



DEBATES

OF THE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

24 June 2003

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MR SPEAKER (Mr Berry) 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.

Civil Law (Wrongs) Amendment Bill 2003

Mr Stanhope, by leave, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by acting clerk.

MR STANHOPE (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Community Affairs and Minister for the Environment) (10.33): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

This is the second stage of the ACT's three-stage response to the insurance crisis. The Civil Law (Wrongs) Act 2002 was the first stage, which set up the essential building blocks for reform, and included a number of tort law reforms. This bill represents stage two of the reforms.

This bill contains amendments to the act, based on the recent national reviews on insurance and tort law reform. The recent national reviews were the review of the law of negligence, also known as the Ipp review, and the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council report responding to the medical indemnity crisis, also known as the Neave review.

Stage three, which my department is currently working on, will improve the management of civil claims in our courts. This bill will amend the Civil Law (Wrongs) Act 2002 by including a range of reforms from the Ipp and Neave reviews, and also some innovative solutions developed by the territory to solve the insurance crisis.

Unlike some other Australian jurisdictions, my government has chosen a path that will not exclude genuine plaintiffs from exercising their rights to seek redress for negligent conduct. Rather, this bill includes a range of reforms to improve the ACT civil justice system, and address legal issues arising from the recent insurance crisis.

The reforms that have been included in this bill aim to create greater certainty in personal injury outcomes, in the case of medical negligence. The proposed reforms contain measures that will foster efficiency in case processing and management, and additional pre-trial procedures to assist settlement of cases before they get to court.

The bill includes some amendments which, although not essential for implementation in the territory, have been included on the basis of ensuring national consistency. Members will appreciate that it would be counterproductive for the ACT to retain a common law approach to the determination of liability in the face of widespread adoption of a new statutory framework by other states.

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The dynamic nature of the civil law would be significantly dampened, as the bulk of court decisions would concern the new statutory provisions in other states. In addition, there is the possibility that a significantly different civil law could lead to some sectors of the work force, and insurers, leaving the ACT market.

There are two fundamental areas of the Ipp report that the Treasurer and I have persistently opposed and have not included in this bill. These are recommendations that there be a threshold of 15 per cent of the most extreme case before plaintiffs can seek redress, and that there be a cap on general damages of \$250,000.

A threshold of 15 per cent of the most extreme case would typically exclude people with soft tissue injuries, which heal relatively rapidly, from recovering damages. Capping general damages at \$250,000 would set an upper limit on the amount that could be awarded for pain, suffering, loss of amenities, and loss of expectation of life. This upper limit may prevent some plaintiffs from being fully compensated for their injuries. I am opposed to caps and thresholds that sacrifice the fundamental principles of the law, such as equity and equality before the law.

The bill includes a range of reforms that I will now take members through. The bill provides that an apology does not constitute an admission of liability, and will not be relevant to the determination of fault or liability in connection with civil liability of any kind. This amendment was recommended by the Neave report, specifically for medical negligence cases. If people are treated appropriately at an early stage immediately following the occurrence of an adverse event, the whole process of litigation can often be avoided.

A study in the United Kingdom in 1999 entitled “Mediating medical negligence claims—an option for the future?” highlighted the benefits of apologies in medical negligence cases. This study found that, in 44 per cent of medical negligence cases, the plaintiff was litigating to receive an apology, rather than for compensation.

The bill requires legal practitioners to notify doctors or other defendants of a client’s instruction to proceed with a personal injury case. This provision promotes early notification of claims, and open disclosure. This provision will allow early investigation of claims, while evidence is still fresh; it will allow appropriate cases to be managed outside the court system, and will allow compensation to be made available much earlier and at a lower cost.

The bill establishes a new regime for expert witnesses. Under the new regime, medical experts will be sanctioned and appointed by the court. A list of medical experts will be obtained from the College of Surgeons. The parties will be given the opportunity to nominate and agree on one medical expert witness. If agreement is reached, the parties brief the expert and the parties pay equally. If the parties cannot agree, the court will appoint an expert, and the parties will share the cost.

