



DEBATES

OF THE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

24 SEPTEMBER 1996

Tuesday, 24 September 1996

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Tuesday, 24 September 1996

MR SPEAKER (Mr Cornwell) took the chair at 10.30 am and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

PETITION

The Clerk: The following petition has been lodged for presentation:

By **Mr Hird**, from 25 residents, requesting that the lease and development application for the community sporting facilities in McKellar be approved.

The terms of this petition will be recorded in *Hansard* and a copy referred to the appropriate Minister.

National Soccer Centre

The petition read as follows:

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

The petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Parliament that: the undersigned residents living in the Belconnen area can identify huge benefits to our community from the proposed project to introduce much needed community, sporting and other amenities by the Belconnen Soccer Club. This project is to be located in McKellar at Section 71, bounded by William Slim Drive and Owen Dixon Drive.

Your petitioners therefore request urgent attention by the Assembly to approve this lease and development application.

Petition received.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING AND TEMPORARY ORDERS

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

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

- (1) any business before the Assembly at 3.00 pm this day being interrupted to allow the Treasurer to be called on forthwith to present the Appropriation Bill 1996-97;
- (2) (a) questions without notice concluding at the time of interruption;
or
(b) debate on any motion before the Assembly at the time of interruption being adjourned until the question "That debate on the Appropriation Bill 1996-97 be adjourned and the resumption of the debate be made an order of the day for the next sitting" is agreed;
- (3) at 3.00 pm on Thursday, 26 September 1996, the order of the day for the resumption of debate on the question "That the Appropriation Bill 1996-97 be agreed to in principle" being called on notwithstanding any business before the Assembly, and that the time limit on the speech of the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Moore, Mr Osborne and one Member from the ACT Greens be equivalent to the time taken by the Treasurer in moving the motion "That this Bill be agreed to in principle"; and
- (4) (a) questions without notice concluding at the time of interruption;
or
(b) debate on any motion before the Assembly at that time being adjourned until a later hour that day.

AUTHORITY TO RECORD, BROADCAST AND PHOTOGRAPH PROCEEDINGS

Motion (by **Mr Humphries**), by leave, agreed to:

That the Assembly authorises:

- (1) the recording on video tape without sound by the television networks of proceedings during questions without notice and the presentation of the Appropriation Bill 1996-97 today, Tuesday, 24 September 1996, and the Leader of the Opposition's speech on the resumption of debate on Thursday, 26 September 1996;

- (2) the use by any television station of any part of the recorded proceedings in subsequent news, current affairs and documentary programs and not for the purposes of satire or ridicule; and
- (3) the taking of still photographs during questions without notice and the presentation of the Appropriation Bill 1996-97 today and the Leader of the Opposition's speech on the resumption of the debate on Thursday, 26 September 1996, and the use of such photographs in the print media generally.

STAMP DUTIES AND TAXES (AMENDMENT) BILL (NO. 2) 1996

MRS CARNELL (Chief Minister and Treasurer) (10.33): I ask for leave to present the Stamp Duties and Taxes (Amendment) Bill (No. 2) 1996.

Leave granted.

MRS CARNELL: I present the Stamp Duties and Taxes (Amendment) Bill (No. 2) 1996 and its explanatory memorandum.

Title read by Clerk.

MRS CARNELL: I move:

That this Bill be agreed to in principle.

Mr Speaker, this Bill amends the Stamp Duties and Taxes Act 1987. The Act provides for the imposition of stamp duties on, among other things, conveyances of leases of land. Mr Speaker, the changes proposed in this Bill correct an anomaly in the Act which could lead to a significant erosion of stamp duty revenues.

In 1991 the Labor Government introduced an amendment to the Stamp Duties and Taxes Act 1987 which shifted the liability for the payment of stamp duty on commercial leases from the lessee, the tenant, to the lessor, the building owner. The effect of the change was to bring within the stamp duty net buildings leased to the Commonwealth and Territory governments. The amendments operated effectively for several years, with stamp duty being collected at full ad valorem rates. However, it was recently brought to the Government's attention that, on a literal reading of the relevant provision in Schedule 1 to the Stamp Duties and Taxes Act, conveyances of subleases to the Commonwealth and the Territory could, in fact, be liable only to prescribed stamp duty of \$20. This was certainly not the intention of the previous Government, nor is it the intention of this Government.

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Mr Speaker, this Bill corrects that anomaly. It also applies retrospectively, to validate stamp duty revenues collected from conveyances of commercial leases to the Territory or the Commonwealth since the previous amendment was introduced in October 1991.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Whitecross**) adjourned.

ELECTORAL (APPLICATION) BILL 1996

MR HUMPHRIES (Attorney-General) (10.36): Mr Speaker, I ask for leave to present the Electoral (Application) Bill 1996.

Leave granted.

MR HUMPHRIES: I present the Electoral (Application) Bill 1996 and its explanatory memorandum.

Title read by Clerk.

MR HUMPHRIES: Mr Speaker, I move:

That this Bill be agreed to in principle.

This Bill is intended to extend the deadline for the submission of election financial disclosure annual returns by political parties and Independent MLAs for the 1995-96 financial year. The Bill extends the deadline for submission of annual returns from 17 November 1996 to 17 December 1996. This extension will give the Legislative Assembly time to consider the proposed changes to the ACT's election funding and financial disclosure laws set out in the Electoral (Amendment) Bill (No. 3) 1996, which I intend to table on Thursday of this week, before the annual returns fall due. If the Assembly decides to adopt the Electoral (Amendment) Bill (No. 3) 1996 in the November sittings, this extension of time will enable political parties and Independent MLAs to submit annual returns under the simplified disclosure laws rather than the more onerous requirements that currently apply. I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Whitecross**) adjourned.

**LONG SERVICE LEAVE (BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY)
(AMENDMENT) BILL (NO. 2) 1996**

Debate resumed from 5 September 1996, on motion by **Mr De Domenico**:

That this Bill be agreed to in principle.

MR BERRY (10.38): I rise to oppose this Bill. This is a seriously flawed Bill. It is flawed in the reason for its development; it is flawed in the process it entrenches; it is flawed in the way it is to be executed. The Government's involvement in the development of this Bill is to be condemned. The Minister, in his speech, said:

At the heart of the amendments lies a Government commitment to employment ...

Just have a look at the record of this Government. It was not five minutes into its term when it cut \$6m from job programs. It cut them out of the budget. Mrs Carnell sits there laughing. She thinks it is a big joke to cut \$6m worth of job programs from the ACT budget. What a joke you are! How dare you laugh at cuts you made in jobs programs just a few minutes after you came into office! Supposedly, this is the Government that is committed to jobs. What did they do next? You remember, Mr Speaker, as does everybody else.

Mrs Carnell: We created 6,800 jobs.

MR BERRY: Mrs Carnell says, "We created another jobs crisis. We stopped recruitment. We should be applauded for that". You made a cut of \$6m in job programs as soon as you came to office; in the next breath. Shortly thereafter was the recruitment freeze. That has hit young people the hardest. Mrs Carnell claims - of course, they are hollow claims - that employment of young people is a crisis area. This Government has presided over rising unemployment. It has done nothing to stem that rise - 3,400 more people have joined the unemployment list since the Carnell Government came to office and 4,000 fewer people have been employed in the last year alone. This Government has stifled employment.

Mr De Domenico is personally responsible for less money being spent on training in the building and construction industry. It was Mr De Domenico who pushed for the reduction in the money available from the fund for training. It was Mr De Domenico who moved and strenuously argued to reduce the levy from 2.5 to 1.5 per cent. Of course, now it is even less than that. Mr De Domenico himself forced the reduction in funding for training. Shame on you, Minister, and shame on all your colleagues for supporting you.

Mr De Domenico: And the Assembly supported it, Mr Berry.

MR BERRY: Do not blame the Assembly. You are the one who moved it. You are the one who tried to pull the wool over everybody's eyes, Minister. Shame on you! Having reduced training funding, Mr De Domenico has the hide, a hide as thick as an elephant's, to come in here and claim that he stands for the creation of more opportunities. Now, under the guise of creating employment, the Minister plans to bleed

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the fund of 40 per cent of its assets. He then plans to stop all training money from the fund on 31 December 1997, but he does not have in place an alternative funding mechanism yet. He talks about it, but who would trust this lot on their record? This lot have an appalling record on the creation of job opportunities in the ACT. Their record stinks. There is no other way of describing it. Mr De Domenico proposes a massive injection of funds, and then a complete abolition of funds. This Minister has no alternative, just some vague wish - - -

Mrs Carnell: Excuse me; we have been consulting on that.

MR BERRY: Not with me, you have not. Do not come that consulting nonsense with me. You consult with only the people you want to consult with, not with the wider community. The Minister has no alternative, just some - - -

Mr De Domenico: George Wason said, "Do not go anywhere near Wayne. He would not know. Come and talk to me. Do not worry about Wayne. He will do what I tell him".

MR SPEAKER: Order! Silence! Mr Berry has the call.

MR BERRY: Mr Speaker, there is just some vague wish by this Minister and this Government that the industry will develop an alternative funding mechanism for industry training. Mr De Domenico, that approach has not worked for 18 months. Just ask the 3,400 extra people who are looking for jobs.

Mrs Carnell: What about the 1,000 extra people who are in work or the 6,800 - - -

Mr De Domenico: And what about the potential 150 who will be in work if you support this Bill?

MR BERRY: Did you not read the *Canberra Times* this morning?

Mrs Carnell: Mr Speaker, if Mr Berry is going to be precious about this, you might like to call for relevance to the Bill.

Mr De Domenico: Yes, get him back to the Bill. Does he support the 150 new jobs or does he not?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Berry, you are coming back to the Bill, are you not?

MR BERRY: Mr Speaker, I have been relevant throughout. I was referring to the Minister's speech.

MR SPEAKER: The Minister's speech introducing the Bill; is that right, Mr Berry?

MR BERRY: Indeed, sir.

MR SPEAKER: Proceed.

Mr De Domenico: He has read the wrong speech, Mr Speaker.

MR BERRY: This might be a laughing matter to you; but, Mr Speaker, I would like to get the opportunity to speak.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR BERRY: We have to look at the process, which is seriously flawed. Initially, the Minister wrote to the board asking for their comments on a proposal from the MBA to establish a skill centre. You proposed either increasing the levy from 10 per cent to 25 per cent or using some of the board's surplus to fund the centre. The board investigated the proposal, was unable to get satisfactory answers and wrote to the Minister advising him that it was philosophically opposed to using board funds for anything other than workers' long service leave. They are funds outside of the 10 per cent, one assumes. It is assumed that that is money outside of the 10 per cent. It was clear - - -

Mr De Domenico: No, it does not assume it at all.

MR BERRY: Mr Speaker, Mr De Domenico will have the chance to open his trap a little later on when he replies. I would appreciate it if he would keep it shut while I am speaking.

MR SPEAKER: Proceed, Mr Berry.

MR BERRY: Mr Speaker, you are in charge of the chamber.

MR SPEAKER: Proceed, Mr Berry.

MR BERRY: It was clear from the outset that there were not sufficient funds to cover the costs of the MBA proposal, but the Minister was so keen that he signed a cheque for \$75,000 as the first instalment of the \$300,000 cost of the proposal, even though the cash flow of the fund could not support these costs. He just went and did it, anticipating that people would fall into line behind him. This Minister is a disgrace at all levels. Now, when the Bill is introduced, we find that the Minister wants us to backdate the effect of the increased levy to January. What a disgrace! Do you know why, Mr Speaker? It is to cover his tracks, because he authorised funding which was not available.

Mr Hird: Do not judge everyone by yourself.

MR BERRY: You ask the taxi drivers what they think about you, Harold. The appropriateness of the MBA's proposal is another issue of concern. The MBA Group Training (ACT) Inc. was set up in February 1996 as a successor to the Master Builders Construction and Housing Association (ACT) Group Training Apprenticeship Scheme for the ACT (Inc.). In 1993 the company posted a profit of \$111,000. We got these records from the Registrar of Associations.

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Mrs Carnell: And that is how they are paying for their bit of it.

MR BERRY: I am glad Mrs Carnell interjects and says, "That is how they are paying for their bit of it". We must have that on the record. In 1994 the company posted a reduced profit of \$86,000. In 1995 the company posted a loss - it was in the red - of \$102,594. Listen to the next one, Mr De Domenico. I do not know whether you have heard about this. Maybe you have. In January this year the company projected a deficit for 1996 of \$380,000. Is it not just a coincidence that the amount of money that they want from the Government is roughly equal to the deficit?

I would like at this point to table a document that I have. It is headed "Master Builders' Construction & Housing Association - ACT: Group Apprenticeship Scheme: Income and Expenditure Statement for the Financial Year Ending 30 June 1996: Year to Date Actual against Budget 31 January 1996". It clearly shows that the anticipated operating result is a deficit of \$308,000. I seek leave to table that document.

Leave granted.

MR BERRY: Let us go back to Mr De Domenico's speech, which of course has become the focal point of debate in relation to this issue. Mr De Domenico said:

At the heart of the amendments lies a Government commitment to employment ...

If these funds are given to the MBA on the basis of the report that I have just tabled, it will not create a job. Not one single job will it create. It will go to the training scheme. When the \$300,000 goes to the training scheme, the training scheme will be in deficit by \$300,000, according to its own report in January. Contrary to what Mr De Domenico has claimed and what Mrs Carnell will claim - over and over again she will claim that there are thousands - from the papers that I have been provided with it is clear that the money from the Government will plug a deficit hole in the training scheme's budget. Mr Speaker, there has been caution about this issue in the long service leave fund boardroom, for good reason. The Minister has involved himself in this matter at a personal level. He did not accept the recommendations of that board and ensure that there was proper consultation in coming to his decision.

I say that there are real problems with this Bill. There is a range of problems. It is inappropriate for funds set aside for long service leave benefits for workers to be used for politically expedient reasons. The Government that proposes to use them makes claims about its commitment to employment in the Territory. What a joke, when you have a look at their record! It is one of the most shameful records that you would ever see from any government. The record of this Government in relation to employment is an absolute disgrace.

This proposal seeks to take money from a source which is an inappropriate source of funding for these sorts of training funds. The crisis, if there is one, has been created by the Government itself, Mr De Domenico in particular. He has more than halved the funds available for training in the ACT by his insistence on the reduction of the levy.

This Minister has reduced the funds available for training by his fanatical zeal to reduce the levy. Now he wants to use funds from the long service leave component of the fund, outside of the 10 per cent. That is quite inappropriate, and it does not have the support of the board. You have not come in here - - -

Mr De Domenico: Which board?

MR BERRY: The Long Service Leave Board. You have not come in here with their support. They are the funding organisation in relation to this matter. This Minister, who thinks he can pull the wool over our eyes, has another think coming. The Government, and this Minister in particular, reduced the funding available for training. It does not have the support of the Long Service Leave Board in its pursuit of this matter. It is clear that this funding at least equals the deficit in the MBA training scheme's budget. For those reasons, the Bill has to be opposed. *(Extension of time granted)*

You have to come back to the basic point when you are considering this issue - the Government's performance in relation to employment. This is a government that makes all the phoney claims, makes all the phoney promises, and expects people to believe them without question. This Government's record is shameful. Just ask the 3,400 people who are unemployed as a result of the activities of the Government.

Mrs Carnell: You just want to make sure that some of those stay unemployed.

MR BERRY: Mrs Carnell interjects that I want to make sure that some people stay unemployed. That is absolute rubbish. For somebody like Mrs Carnell, who cut \$6m worth of job projects out of the ACT funding, to make those sort of comments is an absolute joke.

