and acknowledges when she goes to the points in the defence strategy—resides here in Canberra. To use veterans' issues to hide from the substance of the debate is absolutely shameful! Veterans are not stupid; they can see what those opposite are doing. Those who are watching will say, "At least Mr Rattenbury has the guts to stand up with the courage of his convictions; he does not want to try to use veterans' issues as a shield to hide behind and distract." I am disappointed that the local Labor Party has not decided to engage in the substantive debate, as Mr Rattenbury and I have, and to acknowledge that there is a debate to be had. It is an important debate for our community, as Mr Rattenbury said. This is a really important debate to be had.

Instead, the local Labor Party do not want to talk about it. They do not want to have this debate because they are wedged, aren't they? They do not know who they support. Is it the federal Labor Party? Do they want to annoy the local Greens? They want all the support that the Greens give them all the time. Where is the courage of the convictions of the Labor Party, which used to stand for something? It used to stand for something instead of just appeasement of the Greens, which seems to be the policy that they will follow at any cost. In this case, if the worse comes to the worse and we get a federal Labor-Greens coalition or similar, the price will be paid for this in lives of defence personnel down the track. But certainly, in the near term, the price will be in jobs of defence personnel and public servants and in the defence industry.

Substantively, there is nothing wrong with the amendment; it is just throwing smoke. It is weak. It is weak and shameful to not engage in the debate and to try and hide behind veterans as part of that debate. What the Greens are doing today is perhaps not surprising, but I think it would be clear to those following politics that the Labor Party

is losing its soul here. Standing up for the defence community, standing up for jobs and standing up for economy were things that used to be important to Labor values. They have sold that out in this amendment today and in this refusal to even engage in the substantive debate.

Mr Rattenbury and I have had many, many fights, and I disagree with him wholeheartedly on the substantive issues, but he has more guts, as it turns out, on the substantive issue than the rest of the Labor Party combined. I am disappointed in Ms Davidson's contribution because she has tried to hide behind veterans' issues instead of engaging in the substantive debate. People need to understand this, and, as I said before, I will be telling them between now and the election, "You think you are voting for flying foxes, but in reality you are voting for Greens who want to rip the heart and soul out of the defence budget, to see the loss of thousands of jobs and to put our defence personnel at risk." What I was not expecting is that every step of the way they are being aided and abetted by the local Labor Party!

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 14

Noes 7

Mr Barr	Mr Gentleman	Mr Cain
Mr Braddock	Ms Orr	Ms Castley
Ms Burch	Mr Pettersson	Mr Hanson
Ms Cheyne	Mr Rattenbury	Mrs Kikkert
Ms Clay	Mr Steel	Ms Lawder
Ms Davidson	Ms Stephen-Smith	Mr Milligan
Mr Davis	Ms Vassarotti	Mr Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Appropriation Bill 2021-2022**

[Cognate bill:

Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022

Cognate papers:

Standing Committee Reports on Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and  
Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022]

### **Detail stage**

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

Debate resumed.

## Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate—Part 1.5

**MRS JONES** (Murrumbidgee) (4.20): Today I speak to the Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 on behalf of Ms Lee. This budget was Mr Barr's 10th consecutive budget as Treasurer of our territory. This is an important point that should be made at the outset: Mr Barr has controlled the levers of the budget for over a decade now. After 20 years of Labor budgets—the majority of which have been supported by the Greens—this government has handed down a patch-up job of spending to cover up 20 years of mismanagement and complacency in our territory.

In Ms Lee's budget reply she outlined the Canberra Liberals labelling of the budget as a band-aid budget. Mr Barr proclaimed, on launch day of his 10th budget, that the budget would deliver record investments in our health system, further funding for public education, and an ambitious infrastructure program. Well, after 20 consecutive Labor budgets, it is an indictment on this government's record that so many areas of this government's responsibility are in need of a cash splash.

The incursion of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown our city has gone through have taken a massive toll on everyone but particularly on our economy. The next 12 months are critical for our economic recovery. Many businesses have closed and will never re-open. Many others have had to dig deep into their savings or have gone into debt to preserve what they have worked so hard to build. These Canberra businesses need this government to have their backs.

COVID-19 has caused fundamental changes to the global economy. International and interstate border closures over the course of the last two years have severely reduced labour movements into Australia, and into the ACT from other states and territories. International students and migrants fill vital workforce shortages in our economy, particularly in the hospitality and retail sectors, which have been hit so hard by this pandemic. Reduced labour mobility across Australia, combined with this government's appalling treatment of business during the lockdown, poses significant risk to our economic recovery. National unemployment data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the month of October indicates that the ACT now has the highest rate of unemployment of any state or territory in the nation with an increase from 4.1 to 6.7 per cent, constituting a loss of 4,641 jobs in just one month.

While this data is only very recent and of a small timeframe, the sudden increase is of concern given the fundamental stability of our labour market here in the ACT. Increased unemployment here is also particularly concerning given the rapid increase in job vacancies we are seeing in Canberra and across the region. The latest data from Labour Market Information Portal shows that the ACT's three-month rolling average for online job ads to the end of October 2021 was 40 per cent higher than the long-term average. Nationally, job ads are as high as they have ever been, with Seek reporting the highest number of job ads posted in a month in the company's 23-year history.

A combination of unemployment and job vacancies indicates a skills mismatch in our labour market. Skill shortages across the ACT economy—a product of this

government's complacency and neglectful approach to private sector investment and diversification—risk jobs and the economic futures of Canberra families. Mr Barr's budget headline, a \$5 billion infrastructure pipeline, is a great headline. If there is one thing this government does very well it is generating a headline, but struggling Canberra families and local businesses need more headlines that actually mean something; they need real action and real investment from their government to address the underlying challenges in our post-lockdown economic recovery.

We know that Canberrans are not getting an additional \$5 billion investment, as Mr Barr has trumpeted. The budget delivers a four per cent increase on the existing infrastructure program as promised at the last budget. In the year we need an economic boost the most, the promised infrastructure spend this financial year is actually less than the previous budget. Hyperbole and announcements do not create jobs or grow our economy. This government makes bold and hyperbolic promises but, when it comes to delivering, its record on capital works expenditure speaks for itself.

Even with top-ups from rollovers from previous years, the amount of underspend each year on infrastructure projects is staggering. Since 2017-18, the government's underspends ranged from just under 20 per cent to, often, over 30 per cent. Just last year, we saw an underspend of a whopping \$250 million on infrastructure projects. How did the Chief Minister respond? He responded by shifting blame onto industry and local business—a tactic that he is well known for. How does the Chief Minister expect our building and construction industry to deliver on the infrastructure program when the government fails to invest in the skills and trades that are required to deliver these projects? Local businesses and households endeavouring to transition away from a carbon-based economy are being faced with delays and very high costs due to skills shortages in electricians and plumbers.

If we do not invest in skills and training now, not only will our ability to deliver on projects on time and on budget be jeopardised, but our local companies will be out-competed by larger interstate corporations. ABS employment data indicates that in May 2020 there were over 20,000 employees in the ACT building and constructing industry. In August of this year, there were just over 15,000. The ACT has lost the most construction jobs compared to pre-pandemic levels when compared with any other state or territory.

This budget commits our city to important projects for our community, including light rail, the Canberra Hospital expansion, investments in our school infrastructure, a new Canberra Theatre and Kingston arts precinct, as well as investments in our local shops, roads and suburbs. These are important investments for the future of our city, but without the tools and the workforce to deliver on these projects on time and on budget, we will continue to see delays, cost blowouts, and broken promises from this government.

Mr Barr tells us that pent-up demand from Canberrans will support a V-shaped economic recovery. While we on this side do not deny the effect of pent-up consumer demand, we must ensure that Canberra businesses can make up for the losses they sustained during the lockdown. In the last sitting week we all saw this government's true colours when it comes to business; it ridiculed our positive initiative to support

the local night-time economy. After the appalling way the government has treated business throughout this year, why should anyone trust its advice?

The Canberra Liberals recently met with Antony, who is the owner of a number of hospitality businesses here in the city. Antony told us that when the lockdown occurred he applied for his COVID-19 business support grant. Thirteen weeks later he is still waiting to be paid. Unlike what this government assumes, he is not a fraudster; he is an honest, hardworking Canberran who has chosen our city in which to start a family and run his business. Our city relies on people like Antony to take risks and dare to try something different, but under this government's watch, he is guilty until proven innocent.