This new regime should remove some of the adversarial process, as it will provide for medical experts to assist the court, rather than their respective parties. This regime will also reduce costs in litigation, as parties will share the cost of one medical expert, rather than having at least one medical expert for each party.

The bill provides that the court may appoint more than one medical expert witness, where it is necessary for the interests of justice, or where there is more than one medical issue.

The bill changes the statute of limitations for adults from six years to three years from the date of occurrence of their injury. This will ensure that matters are settled quickly, and will allow parties to move on with their lives. This will also ensure that matters are heard before evidence is lost.

The bill provides that the statute of limitations for adults with a disease or disability is three years from the date the disease or disability is discovered. The bill changes the statute of limitations for children. The provisions address the recent concerns of obstetricians and anaesthetists, while protecting the rights of children.

The bill provides that parents or guardians of children under 15 years of age must give notice of a claim to the prospective defendant within six years of the accident or discovery of the injury. If a parent fails to give notice, the child does not lose the right to sue. This endures until the child turns 21. However, in that case, the costs of medical treatment, legal work and gratuitous services incurred by the parents before the commencement of the proceedings are not claimable from the defendant, unless the court finds that there was a good reason—excusing the non-compliance with the notice requirement.

Further, the bill provides that a defendant who has been served with a notice can require the child's parent or guardian to apply for a declaratory judgment on liability. After six years, it should be possible to deal with the issue of liability, even though final assessment of damages may need to await for stabilisation of injuries.

These provisions will take effect immediately on commencement of the bill, and will apply to all possible causes of action, even where the cause arose before commencement. Transitional provisions deal with the application in greater detail.

The bill reintroduces part 10.2 of the Civil Law (Wrongs) Amendment Bill 2002, requiring legal practitioners to certify that cases have a reasonable chance of success. This will ensure that parties do not incur costs for claims or defences that have no reasonable prospect of success. The bill provides that the court can allow claims to continue where the interests of justice so dictate—for instance, to allow the court to consider a desirable advance within the common law.

The bill allows the courts to order that parties attend mediation. Mediation will not assist in all cases—rather, it can be ordered by a court where a case is identified as suitable for mediation. The cases which are generally suitable for mediation are simple cases where the compensation sought is small. Other suitable cases are those where one party is seeking non-legal remedies, such as apologies and explanations; claims where parties want a greater involvement in case management; claims where speedier resolution is required, and those where the parties have a long-term relationship.

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The bill includes the provision from the existing compulsory third party scheme which allows for parties to be penalised for making a claim or statement knowing it is false or misleading in a material particular.

The bill includes the partial codification of the law of negligence. The Ipp report recommended legislative clarification of the general principles of negligence, in response to recent cases that have had the potential to expand liability for negligence. The basic principles of negligence, including duty of care, standard of care for negligence, precautions against risk and causation, have been included in the bill.

The bill provides a restatement of the common law regarding contributory negligence and provides that the court may reduce a plaintiff's damages by 100 per cent for contributory negligence.

An underlying principle applied by the Ipp report was that people should take responsibility for their own lives and safety. The bill recognises that there may be cases where the plaintiff's relative responsibility for their injuries is so great that it is fair to deny the plaintiff any damages at all.

The bill provides that damages are not available for mental harm, unless the mental harm is a recognised psychiatric illness. Implementation of this provision will avoid what appear to be early signs of the courts developing a new head of damages for mere sadness.

The Ipp report recommended that, in assessing general damages, courts should be able to refer to decisions in earlier cases. Implementation of this Ipp recommendation will allow the courts to consider comparable injuries and damages and will ensure that the courts are consistent in awarding damages. This recommendation will assist in the collection of data on personal injuries damages.