Mr De Domenico: Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order.

MR SPEAKER: Sit down, Mr Berry. There is a point of order.

Mr De Domenico: Mr Speaker, we have been pretty liberal in allowing Mr Berry extra time so he can relate his comments to the Bill at hand. I suggest that relevance comes into it.

MR SPEAKER: Relevance, Mr Berry.

MR BERRY: It is entirely relevant. Mr De Domenico's speech said that at the heart of this amendment lies this Government's commitment to employment. I just want to debunk that claim. That is clearly a phoney claim by a bunch of phoneys. There is no way that this Bill ought to be supported. This Government, in coming up with this proposal, has not put in place a proposal which would provide for more training funds for the future. All we have in front of us with this Bill is a proposal to raid the long service leave funds, which are meant for long service leave for workers, for a short term, and then cut out the training aspect of the long service leave fund from that point forward.

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There are some claims that the Government is consulting with industry about the development of a training package, but there is nothing in place to replace it. This Minister wants us to approve the dumping of the training component of the Long Service Leave Board's available funds on his word. Who would take his word? I do not know many people who would. I certainly would not. Nobody on the Labor benches would, and I will bet there are a few on your benches who would not either.

Mr De Domenico: Put your money where your mouth is.

MR BERRY: I might go and do a little secret ballot. You might be surprised at the outcome, Mr De Domenico. I see a few smirks around the Government benches.

Mr De Domenico: And I see no-one behind you, Mr Berry, except the CFMEU, the same mob that attacked Parliament House.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Other members will have a chance to speak, hopefully in silence, in due course.

MR BERRY: I give Mr De Domenico the opportunity to withdraw his wish for me to go and survey Government members. I think he might be disappointed at the outcome. Mr Speaker, I re-emphasise that this Assembly would be a laughing-stock if we were to endorse the processes that have been engaged in by this Minister. He bullied the Long Service Leave Board into a position in relation to this matter and has not taken their advice. This decision was taken before consultation. Indeed, attempts were made to adjust the legislation which is now in this place. The great coincidence that should worry everybody is the fact that, on the Master Builders Association's own figures for its training scheme, this amount of money roughly equals the deficit.

Mr De Domenico: Just wait and listen, but that is really scurrilous. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

MR BERRY: You go for your life. In any event, you still have to keep coming back to the point that governments should not be raiding the funds of the Long Service Leave Board to play political games with. The Labor Party will not be supporting this Bill, and we urge other members in this place who are reasonable about these issues not to support it either.

MRS CARNELL (Chief Minister) (10.59): Have we heard so much gobbledegook and absolute guff in this place since the last time Mr Berry spoke? This Bill increases - not starts but increases - the level of funding allocated from the long service leave fund for training purposes. The first 10 per cent, I understood, was put in in 1990 by Mr Berry himself - I would assume at odds with the Long Service Leave Board.

Mr Berry: With their approval.

MRS CARNELL: No; I am sorry. They philosophically oppose any money from the long service leave levy being used for any purpose other than funding current entitlements of people in the industry. That is their brief and they stick by it. When Mr Berry and

the Assembly of those days agreed to 10 per cent of the long service leave levy being used for training purposes, they did so at odds with the Long Service Leave Board. The board simply do not agree with that sort of approach. Mr Berry is quite right; they certainly do not agree with increasing that either. They believe that all of it, the 10 per cent included, should be used for the current entitlements of people who need long service leave. That is really where they stand.

It is really important to understand that the amount of money in this Bill, the 40 per cent, will be spent on three separate things. Quite significantly, Mr Berry seems to have overlooked that. The first one is on-site training of up to 70 apprentices who do not have employers. I know that Mr Berry does understand how apprenticeships work, so I will not suggest that I need to explain it; but, listening to his speech, you would not have known that he understood how apprenticeships work. Those 70 apprentices who do not have employers need a scheme that provides on-site training if they are to achieve the end of becoming qualified tradespeople. This on-site skills scheme will be run and organised by a cross-industry skills centre. The on-site skills centre will have three parties involved in it - the MBA, the union and the Government - as I understand it. If this Assembly passes the Bill, the on-site skills centre will be funded from the 40 per cent of the long service leave levy which will be set aside for training. That will train up to 70 apprentices. There is no money, not one dollar, going to the MBA training fund. Mr Berry is just wrong again. The MBA training fund will not receive one dollar from government. The body that will receive the money if this Assembly passes the Bill is the on-site skills centre, which has the union, the Government and the MBA as equal partners in it. That particular group will run this centre, which will ensure that 70 young apprentices go through their training and become tradespeople.

As well as that, we have direct funding for employers for the placement of an additional 50 apprentices. That is 50 young people who would not be able to get an apprenticeship in the current economic climate. That is 50 new jobs; 50 young people getting an opportunity to enter the work force. On top of that, there is funding for an additional 25 at-risk apprentices and trainees. Those are people who do have employers but whose employers are doing it a bit tough and may not be able to keep their apprentices and their trainees on. That is 150 jobs for young Canberrans. Where is that money coming from? It is coming from the long service leave training levy, which the Actuary and the Auditor-General tell us is overfunded. It is money sitting in the bank earning interest. It is money that the Auditor-General and the Actuary tell us is not needed to pay long service leave entitlements at current levels for current employees.

I would have thought in the current economic circumstances that those opposite, Mr Berry particularly, would be willing to support anything that meant that money that was not being used for anything, that was sitting in a bank, could be used to employ 150 young people. It is important to realise that the need for apprentices and trained tradespeople over the next four to five years will be quite significant. We have a problem at the moment. The construction industry is very flat, as we all know. Therefore, it is hard for people in the building industry to put on apprentices.

We also know that, with the advent of the Olympics in Sydney and the huge requirement for tradespeople on site in Sydney, there will be an outflow of tradespeople from the ACT. We have to make sure that we are backing up behind those tradespeople who will inevitably leave to go and work on construction sites in Sydney. Here is a way to ensure that those employers who are currently doing it a bit tough but would like to put on apprentices can do so and, by giving young people jobs, ensure that Canberra has an adequate supply of tradespeople in the future. With the current level of youth unemployment, the current problems in the construction industry and the current Commonwealth Government redundancy levels, this Assembly should not step away from 150 jobs for young Canberrans.

Mr Berry made the comment that this legislation will stay in place only until 1 January 1998. The reason for that is that we have been engaged in discussions, not with our own people as Mr Berry said but with such people as George Wason, Trevor Zeltner, and all of the people from the CFMEU. They have all been to my office as well as to Mr De Domenico's on a number of occasions.

Mr Berry: They do not agree with you.

MRS CARNELL: They certainly do about the training levy. The industry and the employers believe that there should be two separate approaches. There should be money that is for long service leave and money that is for training. This sort of hybrid approach will probably not give the best outcome in the longer term. Because of that, we have a 1 January 1998 sunset on this approach. We believe that by then we will be able to negotiate and pass in this place a training levy on the basis that we reduce the long service levy to the level that is needed to cover current employees. In other words, we will reduce the long service leave levy to the level that is needed to fund long service leave in line with what the board, the Actuary and the Auditor-General say, and we will introduce a levy for training. In that way we will overcome the problem.

As we said, we are consulting with the union, the employers and all of those people in coming up with that package. Those negotiations are under way. We could sit on our hands and do nothing. That is what those opposite would do. I hope that is not what those on the crossbenches would suggest that we do. Sitting on our hands and doing nothing would mean that 150 young Canberrans would not have jobs next year. There would be more money in the long service leave levy pool or, if Mr Berry had his way, current employees would have greater entitlements. But there would not be any new jobs. At the end of next year, when we come to some sort of agreement on training levies and long service leave levies, other things might go ahead, but in the meantime these 150 young Canberrans would not have jobs. What we are suggesting here today is a very sensible approach to meet the difficulties that are facing both the construction industry and young Canberrans right now - not in 12 months' time, not when the negotiations on the training levy can finally come to fruition, but right now. That is what this Assembly has to take into account.

Again, let me follow through on Mr Berry's comments. Mr Berry's level of hypocrisy when it comes to the level of training dollars going from 10 per cent to 40 per cent is amazing. Mr Berry himself brought in the 10 per cent. He already accepted the premise that 10 per cent of the long service leave levy could be used for training purposes.

By accepting 10 per cent, you accept that it can be used for training purposes. Increasing the 10 per cent to 40 per cent in times when youth unemployment is unacceptably high and the industry is at a low and therefore cannot really afford to employ a lot of apprentices would seem a logical extension of the 1990 position that Mr Berry and those opposite had already agreed to. Mr Berry suggests that this money is going to the MBA training fund. Mr Berry is wrong again. It is not going to the training fund; it is going to the on-site skills centre, which has a tripartite board of the MBA, the union and the Government. That is the entity that will manage this fund. It is that simple.

It is also important for those opposite, and probably more important for those on the crossbenches, to realise that this scheme is not a \$300,000 scheme. It is a \$1m scheme. If this legislation is passed, \$300,000 will come from the long service leave levy fund. The rest, though, will come from the industry - \$572,800 from employer reimbursements and \$70,000 from the MBA. We are not talking about the ACT Government plugging \$300,000 into the MBA, with nothing coming out the other end. We are talking about the long service leave fund plugging \$300,000 into a \$1m training scheme that will ensure, in that part of it, that 70 young apprentices can continue on-site training. On top of that \$300,000, as I have already explained, there will be direct funding to employers for the placement of 50 extra apprentices and funding for an additional 25 at-risk apprentices or trainees - people who might lose their jobs if we do not ensure that their employers can continue to afford them.

I come back to the bottom line. The bottom line is that if we pass this legislation we can start today - not in 12 months' time, not in two years' time - on planning for 150 jobs in Canberra. At the end of this year, when apprenticeships are being put together, those people can really look to a new approach. Mr Berry made the comment that this Government cut \$6m out of training funds.

Ms Follett: Four.

MRS CARNELL: He said \$6m about four times. That is fundamentally incorrect. This Government has spent on labour market programs exactly what the previous Government put in their forward estimates for training funds. This Assembly, in a non-partisan manner, should come to grips with the fact that we have to look at all ways we can to ensure that young people have jobs and not just at using this money at this time to give greater benefits to people who already have jobs. We simply have to focus on people without jobs, people who, if we do nothing here today, could still be without jobs.

MR MOORE (11.13): Rather than the Minister closing the debate, Mr Speaker, I will speak. It has been a very interesting morning of debate on this issue. A whole series of issues are still outstanding. A series of claims were made by Mr Berry. He has just brought around a sheet of paper which he believes illustrates his contention that the \$300,000 or so will go to the MBA through the process that the Chief Minister said.

Mr Berry: No, through the contract with the MBA.

Mrs Carnell: Through the tripartite board that manages the money.

Mr Berry: No. She said that there was no contract. There is a contract with the MBA.

Mrs Carnell: I did not say that there was no contract. I said that the money would not go to the MBA, and it will not.

MR MOORE: Mr Speaker, you can see the contention that has been raised by just raising the issue. There are questions about why we would consider legislation that will act retrospectively. This Assembly is always particularly reluctant to deal with retrospectivity. The Minister, in introducing the Bill, identified the retrospective nature of the legislation. I have just had a quick scan through his speech and, as I recall, he said something to the effect that the legislation would allow the money to be quickly used to create jobs.

That leads us to the question of whether jobs will be created by this piece of legislation or not. My contention is that no jobs will be created. Training money is to be provided and apprentices will be trained. Nobody is going to sneeze at that - it is an important issue - but will this legislation create jobs or just train people to fill jobs? I think that the latter is true. We are talking about money that trains people to fill jobs. The Chief Minister, a short while ago, said that the construction industry is very flat at the moment. Are we training people for jobs that simply do not exist? That is a very important point for us to take into account.

I am told that there will be an actuarial report on this fund in the next little while so that we will have a very clear idea of what the fund is. The Minister has told us that the board's balance sheet shows that the board had assets and total equity to the value of \$18.6m at 30 June 1995. That figure was derived by subtracting total liabilities of \$14.59m from the total assets of \$33.45m. That is how we get that figure of \$18m to \$19m that people are talking about as being available. That was over a year ago. Apparently, an actuarial report will be coming down in the next month or so, certainly before the end of the year. We have not seen a report yet, so we do not know the amount of money involved. I presume that the report will show more money, not less, because the Long Service Leave Board has been in existence longer and funds are still being put in.

Mr Berry argues strongly from the basis that he has tabled before this Assembly another piece of legislation which calls on this money. His legislation provides for an improvement in service conditions for people in the construction industry. That also has to be taken into account when we make a decision. It is a complicated set of issues, and I have been lobbied heavily by people on both sides of the fence. On the one hand, we have the Government saying that they are going to create 50 to 150 jobs, depending on who is speaking and at what time. On the other hand, we have the Opposition saying that \$300,000 is going to go directly into plugging a hole in a training scheme of the Master Builders Association.

There are still questions to be answered. As far as I am concerned, these questions have not yet been answered satisfactorily by the Chief Minister. They are questions that must be answered by Mr De Domenico. This morning, when I discussed this issue with the Chief Minister, I pointed out, as I did when I discussed it with various representatives of Canberra business, that I will make up my mind on the floor of the house; that I had not yet drawn a conclusion. That is still the case. Both sides are presenting conflicting evidence and conflicting arguments. I have not yet drawn a conclusion. I am waiting to hear the rest of the evidence before I do so.

MR STEFANIAK (Minister for Education and Training) (11.20): I have listened with interest to this debate and especially to Mr Moore's arguments. I think the bottom line is that one has to look at what the Canberra economy is like now, what the job situation is like now and what the situation for our young people is like now.

Mr Berry: You created it.

MR STEFANIAK: I do not think that is quite the case, Wayne. We had a Federal Labor government for 13 years. We had you lot in for about four years. That is certainly the pot calling the kettle black. Whilst obviously that situation is not going to continue, let us look at the here-and-now.

Mr Berry: How can you stand up there blush free? You created it. There are 4,000 fewer jobs and 3,400 more unemployed. Shame on you!

MR STEFANIAK: Mr Berry goes on about jobs. Mr Berry is always going on about jobs. He tries to lay the blame at this Government's feet. Quite clearly, Mr Berry, you need to look at yourself. Let us just concentrate on jobs.

Mr Berry: There are 3,400 extra people on the unemployment list.

MR STEFANIAK: Mr Berry says that there are 3,000 on the unemployment list.

Mr Berry: There are 4,000 fewer jobs.

MR STEFANIAK: He says that there are 4,000 fewer jobs. Mr Berry, here is your chance to do something about it. Here is your chance to create a few more jobs. Here is your chance to help people in the industry. Here is your chance to help young people especially. This will give an opportunity to 150 young people. It is all very well, Mr Berry, to say, "You got rid of 3,000 and 4,000 jobs". Here is a chance, Mr Berry, for 150 new jobs. Here is a chance to give some young people some training. Here is a chance for some young people to learn some skills, to get some on-site training. We are talking very much about Canberra's future and the future of Canberra's young persons. If we can do something practical, as this Bill seems to do, it should be given a chance.

My colleagues have indicated that the Bill has a sunset clause. Later today you will hear about some other schemes this Government has to assist people with jobs. This is an important scheme that will help a number of young people into the labour market. I am absolutely amazed by Mr Berry. I am not really amazed by his blinkered approach,

but I am amazed that he has taken an approach which unfortunately will only hurt young people. Mr Moore, perhaps the most important thing for you to do is to ask yourself whether some people, especially young people, who might otherwise not have an opportunity to get a job are going to benefit from this. Quite clearly, the question has to be answered in the affirmative. Yes, they are. It is quite clear that the money is not needed to pay long service leave entitlements. The other question is whether anyone is going to be adversely affected by this. Quite clearly, the answer is no. When you look at it as simply as that - and I think you can in a situation like this - quite clearly, this Bill is one worth supporting.