This government's record on business is nothing short of appalling. First, we had ChooseCBR, a \$2 million calamity that was so bad that the government had to shut it down on the day it was launched after weeks of the business minister telling us all how great it would be. Then we had the stroll-out of the business support grant. Amazingly, the government went from designing a scheme that seemingly did not care about risk to becoming the most fraud-wary government in the country! Of course, we need to minimise risk—there were months of assurances from Mr Barr and colleagues that they were prepared for a lockdown—and that is why you should prepare a system that is capable of delivering support payments in the preceding 18 months, not after the lockdown has started.

Then, to top it off, the government's hardship scheme—the scheme that Mr Barr now wants us to believe is an additional payment rather than a critical life support to business—was delayed. The government simply does not get or care about business. And this budget, with no additional business support measures, fails our local businesses. (*Extension of time granted.*)

A strong economy lays the foundations for a strong society. We on this side of the chamber believe that by growing the economy we can deliver better government services that keep Canberrans healthy, safe and supported. Mr Barr argues that this budget provides record levels of funding to our health system but, after years of neglect and mismanagement, the state of the public health system speaks for itself. For years, our territory, the smallest and most well-off jurisdiction in the nation, has had the worst performance in the country, with the longest emergency department wait times in the nation, persistent high rates of workplace bullying, and the lowest percentage of urgent presentations seen on time.

Despite promises from the health minister, in January of this year, to have 70 per cent of urgent presentations seen on time by October, the ACT has again claimed the title of the lowest percentage of patients through the ED in four hours or less. The latest public hospital report card released by the Australian Medical Association again revealed that our hospital system remains the worst performing in Australia after 20 consecutive Labor budgets, despite commonwealth funding for our hospital at its highest level since 2008.

Despite facing critical staff and teacher shortages in education, this budget breaks a major election promise and proceeds to cut 188 jobs out of the education system. Last

year, the education minister promised 400 teachers. This budget delivers 188 job cuts. If the government does not believe us, it should listen to the teachers themselves. Ninety-one per cent of schools say they are negatively impacted by a lack of staff, 95 per cent believe these staff shortages are serious, and a third of all teachers consider leaving education in their first three years, with half not recommending it as a profession.

After 20 consecutive Labor budgets, these issues are on your heads. The Labor Party and the Greens deny this is even an issue, claiming that once again they know best. And when it comes to their gigantic deficits and the mounting billions of dollars of debt, they do not even bother with a fake band-aid. Even with the prospect of rising interest rates and ballooning interest payments each year, they simply do not care. This is neglect of the highest order—neglect that jeopardises the economic wellbeing of future generations of Canberrans. Canberra families deserve better than this. They deserve a government that respects their tax dollars and that delivers on its promises on time and on budget.

To recover from COVID-19 and ensure that no-one is left behind we must back business by creating an environment where Canberrans want to create, innovate and invest—building a more vibrant and diverse city for all. We need to shift our focus to deliverables and outcomes, not headlines and blueprints. Our health and education systems should be the best in the nation, not the worst. We should be a city that attracts world-class talent, educators and health professionals. The decisions that those opposite take in the next 12 months will determine the trajectory of our economic recovery. This government could have paved a bold new path out of this pandemic, towards a stronger and more secure future, but instead, the 20th consecutive Labor budget delivered a band-aid and no solutions to issues of the government's own making.

**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (4.35): I rise to reply to the 2021-22 ACT budget in my capacity as ACT Greens spokesperson for tourism and economic development, sports and recreation, LGBTQIA+ people and small business.

COVID-19 has had a profound impact on Canberra's small business and tourism sectors. This is in part due to the ACT's public health measures, but also because the local economy is responsive to our local region. Small businesses have shown resilience and ingenuity in adapting to the changing business environment, including developing online businesses to accommodate click and collect. Businesses known for craft and textiles produced PPE, pumping out masks. And we all know that Garry Malhotra from Ken Behrens Helping Hands turned his kitchen into a food bank, pumping out thousands of meals to those doing it tough throughout the lockdown and beyond. It is a testament to the role of the business sector in our community.

Targeted relief and stimulus will ensure that our economy remains resilient and continues to grow as we recover from the pandemic. Relief included the COVID-19 business support grants—the single largest grant scheme in the history of self-government—which directly put money into businesses to assist them to survive the lockdown, to build resilient strategies to survive the pandemic and to grow now that we are out of lockdown. Public servants came together from across government

and worked long hours and over the weekend to process these grants, ensuring they could be processed as quickly as possible while ensuring appropriate public accountability and transparency in the use of public funds—a stark contrast to similar funds in other parts of the country!

Close to \$300 million was allocated in this budget to support businesses in this time, and I am pleased to have worked with Minister Cheyne this year to support these grants, the hardship scheme and the continued open and robust communication between the government and the private sector. Alongside this work, the government's plans helped the visitor economy bounce back through the 2022 action plan for recovery. The government's commitment to Canberra's private sector is clear.

In sport, I was thrilled to see that the ACT has continued to boast higher-than-average community participation in sports and recreation. I wholeheartedly believe we should keep up the hard work and ensure that as many Canberrans as possible have the opportunity for a sports and recreation outlet. I cannot overstate the benefits that regular sport can provide to the Canberra community. As our participation numbers increase, let me continue to encourage and advocate for the government to secure new and improved existing sports facilities to keep up with increasing demand.

On facilities, I was delighted to see that the ACT government committed to funding grants for education and training opportunities, as well as the planning and development of sports infrastructure. Specifically, I notice that funding has been allocated for the early planning of indoor sports centres. A common theme in my meeting with the sports and recreation community organisations has been a lack of facilities to meet our community's increasing demand. With new and continued funding in this budget, it is my strong hope that this funding will be reviewed and applied systemically and with a needs-based funding model.

I was proud to introduce my motion for a comprehensive facilities management plan for sports and recreation back in April and chuffed that it received unanimous support from this Assembly. Such a plan is key to ensuring that our community sports organisations get their funds where and when they need them most, in a clear, transparent and accountable fashion.

I am excited to see that the ACT government has committed more support for women's elite sports. In my meetings with community sports groups I have had the pleasure of meeting up-and-coming elite women athletes. These young leaders spoke passionately about their teams, their needs and the importance of receiving the same treatment as their male counterparts. I am optimistic about the future of community sports and recreation, and I trust that, with a coordinated effort, we can support those organisations that are integral to our community.

Finally, the Office of LGBTIQ Affairs, has a very ambitious year ahead, with important reforms to protect the bodily integrity of intersex people and the development of the second action plan for the Capital of Equality. I was pleased to work with the A Gender Agenda this year and speak about their work with trans and gender diverse folk in the Canberra region. I was pleased to see that the AGA have been funded \$150,000 per year through this budget to continue their empowering

work with the Friday Centre, a peer-based navigation and information service. This work will allow AGA to continue to provide this important service while the government scopes options to provide a strong and coordinated health response to the needs of our community. I look forward to advancing LGBTQIA+ issues on behalf of the ACT Greens into the coming year and working in collaboration with the Chief Minister on these issues.

**MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (4.40):** In my role as the shadow minister for business, I wish to speak on the Appropriation Bill 2021-22. Delivering his budget speech on 6 October, the Chief Minister and Treasurer trumpeted that one of the budget's three priorities was to "turbo-charge our economic recovery". He went on:

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

The Treasurer also told us that one of the principles underpinning the budget was protecting and creating jobs. On all these measures, the budget failed. This Labor-Greens government has failed. It has failed to support our most courageous Canberrans—our small business owners—and in failing to protect and support our small business owners, it failed to secure our private sector jobs.

It is incredible to think that some Canberra business owners are still waiting for financial support from this government. During yesterday's COVID select committee, it was revealed that more than 70 businesses are yet to receive financial support. In relation to top-up support payments for tourism, accommodation, arts events and the hospitality sector, a total of 1,053 applications have been received, yet only 675 applications have been paid. To say small business owners are desperate for this financial support is an understatement. The reality is that small business owners have done it tougher than most, largely due to this government's incompetence and neglect.

Canberra's struggling business sector looked to this government and this budget for financial support beyond what was already offered through the joint federal-ACT government business support grants. There was nothing. Not only has our small business sector been let down by this government that failed to prepare for the lockdown and provide the clarity and certainty that business needs; it was left out in the cold by a budget that offered nothing extra.

I am one of the lucky ones. Like everyone else in this place, during lockdown I kept my job and fortnightly pay cheque, and my super kept ticking over, but many Canberrans are not so fortunate, particularly small business owners and their employees, which is why so many people felt desperate. I refer to the gardeners and hairdressers, music teachers and builders, beauty therapists and retailers, hire car drivers and fencing specialists, handymen, gym owners, drycleaners and taekwondo instructors—all struggling business owners who wrote to me during lockdown, sharing tales of despair.