The bill clarifies the liability of public authorities, following the High Court decision in *Brodie v Singleton Shire Council*. That case held that the former rule, which protected highway authorities from liability for harm resulting from mere inaction, was no longer good law. The Brodie decision has caused an understandable level of concern amongst road authorities at the local, state and federal level about the implications the decision may have on already strained road budgets, and what response is required of government. In response to these concerns, the Ipp report recommended legislative clarification of the duties of public authorities.

Specifically, the Ipp report recommended that legislation provide that a policy decision should not be able to be used to support a finding that a public authority was negligent, unless the decision was so unreasonable that no reasonable public authority could have made it; and that a public authority should only be liable for personal injury damages for breach of a statutory duty where the provisions and policy of the relevant statute are compatible with the existence of such liability.

Mr Speaker, insurance for the equine activities industry is currently unavailable. To ensure that equine activities can continue, and to encourage insurers back into this market, the bill clarifies the liability of people who provide equine activities. This is based on model legislation, operating in 42 American states, which provides a stable

insurance environment. From that, the insurance market for these activities should be restored. Further, the provisions fairly balance the rights of participants in equine activities with obligations of the providers of equine activities.

The bill provides that there is no liability for an injury to, or the death of, a participant resulting from the inherent risks of equine activities. Inherent risks include the unpredictability of a horse's reaction to sounds, sudden movements, unfamiliar objects, certain hazards such as surface and subsurface conditions, and collision with other horses or objects. The bill provides that there is liability for the provision of equipment or tack that is faulty and causes injury; failing to make reasonable and prudent efforts to determine the ability of the participant to engage safely in the equine activity; committing an act or omission that constitutes wilful or wanton disregard for the safety of the participant, which causes injury; or intentionally injuring the participant.

Those are the details of the bill I introduce today. The bill will go a significant way to completing the range of reforms the ACT government has committed itself to, as our response to issues around the non-availability at a reasonable price of insurance for public liability—and specifically medical indemnity insurance.

We believe this is a package which meets the needs of all those significantly affected by the insurance crisis. It has been specifically designed to address the needs of the medical profession and professionals in the ACT. The ACT government believes it will do that and will do it well. I commend the bill to the house.

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

Estimates 2003-2004—Select Committee Report—government response

MR QUINLAN (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development Business and Tourism and Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming) (10.46): For the information of members, I present the following paper:

Estimates 2003-2004—Select Committee—Report—Appropriation Bill 2003-2004 (*presented 17 June 2003*)—Government response.

I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

Mr Speaker, at the beginning of what will, no doubt, be a long and turgid day for this Assembly, I do not intend to take too long in presenting this report, as I presume it will be debated cognately with the Appropriation Bill 2003-2004. The report is in response to the Estimates Committee report, which was described by its chair as remarkable. I am sorry—I missed the remarkable dimension of it when I looked through it. It is not unlike Estimates Committee reports which have been brought before this place before. Like the curate's egg, it is good in parts.

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There are some suggestions and examinations within the report which relate to the budget and are relevant to consideration of this budget and future budgets. The discussions that led to the formulation of the report—and the report itself—tended to be wide ranging. Previous estimates reports have gone far beyond the parameters which might be defined by the budget itself. However, that has become rather conventional. It may be a question for this house one day, as to how far we go in an estimates hearing in relation to examining other issues that are not particularly relevant to the budget itself and to the terms of reference of the select committee.

I am a bit concerned, as I have mentioned in this place before, to see the skulking around the issue of the bushfire which has taken place, in the hope of some morsel of political capital that might be taken advantage of, or some area where there can be engendered some doubt in relation to the current government—and to trade on the hurt people suffered during that bushfire. That disturbs me somewhat. It seems to have been somewhat pervasive. I hope we get to a point where this Assembly can work together to make sure we return this town to the state it enjoyed before the bushfire, if not a more improved state.

As I said, I do not intend to address the individual recommendations within the estimates report, whether they are relevant to the budget or not, because we will probably be discussing some of these matters for a long time today.