MS TUCKER (11.23): Mr Speaker, the Greens have given this Bill great consideration because there are obviously a number of different agendas running here. What Mr De Domenico is doing is, firstly, asking the Assembly to approve an increase in the proportion of employer long service leave contributions which are transferred to the Construction Industry Training Fund from 10 per cent to 40 per cent. This transfer is to be retrospective from the start of this year. The second thing Mr De Domenico is asking the Assembly to endorse is the abolition of this fund at the end of 1997.

I am aware that there is a considerable amount of history from the last Assembly on the issue, and the question of an appropriate strategy for funding training in the industry has been particularly problematic. There seems to be general agreement now that a longer-term strategy needs to be put in place for the financing of training in the industry. It was only in 1994 that a proposal to establish a Construction Industry Training Fund was knocked back by this Assembly. At that time it was argued by the then Liberal Opposition and the Independents that additional money for training was not necessary. Now there is not enough money for training, and the Minister is spending considerable time discussing how there is a real shortage of training and skills development and how demand for training outstrips supply.

The Long Service Leave Board has accumulated substantial assets. It is not appropriate that these funds be used for the longer-term training needs of industry. This is something Mr De Domenico acknowledged in his presentation. There seems to be a matter of principle about whom the money belongs to. Sure, the one per cent levy is paid by the employers, but it must be seen as part of the overall package of benefits that accrue to workers. It is rather curious then, given the emphasis that is put on skills shortages and the need for training, that the Construction Industry Training Fund is being abolished by this Bill before any proposals for alternative financing arrangements for training are presented to the Assembly and before the industry has formally agreed to any specific proposals.

Clearly, there are a number of issues that have to be sorted out. The Greens support in principle the notion that money should not be diverted from the Long Service Leave Board into training, and we encourage the Minister in his efforts to gain support across the industry for some sort of training levy. We believe it would be appropriate for him to bring any new proposals, together with the proposal to abolish the 10 per cent levy from the fund, to the Assembly. It might be superficially appealing to throw this money into

the Construction Industry Training Fund, but the proposal before us cannot be looked at in isolation from the longer-term training needs of the industry. There is a real risk in financing a short-term fix to training needs before any long-term strategies are in place for either training or job creation.

As for the issue of increasing the funds available to the Construction Industry Training Fund, we believe there are a number of issues that need sorting out also. Although there is some benefit in the skills centre proposal, whether it really will generate 50 new jobs appears to be questionable, and what happens at the end of next year has not been addressed. It is also concerning that, although the Long Service Leave Board does not have a formal statutory role in how employer long service leave contributions are spent, they are not happy with the way the Government has acted. That is another reason why we believe this Bill is premature and needs looking at again with all the parties, not just one or two.

The Greens will oppose this Bill today, for the reasons I have just given, but we would look very favourably on some longer-term strategies for training in the industry. The actuarial report on the Long Service Leave Board has raised a number of concerns about the way the training levy is used, especially big equity issues about who can access the fund. It is obviously of critical importance that these issues be addressed, hopefully in a more cooperative way than has happened so far. If this Bill is not passed today, we would welcome the opportunity to look at it again at a later time when these issues have had a chance to be addressed in more detail.

MR OSBORNE (11.27): I would have to say that it all sounds very attractive; but, for me, some very worrying issues have been raised today, and I feel they need to be addressed before I could be comfortable in voting on this issue. That being the case, I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ARTIFICIAL CONCEPTION (AMENDMENT) BILL 1996

Debate resumed from 27 August 1996, on motion by **Mrs Carnell**:

That this Bill be agreed to in principle.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Stefaniak**) adjourned.

LEGISLATION (REPUBLICATION) BILL 1996

Debate resumed from 16 May 1996, on motion by **Mr Humphries**:

That this Bill be agreed to in principle.

MS FOLLETT (11.28): When I first saw this Bill tabled in the Assembly, Mr Speaker, I got quite excited, thinking that it was something to do with bringing on the republic. I think it might have just been wishful thinking on my part.

MR SPEAKER: I am glad it was, Ms Follett. I was concerned myself, actually.

MS FOLLETT: I thought there may have been a few overnight conversions in the conservative ranks. Mr Speaker, when I came to examine the Bill, those hopes were dashed. I had a further thought about whether “republication” was the right word to use. It is not a word that I was particularly familiar with. When I read the Bill, I thought the word used should have been “republishing” or some other word that more closely suggested what the Bill was about. However, I did some research in the library and I discovered that the word “republication” is virtually a technical term. It refers in a technical way to either religious or legal tenets which are being restated, so I guess it is the correct term technically. I think it is a bit of a shame that it does not actually convey what the Bill is about to perhaps the majority of people. Nevertheless, I do not propose to move an amendment to the title.

The Bill will be supported by the Opposition. I support the thrust of this Bill. I understand that the work towards the production of this legislation was started by the Scrutiny of Bills Committee back in 1993 when they saw similar provisions in operation in the Queensland Parliament. The Bill provides a mechanism for the laws to be republished with editorial and stylistic amendments. In particular, the effect of the Bill, as Mr Humphries has said, is to facilitate a less cumbersome means of statute law revision to avoid the cost of printing large Bills effecting purely technical or formal changes for consideration by the Assembly. It is expected also to speed up the revision and modernisation of legislation and to improve accessibility to, and the readability of, legislation through clearer language, shortening and simplification and improved style of presentation. I think it is on that last objective of the Bill where, as I have explained, I think the title of the Bill might fall down to a certain extent.

I think it is necessary that we have this legislation, particularly in view of the number of Statute Law Revision Bills which have been through this Assembly, often on relatively minor matters. I know from experience that it can sometimes be in the Government’s best interests to have a few Bills on statute law revision up their sleeve to pad out an otherwise rather scanty Assembly agenda, just as they trot out a series of motor traffic amendments from time to time as well. I think it is a courageous step that Mr Humphries has taken to do himself out of that little method of padding out Government business.

I think it is also very important that the publishing of our legislation keep pace with modern technology. I am aware that this republication Bill will make it easier for electronic publishing of laws to occur, either within the Territory or outside of the Territory. I think it is important that we continue to advance our use of modern technology for legislation.

The Bill will allow for things like the removal of sexist language, the simplification of expression, renumbering and so on to occur without reference back to the Assembly. I think that is an absolutely commonsense approach to the revision of legislation, but I also think that it does impose some additional responsibilities upon the people who make the drafting amendments, I presume the parliamentary counsel. We do expect that those drafters will pay absolutely scrupulous attention to whether the amendments that they are proposing to make without reference back to the Assembly are in fact amendments purely of an editorial or renumbering nature or whether they may have some policy or other implication which may change the nature of the legislation. I would remind the Assembly that we recently had enormous controversy, in fact I believe a court case, involving the use of a comma or the failure to use a comma in a particular piece of legislation. Clearly, if the drafters are to be going to make those kinds of amendments without their having public scrutiny, then they will have to exercise that responsibility in a way that is extremely careful in attention to detail.

To conclude, the Opposition will be supporting the Bill. I hope that it does mean much clearer legislation and, of course, much greater access to legislation by our community generally. I think that we will have to monitor the use of the republication laws over the next couple of years to make an assessment as to whether they have in fact worked to the benefit of our community and not just to the benefit of the Assembly, which will of course get far fewer Statute Law Revision Bills for its consideration.

MR MOORE (11.35): Ms Follett is indeed right in drawing attention to the irony that the whole intention and drive behind this Bill is to improve accessibility to, and readability of, legislation through clearer language, shortening and simplification, and improved style of presentation; yet it is called the Legislation (Republication) Bill, which is clearly going to cause some confusion for people when they look at the piece of legislation. Ms Follett also points out correctly that the Bill is the result of an initiative of the Scrutiny of Bills Committee - I think an important initiative which goes back some years - but that does not take away credit from the Minister. He raises his eyebrows, so he may well take issue with that. I think there is a role for the Scrutiny of Bills Committee where this legislation is used, where there are situations where legislation has been clarified, where modifications have been made of the limited types that are proposed in this Bill - in other words, not to the substance of the legislation but to its style, presentation and use of language. In that case, I think it is appropriate that the Scrutiny of Bills Committee, under the chairpersonship of Ms Follett, look at that with great care and ensure that where it has been done there are no substantive changes to legislation that, I suppose, would be possible with this Bill.

One thing that eases my mind is the care with which parliamentary counsel always operate. When we give drafting instructions to parliamentary counsel, they invariably raise with us a series of issues or problems about changing legislation. We know the care that they take, but the reality is that the responsibility for legislation still lies fairly and

squarely in this house. Whilst this is in many ways a minor piece of legislation, there is a very minor shift in the way we operate. Effectively, there is a delegation of power to parliamentary counsel. I think it is an appropriate delegation of power but one that certainly does require monitoring of how it is used. I hope that the Scrutiny of Bills Committee in a year or so will take the time and effort to look at this particular piece of legislation and say, "How has it operated over the previous year? What changes have been implemented and what has been their impact?". The reason I am happy to support this legislation is that I believe it will be positive. Nevertheless, since it is the responsibility of this house, it is an important issue that does need to be dealt with carefully.

MR HUMPHRIES (Attorney-General) (11.39), in reply: Mr Speaker, I thank members for their support for this piece of legislation. I note the concern about the title of it. Perhaps some other title might have been more appropriate. Mrs Carnell likes the title, so someone likes the title at least.

Ms Follett: Up the republic!

MR HUMPHRIES: That was not the intention, Mr Speaker. Members can fantasise about these names if they want to, but this is as close as I think we are going to get to a republic, so I am quite happy to sponsor this very small step. This is a significant piece of legislation because it frees the time of this Assembly from things which I think are of less importance to allow us to concentrate on things that are of more importance. In fact, I dare say that of all the Statute Law Revision Bills that have been presented in this house there would probably not be one which has been read from cover to cover by any member of this place. Perhaps someone will jump to their feet and indignantly say, "No, I read No. 6 of 1992" or something.

Mr Moore: I may have missed some, but I have read them from cover to cover, you bet.

MR HUMPHRIES: Mr Moore assures me that he has read them from cover to cover. He obviously has too little to do on the crossbenches. For the most part, those Bills are mechanical devices. They are designed to fix up purely typographical, stylistic, formatting or related matters in legislation and they ought not to occupy the time or incur the other costs associated with the operation of this house in dealing with them. I hope that this legislation will free us of those sorts of problems and allow us to concentrate on things which are more important.

Ms Follett commented that this is the loss of a filler in the program. This Government eschews fillers, Ms Follett. We do not mind getting rid of them at all. Let me also make a reference to Mr Moore's comment that this was an initiative of the Scrutiny of Bills Committee. The legislation in Queensland on which this is based certainly came to the attention of the Scrutiny of Bills Committee, but at the time there was some resistance in the Assembly, and the Scrutiny of Bills Committee particularly, to picking up this idea in the Assembly. Indeed, Mr Connolly was rather opposed to the concept of a Bill like this. At least, that is what he said at the time. I am pleased that there is now support for this concept from the floor of the chamber.

I also pick up the point Ms Follett made about mistakes in drafting. Parliamentary counsel, of course, bear the responsibility of making editorial amendments to Acts. I have to indicate that it is possible that from time to time a mistake which is of more than an editorial nature may be made, or rather it is possible that a mistake that is corrected or an updating that is effected may be more than merely editorial and in fact may effect some change in policy. As Ms Follett indicated, the Tenancy Tribunal Act comma gave the Tenancy Tribunal enormous difficulty. It is possible that some change which it is not intended by the Assembly should be made might be effected in that way.

I welcome any scrutiny of this process by, for example, the Scrutiny of Bills Committee or any other members of the Assembly to make sure it operates well. I remain confident, however, that on the vast majority of occasions when this legislation operates it will be to the benefit of the process of getting on the statute books legislation which is relevant, easy to read and up to date. It will very rarely, if ever, occasion a problem for members of the Assembly. If there is such an occasion, of course, it can be remedied quickly with legislation on the floor, and I am confident that that will be the case if ever that occurs. I thank members for their support for this legislation, and I hope that it will greatly help us to focus on the important things in this chamber rather than the mechanical and less important things.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

**SCRUTINY OF BILLS AND SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION -
STANDING COMMITTEE
Report and Statement**

MS FOLLETT: Mr Speaker, I present Report No. 14 of 1996 of the Standing Committee on Scrutiny of Bills and Subordinate Legislation, and I ask for leave to make a brief statement on the report.

Leave granted.

MS FOLLETT: Report No. 14 of 1996, which I have just presented, was circulated when the Assembly was not sitting, on 12 September 1996, pursuant to the resolution of appointment of 9 March 1995. I commend the report to the Assembly.

PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT - STANDING COMMITTEE
Report on Draft Variation to the Territory Plan - Outdoor Recreation Facility

MR MOORE (11.43): Mr Speaker, I present Report No. 15 of the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment entitled "Draft Variation to the Territory Plan (No. 54): Minor Corrections Series - Outdoor Recreation Facility", together with extracts of the minutes of proceedings. Pursuant to the resolution of the Assembly of 24 August 1995, the report was circulated when the Assembly was not sitting, on 17 September 1996. I move:

That the report be noted.

In tabling this report, I will make a couple of brief comments. The report has to do with clarifying some minor anomalies in the Territory Plan that primarily have to do with recreational horse riding. I believe that the response of the committee is appropriate to this variation to the plan.

MR KAINE (11.44): I support the report coming from the committee, but there are some comments that I would like to make about it. It is interesting that this matter came before the Assembly and before the committee as part of the minor corrections series. When you look at this proposed variation, you see that in fact it makes quite major changes to the Territory Plan in terms of land usage. When I noted that there had been no written submissions to the Government or to the Planning Authority on this matter, I wondered whether people had simply skimmed over it as being a minor variation and therefore not of great importance. I read with interest in the documentation that came to the committee that there were no public submissions. The only comment in this matter came from two of the LAPACs.

It seems to me that the proposed variation makes two major changes. One is to the schedule that relates to hills, ridges and buffer area land zone uses. It includes now, as a new use, outdoor recreational facilities. These have not previously been permitted in hills, ridges and buffer areas. We are introducing a new land use for these areas previously considered to be green areas and previously considered to be not available for this kind of use. When you look at the definition of "outdoor recreational facility" for this purpose, I must say that it does exclude some of the more noxious ones like motor sport facilities. It also excludes racecourses, showgrounds, stadiums and the like. Interestingly, it does include equestrian facilities. Previously, whenever any change has been mooted in connection with land use associated with horse riding, we have had a very large public response because it is a very popular recreation and people have a real interest in the land that is available to use, even for agistment purposes.

I note by observation as I drive across the Scrivener Dam these days that what used to be a riding school is no longer a riding school. It is now just a private residence. Presumably, there are fewer facilities available than there used to be within the areas in which equestrian facilities have in the past been permitted. Yet when we open up the hills, ridges and buffer areas and make them available for equestrian facilities there is not a word from the community. I find it quite astonishing. It is one of those cases which

come up from time to time where one has to wonder whether the public consultation process has been adequate. In this case one has to wonder whether the community has been sufficiently educated and informed as to what this amendment really is about and what the impacts of it on the community will be.