A hairdresser with several salons and three small primary-school-aged kids wrote to me saying that she was in grave danger of not surviving this lockdown. A garage-based fencing business that has stood down most of its 30 staff wrote to me,

wondering “how long we can continue to function this way”. I fear for the small builder and the father of three who employs 14 staff, who wrote to me, saying, “Should we just sit here with our heads in the sand and watch everyone go broke?” and the beauty therapist in my electorate of Yerrabi, who wrote, “Bills are piling up, small operators are floundering, and this is putting even further strain on my already fragile business.”

This government has a poor track record when it comes to supporting small business. In early August, I moved a notice of motion calling for a support package for the smashed hospitality sector, including emergency grants for businesses which had suffered a 30 per cent downturn. The government said no, while the Greens dismissed it as a cash splash. The government’s lack of support follows its failed ChooseCBR scheme, where the government wasted hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars on marketing costs, while fewer than 20 per cent of eligible businesses participated.

Small business owners fear for their economic future. The government’s job is to support them in dire straits and provide a rescue plan that offers certainty and hope. That is what they asked for: certainty. The Chief Minister and Treasurer described his budget as a “full-throttled attempt to revive”, to turbo-charge our economy. What a shame there was nothing in the budget to help small businesses hit the accelerator and rev their engines.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (4.46): In my capacity as the Greens spokesperson for the arts, I am really happy to speak to the budget, which has given quite a lot of support for the arts here, and is really carving out a new vision for Canberra. Art makes life better. It gives us a sense of voice, a sense of place, collective identity and culture. It gives our lives meaning. But as a writer I know first-hand that the arts are perpetually underfunded and over-relied upon. Especially during the pandemic, we have realised how important the arts sector is to our wellbeing.

The ACT Greens took a comprehensive arts package to the territory election, and we negotiated many of those commitments into the Labor-Greens Parliamentary and Governing Agreement. I am really pleased that quite a lot of those have been delivered. We have got additional funding in HOMEFRONT grants for local artists. A further \$350,000 in HOMEFRONT grants was made available for Canberra’s creatives. The \$700,000 in Amp It Up! was also really well received. I was pleased to learn from MusicACT, in a recent hearing, that that program had been co-designed with the industry. Half the funding went directly to local artists, and it was a new funding model. It has worked really well, and I hope we see a lot more of that.

Our recovery from COVID really needs to be strategic. We are funding the arts in Canberra, and we have really high participation rates from our audiences. Canberra loves our arts and culture, but we need to make sure that our artists stay central in our discussions, and we need to make sure that they are paid first and paid fairly. I am concerned that our arts sector has become increasingly overcapitalised. We need to fund our ageing infrastructure and we need to build more where this helps our long-term vision. But we cannot do it at the expense of the people who make the art. We need to support our artists and arts programs, not just the buildings that house them.

We have a bit of a tendency in Canberra to build beautiful facilities that are then rented out at a rate appropriate for a world-class facility. But our community arts organisations and our practising artists cannot always afford those rates. We need to ensure that our facilities are accessible to artists and arts communities and that they do not sit there empty. The Canberra arts scene is an ecosystem. Our artists work multiple jobs across different fields. They feed into one another's work. They use our high-class facilities, and they rely on our arts organisations. But it is not an ecosystem built of facilities and organisations; it is an ecosystem and a hub built of people—and we need to look after those people.

Arts advocacy is almost always framed in terms of needing more funding, but we need to remember some of the fundamental ideas that other sectors simply take for granted: wages, superannuation, sick leave, holiday leave. Artists do not get these, but they are normal for every other type of worker. The arts sector tends to have this system of grants—short-term funding for projects that encourage expenditure on the services of other people. It is not really enough. We need jobs. I was really pleased recently to see that the Gold Coast had introduced a new ArtKeeper program to parallel the COVID JobKeeper programs. I think that is a really good direction.

We also need to make sure we are telling the full range of our stories—our First Nations stories, our multicultural stories, our LGBTQIA+ stories and our women's stories in particular. I was particularly pleased to see funding in this budget supporting public art for and by women and recognising significant women through public art. I really do welcome the funding in this budget for arts and culture and the government's deep and genuine commitment to making Canberra the arts capital of Australia. But I also encourage an ongoing conversation to make sure we are striking the right balance for our artists and our people with that funding.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (4.50): I would like to speak briefly on the investments that our government is making through the budget in skills and training for Canberrans.

We are investing very strongly in our training system to support local industry and Canberra jobseekers in the wake of the COVID-19 public health crisis. We recognise the central role that vocational education and training will play in our economic recovery, helping local businesses to find the skilled workers that they need and supporting Canberrans into good jobs.

Through this year's budget we expect to invest a record \$126.3 million in VET in the 2022 academic year. This investment will support more than 16,000 new and continuing students to access affordable and high-quality training. From 2022 the ACT government will focus our investment in VET on where it is needed most—on young people looking to enter the workforce and on jobseekers in key industries experiencing skills shortages.

Part of this investment will be through the ACT's successful JobTrainer program, together with the commonwealth, which has been expanded and extended, with a

\$16.75 million investment in this year's budget. Delivered in partnership with the Australian government, JobTrainer will provide up to 2,500 free training places over the next two years. These places are in addition to the more than 2,000 places that have already been taken up through the first stage of JobTrainer, from short courses right through to full qualifications, which have been very popular under the scheme.

The new funding will support young people and those leaving school, which is particularly important at this time of year as young Canberrans consider what their first steps into the world of work will look like. JobTrainer 2 will also focus on providing training to other vulnerable Canberrans who are struggling to find a job—those who may have lost employment during the pandemic, and are looking to skill up or retrain to move into the workforce.

JobTrainer will provide a mix of full qualifications and short courses, with 575 training places reserved for aged care and 170 places reserved for digital skills. For the first time, eligibility for free training under JobTrainer will be extended to all Canberrans, regardless of age or employment status, in the areas of aged care, early childhood and digital skills. This recognises the shortage of qualified workers and the expected strong growth in these industry sectors in the years ahead.

The ACT has seen strong and sustained growth in apprentices and trainees on the job. Currently, our numbers are at a four-year high. The government's investment in apprenticeships and traineeships will continue to grow Canberra's skilled workforce in priority occupations and industry areas.

In addition to these great investments, we are delivering a brand-new campus at Woden for our public TAFE provider, the Canberra Institute of Technology, giving them the modern, flexible teaching and learning facilities that are needed to keep delivering high-quality vocational education and training in the years to come. In the interests of time I will speak about that under the CIT section.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (4.53): I am speaking in my capacity as assistant shadow treasurer, shadow minister for regulatory services and shadow minister for jobs and workplace affairs inasmuch as those roles touch on part 1.5 of the bill.

It is my hope—obviously, we will see how these hopes are realised or met—that with this current appropriation, and going forward, the government will have a more visionary approach to jobs in the ACT; and, in particular, to diversifying our employment opportunities and developments.

We have a jobs and economic recovery plan glossy brochure. It is disappointing that the Future Jobs Fund has been shelved. It seems to me that the government is overly comfortable with its reliance on heavy commonwealth public service investment in both employment and contract services in the territory.

As we have seen during the lockdown and restrictions under COVID, it is the private business sector and jobs market that is most severely impacted by both restrictions and, I would suggest, other things that are real possibilities to affect the private and public sector market in Canberra.

One of these—and COVID has demonstrated this, perhaps to the surprise of many of us—is that people working from home is something that may be a part of the new normal following COVID. I was at first reluctant to work from home, but I could see some benefits from that, as part of a workplace arrangement.

Of course, if someone can work from home—for example, for the commonwealth public service—do they necessarily have to be in Canberra? Could they be in New South Wales, Victoria or anywhere else in Australia? So there is a risk to our workplace arrangements in the post-COVID period whereby remote work might actually detract from employment for ACT residents.

We are hearing, from some fronts in the federal sphere, a strong drive to decentralise parts of the commonwealth public service. We have already seen that happen. Again, these are risks that the government should be addressing, and I do not believe that the challenge has been taken up.

We hear again and again about the skills shortage in the ACT. Many of the trades and construction work being done in the territory requires workers to be brought in from outside. I have mentioned this before, but I was quite surprised during estimates when I asked the ACT Insurance Authority from where they sourced their actuarial services. They could not source them within the territory. Such a high-level professional service, surely, should be encouraged to be within this city.