I commend the response to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Smyth**) adjourned to a later hour.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report No 34

MR STEFANIAK (10.50): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (performing the duties of a Scrutiny of Bills and Subordinate Legislation Committee)—Scrutiny Report No 34, dated 24 June 2003, together with a copy of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to move a motion authorising the report for publication.

Leave granted.

MR STEFANIAK: I move:

That the report be authorised for publication.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

MR STEFANIAK: I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MR STEFANIAK: Scrutiny report No 34 contains the committee's comments on eight bills, 61 pieces of subordinate legislation and two government responses. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Appropriation Bill 2002-2003 (No 3)

Debate resumed from 6 May 2003, on motion by **Mr Quinlan:**

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (10.52): The opposition will be supporting Appropriation Bill (No 3), but we have a couple of questions for the Treasurer that we would like answered. The purpose of the bill is to provide an additional \$23.9 million to meet a clerical wage increase and back pay, some bushfire recovery costs and a new paramedic skills allowance.

The break-up of the \$23.9 million is as follows: \$19.489 million is for a 6.5 per cent clerical wage increase, backdated to October 2002; \$3.374 million is for the Department of Urban Services to spend on bushfire recovery activities; \$630,000 is for ACT Forests to clean up burnt areas in Duffy, and for aerial grass seeding of denuded areas; and \$500,000 is for the ACT Ambulance Service to fund the new paramedic skills allowance awarded by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in September 2002.

Mr Speaker, this bill was not specifically referred to either the PAC or the Estimates Committee. In agreement with the Treasurer, it was thought best for questions to be asked during the estimates process. Questions were asked across a number of these areas during that process.

Working in reverse, the funding for the ACT Ambulance Service was awarded last September, and it is appropriate that it is included. One could ask the question as to whether it should be in Appropriation Bill (No 2), which would have been the first opportunity to do so. You would have to ask whether or you not can spend the \$500,000 appropriated today between now and the end of the financial year. That is one of the questions for the Treasurer. I would appreciate it if he would answer how that money will be spent between now and 30 June.

We spoke to Mr Bartlett, from ACT Forests, about the \$630,000 for the clean-up and the aerial seeding. The clean-up of the burnt trees in Duffy was very important—and we commend the government for the way that has been handled. Especially important is the aerial seeding of the denuded areas, simply because that had to be done urgently. We commend the government for making sure that has happened.

Regarding the \$3.374 million for Urban Services spent on bushfire recovery activities, it is also important that those activities have occurred. I will go through those a little later.

This leaves the clerical wage increase, which has already been paid. Last Thursday—20 June—was the final pay day in the 2002-03 financial year. The \$19.489 million which the Treasurer is asking the Assembly to appropriate, or approve today, has

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already been spent. If he is now requiring the Assembly to rubber-stamp a commitment entered into by the government for which funding was not approved, the question has to be asked: is that appropriate? Whilst the opposition does not propose to deny passage of the Appropriation Bill, there are several major criticisms which need to be made of how the Treasurer has handled it.

To begin with, I would like the Treasurer to guarantee absolutely that the payment of the clerical wage increase before the Appropriation Bill was passed is not a breach of the Financial Management Act. In paying the whole amount of the clerical wage increase last Thursday before the funds have been appropriated, are you, Treasurer, absolutely certain that you have not breached the FMA?

That raises a second question. If, since you have already made the payment, obviously from existing funds, why is this part of the appropriation deal necessary at all? If you have the money—you obviously do, because the payment has been made—why are you now asking for more? How will you use the extra funds being sought?

Third, if you said in your presentation speech that \$13 million was provided in the budget for clerical wage increases, why are you seeking \$19.5 million when clearly the only additional amount to be paid is \$6.5 million? I mean, \$19.5 million minus \$13 million is \$6.5 million. I am sure the Treasurer will explain and clarify these issues before we vote on the bill, and I believe members will be interested in the answers.