I think that some aspects of this need to be recorded in the debate. We note that the draft variation is to do three things. It is to amend the definition of "Outdoor recreation facility" in Appendix VI of the Territory Plan to include "Equestrian facility" as a permissible use; secondly, to delete "Equestrian facility" as a separately defined use; and, finally, to amend the land use schedule for hills, ridges and buffer areas to provide for outdoor recreation facilities on public land - but there is a qualification to that - only when specifically provided for in a management plan under the Land Act. So there are still some constraints in some areas defined as public land.

There was one aspect that the committee particularly noted. The environmental assessment provisions of the Territory Plan which override this variation require that a mandatory preliminary assessment take place for an outdoor recreational facility with a site area of more than four hectares. Of course, that will apply also to equestrian facilities. If you want an equestrian facility that exceeds four hectares to replace one that has been done away with within the other areas of the city, then the proponent is going to be required to produce a preliminary assessment taking into account the environmental consequences of the potential land use.

What is being proposed not only materially affects the general use of hills, ridges and buffer areas, previously sacrosanct, but also allows the use of such areas for equestrian facilities. I would have thought that that would have been a matter of great interest to a quite large part of the community, yet there was no comment from the community in connection with that. It may be, of course, that those concerned with horse riding and the provision of equestrian facilities are well aware of, and well informed on, what the intent, the effects and the ramifications of this variation will be and found no problem with it. Perhaps silence in this case is assent, but one does have to wonder whether it has merely gone past by default and whether people are really not aware of the consequences or in fact of what is being done.

I would note also that, in spite of the extension of the land use in these areas, areas in the river corridors, mountains and bushlands are still not available for this purpose. There are areas of land which are not available for this extended use. I just wanted to note those points, Mr Speaker. Although this variation comes under the heading of "Territory Plan: Minor Corrections Series", it may not be as minor as it first appears to be. The committee has acted in the knowledge that nobody from the community objected, so presumably the community accepts this. That is why the committee has adopted the variation and recommended that it proceed. My only concern is that when people in time find out what the ramifications of this are they may find that they have some objections to it and it is a little bit too late for them to record them or take any action. Apart from that, Mr Speaker, I endorse the committee's report.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE TO MEMBER

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

That leave of absence from 13 October to 11 November 1996 inclusive be given to Mr Whitecross.

Sitting suspended from 11.53 am to 2.30 pm

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Retail Trading Hours

MR WHITECROSS: Mr Speaker, my question without notice is to Mr Humphries. Mr Humphries, I refer to the Trading Hours Act which you rushed through parliament in June this year allegedly for the purpose of assisting small business. Are you aware that small businesses in at least one major shopping mall have been asked to agree to an increase in core hours to include Sundays, with a commensurate increase in rent? Given that the shopping malls already trade on Sundays, do you agree that this additional impost on small business is not justified, and that shopping mall owners are taking advantage of a situation which you have created, to the disadvantage of small businesses and ultimately of consumers?

MR HUMPHRIES: Mr Speaker, I am not aware of any particular proposal to increase core hours. There has been much debate in the past about core hours in major malls. I point out that part of the process of restricting the trading hours of major supermarkets in the town centres was to make sure that malls were not able to use the opening of trading hours of those supermarkets to drive longer trading hours for the other shops in the centres.

Mr Speaker, one of the earliest and most persistent sources of calls for the Government to act on trading hours in this Territory has been the shopkeepers in major malls. They are the ones who came forward and said, "Do something about the effect that those supermarkets in those centres are having on our businesses". They felt that their businesses were being very hard done by by the invasive behaviour of those large supermarkets. Mr Speaker, it seems to me that it is appropriate for the Government to be able to do something about that problem and to deal in turn with the problems of those smaller shopkeepers.

If the centre management, as Mr Whitecross alleges, is now in the business of extending core trading hours, that is not a consequence of the Government's decision on trading hours, because the Government's decision was to reduce trading hours in those supermarkets. Why the other shops in the town centres should now expand, when the supermarkets, which are usually the hub of things that go on in those town centres, are reduced in trading hours, is something of a mystery to me. Perhaps Mr Whitecross can explain the source of his information and why he thinks this step by the Government should have that effect. I cannot see what connection there is between those two things.

MR WHITECROSS: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. Mr Humphries appears to be being rather obtuse or thick. I am not sure which. Mr Humphries, we are not talking about supermarkets; we are talking about specialty shops which are now going to be paying additional rent for hours that they used to be open anyway. These are small businesses. Will you concede that your ill-advised decision to rush Mr De Domenico's Trading Hours Bill through parliament, without public debate and without properly considering the impact on these other traders, is having adverse consequences for those small businesses and for the ACT community?

MR HUMPHRIES: I do not know what sort of supplementary question he had printed in front of him, Mr Speaker, but it did not make much sense to me. Mr Speaker, I am not being obtuse or thick. I am telling you the facts as they are. The information that has come to me from small businesses has been that they have been helped by the decision made by this Government. Mr Speaker, I had a fax the other day from the owner of a supermarket in a local centre in Canberra saying, "Well done. Stick to your guns. We were in deep trouble before the change. Our turnover is up".

Mr Berry: That is one.

Mr Whitecross: What did the other 100 say?

MR HUMPHRIES: They do not care, Mr Speaker. They could not give a damn. They could not give a damn about the people in those small centres. The local shopkeeper is doing it tough. "That is too bad", says Labor.

Mr Berry: Who said it stinks?

Mr Whitecross: What about other small businesses that pay more rent?

MR SPEAKER: Order! The question has been asked and the answer is being given. Would you please hear it in silence.

MR HUMPHRIES: That centre recorded a 5½ per cent increase in turnover in the few weeks after the trading hours changes took place. You perpetrated a myth around this town that our legislation would make no difference. To what do you attribute that, Mr Whitecross? You go out and talk to some of these small businesses, the ones you are not game to show up to. You go and talk to the small supermarkets in the local centres in this city. You ask them what they think about the trading hours legislation. I know what the answer is, and you will find out as well if you ask them.

ACTION Bus Services

MR HIRD: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Urban Services, who is responsible for transport. Just before lunch I noticed a small bus outside the public entrance of the parliament.

Mr Wood: Twenty years old. How old is it?

MR HIRD: This bus was in the ACTION colours, Mr Speaker, and it was on display for all to see. Can the Minister inform the house as to whether it represents an initiative which this Government is undertaking in giving better bus services to Canberra commuters?

Mr Berry: It is new all over - about that big.

Ms Follett: And is the bus old enough to vote?

MR DE DOMENICO: I thank Mr Hird for his question. I note that there were some interjections from some opposite about the fact that it is only - - -

MR SPEAKER: Which you will ignore.

MR DE DOMENICO: They are very good ones, Mr Speaker. They suggest that it is an old bus with new paint. That is correct, Mr Speaker. However, unlike previous governments, we are going to utilise them to the fullest. Let me begin by saying that ACTION continues to provide the best bus service in Australia. I will say that again; it continues to provide the best bus service in Australia - a fact that some members opposite and some on the crossbenches should realise and appreciate, instead of running it down all the time.

Mr Speaker, the small bus that Mr Hird referred to in his question is one of the series of small buses currently run by Totalcare which are about to be transferred across to the ACTION fleet. The Government firmly believes that by transferring the Totalcare fleet across to ACTION the bus commuters of Canberra will directly benefit. Presently, Mr Speaker, the Totalcare fleet is underutilised, and has been for a great number of years, and ACTION's expertise in bus operations, we believe, should allow for dramatic improvement in management of the Totalcare fleet. Furthermore, ACTION will investigate ways of more fully utilising the Totalcare fleet of smaller buses, including using them for off-peak services and in multiskilling the respective work forces.

This move is one of a number of initiatives that the Government will undertake to further benefit ACTION commuters. We have all heard the ranting and raving of the Opposition - certain members still rant and rave - in this place in recent weeks over the Government's alleged reduction of services and general downgrading of ACTION. What a load of rubbish, Mr Speaker! This Government is doing the exact opposite to what Mr Whitecross claimed we were doing. We are improving the overall quality of ACTION services through new services to suit our changing community needs and by making ACTION a more economically efficient and flexible public transport system.

Mr Speaker, it has been recognised nationally that ACTION has the lowest average fares of all Australian public transport operators. For most years during the 1990s fares were increased only in line with the CPI. Cash fares remained the same for adults and those eligible for concessions. A new off-peak daily ticket for adults, as you know, Mr Speaker, has been introduced for the shoppers special, allowing for unlimited travel in the off-peak periods. We have also introduced a new family day ticket for two adults and three concession passengers, which is very attractive for family groups travelling at weekends and off-peak periods. Since the introduction of the new fare schedule, commuters have been given a greater range of travel options, and general patronage levels are increasing.

Mr Berry: Nobody believes that.

MR DE DOMENICO: Listen carefully. Since the new initiatives were put forward by this Government, patronage levels have increased. They have not gone down; they have gone up. Mr Speaker, the Industry Commission benchmarking report into ACTION's performance over the last five years continues to show improvements against nearly all indicators, reflecting the impact of the budgetary strategy and associated productivity initiatives. ACTION's performance compared with other States was considered most competitive. When rated against the efficiency and effectiveness indicators, ACTION was amongst the top three performers.

Mr Speaker, this Government and ACTION will not be resting on their laurels. The Chief Minister will shortly outline a full range of initiatives in the budget to further improve ACTION, including the trial of 30-seater midi-buses, the trial of smart cards and stored value cards as an alternative to paying cash or using prepaid tickets on ACTION buses, and a sale and lease-back arrangement for the ACTION fleet. This last initiative, Mr Speaker, brings the ACT into line with a number of other jurisdictions, including New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, whose bus systems have proven far more effective since they also went down this path.

Mr Speaker, this move has received criticism from the Greens. This morning they issued a press release, once again, condemning the Government's decision and accusing us of contravening a motion passed in the Assembly on 31 May last year. That motion required the Government to bring before the Assembly any proposal to corporatise ACTION or to sell its services. Let me be clear, Mr Speaker, that the Government is not selling its bus services but rather selling assets; nor are we corporatising ACTION. We are not selling services, and we are not corporatising.

Ms Horodny, who put out the press release, suggested that we take a leaf out of Toronto's book and look at their public transport initiatives. What an amazing analogy, Ms Horodny! I did a little bit of research when I heard of this wonderful system in Toronto. She has compared Toronto with Canberra. Toronto is a city of over two million people. It has a complex transport system which includes buses, heavy and light rail systems, and an underground metro. Why would we want to emulate a transport system that is currently in decline, with reducing passenger boardings? It has had an

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almost 20 million reduction in passenger boardings in two years. It might pay to think next time, Ms Horodny, before you offer such suggestions. We have got used to Ms Horodny coming out with the first thing that comes into her head. She picked a city somewhere in the world and said, "Why don't we do it like they do it in Toronto?". No, we will not do it like they do it in Toronto because it is not working.

Mr Speaker, the Canberra commuter can look forward to an even better ACTION bus service next year as we finalise the new Network 1997. ACTION's current high level of service, coupled with the Government's budget initiatives, will ensure the long-term quality and effectiveness of ACTION for all people in the ACT. I thank Mr Hird for his question.

MR HIRD: Mr Speaker, did I understand the Minister to say that the patronage of the ACTION transport system is up? Is that correct?

MR HUMPHRIES: My advice, Mr Hird, is that that is correct.

Home Purchase Assistance Scheme

MS TUCKER: My question is for Mr Stefaniak as Minister for Housing. New loans under the ACT Housing home purchase assistance scheme were suspended earlier this year pending the outcome of a review. It is my understanding that the scheme enabled many low- to moderate-income earners in the ACT, particularly many single mothers, to escape housing poverty and that a vital feature of the scheme was that it allowed for variation in the rate of loan repayments in accordance with changes in the income of borrowers. It is also my understanding that the default rate on loans was lower in the ACT than in comparable schemes elsewhere. Could the Minister please explain the process of that review to the Assembly? It is my understanding that a consultant spent only a few weeks on it back in June and that his contact with the community sector may have been as little as one interview with ACTCOSS. Can the Minister table the report of the review? I will mention that we gave the Minister some notice of this question.

MR STEFANIAK: I thank the member for the question, Mr Speaker. I will take the last part of it first. I am advised that the consultant's report is not yet finished and is still being worked on. I am unable, Ms Horodny, to tell you exactly when that will be given to the Government. It is still not complete. That is the advice I got today.

The ACT Government has undertaken a review of its home lending program. This is an initiative that is consistent with similar reviews either under way or being contemplated by our counterparts in New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria and Queensland. The need for such a review arises from the fact that our HomeBuyer housing assistance program has not undergone a major re-evaluation of its eligibility criteria or operating basis since its implementation some five years ago. In addition, the prevailing economic and housing market conditions are very different from those prevailing at the time of the launch of HomeBuyer.

As Ms Tucker may be aware, existing market conditions confirm that housing affordability is at its highest for 10 years. Low interest rates persist. There is an oversupply of properties and we have witnessed also the entry of non-bank mortgage originators into the ACT. This all makes for a very competitive buyers market, with lenders aggressively competing for clients. I was listening to the radio - it was the ABC, of all things - one or two days ago and I heard that there was another new lender in the market which had conditions which were very similar to some of the conditions under the home lending program in terms of tenants who suddenly went out of work. There were unemployment provisions and conditions. I think one of the banks was doing that. So it is a very competitive market.

The review will address issues related to the levels of client assistance in the present economic climate and also the impact on HomeBuyer of the recently announced interest rate reductions from 10.5 to 9.25 per cent, or even less by the major banks, for their standard variable interest rate loans. No new loan applications are being accepted for the duration of the review. All the applications that were in the system prior to the announcement of the review have been assessed and, where eligible, approved. Of course, the Government is continuing to closely monitor the loans portfolio. The Government will determine future directions regarding the provision of home purchase assistance on completion of the review. Ms Tucker, I have no doubt that you will listen most intently to the Chief Minister when she brings down the budget, because there is a great good news story for low- to medium-income earners which not only will assist people into home purchase but also should do something to assist waiting lists.

MS TUCKER: I do not know whether the good news is what was referred to in the *Canberra Times* last week, but could the Minister assure the Assembly that the \$50m loans scheme said to involve loans of \$5,000 to 500 tenants, which was forecast in the *Canberra Times* this week, will not be introduced at the expense of the ACT Housing home purchase assistance scheme or its components?

MR STEFANIAK: They are different schemes, Ms Tucker. As I indicated earlier, this one is still being looked at by the consultant whose job it is to do that. There are leaks and there are leaks, and that one, I think, was a little way off. There are a few inaccuracies there. I do not want to take the Chief Minister's thunder away from her. You will hear it all very soon. Believe me, I think you will be very impressed with this scheme. I will not tell you too much about it. I do not want to preview the budget. It is a very good scheme. I will give you one little hint, though. The figure of 500 people is quite accurate, so I think you will be impressed with it.

Ministerial Conduct

MR BERRY: My question is to the Chief Minister and Minister for Health, Mrs Carnell. I have in my hand, Mr Speaker, a medicine described as “Kate Carnell’s Cough and Cold Mixture”. It was purchased this morning at the Red Hill Pharmacy in Red Hill. Mrs Carnell, is it not clearly a conflict of interest for you, as Chief Minister and as Health Minister, to market this product in this way?

MRS CARNELL: I am very happy to do an advertisement here, Mr Speaker, but I do not think it is terribly appropriate. It is actually a very good cough mixture, Mr Speaker. I think those opposite, particularly Mr Berry, are amazingly hypocritical on this thing. Those opposite come in here and say, “No expansion of poker machines. We cannot possibly allow poker machines to go into - - -

Mr Berry: Mr Speaker, relevance. I do not know what poker machines have to do with conflict of interest.