I mention with regret, too, with respect to skills shortage and training subsidies, that the training subsidies for trades and construction in the territory are the lowest in the country. I would encourage the government, with its procurement, to be bolder in developing and encouraging the private sector. We deserve to have a diversified employment place. Canberra should be an employment destination.

We have so many opportunities here in professional services, IT, clean energy, cybersecurity and defence. We have highly trained educators. We have world-class operations in the ACT. We should be encouraging them and doing more for them so that people want to come to the territory to work—and, even more importantly, perhaps, so that those who are skilled and trained here, sometimes at the highest educational levels, are encouraged to stay.

That touches on the taxation space as well. The impact of the rates review, the rates reform, is disappointing. Again, we are seeing the high residential rates and commercial rates in the territory acting as a disincentive for businesses and individuals to come here. Unfortunately, it is an incentive for many to leave. I would encourage the government to review its current reform agenda.

In closing, and in terms of my role as shadow minister for regulatory services, I want to praise, as the minister has done on many occasions, the staff of Access Canberra. But I bemoan the fact that, clearly, they are not properly supported in performing their functions, particularly the public-facing functions at shopfronts. The stories are well known when it comes to the long waiting times that are facing individuals seeking those services.

Surely, the development of digital solutions and digital remedies should be encouraged. New South Wales is able to do it. Why are we so slow? Why are we behind? This is Canberra, in 2021. Who would have thought there would be people lining up for a government service for hours in Canberra in 2021?

We are in a digital revolution. It will continue. Why are we not at the forefront of digital services for the citizens of this territory? It must be able to be done. New South Wales has done it. We have digital drivers licences and working with vulnerable people cards. With e-invoicing, the commonwealth have foreshadowed that this is something they are committed to, yet when I moved a motion earlier this year, the government said, “We’ll look into it.” Why isn’t there a stronger commitment to effective service delivery for the citizens of this territory? The money is there. Is the will there? That is what I wonder about.

While we will obviously be supporting the appropriation, I hope the government is listening, not just to us but to the community, to those people who stand in long lines. I hope they are listening to them, and to those Access Canberra workers who are wandering along those lines to support those people out in the elements.

I advocate for a stronger uptake by this government of digital provisions, and to look at diversifying and securing our jobs market and, in particular, the private sector.

**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) (5.01): My portfolio responsibility areas appropriated through part 1.5 of the bill relate to workplace health and safety, industrial relations and workers compensation services for the public and private sectors.

The appropriation funds will support initiatives to improve the territory’s injury management and workplace safety laws. The funding will also support a comprehensive review of the territory’s portable long service leave scheme, which will include consideration of how cover should be extended to more industry sectors. Consultation on these and other reforms will be coordinated through the ministerial advisory forums, which are supported and operated using the appropriate funding. The appropriation also provides staff to support the operation of the ACT public sector workers compensation self-insurer and includes comprehensive rehabilitation and return to work services for people who may be injured in the course of their work.

I expect that, in the year ahead, health and wellbeing initiatives will be particularly focused on the prevention of occupational violence, the promotion of mental health and good work design.

The government knows that safe and secure jobs are good jobs. To promote secure employment in the territory, appropriation in this class has supported the development of a labour hire licensing scheme and the Secure Local Jobs Code. The Secure Local Jobs Code is a nation-leading initiative. The government is committed to ensuring that businesses tendering for work with the territory meet the highest ethical and labour standards.

The budget provides funding to continue this initiative and to progress implementation of recommendations made by the advisory council in their review of the Secure Local Jobs Code that was delivered to me in December 2020. Continued support of and investment in the code ensures that the registrar has appropriate support to drive the government's commitment to ensuring contracts are only awarded to businesses that meet the highest standards.

Ahead of the release of the 2020-21 annual reports, I would like to take this opportunity to update the Assembly on the additional reporting work that we are undertaking. On 6 October, the Assembly passed a resolution from Ms Orr that called on the ACT government to undertake more detailed reporting on the gender pay gap in the ACT public service. I expect the ACT public service to be a model employer for gender equity in the workforce. Compared to the Australian workforce, the ACT public service gender pay gap is low. The State of the Service Report 2020-21 will show that the overall gender pay gap has further declined to a low of 0.8 per cent. While this further reduction is an important achievement, further improvements can be made. Our statistics compare to 7.9 per cent in the wider ACT labour force and 14.2 per cent in the Australian labour force.

I am pleased to report that the 2020-21 State of the Service Report will contain data on the gender pay gap experienced by casual and part-time employees, a breakdown of the pay gaps experienced by women with a disability, women who are culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and a breakdown of the gender pay gap by classification, including executives and non-executive classifications. This visibility of different outcomes across diverse groups of women will allow us to better understand the nature of the problem and develop targeting actions, and it will be crucial in ensuring that the gender pay gap continues to decrease in the ACT public service.

Data collection by itself is only one aspect of the government's action on addressing gender equality and the gender pay gap. In April 2021, the ACT public service commenced a project to expand its diversity and inclusions agenda, which includes reviewing the existing respect, equity and diversity framework. Actions to improve gender equity within the ACT public service, including to address sexual harassment, will be developed and implemented as a central component of this project. Fundamentally, improvement in reporting and decision action are key to the ACT government's commitment to improving equality within the ACT public service.

I am pleased to be able to provide this update today as part of this appropriation debate, and look forward to continuing this important work.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (5.06): I want to talk about a few elements within the CMTEDD remit. Firstly, I want to talk about industrial relations. Migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by bad employers. They face language and cultural barriers, insecure employment arrangements, discrimination, and precarious visa arrangements. They are also frequently exploited through wage theft and unsafe working conditions. Migrant workers are vulnerable due to their precarious position, to a lack of specialised support services, and to a lack of education and understanding about their rights at work.

It is a reflection of the success of the Young Workers Centre that I have called for the ACT government to explore using this model for a migrant workers centre. Such a workers centre could support these migrant workers in the ACT by educating them about issues regarding workplace safety and rights, assisting workers from emerging communities to address problems they encounter at workplaces, collaborating with unions and community partners to organise events and grassroots campaigns focusing on workplace rights for migrants, bridging language barriers that limit workers' access to information, and, finally, promoting workplace rights on our media platforms, such as mainstream and ethnic community media outlets, so that it reaches those who need the information most.

Secondly, I call attention to digital data and technology solutions. The importance of records management has become abundantly clear to me in my role on the public accounts committee. During estimates I learnt that Housing ACT is reliant on a paper-based records system, which, in the current year, 2021, still blows my mind. The potential for time savings in investing in a digital system would make this system so much more efficient and effective and would improve outcomes for the community at less cost.

It makes me wonder what other instances within the government are reliant on antiquated or not-fit-for-purpose business systems. I therefore exhort those areas to bring forward budget bids that focus on enabling systems that allow us to achieve digital data and technology that are more than just an output class, but that are inbuilt into how this government runs.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (5.08): I am happy to speak today on the Appropriation Bill 2021-2022, as it relates to my shadow portfolio of the arts. The arts are a sign of a mature society. When we see painting, sculpture, literature, music, dance and other arts, they are a repository of our collective social memory. They can also be a catalyst for change in the future. It is great when we support our arts, and it has never been more important than now, after they have been so severely impacted by the COVID pandemic.

We have seen a lot of promises over the years from this government in the arts space, but what we actually need is the delivery of some of the promises. For nearly 20 years—not quite, but nearly 20 years—we have heard talk in Canberra of the Kingston arts precinct, as an example, but it has not come to anything much as yet. In the recently released statement of ambition for the arts by the Minister for the Arts, \$79 million was allocated to the Kingston arts precinct. That is a reasonable amount, but it is not reflective of what has already been spent; and, after decades of discussion, you would have thought there could have been something more concrete—pun intended—to show for the Kingston arts precinct. Instead community members and groups have felt they were being ignored. They were not happy that they were forced to sign confidentiality agreements, and many of their concerns were left unanswered.

Given the lack of progress, out in the community there was significant concern about whether Geocon were able to deliver what stakeholders and community members anticipated. Of course, those concerns held by community members were well

justified, because we recently heard that that contract has been cancelled. A mere week earlier, the arts minister, before the estimates hearing, defended the progress of the project, as if all was well. I hope that, moving forward on this project, there will be better community consultation and communication with stakeholders and that we will see the fantastic display space, performance space, artists in residence facilities et cetera that we really deserve at the Kingston arts precinct.