The Treasurer made another remark when tabling his speech—that this has been a negative opposition, and we have taken a negative approach. I think it is important to point out that that is not true. You may want to check the facts yourself, but legislation we have agreed to pass since we have been in opposition includes, this year, the Community-based Sentences (Transfer) Bill, the Duties Amendment Bill (No 2) and the Taxation (Government Business Enterprises) Bill 2002.

Last year we agreed to the second appropriation bill, the Appropriation Bill itself, the civil wrongs bill, the crimes amendment bill, the drugs of dependence bill, the Financial Management Amendment Bill, the First Home Owner Grant Amendment Bill, the Pharmacy Amendment Bill, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Amendment Bill, and the Workers Compensation (Acts of Terrorism) Bill.

Other opposition members have also agreed to support government legislation in their portfolios. Of course we passed Labor's budget. That is something Labor did not do for us—except in the previous government's final year. They normally voted against our budget. As I have already said, we will allow this Appropriation Bill to pass. However, we have serious criticism of the Treasurer for the most unsatisfactory way in which he has managed his portfolio in this case.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the Treasurer has said nothing about what this payment achieves. What is the territory getting for the additional \$19.5 million it is paying? The Treasurer could have said that the wage increase is required to retain or attract staff against competition from the Commonwealth or other state governments, but he has not said that. Nowhere does that argument appear in his speech to this Assembly urging the Assembly to support the appropriation. The Treasurer has asked the

Assembly to pass his bill to authorise funding for the wage increase, but has not justified the request. His presentation speech does not give one reason why the payment of \$19.5 million is necessary.

Mr Corbell: There were real wage decreases for the last seven years under the Liberal government. That is the reason.

MR SMYTH: Mr Corbell interjects. Mr Corbell should consult the Treasurer's speech, because none of that is outlined in the speech. The Treasurer should at least explain to the Assembly the reason for his request to spend the \$19.5 million. I invite him to do so at the conclusion of this debate.

The Treasurer should also be criticised for not seeking productivity improvements within the public service to fund, at least in part, the wage increases. The result is that the public service will benefit at the expense of the rest of the community—in this case, individuals, ratepayers and businesses—who will pay for it either directly through higher taxes and charges, or in services forgone.

Since the wage increase is not offset by any compensating improvements in productivity or delivery of services, and there are additional transaction costs, such as raising taxes and processing payments, the net effect is that the community as a whole is worse off.

To concede that the government did not even try to negotiate productivity improvements, the Treasurer said in his presentation speech that this is the first time in many years clerical wage increases have been supplemented by additional budget funding. I think he should be embarrassed to even think that, let alone say it publicly.

Even if he were to argue, which he has not done so far, that the pay increase is necessary to be competitive with other employment opportunities, that should not rule out more effective ways of delivering those services, or working smarter rather than harder—but the Treasurer has not even tried. Why? Perhaps it is his incapacity to manage public funds responsibly—or is it because of the opposition's third major concern, which is the extent to which this government has been captured by the union movement?

We all know that the Labor Party is the child of the union movement and that, at the end of the day, individual Labor MLAs stand or fall at the behest of the factions of faceless union powerbrokers. I suspect that the reason no productivity gains were sought by the Treasurer, in return for handing over \$19.5 million in wage increases, is simply that his union masters would not allow him to do so.

Despite the Treasurer's silly and false remarks that the opposition is saying no to anything the government does, and that we always take the most negative approach, we intend to allow the passage of this bill. However, we ask the Treasurer to explain why he just handed the money over and did not try to achieve some productivity gains on behalf of the people of Canberra.

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We ask two questions: firstly, has the FMA been breached by making the payment before the funds were approved by this Assembly? Secondly, why are additional funds being sought when clearly they are not required, as can be seen by the fact that the wage increases have already been paid?