MR SPEAKER: She is coming to the point.

MRS CARNELL: This is absolutely relevant, Mr Speaker. I will get around to it. Those opposite say, “We could not possibly give hotels and taverns poker machines”. Why, Mr Speaker? Because they are in the Labor Club, Mr Speaker.

Mr Berry: Mr Speaker, all she has to do is answer. Is it a conflict of interest? Yes or no.

MR SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

MRS CARNELL: Mr Speaker, it is because they are in the Labor Club, from which those opposite get a significant amount of their funding. The point, Mr Speaker, is that, if every single activity that any of us is involved in were a conflict of interest, nobody would be able to sit in this place. If Mr Berry spoke about anything to do with the union movement he could not sit in this place, and so on. Our code of ethics requires me to have nothing to do with the day-to-day running of my business, which I do not have, Mr Speaker. One of the things I do have is an in-depth and good knowledge of small business in this city because, Mr Speaker, I have run one for most of my life. When I was elected to this place I was elected as a small business operator, and I am proud of it.

MR BERRY: I have a supplementary question. Is not your labelling of this product as “Kate Carnell’s Cough and Cold Mixture” misleading when it is registered by Nelson Laboratories in the name of “New Formula Prodelix”? Would you consider handing it over to Gary Humphries?

MRS CARNELL: Mr Speaker, it is a quite normal procedure in pharmacy, you will find, for pharmacists to choose a brand of cough mixture that they believe is a good formulation and market it in such a way. I think most pharmacies in Canberra would have a similar approach.

Public Housing

MR MOORE: Mr Speaker, my question is to Mr Stefaniak as Minister for Housing, and I think it is an appropriate question for today. I refer to your press release, Minister, of 20 September when you argued that good progress was made with the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement. At no point in your press release did you distinguish between welfare housing and public housing. Will you explain to the Assembly the difference between welfare housing and public housing, as you see it, and will you assure the Assembly that your Government will retain a commitment to public housing in the ACT?

MR STEFANIAK: Mr Speaker, I think this Government has said on numerous occasions that there will always be public and welfare housing in the ACT. Obviously, a significant portion of the Housing Trust stock is for people who are not as well off as others in the community, for people who are on pensions or part pensions, for people who have disabilities, and in many cases extreme disabilities, and for people who need special arrangements for them. Indeed, those are some of the points that were dealt with at the Housing Ministers Conference in Darwin, Mr Moore. It was a most useful conference and it was excellent to hear Senator Newman reaffirm two principles. They were that the Federal Government was committed to the principle that existing public housing tenants are protected and not disadvantaged by the reforms, and that new public housing tenants should not pay more than 25 per cent of their income in rent.

A lot of work needs to be done. There is a lot of concern in terms of a lack of complete detail, a lack of some draft papers in relation to the new Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement. I think that was unfortunate, and I and my Territory and State counterparts had some significant problems with that particularly. Accordingly, Mr Speaker, a working group of relevant officials from housing trusts and also treasuries has been set up. It is to develop further the Commonwealth proposals which have to be laid on the table. They have to be worked through because there is, naturally, considerable concern in the sector as a result, really, of a lack of detail.

Also, Mr Moore, I think some people in the media Australia-wide are going off on a lot of tangents. There is probably a lot of misinformation out there at present. I think it is very important, not only in the ACT but Australia-wide, for this issue to be progressed as quickly as possible; for the working party to develop and bring back further proposals to the next meeting of Housing Ministers and, further, to COAG. The next meeting of Housing Ministers is on 1 November. I would hope that at that meeting, Mr Moore, there will be some detail on the table, some meatier stuff which we can get our teeth into. However, that being said, I was pleased, and my counterparts were pleased, to see Jocelyn Newman reiterate those two very important principles which, I think, should go some way to alleviating some of the concerns that have been whipped up in parts of the community.

MR MOORE: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. The Minister has described welfare housing, which he has called public housing, and has not done anything that I asked. I asked him to distinguish between welfare housing and public housing. I understand that he has no understanding of the difference, which reflects very poorly on him. Having described welfare housing, will you now describe what you mean or what you understand by public housing?

MR STEFANIAK: Mr Moore, the ACT has three types of tenants. About 70 per cent of our tenants are on complete social security benefits; a remaining 19 per cent or so are on part benefits; and there are 11 per cent who pay full market rent for our houses. Those are the categories of our tenants, Mr Moore.

North Ainslie Preschool

MS FOLLETT: My question without notice is to Mr Stefaniak in his capacity as Minister for Education. Minister, will you reverse the decision that you have taken to force North Ainslie Preschool to go part time next year, and the compulsory transfer of North Ainslie's teachers, if, by the end of the school year, potential enrolments would justify a full-time program?

MR STEFANIAK: I thank the member for the question. I understand that Ms Follett might have a sensible proposal which I am happy for the department to look at. When I commented in relation to this in the press recently I indicated that the current system - Ms Follett would be well aware of it because it was used by her Government - is that enrolments are predicted and are taken. When the department has those lead times it places teachers and does all the organisation for the new school year. If she has a better suggestion we will look at it.

Ms Follett, this year the department's whip-round of the preschools and the taking of enrolments indicated that the numbers are somewhat down. I think at the latest count it was something like 130 students down, which means, naturally, a lessening of some teacher resources. I think all members would want to ensure that we did not go through the problems that were caused, I think, back in about 1989 when this Assembly first started. The Federal Government then - I think your Government might have reversed it, Ms Follett, to give you credit - wanted to close eight preschools.

It is important that resources are given where there are areas of greatest demand. Quite clearly, as I indicated in the media last week, the areas of greatest demand are in the new suburbs of Gungahlin where there is a young population. Where young families are moving in there is a greater need for preschools. Rather than close preschools, I think it is far better in some areas where the numbers are down to go to part-time preschools.

To alleviate anyone's misconception of what a part-time preschool is, saying that a preschool will go from full time to part time does not mean that the number of hours available for preschool sessions for any one child will be reduced. Each child will continue to get the same 10½ hours a week, as they do now. The term "part-time preschool" refers to a preschool that offers a full 10½-hour week program for one group of children. A full-time preschool provides two 10½-hour programs for two groups. The words "full time" refer to the fact that the teacher is full time in a program that offers preschool sessions for the two groups. I think it is important to make that distinction, Mr Speaker.

I am aware, following some comments Ms Follett made, and some other comments I saw by Ms Tucker, I think, who also has made some representations to me, that there is a question about families enrolling late. Some families come in only at the end of the year. The system is the system you had. The department has to do its planning. It has to work out what it needs to do, with reasonable lead-up times for the new year. That has been done. That was done at the end of August. I reiterate, Ms Follett, that if you have any other suggestions I am delighted to have a look at them and see whether there is any way that can be improved. I think it is important that families of preschool students realise that they certainly should register in August where they want to go, because that certainly does assist with planning by the department.

I have heard - I think this might relate to the North Ainslie area - that the Department of Defence might have some people coming in. Just as the Education Department needs lead-up time before people are posted, I would hope that the Defence Department would know of its intention to post certain people. For example, Warrant Officer Bloggs and his two preschool-age children and Captain Mary Smith and her one preschool-age child might well be posted to Canberra, and they could be going into quarters in Ainslie. I would hope that other departments might be able to assist in that regard. Ms Follett, I simply reiterate that if you have any ideas on how the system can be improved, in view of those difficulties that the department does have, I would be happy to look at them.

MS FOLLETT: I know I am pushing my luck with a supplementary question, Mr Speaker, but I will ask it anyway. The Minister mentioned that enrolments were down. Minister, will you instruct preschools to reopen their books for enrolments if, as has happened in at least one preschool, they have been advising potential enrolments that they cannot be accommodated for the coming year because that preschool is to go part time?

MR STEFANIAK: As I indicated, Ms Follett, if you have some further suggestion I would be happy to take it on board and see whether that is possible. The current system is that, if the number enrolled is a certain amount at the end of August and there is a preschool in the adjacent suburb which is full time, overflows can be picked up. Ms Follett, if you have any definitive suggestions, I am happy to put them to my department.

MR SPEAKER: It being 3.00 pm, in accordance with the resolution agreed to earlier this day, I call upon the Treasurer, Mrs Carnell.

APPROPRIATION BILL 1996-97

MRS CARNELL (Chief Minister and Treasurer) (3.00): I present the Appropriation Bill 1996-97, together with the explanatory memorandum and associated budget papers. Later this afternoon I will be presenting the ownership agreements and the purchase agreements related to my portfolio. Other Ministers will also be presenting purchase agreements relating to their portfolios.

Title read by Clerk.

MRS CARNELL: I move:

That this Bill be agreed to in principle.

Mr Speaker, the budget I present today has been framed in extremely difficult circumstances. Canberra's biggest employer, the Commonwealth, is shedding thousands of jobs. As a result, unemployment is rising, business confidence is low and population growth has stalled. At the same time, the resources available to my Government are under more pressure than ever before. The demand for services is rising at a time when our capacity to meet higher demand is severely constrained by limited sources of revenue.

Under these difficult circumstances, I am extremely proud of the budget we have put together. It is not so much a tough budget as a budget for tough times. It represents prudent financial management and leadership at a time of great economic challenge. This is a budget that delivers a cash surplus. It is a budget that will not require any new borrowings. In fact, it is a budget that repays debt. It is a budget that maintains and improves services to our community. Election commitments have been delivered in health and education, while spending has been increased in areas where it is most needed. But, most of all, this budget is about jobs, because right now that is what Canberrans need most. It is about creating new investment, new jobs and renewed confidence in the future of the ACT.

The budget papers I present today include a major statement on employment and economic revitalisation entitled "Jobs for Canberra". It outlines initiatives that will generate an estimated 2,700 new jobs in Canberra in both the public and private sectors and a further 3,000 training opportunities. That figure does not include jobs generated by our capital works program, which supports an estimated 1,500 jobs. The value of our new capital works program in this budget represents a 40 per cent increase on the money spent last financial year.

Mr Speaker, a year ago I came into this Assembly and announced a three-year budget strategy designed to put the management of this Territory back on track. Back then, I made it clear that this was a strategy that had nothing to do with politics and everything to do with reality. My second budget is no different. It is based on cold, hard reality - the reality that this Territory is facing its greatest challenge in almost two decades, and the realisation that from now on, whether we like it or not, the ACT is going to have to stand on its own two feet. In the past seven years, since the advent of self-government, successive Federal governments have shown that their commitment to Canberra is hollow.

We have all learnt the painful lesson that this city and its economy have been too reliant upon the Commonwealth to generate growth and employment. In the past few months we have been forced to reassess fundamentally our priorities to take account of this changed political and economic environment, but we have done this in a financially responsible way. This budget is the product of a government that is determined to see our city finally realise its potential as a great place in which to live, to bring up a family, and to do business.

The ACT is experiencing its worst economic downturn for more than a decade. Uncertainty surrounding the Federal election and the Commonwealth's decision to reduce the size and expenditure of its agencies in Canberra have flowed through to reduced investment and consumption in 1995-96. Put simply, the confidence that many Canberrans had in their city and the confidence that others have had in our future has been dramatically shaken. Low economic growth resulted in a shortfall of more than \$20m in taxes and charges collected in 1995-96. While the extent of the impact of Commonwealth cutbacks upon the ACT economy is far from clear, it is estimated that this year alone 3,500 jobs will be lost in the Australian public sector. These across-the-board reductions will affect Canberra more than any other city because the Commonwealth is by far our largest employer.

Highlighting the need for strategies to generate employment growth, the ACT's unemployment rate reached 8.9 per cent last month. This is the highest unemployment rate on record in the ACT and the first time in more than a decade that the rate in Canberra has exceeded the national average. After strong employment growth in the first eight months of this Government's term, when more than 6,800 new full- and part-time jobs were created, total employment in the ACT has been falling since speculation about a looming Federal election began to have a dampening effect on the ACT economy. In summary, the major issue facing this Government and the community is meeting the challenge posed by rising unemployment and low growth.

The task of framing this budget has not been made easier by further reductions in Commonwealth funding this year. Total general purpose funding was reduced by \$13m, to more than 3 per cent below that received in 1995-96. The ACT has also been required to contribute a further \$10.4m as its share of payments by all States and Territories towards reducing the record deficit that was the legacy of the former Keating Labor Government. For the first time since self-government, the Commonwealth decided not to grant the ACT any additional special revenue assistance. It is worth noting, however, that although transitional funding is due to end in 1997-98 the new Federal Government has agreed to have the Commonwealth Grants Commission consider extending this beyond its original eight-year timetable.

Reduced Federal funding, large scale redundancies in the Australian Public Service, and reductions in revenue in the ACT due to lower levels of economic activity have all caused this Government to reassess fundamentally its financial relationship with the Commonwealth. In this context, I have already approached the Prime Minister and sought his support for the formation of a joint task force to examine the payment of ACT taxes and charges by Commonwealth agencies. Put simply, the Commonwealth is not paying its way in Canberra and we can no longer afford to give it a free ride.

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The development of a more transparent taxation regime is a key financial priority, and I will continue to keep the Assembly informed about progress in resolving the anomalies that currently exist. Delays in receiving specific purpose payments that the ACT will receive from the Commonwealth this year have also made the task of finalising this budget more difficult.

This Government was elected with a commitment to regaining control over the Territory's escalating debt without reducing services to the Canberra community. The financial outcome for 1995-96 demonstrated just that. Despite the significant deterioration in revenue that occurred in the final six months, the deficit position for the general government sector was \$30m, almost \$15m lower than the original budget estimate. This result, achieved under difficult circumstances, showed that we are well placed to achieve our objectives of reduced debt, cash surpluses and better services for all Canberrans. The budget I am bringing down today will further reinforce this approach.

The ACT is leading Australia in budget management and financial accountability. The financial management reforms we have introduced have achieved what taxpayers and governments alike have always wanted to know: What their services really cost and what they are getting for their money. This budget is the first to be presented by any Australian government in such a comprehensive accrual format. With our financial management reforms, we have achieved in one year what the previous Government promised for four years but could never deliver.

This budget goes beyond the Federal Government's charter of budget honesty. No longer does the Territory focus on inputs, that is, things like salaries, stationery and cars, as measures of performance. Instead, we have moved to outputs, which are the goods and services the Government buys to achieve better outcomes on behalf of all Canberrans. We have introduced the concept of government as a purchaser of goods and services on behalf of the community. Our agencies are recognised as providers of services, so appropriations are, in effect, the price the Territory is prepared to pay for goods and services produced. These and other reforms will, for the first time, give managers the ability to make informed decisions about how the Territory's scarce resources are being employed. Last year, our budget papers provided a level of accountability that was previously unheard of in the ACT. This year, our output statements and other supporting documents have demonstrated that we are committed to open, transparent government and independent scrutiny of our performance and our finances. As well as our "Jobs for Canberra" statement, we have again produced a special budget paper which provides a summary of where your money is being spent and why.

The budget I present today unashamedly reflects this Government's utter determination to bring the Territory's economy back to life. It is about employment, economic growth and urban revitalisation. This budget will create new jobs in the ACT Public Service and provide for numerous apprenticeship and training opportunities. We have also committed significant resources to boost the housing and construction industry and the private sector more generally. We have taken a conscious decision that it must be this Government that takes the lead in restoring confidence in our future. Against this background, we will achieve this without having to borrow and, at the same time, generate a modest cash surplus of approximately \$10m. It will also enable us to retire approximately \$15m worth of existing debt.