We have also been talking for many years about upgrades to the Canberra Theatre Centre. In 2014 there was a feasibility study for a potential new theatre, which accounted for \$200,000 between the 2015 and 2017 financial years. In the 2017-18 budget there was \$100,000 dedicated to community consultation. In the 2018-19 budget, there was around \$1.1 million for early planning, and in the 2020-21 budget another \$400,000 was dedicated to the early planning of the Canberra Theatre complex. In the newly-released statement of ambition for the arts, \$2.7 million was set aside for the new Canberra Theatre Centre.

I recall, back in 2016, I think, being shown quite reasonable plans for an upgraded Canberra Theatre Centre from the head of a development company who was closely involved with the Canberra Theatre Centre. There have been a range of plans along the way. Once again, we have not seen the result.

The government has put quite a bit of focus on infrastructure in the arts space. Of course, the most important area here is the Canberra artists and creatives themselves, because without them we have no arts community here. The artists do not get the benefit of the infrastructure projects until they are built and ready for them to use, to move into, and until they are fit for purpose. Of course, we have shown over time that this Labor-Greens government takes a long time to deliver on many infrastructure projects. We do need to support our artists and creatives in the interim; and, most recently, we have not seen enough of that.

I do like the promised \$200,000 for public art to be created by women and non-binary individuals, but it is not a lot of money when you compare it to some other public art pieces, and there is no ongoing funding for it in the outyears. It seems to be a one-off; indeed, potentially only one artist for one project.

This initiative is just a small step forward in what is needed to make sure that there is more female and gender-diverse representation in Canberra's public art. You can see for yourself that there are so many statues and murals by men, of men, and that allocating money for just one piece of art by a woman or gender-diverse person will not be enough.

I would also like to draw attention to the fact that we are the only east coast jurisdiction that does not have an Indigenous writers award. My colleague Elizabeth Kikkert and I wrote to Ms Cheyne about this back in August, after hearing from community groups about their desire for an established art prize, and I have still heard nothing back from the minister. The government likes to talk about promoting Indigenous art, but when it comes to responding to a very practical suggestion about ways to do so, we have been met with silence.

I support the aspiration for Canberra to become the arts capital of Australia, as put forth in the statement of ambition for the arts, but we still have a long way to go. The vision put forward does not yet provide the clarity or details that artists need' in order to see a clear pathway while they are waiting for those infrastructure projects to come to fruition.

A phrase that we often hear in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic was that the impact on the arts community was first hit, last out. Our arts community have had all of their events cancelled, and they are only starting to reopen now in limited numbers. They have been patient, they have been resilient, and they have been supportive and understanding of the health restrictions. But as we are emerging, as much as we can, from the pandemic, we need to do everything we possibly can to support our arts community.

The intention with the statement of ambition for the arts is good, but we still need more. I hope that, when working on future budgets, the minister will focus more on how to support artists in the short to medium term, as opposed to waiting for those infrastructure projects to come to fruition. Who knows when that will be? The artists of Canberra deserve better from their government. They deserve world-class facilities and they deserve to be properly supported.

I will continue to speak about and monitor developments in this space, whether it is Strathnairn, Gorman House, Tuggeranong Arts Centre or the Belconnen Arts Centre—all of our wonderful facilities that we have here, the people in those facilities and the artists who work so hard to support us as a vibrant and mature community.

**MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (5.17):** In my view, the ACT government has failed in this budget to recognise the need to provide long-term sporting infrastructure across a broad range of sporting activities. This is necessary to foster interest in key sporting events and the development of much wider participation in grassroots sports that, in turn, contribute to the wellbeing of the community.

Let me start with elite sporting events. It is obvious that the outdated facilities here in the ACT are major deterrents to attracting major sporting events to Canberra. Regardless of any bidding war about funding, the ACT is generally on the back foot when it comes to negotiations against other states, as other states continue to invest in their sporting infrastructure. There is a cascading effect when the ACT fails to attract a broad range of high-level events.

Elite, high-level sporting events add real value to the ACT economy and attract significant visitation from an area even wider than the capital region. The economic benefits are, indeed, substantial, and affect many sectors of industries in Canberra, particularly entertainment, hospitality and accommodation. I was disappointed when I heard the Chief Minister express the opinion that the ongoing cost of the economic recovery in Canberra would equate to and negate the cost of a new stadium, so it is likely that a replacement stadium or venue is off the radar for some time.

This budget also failed to recognise the need to provide a boost to grassroots sports after the severe impacts from the recent COVID lockdowns. The sporting clubs and grassroots recreation groups have suffered greatly from being unable to offer competition. Many are experiencing funding issues due to the loss of player registration, as well as sponsorship from supporting community groups and clubs.

Ball sports such as netball and basketball, which cater for significant youth and social participation, have been largely overlooked in this budget. There are rapidly expanding deficits in meeting demand for participation in these sports within the northern suburbs of Canberra, yet no provision has been made for any new amenities.

Planning for sporting facilities needs a focused and professional approach, which is lacking at present. Take, for example, the need to allocate almost another 50 per cent of funding to deal with the watercourse problems associated with the new Home of Football development in Throsby. The government built a new suburb nearby, expanded the nature reserve and supported the new environment centre. You have to ask: wouldn't the government already be aware of the potential watercourse issues close by those new developments?

A similar problem may occur in Amaroo, with the proposed new tennis facilities for Tennis ACT. That is very close to or is on a watercourse area as well. We may be expecting another blowout in the costs associated with that. Hopefully, the ACT government will pick up that bill and not pass it on to Tennis ACT.

I have foreshadowed the need for long-term infrastructure planning for sporting facilities and amenities in Canberra. I note that some major sporting clubs are echoing that need. That brings me to raise the issue of the ACT continuing to fall behind in the bidding stakes to secure major national events and international sporting events. The reasons given are that the requested contributions are too high and that the facilities here in the ACT are outdated.

If we do not start planning for an attractive multipurpose sporting and events facility here in the ACT, we will forgo significant economic benefit to the ACT and we will condemn Canberrans, plus visitors from the broader Canberra region, to being second-class citizens in relation to being able to attend high-level sporting events as well as entertainment events, theatre, concerts and the like in the ACT.

Canberrans deserve the opportunity to be able to attend these types of events in world-class facilities, yet it seems that that will be in the distant future, as there is no money allocated in the budget and nothing is being built here in the ACT by this government.

I call on the government to significantly increase investment in both elite and grassroots sports in the ACT, in order to maintain and build on the participation base, which, in turn, will help to foster our athletes of tomorrow. We said repeatedly in the last term that we needed to invest in our grassroots sports so that we can start building our athletes of tomorrow here in the ACT. We are the national capital, and we should have the capacity to host national events, to grow our grassroots participation and to build our athletes of tomorrow.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (5.23): I am proud to speak in support of this budget and this output class. This budget empowers our community to build back stronger from the pandemic and empowers businesses to capitalise on opportunities that the recovery presents.

This budget delivers a lot of initiatives for businesses, not least of is the almost \$300 million of business support grants. Mr Cain delivered a remarkable speech, accusing us of not being ambitious in job creation. I do wonder exactly what he has been doing in the last two months. To bring him up to speed, initiatives to support local business innovation and development include: \$3.2 million to reinvigorate international trade and engagement with key markets aligned with our international engagement strategy; \$1 million to continue the ICON grants program delivered by the Canberra Innovation Network, which helps entrepreneurs develop and grow their innovative ideas; \$920,000 over four years to deliver both an accelerator program and a full concierge service to better support the development of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses; and \$504,000 over two years to attract new businesses and investment into Canberra and to further grow our economy.

The ACT government will also continue to create job opportunities through the Future Jobs fund, which Mr Cain said was shelved, including \$500,000 for the continued development of the Canberra Cyber Hub. That was something Mr Cain implored us to do more of—well, we are. A further \$450,000 went towards the Academy of Interactive Entertainment’s sound stage development; \$200,000 for key industry advocacy; and \$150,000 for significant capital ventures to help drive innovation in Canberra and build investment links between business and research.

There is more, but I would like to highlight two initiatives in particular which will help local businesses to grow our economy as we work towards 250,000 secure local jobs by 2025. This budget empowers the ACT’s First Nations entrepreneurs through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business support package, providing nearly \$1 million over four years for an accelerator program and a business concierge service, an accelerator program to help businesses to scale up and a concierge service to support businesses to access the wide range of business assistance programs available to them.