MS DUNDAS (11.01): I commend the government for concluding negotiations with the Australian Services Union and the clerical staff to finalise the ACT public service framework agreement. The agreement provides for pay increases and modernisation of conditions to keep public sector workers in the ACT in step with employees in other states and territories.

I also support the appropriation in this bill to implement the AIRC work value decision to confer a paramedic skills allowance. Like our nurses, our paramedics have long been undervalued for the high level of skill they require and use every day in their work. I hope this decision means that these essential workers are now being more fairly remunerated.

This appropriation also provides for the removal of burnt trees, landslip rectification, weed suppression, restoring grass on Duffy forest land, Murrumbidgee restoration and restoring trails—among other things which were all flagged shortly after the fires—and are reasonable expenses.

Concerns have already been raised today about money being spent before it is appropriated. I hope the Treasurer provides an answer to these questions. It is concerning to see this kind of process taking place. I hope there is a full explanation for it and that we do not see this kind of thing again, where there is a presumption of the outcome of an Assembly vote, or a decision of this Assembly is ignored before it even takes place.

I understand the Treasurer is going to circulate an amendment which increases the amount we are appropriating today. That is in relation to the National Information, Communication and Technology node here in Canberra—the centre of excellence. I will speak briefly to this now.

While the ACT's involvement in the National ICT centre of excellence is directed towards a noble end, it appears to be something that was not well planned. I understand there were millions of dollars spent in preparing the ACT's submission, as part of a group of submissions, to have a node of excellence here in the ACT.

It appears that there will be benefits for the people of the territory and for technology growth here in the territory because of this. However, considering that millions of dollars were spent in preparing the submission, it is concerning to see that we have already had two changes to the appropriation for the node of excellence—one through the Treasurer's Advance, and the other through this Appropriation Bill today.

The way this is being handled in relation to the movement of land; how that will be given to the centre of excellence; how it will be managed, and which block of land it is going to be, appears to have created a lot of confusion throughout the planning community, in relation to strategic planning and strategic use of land here in the territory.

The Treasurer is shaking his head, but I have heard these concerns from people who have called my office and discussed section 61 with me—and the future of the ICT. The information I have been provided with goes some way towards addressing those concerns, yet the fact remains that we are getting this information almost a year after the initial money was appropriated for the node of excellence. These changes continue to be made, in essence delaying the node of excellence project. These factors are of concern, especially because millions of dollars were spent in preparing the government's submission to be part of this ICT centre of excellence.

To me, this appears to be poor planning. That raises concerns about how this government is, and how the former government was, operating, in respect of their business dealings and their dealings with the federal government. I hope this is the last change we see to the appropriation for the node of excellence. I hope things are settled and they are able to get on with doing the job of building the node of excellence in the ACT, thus allowing that idea to continue.

Despite the concern about the management of NICTA and the ACT's involvement, especially in respect of the use of land, the ACT Democrats will be supporting the other matters in this Appropriation Bill.

MR STEFANIAK (11.06): Appropriation Bill (No 3) is again a supplementary appropriation bill. Although the Treasurer explains his amendments, I see there are further amendments and further moneys to be expended. I do not think, in my time in the Assembly, I have seen so many supplementary appropriation bills introduced by a government.

Mr Smyth mentioned the ambulance drivers and paramedics. I wonder why that could not have been done earlier. If it was necessary for appropriations to be made, they could have been made much sooner. But that is typical of this government, which tends to try to do things at the last minute.

I cannot resist responding to the comments Mr Corbell made about wages going down under the previous government. Mr Corbell—through you, Mr Deputy Speaker—we may have some issues. I know the current Treasurer disputes the \$344.8 million deficit and comes up with a different figure.

The clear fact remains that, when we achieved self-government in the territory, we were in a very healthy financial situation but, when the Carnell government came in, in March 1995, we certainly were not. There was a significant deficit. We say it was \$344.8 million, Mr Quinlan may not agree with that, but even he concedes that there was a substantial deficit.