I will turn now to some specific initiatives. The future of the ACT is in the hands of our youth. We are committed to providing new jobs and training opportunities for young people looking for work and for those who are still at school or college who need training now. The labour market in the ACT is struggling to come to grips with the reforms flowing from the restructure of the Australian Public Service. It is essential, therefore, that we have in place a strategy to rebuild confidence in our economy, provide leadership to the private sector and increased opportunities for youth at a time when higher education is under pressure. This budget does just that. It provides new job opportunities within the ACT Public Service, training and apprenticeship opportunities that are supported and sponsored by the Government, and private sector opportunities arising from Government initiatives. The whole basis of our strategy is to maximise employment and training within the private and public sectors at a time of economic downturn.

A major feature of this budget is the generation of a range of employment initiatives which will have the effect of producing 270 new permanent and temporary jobs where they are needed most within our Public Service. In addition, more than 2,000 private sector employment opportunities will be generated through the initiatives detailed in this budget.

Mr Moore: Pull the other leg. Come on!

Mr Whitecross: It is written there, but that does not mean it is true.

MRS CARNELL: It is interesting that those opposite do not seem to like that. As part of this Government's determination to reduce our city's graffiti problem and clean up Canberra, \$700,000 funding has been allocated to the creation of 60 part-time positions for an expanded graffiti removal program.

Mr Berry: We saw what you did last year. We are experienced Carnell watchers, remember.

MRS CARNELL: Mr Berry might be interested to know that that is on top of what we did last year - as well as. To be staffed by young unemployed people, this program will offer them a chance to increase their skills by working as part of a team in carrying out this maintenance work. Traineeships will be offered by the Department of Urban Services for an Aboriginal worker, two general park workers and two trainee rangers, at a cost of \$170,000. These five positions will provide practical training experience for two specialist science staff seeking work in forestry and national parks management, and also on-the-job experience and relevant CIT training for two recent school leavers. An additional three places will be offered this year in the graduate administrative assistant program in the Public Service. This will bring to 26 the number of graduate placements available across all agencies, at a cost of more than \$700,000.

This budget also provides for a whole-of-government approach to employment and training of entry level recruits into the ACT Public Service. A total of 34 permanent trainee positions will be made available within the ACT Public Service in this financial year, at a cost of \$450,000. In addition, 12 apprenticeships will be offered in the Department of Urban Services and ACTEW, at an estimated cost of \$130,000.

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The Government has also decided to provide subsidised funding arrangements for 50 temporary traineeships for up to 12 months for long-term unemployed youth. Priority for these places will be given to teenagers who have been unemployed for more than six months. As part of the recently concluded enterprise bargaining agreement, the Department of Education is to introduce a new teaching classification to target the recruitment of teachers who have recently completed their training. It is expected that 50 teaching positions will be filled from new graduates.

I am announcing today the creation of a new program to assist elite sportspersons to establish a career within the Public Service and also remain competitive in their chosen sport. Ten positions have been created under the sports enhancement program, which will be linked to the Olympic job opportunities program managed in the ACT by Ernst and Young. The program will be available to new or existing Public Service staff and will provide them with an opportunity for more flexible working arrangements to accommodate training times and extended competition.

A new program will commence shortly to provide better opportunities for excess employees or those who are injured and unable to return to their previous position in the ACT Public Service. It is called the help program, and employees will be given the opportunity to undertake work placements with non-government employers, providing direct experience and new skills which will enhance their prospects for retention in the work force. The Government will also continue the women in the work force development scheme to provide six months of employment and training within the Public Service for disadvantaged women seeking re-entry into the work force. Funding of \$140,000 has been made available for 12 participants.

The ACT Government will continue to work with the private sector to support and promote a range of training and labour market programs which will develop skills, give young Canberrans real experience, and promote real job opportunities. Our commitment to this area is clearly demonstrated in the recent joint venture agreement signed between the Government and Unisys Australia. This project will eventually lead to more than 1,000 high-technology jobs right here. Through a partnership with CIT, local computer programmers and analysts will receive training and certification in the work required to prepare computer and data systems for the changes required to dating systems prior to the year 2000. This project has already enhanced Canberra's reputation as a centre for high technology and has helped to further diversify our economic base.

The agreement with Unisys is only one of many initiatives this Government is pursuing. Amendments to the Long Service Leave (Building and Construction Industry) Act, which we have already tabled in the Assembly and which were semidebated this morning, will provide additional funds to support a new package of employment and training proposals. This package will result in placements for an additional 50 apprentices and trainees in the building and construction industry. The Government has allocated \$290,000 for funding projects under the annual employment grants program. It is anticipated that 300 unemployed people will benefit from the training programs funded under this scheme.

The Government has also decided to double expenditure to \$116,000 to provide for two additional courses under the new future in small business program. This program provides older unemployed people who have been retrenched or made redundant with an opportunity to establish themselves in a successful small business. A total of 64 people will now be able to take advantage of this program, which includes five intensive weeks of training, business experience placement, and 12 months' mentoring support. Additional funding of \$34,000 has been allocated to service Canberra's three open access centres, which enable people who are unemployed to access resources needed to update their resumes or improve keyboard skills. It is anticipated that more than 1,100 clients will use these centres in Belconnen, Tuggeranong and Civic. The centres will now receive total funding of \$200,000. Funding of \$165,000 will again be provided to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry for management of the Youth Joblink program. The target for this financial year is the creation of 150 new positions. The Government is also assessing expressions of interest from organisations seeking to operate a casual job placement service. A total of \$60,000 has been offered as seed funding in this budget.

Mr Speaker, the ACT is at the forefront in Australia in offering apprenticeships to Canberra's school students. The Government is committed to enhancing training opportunities for students. We will continue to work with industry to maximise the relevance and opportunity for training while at school. This year, the ACT will receive more than \$400,000 additional funding for formal vocational education and training in schools. What this means is that by the end of 1998 more than a quarter of school leavers in the ACT will have skills that will be recognised by local employers. In 1996, more than 1,000 senior secondary students are undertaking training that will gain them a qualification recognised by industry nationally. The number of students who will leave school with training qualifications in 1997 will double.

Up to 800 additional places, representing more than 140,000 student contact hours, will be funded in 1996-97 in training institutions and workplaces in the ACT by the Australian National Training Authority. Many of the training places will be in courses in the Canberra Institute of Technology, covering areas as diverse as health, community services, business, the arts and clerical skills. Additional places will also be funded in information technology and in the tourism and hospitality industry.

As part of the Government's determination to get this Territory moving, I am announcing today a major new home buyers assistance program called Kick Start.

Mr Hird: Good news.

MRS CARNELL: It is good news. In fact, this is very exciting. This scheme will provide increased opportunity for public housing tenants to buy a home, while at the same time providing a significant stimulus to the ACT building industry. Assistance of \$5,000 will be available for 500 approved public housing tenants each year, which will help them to meet the requirements for a 5 per cent deposit. The Kick Start scheme will be run in conjunction with two major mortgage lenders, who will offer a concessional rate of

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interest in the first year of 6.95 per cent. To be eligible, applicants must have a household income below \$45,000. Eligible applicants will also be exempt from stamp duty - a further saving of \$2,000 - and may also receive concessions on other start-up expenses. The total cost to the budget of Kick Start will be \$5m over two years, and the building industry has indicated that it could provide up to 1,000 jobs in that sector.

To support our employment strategy, there must be an economic climate that is conducive to investment and growth. The Government will therefore be maintaining assistance to the private sector by extending the business incentive scheme, improving advisory services to small and medium enterprises, and for the first time establishing a business development fund. In 1995-96, benefits totalling \$1.6m were provided under the ACT business incentive scheme to assist the development and relocation to the ACT of new enterprises. This assistance resulted in \$8m of investment by the private sector, support for 180 jobs and potentially an additional 270 jobs. It is estimated that a further 200 direct and indirect jobs will be created from this program, which this year will be allocated \$710,000 for direct grants to new applicants.

I can also announce today that a \$2m business development fund is to be established in the ACT to provide financing for small- to medium-sized Canberra businesses that are seeking to develop. Discussions are under way with several major private sector firms about contributing to this fund, which will encourage increased investment and employment opportunities within the Territory.

Mr Berry: "Discussions are under way".

Ms McRae: "Don't you think it is a good idea?".

MRS CARNELL: It is interesting. They think it is. The Government has also recently agreed to provide accommodation in Wanniasa to house Canberra's third business incubator and service Tuggeranong's growing small business community. The incubator will be operated by the Canberra Business Centre from the former John Knight Hostel in Wanniasa, together with its two existing centres in Kingston and Downer.

The Deputy Chief Minister will soon be launching an exciting new initiative to be known as the Canberra business migration strategy. In 1996-97, it is estimated that 74,000 migrants will enter Australia. Approximately 7,000 of these will be eligible to migrate under the business skills program. The strategy the Government will be unveiling is designed to increase the number of business migrants who settle in the ACT and contribute to our economic growth. Assistance will include access to our business incentive schemes, measures to enable migrants to meet the investment criteria, the creation of a register of business and investment opportunities, and access to a network of mentors who could provide support to migrants and their families. The Department of Business, the Arts, Sport and Tourism is to become much more focused on providing services which will attract this investment and also support other economic activities such as opportunities associated with the Sydney Olympics and the 2001 Centenary of Federation.

As from 1 January next year, ACT Tourism will become a statutory corporation. The role of the new corporation will include responsibility for events and festivals funding and management, with a capacity to enter into joint ventures with the private sector. This will better position Canberra Tourism Corporation to compete with similar organisations in other States for a larger share of the tourism market and allow it to enter into commercially oriented arrangements. This year, Canberra Tourism's advertising campaign will focus on the key domestic markets of Sydney and regional New South Wales. The campaign, based on the "most talked about city" theme, will include cinema advertising in Sydney and television advertising in regional areas, with the objective of increasing visitor numbers from 1.6 million to 1.7 million, thereby injecting an additional \$20m into the Territory's economy. As part of our intention to enhance transport services and links within the ACT and the surrounding region, the Government will continue to pursue vigorously a high-speed rail link with Sydney and support the upgrading of Canberra Airport to international status.

This Government has taken the lead in recognising that sport for Canberra is big business. In 1996-97 we will continue our aggressive approach to securing Olympic involvement for the Territory, targeting soccer for Bruce Stadium, the possible inclusion of futsal for the year 2000, and training opportunities for elite athletes and Olympic squads from around the world. Over the next 18 months, Canberra will also host several national and international events, including the Sixth Australian Masters Games, men's and women's international futsal five-a-side soccer tournaments, and the FAI Canberra rally, which will soon become a round of the prestigious Asia-Pacific championships.

This Government is committed to simplifying and streamlining planning and approvals as a critical part of our drive to stimulate economic development and create more jobs. New integrated development approval processes that were introduced on 1 July have already had a remarkable effect in reducing turnaround times and cutting red tape. The average time for assessments to be completed has been reduced from between 36 and 43 weeks, under the old system, to just six to nine weeks for new applications. This is but one example of the can-do approach we have brought to government. The Government will be introducing legislation in the next sitting to amend the Land (Planning and Environment) Act, as proposed in our response to the Stein report. The amendments to be put forward will further improve the processes and timeframes under which development applications are made and considered.

In a move to further stimulate development and job creation, I can announce today that we are moving to amend the regulations to provide for the payment of a change of use rights charge, formerly betterment, at the rate of 75 per cent of the added value arising from an amendment to a lease. In addition, I have written to the Federal Government and requested that it consider amending the self-government Act, which would then enable this Assembly to provide for the automatic renewal of residential and commercial leases under the Land Act. The Government has commissioned a senior academic at the Australian National University to undertake a study of the impact that the change of use rights charge has on investment and also the impact of automatic lease renewal. It is this Government's firm belief that these reforms will be extremely important in creating a more positive investment climate in Canberra, thereby helping to stimulate the economic development we know we need.

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This Government has achieved more to improve the Territory's health and community care services than any other. Our public hospitals treated more than 1,000 additional patients last year, our waiting lists for elective surgery are the lowest in almost three years, while we significantly increased resources to improve mental health and disability services in the 1995-96 budget. There is no doubt that public health services are under enormous strain in Australia as demand increases and the costs of health care spiral. In recent months, I have watched with concern the problems facing health systems in Victoria and New South Wales, where bed and funding shortages have stretched these services to breaking point. This Government will not go down that path.

I can announce today that we have increased resources for health and community care in the ACT to ensure that we retain the best possible system for the people of Canberra. In the next nine months this Government will complete the ACT hospitals redevelopment project, which will identify the Canberra Hospital as Australia's most modern and well-equipped regional teaching facility - a facility we can all be very proud of. A total of \$4m will be spent on improvements to orthopaedics and other facilities, bringing the final cost of the redevelopment project to \$172m. However, the hospital will also begin a major refurbishment program to bring the rehabilitation and aged care wards and our outpatient facilities up to the standard of other accommodation.

We have also acted to improve services for our renal dialysis clients by constructing a new integrated unit at Garran. This \$920,000 facility will replace the ageing unit at Acton Peninsula, which was allowed literally to fall apart by the previous Government. It will feature 16 dialysis stations and four home training rooms, meaning a total of 20 couches. As well, a new 15-bed independent living unit is due to open in 1997 in Garran, which will enable rehabilitation clients to develop living skills away from the hospital environment. This Government will continue to reduce waiting times for the thousands of Canberrans who need elective surgery. Not content with delivering on our election promise to reduce waiting lists by 20 per cent, we have allocated a further \$1.5m this year to target those patients who have been waiting inappropriately long periods of time for surgery. In addition, this Government has established the Territory's first hospital-in-the-home program at a total cost of more than \$600,000 this year.

I can also announce today that the ACT will have a cardio-thoracic surgery unit up and running by June next year. This is the same service that was promised by the former Labor Government back in 1992 but was never delivered. This Government has kept its promise, and Canberrans will have 2.7 million more reasons to believe that it will happen under this administration. A total of \$2.7m has been provided to fund start-up costs and capital infrastructure for the unit. The full-year cost of the unit will be higher, but this will be offset by the revenue generated from treating cross-border and private patients.

Today, I can announce that Canberra's first slow-stream convalescent ward will be established at Calvary Hospital, in line with a promise I made prior to the last election. The unit will replace the 20 nursing home beds that will be decommissioned in 1997 following the opening of Ginninderra Gardens nursing home in Page. Patients who need more time to recover from an acute illness or injury will now have a service meeting their specific needs away from an acute care environment. This Government recognises, too,

that older people who live alone will be among those who most benefit from this important addition to health facilities in Canberra. The new independent living unit and a 20-bed convalescent ward will mean that public hospital beds in the ACT will increase by more than 30 over the next two years. That is on top of the increase that has happened already. That is a far cry from the 200 beds that were cut under the previous Government.

There is no doubt that hepatitis C is fast becoming one of the most serious public health challenges facing Australia today. That is why the ACT Government will also provide an additional \$250,000 this financial year to improve the prevention and management of hepatitis C in our community. I am pleased to note that this additional funding will enable an additional 50 people to access treatment such as interferon for the management of their illness. As part of the Government's harm minimisation strategy for illicit drugs, additional funding of \$55,000 will be made available to expand the ACT methadone program by 50 places to 400. Under new arrangements to be introduced later this year, the program will be extended into community settings by involving GPs and pharmacies.

This Government has also responded to the needs of Canberra's women and families. We have expanded the community midwives program, at a total cost of \$178,000. This program, based at the birthing centre - the one that was going to close - at the Canberra Hospital, will be enhanced to provide for up to 175 women each year after the success of the current pilot project, which has looked after 60 women. Many more women will now have access to the option of community midwifery care.