Secondly, this budget is empowering businesses to trade across borders more easily and to attract skilled workers to Canberra through funding for the implementation of automatic mutual recognition, also known as AMR. AMR will remove red tape, fees and cross-jurisdictional barriers around occupational registrations and licensing. This funding will allow Access Canberra to proactively engage to ensure that businesses, particularly in the ACT and surrounding regions, benefit from the opportunities arising from its implementation. This budget will also enhance Access Canberra’s capacity to support improved building quality outcomes, by funding an additional seven and a half full-time equivalent specialist inspectors with skills in electrical, plumbing, engineering and building surveying.

As well as increasing Access Canberra's capacity to provide timely regulatory outcomes, this funding will also support proactive reviews of engineering designs as part of audit functions to identify issues before buildings are occupied. More broadly, we know that Access Canberra staff play a vital role as the face of the ACT government. They have been, and continue to be, challenged during this pandemic and have responded in a simply extraordinary way, time and time again. They are an absolute credit to this government, and I cannot thank them enough for just how hard they work, how hard they have responded, and how much they have supported this community—and they continue to do so with care and professionalism.

That is why I am pleased that this budget delivers more than \$14 million in additional funding to support Access Canberra to continue to deliver essential services to Canberrans as our city grows—something, again, that Mr Cain might want to get across. In his extraordinary speech he urged us to engage in more digital transactions at Access Canberra. It is well known that more than 450 transactions can be done online. The only transactions that require attendance at a shop front relate to transactions involving a photo identification or arranging new number plates, and there are not too many of those.

We have implemented further digital initiatives to assist people on-line, one of which I informed Mr Cain about mere hours ago and which he wilfully ignored. We are transitioning to e-conveyancing—something Mr Cain has said that he is interested in but has not bothered to ask about. It is a theme from the opposition. They just say whatever to fit in with their political narrative, even when it has absolutely no basis in fact.

Turning to this budget's support to the arts, members will recall that during the ACT lockdown I released my statement of ambition for the arts. It is a bold but achievable ambition for Canberra to be recognised as Australia's arts capital, and I thank Ms Clay for recognising how genuine and committed we are to this, and Ms Lawder for welcoming the ambition. Going quickly to Ms Lawder's comments about the detail she is looking for with the statement of ambition, I have been very clear that the next step is to develop an ACT arts policy and an ACT funding model in consultation with the community and in line with the strategies represented in the ambition. When this is completed, this will be the implementation—how we will get there with the ambition. It will provide the level of detail she is after, and we are kicking off that consultation process imminently. I trust that she will promote it and be engaged with it.

The release of the statement of ambition was supported by a suite of new budget initiatives totalling over \$10 million. Several of these initiatives strengthen the operation and infrastructure of our critically important arts organisations and facilities, which do, in turn, support the entire sector. It includes further work to remediate the lead dust detected during renovations on the former transport depot in Kingston, additional operational funding for Ainslie and Belconnen arts centres, and our commitment to establish a holocaust museum and education centre in the ACT, in partnership with the federal government.

I am particularly thrilled that this budget will provide Tuggeranong Arts Centre with \$2 million over the next two years to enhance its theatre, improve accessibility, and upgrade the sound and lighting systems, which was indeed an election commitment. I am sure that, as the local member, you are looking forward to that, Madam Speaker. And of course there is a significant injection of funding to progress the upgrade of the Canberra Theatre and to open up CMAG—one of our hidden gems that I firmly believe should be hidden no longer. CMAG should be much better integrated with Civic Square so that we can kick-start how we want to feel and live in a revitalised precinct that the Canberra Theatre, as the jewel in the crown, will deliver.

Responding to Ms Lawder regarding the Kingston Arts Precinct, we remain absolutely committed to its delivery, and I thank the arts organisations and artists for their commitment to it. It was fantastic to meet with them online a bit over two weeks ago, and I am looking forward to catching up with them in person for a significant event at the site in the coming weeks. They have come together as a collective, even without the physical precinct being there at this stage. That is just fantastic to see, and it is only up from here.

The decision regarding the change in delivery model was made by the Suburban Land Agency Board with a view to getting the job done. I was not able to speak about it during the estimates hearings, and I acknowledge that that might have frustrated Ms Lawder, given the announcement the following week. But, as has been outlined, including to a question from Ms Lawder and Ms Clay, there were commercial sensitivities associated with the ending of the partnership with Geocon. I can advise that arts groups were advised before the media in relation to the changed delivery process.

This budget includes funding which responds directly to issues raised by the community and broader sector. To increase the representation of women in our public art collection, \$200,000 will go towards the commission of an artwork about a woman or non-binary person and by a woman or non-binary person. It is a first step, but not the only step—and I thank Ms Lawder for acknowledging that—but it is an important step towards achieving better gender equality in our public art and to signal to the broader community, together with an update to our public art guidelines, that we recognise this as an issue, and we are doing something about it.

In response to the devastating effects of ACT's lockdown in August this year, the government is proudly delivering a third round of HOMEFRONT funding to once again support artists who have been impacted by COVID-19. We look forward to having more to say about the successful funding of recipients very soon.

There is a lot across several of my portfolios, but these are proud investments—thoughtful investments that will create jobs and deliver better outcomes for our city. I absolutely commend this appropriation to the Assembly.

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (5.33): I speak on behalf of Minister Berry with respect to responsibilities within the sport and recreation portfolio. The ACT continues to be Australia's most active jurisdiction, with a strong diversity within our sport and

recreation sector. Our most recent figures from 2020 tell us that our junior sports participation rate, outside school hours one or more times a week, was 64 per cent—six per cent higher than the national average. There are great places to play, with sportsgrounds, paths, parks, lakes, rivers and nature reserves all easily accessible.

Canberra is home to many elite sportspeople and outstanding teams represent us on the national stage, across both men's and women's leagues. The ACT sent a strong contingent to the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games this year, with medal-winning performances by Canberrans. The 2021-22 budget further delivers on our government's commitment to sporting infrastructure to meet the growing demands of the sporting community. Providing further sporting facilities to assist increased numbers of people wanting to be active and participate in sport and recreation is a good problem to be tackling.

Further funding has been allocated to the funding provided for the 2019-20 budget for the delivery of the Home of Football at Throsby. A total of \$29 million will be invested by government to ensure the facility will include the expected multiple football pitches, an indoor futsal facility, office space and associated amenities. This budget also provides funding over the next three years for the design, construction, and maintenance of a community recreation park in Casey, supporting the health and recreation needs of the local community.

The government continues to support elite women's sport in the territory over the next four years through funding in this budget. The Canberra Capitals and the Canberra United have consolidated their place among Canberra's most loved teams, and they continue to support young players to "see what they can be". The ongoing closure of the AIS Arena by the commonwealth government is a significant obstacle, particularly for women's teams and sports. The government will also undertake a review of suitable venues that could accommodate large-capacity crowds for indoor court sports.

These projects build upon initiatives already underway, including community consultation and design work on a new district tennis facility in Gungahlin; a permanent home for dragon boating at Grevillea Park; upgrades to Phillip Enclosed Oval, including new clubrooms, upgraded grandstand, floodlighting and playing surface; and new district playing fields for the Molonglo community at Stromlo Forest Park.

The government is committed to upgrades of the five district netball facilities—\$7.5 million in total, and we anticipate receiving a proposal for a new ice sports facility in Tuggeranong for the government's consideration in the near future. The 2022 sport and recreation grant program is currently open for applications, providing further assistance for our sport and recreation sector. This annual sporting grants program provides over \$2.5 million per annum to support community sport and recreation, with a focus on building participation and capacity.

With Active 2020 having now expired, the ACT government has commenced a new strategic planning process for sport and recreation. While the planning process will be informed through vigorous consultation, importantly the resultant strategic plan will

include clear priorities drawn from data and consultation. This plan will include a greater focus on inclusion, our commitment to addressing climate change and a clear strategic roadmap for sporting infrastructure in the ACT.

The 2021-22 budget commits \$950,000 for the continued investment in sport and recreation facilities through providing lighting and amenity upgrades at Mawson Playing Fields and Kambah District Playing Fields, and cricket facility upgrades at Taylor and Melba. In addition to the above, \$1.8 million has been committed through the TCCS Better Infrastructure Funding for improvements to grounds, sportsground lighting and pavilions across a number of sportsgrounds in the ACT.

For ACT government owned pools, since 2019 the ACT government has invested over \$44 million into building new, and maintaining existing, aquatic facilities for the ACT community. The new \$36.5 million Stromlo Leisure Centre was an important addition to the ACT government's existing public pools at Dickson, Manuka, Civic, Tuggeranong and Gungahlin, enabling even more people to get active and learn critical water safety skills. In the 2021-22 budget the government is funding improvements and repairs at the Gungahlin Leisure Centre. This includes completing repairs of the 50-metre pool, installing a new acoustic ceiling treatment to improve the noise level of the pool area, and lighting improvements to enhance the lighting of the pool area. The enhancements will create a better atmosphere for patrons, lifesavers and spectators. Works on the 50-metre pool were impacted by border restrictions due to the COVID-19 health pandemic but are now progressing well. The ACT government is working through a revised timeline for the pool repairs and upgrades, and a further update on the revised completion date will be provided to the community as soon as possible.

This year's budget delivers for Canberra's sporting communities and, even through these challenging few years, clubs and teams have built on their strengths to make Canberra the best place for sports in Australia.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (5.39): I want to take the opportunity this afternoon to provide the Assembly with an update on some of the early economic data that confirms the strength of the economic recovery the ACT is experiencing and then I will have a deeper dive into the most recent data updates on the territory's gross state product for the fiscal year 2020-21, which is obviously a COVID-impacted year but which gives some insights into what to expect in the fiscal 2021-22, which we are currently in.

So let us begin with the good news on employment. The weekly payroll job data has indicated that for the first two weeks of October, our first step out of lockdown, employment—payroll jobs, hours worked—in accommodation and food services increased 12.3 per cent, and in arts and recreation services, another industry particularly impacted, increased by 7.9 per cent. That is just for the first two weeks as we began our easing out. The further data sets will come forward in the coming weeks, based on the job vacancy data and the advertisement data that we understand. What we are seeing from the banks in terms of retail spend on forward accommodation

bookings and bookings through online restaurant booking services, demonstrates increases in terms of credit card spend of 20 per cent above 2019 levels—the equivalent pre-pandemic year. Then what we are seeing across the hospitality sector is that the number of booked seats at restaurants is up by over 100 per cent. These are showing a very strong recovery as we move through the different stages of restriction easing. That is encouraging but of course we want to see that sustained.

The objective would be to get back towards the \$80 million a month, or around \$2½ million a day being spent across the food industry, effectively cafes, restaurants and takeaways. That is where we were before the lockdown and that is where we would like to get back to. We will have data on that in the monthly retail trade figures for November-December, which we will not see until late January and February next year. But the early lead indicators are very encouraging.

We have good data coming out of the ABS in relation to our real gross state product. Let us go through it. Our real GSP increased by 2.8 per cent. The Australian economy, Australia's gross domestic products, increased by 1.5 per cent. So the growth rate in the ACT was nearly double the national average. It was driven by a broad base of increased economic output: public administration and safety, not surprisingly; professional, scientific and technical services. This was largely driven by rises in computer software contracts supporting Australian government operations, particularly cyber security contracts to improve network security for employees working from home—an ongoing trend in terms of how we work.

Healthcare and social assistance grew very strongly. This was partly driven by COVID testing and vaccine services in the latter half of the fiscal year but does represent a long-term increase in healthcare and social assistance as a share of the territory economy.

Private sector activity contributed to the ACT's GSP growth, with retail trade and wholesale trade being the main contributors. Growth in retail trade reflected increased sales in motor vehicles due to higher household disposable income. Online shopping rose considerably, again not surprisingly, for reasons associated with both an ongoing trend year on year and then clearly, for several months, restrictions on bricks and mortar retail trade due to lockdown. Wholesale trade increases reflected strong motor vehicle demand from businesses. Machinery and equipment wholesaling, grocery and liquor wholesaling also contributed to growth. Part of that is business-to-business sales but particularly reflected are the strongest six months ever in the history of record-keeping for restaurants, cafes and takeaways pre-lockdown.

State final demand rose by 3.1 per cent. That was driven by an increase in household consumption of 3.4 per cent. Public consumption, that of the ACT and commonwealth governments, was up by 4.8 per cent. When we delved deeper into the comparisons with other jurisdictions, we saw our growth rate in terms of real GSP being effectively double that of New South Wales. New South Wales grew by 1.4 per cent; we grew by 2.8 per cent.

Our real GSP per capita growth was two per cent—that is, adjusting for population, adjusting for inflation. On per capita GSP, gross state product, the output from our

economy for each Canberran increased and went over the \$100,000 mark to \$100,523. The ABS has also reported that nominal gross household disposable income per capita grew by 2.1 per cent and has now reached nearly \$96½ thousand per capita. The ACT has the highest gross household disposable income in Australia and is well above the Australian average.

As we look to the further detail of the sectors that contributed to our growth, I am pleased to say it was broad based, from smaller niche sectors of our economy like agriculture, forestry, fishing and mining. Agriculture, forestry and fishing grew by nearly 20 per cent. Mining, which is principally services and technology to the Australian mining industry, grew by 31 per cent. They are relatively small parts of our economy but, as we look to the larger areas, wholesale trade grew by 9.6 per cent; retail trade by 7.3 per cent; accommodation and food services by 5.2 per cent; media and telecommunications by 4.4 per cent; rental, hiring and real estate services by 3.5 per cent; professional, scientific and technical services by 6.9 per cent—\$300 million extra in output in gross state product from professional, scientific and technical services in our \$43.37 billion economy; a stellar performance in that area.

I know that criticism is often made, including by Mr Cain when he suggests that the ACT's growth is too heavily focused on public administration and safety. Yes, it is clearly the largest area of the territory's gross state product but it grew by 2.7 per cent, less than the territory-wide average growth of 2.8 per cent. We saw that education, in a very tough year for education export, still grew by 1.3 per cent. Healthcare and social assistance are up by 4.4 per cent. Arts and recreation services—again, a stellar performance in a very difficult year—grew by 6.5 per cent. To put some context to this, that is another \$19 million of output from that sector, taking it over \$300 million as its contribution to the territory economy. These are pleasing indicators of broad-based growth across the territory economy.

When we delve deeper into what are the other drivers, beyond consumption of the territory's economic growth, it is worth looking at the contributions of the public sector. As I look at public investment—that is, the infrastructure programs—the commonwealth's spending as a share of GSP reduced. It fell by 2.2 per cent. The ACT government's share increased, and from 2019-20 to 2021-22 that increased by 6.3 per cent. Of the 2.8 per cent of our growth, 0.1 per cent of that is solely attributed to the ACT government's infrastructure investment program. So it was a net positive contributor, together with all of those other industry sectors that in fact offset an equivalent reduction in the commonwealth government's infrastructure investment.

Where will we see future growth? Clearly the reopening of the Australian border and the opportunity for us to continue what had been nation-leading growth in the export of services—principally, international education; tourism; professional, scientific and technical services associated with services to foreign governments—largely by hundreds and hundreds of firms in this territory who sell services to governments external from Australia in our region, from the Pacific and to developing countries and economies in South East Asia, taking advantage of free trade agreements and deals in the United States, in Europe—means we will continue to see companies that have located in the ACT because of our skilled workforce, because of access to

Australian government procurement, also now being in the business of exporting. And that is where we get access to much larger markets.

Our procurement market inside the ACT just on ACT government goods and services procurement is necessarily limited by the size of our budget and the size of our procurement programs. If your vision for your business growth and opportunity is solely contained within the borders of the ACT, then you are clearly missing out on a range of much bigger markets. Even if your vision is only to go to the next state, to look into the New South Wales market, then clearly you have an opportunity to access New South Wales government procurement, maybe just in our region or maybe more broadly, on a scale that is significantly bigger.

This is an important feature of the Australian Constitution. Section 92 refers to free trade between the Australian states and territories. So it is a source of constant amusement for me when I get questions from those opposite around why we are not effectively putting up tariff barriers and procurement barriers to access government procurement. It certainly is because not only would it be detrimental to value for money for the ACT government from its procurement but it would also then close off 98 per cent of Australian government procurement from the other states and territories for ACT businesses if the policy approach was that you must procure only from firms in your jurisdiction. If every other state and territory government adopted that approach in breach of the Australian constitution, as is being advocated by those opposite, ACT businesses would lose significantly.

The future for small jurisdictions is free trade. You access much greater markets and your growth potential is significantly greater, which is why we are in the business of supporting the Australian constitution and free trade between states and territories and why we are in the business of supporting free trade—genuine free trade, not preferential trade agreements, which are largely what have been struck in recent times, but genuine free trade. It allows for specialisation and allows firms in this city who are nation- and world-leading to access those massive markets.

The ACT is two per cent of the Australian economy. Australia is about two per cent of the world economy. To grow, to go from being small or medium to being medium or large, you must be able to access a bigger market than 440,000 people and a \$43 billion economy. Pleasingly, we are seeing, to the tune of billions of dollars each year, ACT businesses embracing the opportunities that are there in the broader Australian market and indeed internationally. And that is a key part of the government's economic diversification agenda and the facilitation of that through the economic development directorate is an important part of this year's budget, as it has been for each of the last 10 budgets that I have delivered as Treasurer.