As part of giving families with young children better access to community health services, a total of \$3m has also been allocated this year for the construction of three new facilities. Two additional family care centres will be built at Gungahlin and Conder to provide a comprehensive range of services to parents and children, including day stay and outreach support, baby health and immunisation clinics, and parent education programs. A new early childhood residential service will be built in Curtin to cater for families with babies and infants ranging from zero to three years. This facility is expected to open next May and will replace the ageing QEII Hospital in Civic.

This Government has again delivered on its commitment to increase the level of services available to the frail aged and people with disabilities who want to remain independent and continue to live in their own homes. The home and community care program, jointly funded by the ACT and Federal governments, is expected to receive a further \$800,000 increase this year. This additional money will augment the existing range of respite care and personal services that are available.

This year will also see the realisation of a major project to move more than a dozen younger Canberrans with disabilities who are inappropriately located in ACT nursing homes into a new, more homelike environment. A total of four community-based houses will be opened by the Government for up to 16 young Canberrans on two sites in the north and south of the city. The first of these facilities is expected to be completed by next April. On top of this, expenditure on disability services has been maintained at a record \$16m this year. Under this Government, there are now 70 Canberrans who are able to receive individual support packages totalling \$2.2m.

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Successive Territory governments have recognised that mental health services have been underresourced. Since 1992-93, direct expenditure on the Mental Health Service alone has increased by more than 30 per cent. Last year an additional \$1m was spent to maintain and improve services for people with mental illness. Today I can announce that, on top of record expenditure for mental health services of more than \$14m this year, the Government has decided to commit an extra \$250,000 to provide more support and services. We will shortly be calling tenders from non-government agencies to provide community-based accommodation support for up to 20 people with mental illnesses. A total of \$150,000 in new funds will be made available for this support to help address what is one of the key problem areas in mental health.

A further \$100,000 has been provided to employ two extra mental health nurses, who will be working out of both the Emergency Department and the psychiatric ward at the Canberra Hospital. This will enable the formation of an intensive case management team to develop closer liaison between the psychiatric unit and our Emergency Department. This team will be able to provide better treatment and support for clients who present at our Emergency Department and follow-up in the period immediately following discharge to help the transition of clients back into the community. As well, we have listened to the concerns of staff at the Belconnen Remand Centre and have made available additional funding of \$45,000 to employ a level 2 nurse to assist with the care of detainees with mental health problems.

Our commitment to health promotion and improving quality of life for all Canberrans is again evident in this budget. Healthpact, the new stand-alone Health Promotion Authority, has funding of more than \$3.1m available to it this year. This represents more than three times the level of funding that was provided in the final year of the previous Government and will enable many more sporting, artistic and community activities to be supported right across Canberra.

Funding for education has again been maintained in real terms in this budget, in line with our election promise. But we have not stopped there. This year we have taken a major step towards improving the basic skills of students across our primary and secondary sectors - a promise we also made prior to the last election. The Government has decided to establish a fund totalling \$1.2m that will be specifically targeted at expanding literacy and numeracy programs in schools. These additional resources will provide hundreds of Canberra students with greater opportunities to receive specialist assistance right now, when they most need it. It means that funding for our schools this year will, in fact, exceed the forward estimates.

In line with the Government's response to the Assembly's inquiry into voluntary contributions, a schools equity fund has been established to provide assistance to disadvantaged schools. The fund has been allocated \$110,000 in its first year - double what the Assembly was originally advised. I can also announce today that a total of \$450,000 will be injected to replace the antiquated student record keeping system, which holds all student records and provides data for Year 10 and Year 12 certificates. As part of catering for the growth of new areas in Canberra, a high school in Gungahlin will be built in time for the 1998 school year, while a new primary school will open its doors at Ngunnawal next year, together with a preschool and child-care centre.

Mr Speaker, 1 July next year will mark the introduction of mandatory reporting of child abuse in the ACT. In preparation for mandating, the Government last year funded a training package, which is now being implemented across the Territory, and also significantly boosted funding for child protection workers to assist in maintaining their case loads. As more and more professionals are trained across the ACT in this financial year, there is a possibility that resources may need to be increased prior to the introduction of mandatory reporting. I want to make it clear today that the Government will provide additional funding that may be necessary should there be any significant increase as a result of this initiative. I am pleased to announce that this budget also provides for an increase of 11 in the number of substitute care places to a total of 150 in the ACT.

The budget also signals a major change in direction for the future of public transport in the Territory. Not only will public transport be completely restructured but also the very way people access these services will change dramatically over the next 12 months. Like every government across Australia, we want to ensure that people in this city have access to an effective, affordable and integrated public transport service. The key to a better system is to be able to provide transport when it is needed and at a cost that both the passenger and the operator can afford. For this reason, over the next 12 months the Government will be embarking upon an exciting new trial that could well determine the way public transport is provided in Canberra for the next two decades. This trial will involve the use of vehicles with a seating capacity of between eight and 10 people. These vehicles will make specific journeys in response to the needs of small groups of commuters, providing pick-up at a person's home and set-down at a specific address. The trial will assess the feasibility of providing a personalised public transport system that will work in partnership with existing taxi and bus operations.

It is perhaps the oldest and most timeworn joke in this city that in Canberra most people not only get a whole seat to themselves on the ACTION bus network but also often get a whole bus to themselves. This budget takes the first steps towards finally providing a bus service that is tailored to the needs of Canberra and its passengers. In 1996-97 ACTION will begin a major restructure of its fleet to include a range of smaller buses that will be used on suburban routes and some larger buses to meet increased demand for express services. The Government will acquire 25 midi-buses that will also meet the requirements of the national disability service standards. Totalcare's fleet of 21 smaller buses, one of which you saw outside today, will be incorporated into the ACTION network. As well, a number of articulated buses will be purchased to better meet demand on the 333 route and school services network.

Eventually, we want to achieve a situation where no longer will a large bus be employed on a suburban service where higher frequency services are possible through the use of smaller buses. With this change of direction come significant improvements in the levels of customer service provided by the ACTION network. This includes the introduction of a new peak-hour network into Belconnen and Weston Creek which will provide more direct and faster travel to the interchanges and to Civic. Ticket vending machines will be introduced at interchanges, while ACTION's timetable information will be made available on the Austouch network and also on the Internet. Security measures at the Civic interchange will be improved, and work will commence this year on bus passenger facilities at the Gungahlin Town Centre.

It is a sad fact that many of the additional services this budget will deliver are to honour promises that were made but never achieved by the previous Labor Government. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the provision for a fifth ambulance crew in the ACT's south-eastern corridor. Today I can confirm that, three years after it was promised by the former Follett Government, a fifth ambulance is to begin 24-hour operations in Canberra from 1 October. This will provide the Canberra community with additional paramedics and dramatically improve emergency response times across the Territory. The cost of introducing this service is to be offset by the introduction of a \$15 annual fee on all motor vehicles. The road rescue fee will be levied in conjunction with the payment of annual registrations and all funds raised will be used solely to maintain and improve our high-quality emergency services. Following the introduction of this levy, any Canberran requiring transport by ambulance as a result of a road accident will not be charged for the service.

The Government has also delivered on its commitment to the construction of a new joint emergency services centre at Gungahlin, and I am pleased to report that the Fire Brigade estimates that all ACT Housing dwellings will be fitted with smoke alarms by 1998. Construction of the new Tuggeranong Police Station is due to commence next month, with the facility scheduled to open in late 1997 at a total cost of \$6.2m. This Government has also kept faith with its commitment to maintain funding for the Australian Federal Police operations in the ACT in real terms. Wage increases flowing from the new Federal enterprise bargaining agreements have been fully supplemented, at a cost of almost \$1m.

Members will be aware that the Government has previously announced that the future of the Belconnen Remand Centre is to be the subject of a major review. What is immediately clear, however, is that areas of the centre need to be upgraded urgently to improve the safety and general effectiveness of the facility. The Government has therefore allocated \$350,000 in this budget for essential improvements to the Belconnen Remand Centre. As noted earlier, funding of \$45,000 has been provided to employ a specialist mental health nurse.

This budget also seeks to revitalise Canberra's urban areas. In partnership with community precinct groups across the Territory, the Government will work to progressively upgrade landscapes and facilities in local areas. Already, we have allocated \$800,000 to upgrade local shopping centres at Hughes, Narrabundah and O'Connor by the end of this year. A further \$300,000 has been allocated to upgrade small parks in the vicinity of these centres. I am pleased to announce today that four new precinct groups will be established this year, in Kippax, Dickson, Charnwood and Hall, bringing to 13 the total number that have been established. As part of our strategies to revitalise local and group shopping centres across Canberra, a feasibility study is now being undertaken to examine a joint venture proposal involving the construction of residential dwellings on vacant government land near our local shopping centres.

The Government intends to establish a Canberra Development Authority to coordinate major public sector developments across the whole of the ACT Government. This will be a small central authority that will have responsibility for the promotion, management and execution of major urban revitalisation projects. This year will also see the start of work costing more than \$1m to rejuvenate the centre of Canberra. This will involve the

redesign of Civic Square and Garema Place to improve lighting and accessibility and make these areas more attractive to visitors and residents alike. The long awaited Canberra Cultural Centre will finally become a reality in early 1998. With construction also due to begin early next year, initial exhibition and public activity programs for the centre will be established. Work on the new \$7m Playhouse Theatre, a state-of-the-art facility seating 600 people, will also begin as soon as the tender process is finalised. Following extensive public consultation over the past four months, a program for the revitalisation of Charnwood is due to commence shortly. The establishment of the Gungahlin Development Authority has also marked a milestone in the construction of a town centre. Stage one is due to be completed by early 1998, and the Government will continue to ensure that all necessary infrastructure is provided to meet the growing needs of this region.

I am also pleased to report that work will begin next month on the ACT's second major skateboard and rollerblading facility in Civic, at a cost of \$300,000. The Government remains committed to funding the construction of a third rink in the Tuggeranong Town Centre in its 1997-98 capital works budget. Funding of more than \$450,000 has also been made available for improvements and tree plantings at the Point Hut District Park and Weston Park. As part of our improved public housing management strategies, this year will see the completion of the redevelopment of Ainslie Village and the revitalisation of Condamine Court. The Government will continue to press for a quick decision on the establishment of the National Museum. Funding has again been made available for further studies of the Kingston foreshore site to assess the extent of any contamination and also the investment opportunities that exist. This year will see the commencement of a design competition as the first step towards realising plans for a mixed-use waterfront development that has the potential to become the centrepiece of this city.

With high environmental standards and bushland integrated in an urban setting, Canberra continues to be one of the most attractive and clean national capitals in the world. This Government recognises, however, that complacency has no part in good environmental management and is proud of its record over the first 18 months of its term. Since our last budget, the Government has opened a new automated weather station in Tuggeranong to improve understanding of air pollution patterns in the valley; established a mandatory system for the energy rating of new dwellings; introduced domestic tip charges that have funded composting and research into worm farming; reserved 500 hectares of grassland habitat in Gungahlin for the protection of the striped legless lizard; released a 10-year strategy for controlling weeds in the Territory; and acted on the assessment, management and remediation of contaminated sites. The priority issue so far has been the assessment of former sheep dip sites. In this budget, a total of \$3.1m has been allocated for the purchase and remediation of these sites in residential areas where assessment has been completed.

This Government is proud to announce today that, since the introduction of waste disposal charges at landfills, together with kerbside recycling, there has been a reduction of 40 per cent in the waste delivered to landfills over the last three years. The quantity of material collected for recycling has more than doubled and now exceeds the amount going to landfill for disposal, which is very exciting. The Government will continue developing a strategic approach to management of our natural resources in the ACT.

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An Environment Protection Bill to be introduced later this year will bring together previously separate pieces of legislation covering air, water, noise and ozone issues into one integrated approach. The Bill will also bring the management of hazardous material under legislative control for the first time.

This year, a further \$500,000 has been allocated to continue the successful energy management program. This program reduces energy consumption in government buildings by installing automatic light controls, more efficient heating, ventilation and air-conditioning programs and replacing inefficient boiler units. A total of \$728,000 has been made available in this budget for weed control, including an additional \$150,000 for the control of woody weeds in Canberra Nature Park. I think it was because Lucy told you to.

Mr Humphries: That is right.

MRS CARNELL: I would have to say that was a good idea. The Government will be finalising the bicycle strategy in 1997. This strategy aims to create a safer on- and off-road cycling network, ensure that cycling is accepted as a legitimate road use, and more effectively target Government spending on cycling. The ACT's high-quality and extensive off-road cyclepaths total some 940 kilometres and this year the Government has allocated \$686,000 to upgrade the system. Other environmental initiatives are detailed in Budget Paper No. 3.

As part of our financial management reforms, the Government has been able for the first time to produce a statement of financial position which discloses the assets and liabilities of the Territory. The net worth of the Territory's assets is \$7 billion, or about \$23,000 for every resident of the ACT. This compares with about \$15,000 per person in Queensland and \$11,000 in New South Wales. This Government is developing a comprehensive asset management strategy which will ensure that all assets owned by the Territory's taxpayers are providing the best possible return. It places the ACT at the forefront of modern public sector management.

The Government has already sold and leased back the ACT vehicle fleet, which netted the Territory \$26m and led to savings of approximately \$200,000 a year in costs. We will now shortly be seeking to enter into a similar sale and lease-back arrangement for the Territory's public bus fleet and heavy commercial truck and major plant operated by the Department of Urban Services. Macarthur House is to be sold and leased back. The new ACT Magistrates Court will also be leased by the Government, but we will retain permanent ownership of this important building. These initiatives will free up significant capital and negate the need for any new borrowings. Indeed, they will also allow for debt to be retired this year. If anyone thinks we are selling off the family silver, consider this: Under our strategy, the planned end-of-year position for 1996-97 will now be a reduction of only \$24m in net assets, which represents less than one-third of one per cent of our total net assets.

Mr Whitecross: In case anyone thinks we are selling off the family silver, there will be fewer assets. That is very reassuring! I feel a lot better now!

Mr De Domenico: One-third of one per cent.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister, I did not hear that. Would you mind repeating it.

MRS CARNELL: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. This represents less than one-third of one per cent of our total net assets - hardly selling off the family silver. This strategy protects our AAA credit rating and our strong net asset position.

This Government is conscious of the additional burden that increased taxes and charges place on Canberra residents, particularly at a time when the Territory is weathering an economic downturn. Once again, increases in taxes and charges have been held to no more than those of New South Wales, in line with our commitment to preserve the ACT's competitiveness and attraction as a place in which to live and do business. I can confirm today, however, that the ACT Government will keep its promise to small businesses in the Territory by lifting the payroll tax threshold to \$800,000 over the next two years. What this means is that another 130 small- and medium-sized businesses will no longer be liable for payroll tax. In fact, by January 1998, all ACT businesses liable for payroll tax will be paying \$13,700 a year less than their counterparts in New South Wales.

As a direct consequence of reduced levels of Commonwealth funding and the significant decline in Territory revenues, this budget does contain a number of minor new revenue measures. From 1 October this year, stamp duty on hiring arrangements will be introduced, applying duty to arrangements where goods are hired out by an owner in the ACT. The rates of duty will be in line with those in New South Wales and other jurisdictions, that is, 0.75 per cent for equipment leasing and 1.5 per cent for other leasing arrangements. To minimise the impact of this stamp duty on small businesses, a threshold of \$6,000 a month will apply.

In line with other States and Territories, a debits tax will be introduced from 1 July next year. This will apply to withdrawals from bank accounts with cheque facilities and will be set at New South Wales rates. The Territory's rate of financial institutions duty will be correspondingly lowered to match the rate applicable in New South Wales, namely, 0.06 per cent. These adjustments to financial transactions taxes will partially address the assessment by the Commonwealth Grants Commission that the ACT is underutilising its capacity to raise revenue in this area, compared with other States. From 1 December this year a uniform rate of stamp duty on general insurance will be applied. This will increase the rate payable on motor vehicle insurance from 7 per cent to 10 per cent.

The Government has decided to introduce a cap on the general rates concession for all new eligible pensioners from 1 July next year. This decision will ensure that all existing pensioners will continue to be entitled to the benefits of the 50 per cent rebate and will provide new pensioners with sufficient time to plan their future rates payments. The cap will be set at \$250, which is in line with the New South Wales average. The option of deferment will continue to be available to all pensioners who have difficulty meeting their rates obligations. The introduction of this capping will limit the erosion of revenue in future years as our population ages, but I stress again that the entitlements of existing pensioners have been preserved.

The Government has decided to increase the licence fee payable by retailers of tobacco products from \$50 to \$100, effective from 1 September. This additional revenue of \$30,000 will be used for enhanced tobacco education programs and enforcement strategies, in keeping with our public health goal of discouraging teenagers from taking up smoking.

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, Canberra is at the crossroads. We can stand back and watch our economy and our citizens suffer the pain of Commonwealth funding reductions and redundancies without doing anything, or we can act now to restore confidence in Canberra by aggressively pursuing new investment, new industries, new jobs and new projects. This Government has taken the view that it is time Canberra stood on its own two feet and stopped relying on the Commonwealth to generate growth and wealth. We have outlined a budget strategy that will spark new business activity and generate new jobs, and we have done this without significantly increasing the burden on residents by maintaining the Territory's finances in a strong position. We will return the budget to surplus in cash terms and improve our overall bottom line by \$48m in accrued terms. There is a government now that is prepared to take the lead in getting this city moving again.

Mr Whitecross: Where?

MRS CARNELL: Right here. I have made it clear from the day I became Chief Minister that my Government and I are here to do a job, and that is not just to get re-elected in three years' time - it is actually 18 months' time now. That job is to put Canberra's finances back on track, to make the hard decisions that have been avoided since self-government, and to manage better the services that are provided. There is no question that most Canberrans have been doing it tough since the new Federal Government was elected earlier this year; but we recognise that the last thing they or the economy can afford right now is for their local government to compound the problem. That is why this Government has embarked on the path we have outlined in this budget today. I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Whitecross**) adjourned.

PAPERS

MR SPEAKER: Members, I present, for the information of members, the following papers:

ACT Legislative Assembly Secretariat - Report and financial statements,
including the Auditor-General's report, for 1995-96.

Purchase agreement between the Speaker and Clerk of the Legislative
Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory.

PURCHASE AGREEMENTS

Papers

MRS CARNELL (Chief Minister and Minister for Health and Community Care):
Mr Speaker, for the information of members, I present the following papers:

Purchase agreements between -

Chief Minister and the Chief Executive of the Chief Minister's
Department, dated September 1996; and

Minister for Health and Community Care and the Chief Executive of the
Department of Health and Community Care for 1996-97.

OWNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

Papers

MRS CARNELL (Chief Minister and Treasurer): Mr Speaker, for the information of
members, I present the following papers:

Ownership agreements between the Treasurer and the following
Chief Executives -

ACT Community Care

Chief Minister's Department, dated September 1996

Attorney-General's Department

Business, the Arts, Sport and Tourism, dated 16 September 1996

Canberra Institute of Technology

Department of Education and Training 1996-97

Department of Urban Services

Department of Health and Community Care

The Canberra Hospital.

PURCHASE AGREEMENTS

Papers

MR DE DOMENICO (Minister for Urban Services, Minister for Business, Employment and Tourism and Minister for Industrial Relations): Mr Speaker, for the information of members, I present the following papers:

Purchase agreements between -

Minister for Business, Employment and Tourism and Minister for Industrial Relations and the Chief Executive of the Department of Business, the Arts, Sport and Tourism, dated September 1996; and

Minister for Urban Services and the Chief Executive of the Department of Urban Services.

MR HUMPHRIES (Attorney-General, Minister for Arts and Heritage, Minister for the Environment, Land and Planning, and Minister for Police and Emergency Services): Mr Speaker, for the information of members, I present the following papers:

Purchase agreements between -

Minister for Arts and Heritage and the Chief Executive of the Department of Business, the Arts, Sport and Tourism, dated September 1996;

Attorney-General and the Chief Executive of the Attorney-General's Department;

Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Chief Executive of the Attorney-General's Department for the Emergency Services Bureau; and

Minister for the Environment, Land and Planning and the Chief Executive of the Department of Urban Services.

**SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION
Papers**

MR HUMPHRIES (Attorney-General): Mr Speaker, pursuant to section 6 of the Subordinate Laws Act 1989, I present subordinate legislation in accordance with the schedule of gazettal notices for determinations and instruments of appointment.

The schedule read as follows:

Gungahlin Development Authority Act - Instruments of appointments to the Gungahlin Development Authority -

No. 197 of 1996 (S228, dated 3 September 1996).

No. 198 of 1996 (S228, dated 3 September 1996).

Motor Vehicles (Dimensions and Mass) Act -

Determination of dimensions of vehicles - No. 201 of 1996 (S229, dated 10 September 1996).

Determination of amounts of mass - No. 202 of 1996 (S229, dated 10 September 1996).

Determination of fees - No. 203 of 1996 (S229, dated 10 September 1996).

Public Place Names Act - Determinations of Street Nomenclature in the Divisions of -

Ngunnawal - No. 206 of 1996 (S237, dated 16 September 1996).

Conder - No. 207 of 1996 (S237, dated 16 September 1996).

Remuneration Tribunal Act -

Determination relating to office holders of the Gungahlin Development Authority - No. 199 of 1996 (S228, dated 3 September 1996).

Determination of fees for office holders of the Gungahlin Development Authority - No. 200 of 1996 (S228, dated 3 September 1996).

Sale of Motor Vehicles Act - Determination of fees - No. 205 of 1996 (S236, dated 11 September 1996).

Trade Measurement (Administration) Act - Determination of fees and charges - No. 204 of 1996 (S236, dated 11 September 1996).

PAPERS

MR HUMPHRIES: (Attorney-General): Pursuant to section 54 of the Electoral Act 1992, I also present the report by the Augmented Electoral Commission entitled "1996 Report on the Redistribution of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly Electoral Boundaries".

For the information of members and pursuant to section 7 or 8 of the Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 1995 and other legislation listed, I present the annual reports in accordance with the list circulated in my name.

The list read as follows:

Chief Executives - section 7

Attorney-General's Department - Report for 1995-96, including financial statements and the Auditor-General's report and together with annual reports of the -

- . Administration of *Credit Act 1985*
- . Administration of the *Sale of Motor Vehicles Act 1977*
- . Community Law Reform Committee
- . Guardianship and Management of Property Tribunal
- . Mental Health Tribunal
- . Office of the Community Advocate
- . Operation of the *Freedom of Information Act 1989*
- . Parole Board
- . Tenancy Tribunal
- . Chief Coroner.

Department of Business, the Arts, Sport and Tourism - Report for 1995-96 and financial statements 1995-96 (volume 2) and the Auditor-General's report and together with the 1995-96 report, financial statement and Auditor-General report for the Agents Board for the Australian Capital Territory.

Chief Minister's Department - Report for 1995-96 including financial statements and the Auditor-General's report and together with the 1995-96 report, financial statements and the Auditor-General's report for the ACT Casino Surveillance Authority and the 1995-96 financial statements and Auditor-General's report for:

- . ACT Executive
- . ACT Borrowing and Investment Trust
- . Superannuation Provision Trust Account

and as annexes the 1995-96 reports for:

- . Registrar of Co-operative Societies
- . Commissioner for ACT Revenue
- . Commissioner for Public Administration.

Department of Education and Training and Children's, Youth and Family Services Bureau - Report for 1995-96, including financial statements and the Auditor-General's report.

Department of Urban Services - Report for 1995-96 (volume 1) and financial statements 1995-96 (volume 2) and the Auditor-General's report and annual reports for:

- . Architects Board of the ACT
- . Plumbers, Drainers and Gasfitters Board of the ACT
- . Surveyors Board of the ACT
- . Essential Services Review Committee
- . ACT Gas Authority
- . Conservator of Flora and Fauna
- . Pollution Control Authority
- . Registrar of Pesticides
- . Animal Welfare Authority
- . Canberra Cemeteries Trust, including financial statements and Auditor-General's report; and

audited unitary financial statements for:

- . ACT Transport Trust Account
- . Floriade Trust Account
- . Yarralumla Nursery Trust Account

- . Energy Research and Development Trust Account
- . ACT Fleet Trust Account
- . ACT Forests Trust Account
- . Housing and Family Services Bureau including Housing Bureau, ACT Housing and ACT Office of Rental Bonds and
- . Emergency Services Bureau.

Public Authorities - section 8

Construction Industry Long Service Leave Board - Report for 1995-96 including financial statements and the Auditor-General's report.

ACT Human Rights Office - Report for 1995-96.

Australian Capital Territory Totalizator Administration Board - Report for 1995-96 including financial statements and the Auditor-General's report, pursuant to the *Betting (Totalizator Administration) Act 1964*.

Canberra Theatre Trust - Report for 1995-96 including financial statements and the Auditor-General's report, pursuant to the *Audit Act 1989*.

Commissioner for the Environment - Report for 1995-96, pursuant to section 20 of the *Commissioner for the Environment Act 1993*.

Director of Public Prosecutions - Report for 1995-96, pursuant to section 34 of the *Director of Public Prosecutions Act 1990*.

ACT Electoral Commission - Report for 1995-96, pursuant to section 9 of the *Electoral Act 1992*.

Legal Aid Commission - Report for 1995-96, together with financial statements and the Auditor-General's report, pursuant to the *Legal Aid Act 1977*.

Milk Authority of the Australian Capital Territory - Report for 1995-96 including financial statements and the Auditor-General's report, pursuant to section 93(1) of the *Audit Act 1989*.

Public Trustee for the Australian Capital Territory - Management Report for 1995-96, together with financial statements and the Auditor-General's report.

PURCHASE AGREEMENTS
Papers

MR STEFANIAK (Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children's and Youth Services and Minister for Sport and Recreation): Mr Speaker, for the information of members, I present the following papers:

Purchase agreements between -

Minister for Education and Training and Minister for Children's and Youth Services and the Chief Executive of the Department of Education and Training 1996-97.

Minister for Education and Training and the Chief Executive and Director of the Canberra Institute of Technology; and

Minister for Sport and Recreation and the Chief Executive of the Department of Business, the Arts, Sport and Tourism, dated September 1996.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Northside Community Service

MS FOLLETT (4.14): I would like to mention today a very significant achievement by one of our premier community organisations, the Northside Community Service. Last week the Northside Community Service celebrated 20 years since their inception. I consider that it has been an extremely distinguished 20 years in terms of service to the people of our ACT community. It is a fact, Mr Speaker, that Northside have vastly increased their services and their professionalism over the course of that 20 years. The clientele of the Northside Community Service now includes older people, which they have always included, children, especially through their child-care activities, young people, victims of domestic violence and people who want to improve their spoken English. In addition to their established services to the North Canberra area, centred as they are on the Majura Centre in Dickson, Northside have forged ahead in Gungahlin. They are now reaching out to everybody in Gungahlin, Canberra's newest region.

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Mr Speaker, as an example of Northside's entrepreneurial flair - it is a truly remarkable example, in my opinion - I would ask you to look at the accounts for Northside's first year of operation where its turnover is recorded as \$2,478.29. In stark comparison, this year's accounts for the Northside Community Service show a total income of well over \$2m - an extraordinary achievement. Over the past 20 years I believe that the achievements of the Northside Community Service really are a tribute to the skill and the devotion of their very long-serving executive director, Ms Jillian Grant; to the board of Northside, who serve in an honorary capacity; to Northside staff, which has increased many times over in the 20 years of their life; and perhaps most of all to the volunteers who deliver many of the services for which the Northside Community Service are now famous. In fact, the work of those volunteers is absolutely vital to the delivery of many of those needed services.

I am very proud to have been associated with the Northside Community Service in my pre-political past, Mr Speaker. I would like to place on record my best wishes for at least another 20 years of success and of devoted service to the community by the Northside Community Service. I think that without them the quality of life for many Canberrans would be very much lower indeed.

I know that Northside have recently taken on some new projects and have done so without government funding. I hope I am not pre-empting any announcements about this but they have taken on the child-care centre at the Magistrates Court. They have taken over the child-care centre at the Canberra Centre, the large shopping centre here in town. They will also be taking on a youth project in Ngunnawal, out in Gungahlin, utilising the demountable building that has been in place at Palmerston. I think that kind of expansion, that offering of new and improved services to the community, is typical of the Northside Community Service. I wish them very well in those new ventures as well.

Mr Speaker, I would remind members that a community service like Northside in many ways delivers services to the community which are delivered by local government in other areas of Australia, so they are absolutely integral to the quality of life of Canberrans. In the Northside Community Service we truly have a service worthy to look up to, and perhaps one worthy as a model for many other organisations around Australia. I congratulate them, and I am sure that everybody in the Assembly does as well.

NSW-ACT RAMS : Brownlow Medal

MR HIRD (4.19): Mr Speaker, New South Wales-ACT RAMS last week beat the top side in the national competition, Geelong, by 11 goals to go into the grand final at the MCG this weekend. This is their first year in this competition. They are in the curtain-raiser for the AFL grand final at the MCG. By the final quarter a crowd of over 80,000 people should be watching the cream of the ACT football fraternity. They can be seen on Prime TV this Saturday at 8.10 am. All Canberrans should be proud of our team.

James Hird, as well as all Canberrans, should be proud. He is the first ACT player to win the prestigious Brownlow Medal. James started his football career with the Ainslie juniors and progressed to the seniors. He played a strong part in their many premiership victories. James follows the family tradition started by his grandfather, a former Essendon Bombers player and president of Essendon. James's father Allan, from our Education Department, also played with the Essendon Bombers. James has made the Hird family and the Canberra community very proud. I am sure everyone would join with me in wishing James every success in his career. I would like to close by saying that Michael Voss, the joint winner of the Brownlow Medal, comes from Brisbane. I am sure everyone in this chamber would also join with me and wish him well too.

Northside Community Service : Brownlow Medal

MR STEFANIAK (Minister for Education and Training and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.20): Mr Hird, you have stolen what I was going to say. Initially, I join with Ms Follett in congratulating the Northside Community Service on 20 excellent years. I have had the pleasure of going to all our community services in recent times and seeing what they do. They are doing a lot of excellent things in the northside of our community, especially in the new areas of Gungahlin. The youth project Ms Follett mentioned is worthy of special mention as that seems to be getting a lot of kids in Gungahlin actively involved in some very good programs in recent times. I particularly single out their efforts there.

I would also like to congratulate James Hird, the Canberra boy who did well in being joint winner of the Brownlow Medal. His side narrowly missed out on getting into the grand final on the weekend. As Harold said, Mr Speaker, he is the son of Allan Hird who also played with Essendon. Allan and James's mother both work with our Department of Education. I think we have a couple of very proud parents there. Obviously, everyone in the sporting community in Canberra would congratulate James on his great effort.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Assembly adjourned at 4.22 pm