What we are looking to do is continue that growth path. We will have more data, confirm the direction of our economic recovery in the coming weeks and months. If I have an opportunity again later in the budget debate next week and there are new datasets that become available, I will update the Assembly. But the trend is very good. We look forward to solidifying this economic recovery.

But it is all underpinned by the success of our public health response which, on all of the metrics—whether that is number of infections per 100,000 people, number of hospitalisations per 100,000 people, number of intensive care presentations per 100,000 people, number of deaths per 100,000 people, number of vaccinations per 100,000 people—demonstrates the success of the public health response in the ACT when benchmarked against other states and territories in this country and indeed against other jurisdictions, small, medium and large, around the world. And what underpins our successful economic recovery is the strength of that public health response.

I hope by Christmas the remaining 10,000 or so Canberrans who have had their first dose of a vaccine will be able to have concluded their primary vaccination course, be fully vaccinated, so that our 99.9 per cent first-dose rate is matched by as close to 99.9 per cent fully vaccinated. It is sitting at 97.3 per cent today. We are growing at about 0.1 per cent each day. There are about 10,000 to go.

Then we roll into the booster program which we must deliver in big numbers ahead of next winter. Clearly the lived experience in the Northern Hemisphere is that winter is very problematic as far as COVID transmission is concerned. So we must get ahead of this. It would seem for the first time in the Australian vaccination program that vaccine supply will not be the inhibitor of the successful delivery of the booster program. That is fundamental to our ongoing economic recovery, as we have seen very clearly the devastating impacts of losing control of the public health situation not only on public health but on economic outcomes, be that business profits or government budgets.

Encouragingly—and members may or may not have got across the detail of the September quarter budget update—and pleasingly, the economic recovery that we are seeing across the key metrics is also now flowing into the government's own-source revenue. That was an encouraging set of data for the first quarter. But the first quarter does not make a fiscal year. We need to see what happens in quarters 2, 3 and 4.

With that, I commend the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate appropriation. It is indeed diverse and covers a range of important areas of investment for the territory government. I thank all my ministerial colleagues for their contributions and indeed all members for their contributions to this section of the budget debate and commend the appropriation to the Assembly.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Gentleman**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Adjournment**

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

**Environment—ACT Landcare**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (6.00): I will not keep my fellow members for long, while noting that they are not compelled to stay here. I would like to speak very briefly about the delight of being able to get back out into the community. Over the weekend I had that pleasure. On Saturday in particular I was able to join two Landcare events. On Saturday morning I joined the Emu Creek Landcare Group. I joined four other people, and we planted some native flowering plants and shrubs, and undertook some weeding near the Belconnen town centre. I would commit to keeping green spaces available to that densified part of Canberra. We enjoyed a morning tea very kindly put on by the Landcare group convenor. Thank you, John.

That afternoon the Lions Club Croke Place Landcare Group in Evatt celebrated their first anniversary. After hearing about their vision, it was a privilege to plant a tree along Ginninderra Creek. I note that I was joined by member Jo Clay from Ginninderra as well.

This group has started to remove poplar suckers and other exotics along Ginninderra Creek, and hope to steadily remove them all the way from the Lake Ginninderra spillway to the footbridge near Copland Drive, a stretch of about 900 metres. This is a very large but worthy task and will be of great benefit to the increasing number of residents and visitors who traverse the pathway along Ginninderra Creek.

It was really encouraging to see their commitment to planting and protecting native plants, including hoary sunrays and creamy candles. I also heard about their vision for educational and recreational enhancements of some of the green space along the pathway near Ginninderra Creek.

It is always encouraging to see community initiatives in action, to see the volunteer work of members particularly of my electorate, and of Canberra as well. Some of those who attended Evatt on Saturday afternoon were from different parts of Canberra, representing different Lions clubs in Canberra—a great encouragement to see their commitment in their volunteer capacity.

As an aside, gardening is one of my pleasures at home in my own spare time, although that is shorter now over the term of this Assembly. I do consider myself to be lucky that gardening occasionally is part of my work duties.

I want to thank both Landcare groups for their commitment and that of their members, and I will certainly look forward to engaging with them in the future.

**Australian Pollinator Week**

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong) (6.03): Isn't it fantastic that in the Assembly we get all of our members so excited about our local environment and getting out into nature? I think that is really exciting. Today I rise to speak about the importance of pollinators. We have just celebrated Australian Pollinator Week. This is an annual event that has happened since November 2015 and it is a designated week when communities, organisations and businesses come together to raise the awareness of

pollinators. It was a bit difficult to have the picnics because of the rain last week, but lots of events happened.

The majority of our pollinator species are wild and include native bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, birds, and bats, that we talked about today. Honeybees are also important pollinators and are the most widespread managed pollinator in the world. Here in the ACT we are fortunate to have an abundance of local pollinators and a healthy network of over 900 beekeepers.

Why are pollinators so important? By transferring pollen while foraging, they cause pollination to occur. It is an essential part of the fertilisation process leading plants to develop seeds and fruit—seeds and fruit that will feed countless animals in the world, including us. This includes the plants that produce much of the food we eat. Apples, avocados, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, and onion crops are all totally dependent on bees for pollination. Without them, our diets might have much less variety. Pollinators also drive biodiversity. Over 75 per cent of the world's flowering plants rely on pollinators to reproduce.

The significance of pollinators in the ACT cannot be overstated—from the sturdy, rare green carpenter bee to the iconic, hardworking, blue-banded bee. Our floral emblem, the royal bluebell, takes its distinctive shape and colour from its need to attract the bees that pollinate it.

Canberra is a green and growing city, and we need to ensure that we support our healthy, lively, sustainable city into the future, serving both the people and the landscape, and building the capacity to preserve biodiversity. One of the ways that we do this is by establishing wildlife corridors. I am pleased to see what is happening in places like Ginninderry in Belconnen, where more than a third of the land is being set aside as a conservation corridor. Pollinator-friendly gardens will be created with plants that flower all year round to attract native bees and other pollinators.

The fundamental importance of bees for the future of the ACT requires us all to be aware of the extent to which we depend on our pollinators. Our future is in the hands of pollinators and those who protect them. We can all play our part. We can do this by thinking about what plants we grow on our balcony, in our garden or our veggie patch; by not using pesticides or insecticides; and by providing shelter for pollinators or building pollinator nests. There are many resources available, and I would be pleased to send a list to any interested member.

We are fortunate in the ACT to have such a diverse range of ecosystems and organisms, along with talented and dedicated people across all sectors, working and volunteering to support and maintain our local biodiversity. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge this important work and celebrate our small but wonderful pollinators for whom we have much to thank.

### **Protests—Blockade Australia**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (6.07): I want to speak today about the politically motivated prosecution that happened yesterday, just across our border in New South Wales.

Sergeio, aged 22, was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment, six months no parole, for taking nonviolent direct action as part of the Blockade Australia mobilisation in Newcastle. He was protesting about a coal port.

These are prosecutions against activists that are brave enough to stand up against the export of dirty coal out of the largest coal port in the world. Draconian anti-protest laws were put in place by the Liberal Baird government in 2016 specifically to attack environmental protesters. Those laws are an indictment of how cosy the fossil fuel industry is with the Liberal Party.

The Liberal Party claim they believe in the rights and freedoms of all people, but it is freedoms for some and silence for others. Where people stand up against them and their donors, they use the full force of the state against them.

Blockade Australia are standing up and fighting back against decades of climate inaction from state and federal Liberal governments. They are drawing from a long history of peaceful protest effecting political change. They are taking direct action to prevent coal exports from reaching the port of Newcastle.

The Greens fundamentally believe in the right to peaceful protest. It is essential for a free and democratic society. Environmental groups, unions, First Nations people, suffragettes and many more groups have frequently used these methods. Our modern democracy is built on civil disobedience and standing up against entrenched power to create a better future.

In the wake of COP 26 and in a climate crisis, protesting against coal is a rational action to take. It is an essential action to take, and it is ridiculous to be locked up, under such a draconian law.

We have a lot of protest movements right here in the ACT, and I am really proud that we have strong laws in place here to protect them and to allow peaceful protest. I am really glad to be part of a state parliament that supports peaceful protest and democracy.

If you are frightened of your political critics, you should not seek to silence them. You should make better policies that you can stand behind, and you should win the debate.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.10 pm.**