In the space of seven years, the previous government endured a lot of pain and bore sweat, blood and tears in trying to get the territory's finances back into order—so this current government benefits from the very good, hard work done by the previous government.

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Despite what Mr Corbell says, I can remember—notwithstanding all the budgetary pressures the previous government faced as a result of the incompetence of the previous Labor administration—that, in those difficult circumstances, we still managed to give some significant pay increases.

One that comes to mind, which Mr Corbell, as the previous minister for education, should remember, was a very significant pay rise. It was a pay increase of 11.5 per cent or so over three years which the AEU was happy with. That was at a difficult time for the territory. That went to teachers in the government sector and to TAFE teachers. That was a not insignificant pay rise, compared with what was being offered in the general community, despite the significant financial difficulties in which this territory found itself.

So, I say to the current government: you are able to give out such largesse as this. You are able to give substantial pay rises—the opposition is not criticising that. We have a strong and dedicated public service here in the territory, as anyone who has ever been in government will attest. The reason you are able to do this is the strong financial position in which the previous Liberal government left this territory.

I hope we do not see a situation—although we may well see that—of you people squandering that and going back to the bad old days when this territory was very much in the red, with all the resultant problems and dramas, when whoever is in government, probably us, has to come in, pick up the pieces and start all over again. That is something you lot need to be very cautious of.

MR CORBELL (Minister for Health and Minister for Planning) (11.10): As usual, when these debates occur, we have the commentary from the Liberal members of the Assembly that there is a problem caused by the previous Labor government, and that justifies nearly everything in the world. It justifies delivering real wage decreases to ACT public servants, to the extent that it undermines the capacity of the ACT government service to respond to the needs of the people of Canberra.

Mr Smyth asks, “Who benefits from a wage increase to public servants?” I will tell you who benefits. The Canberra community benefits, because we have public servants who are paid well, although not extravagantly, in accordance with their responsibilities. They are then in a position to respond to needs and deliver the services our community expects of them.

When this government came to office, it encountered a situation where, for the past seven years, there had been real wage decreases to ACT government employees. Their real wages had gone backwards. They had not even stayed stagnant—they had gone backwards. In real terms, they were receiving less last year than when the agreement they signed was entered into back in the late 1990s.

That was the consequence with which we were faced. That is what this Appropriation Bill addresses. This Appropriation Bill delivers real wage increases to public servants for the first time in seven years. It does it in the context of not making ACT public servants the highest paid in the country—far from it. In fact, it delivers wage outcomes for ACT government employees to keep them generally in line with their counterparts in the Commonwealth public service.

I say “generally in line”. They are certainly not in line with the most well-paid Commonwealth agencies such as Treasury, Prime Minister and Cabinet and so on, but it keeps them broadly in line with the mid-point for other Commonwealth agencies. That is appropriate, if we are going to retain well-trained, expert staff to deliver the services the community needs.

Interestingly, Mr Smyth made a comment about efficiencies. He asked, “Where was the push for efficiencies?” It is interesting to hear Mr Smyth push this because, when the government delivered efficiencies in its last budget, he criticised us for that. He is trying to have it both ways. He is trying to have a go at us when we do it—and not have a go at us when we do it. That is the sort of negative oppositionist approach we have come to expect from Mr Smyth.

The issue for the government is to make sure our public servants receive decent wage rises, so we can attract and retain good people in our public service, reward the service of everyone who is already in the ACT government service, and deliver real wage outcomes which improve their quality of life.

The Liberal Party effectively delivered increases that did not even keep up with CPI. Their increases did not even keep up with the cost of living. That was the consequence of the Liberal Party’s approach to industrial relations, and that will be their approach again. If they are back in government, they will drive wages down. They will drive wages down to a degree that they will gut the ACT government service. They will gut the service capacity of the ACT government to deliver on policy development and on services for the ACT community.

Mr Deputy Speaker, that will be the consequence of a future Liberal government. We will see wages for ACT public servants go down—to the degree that we will be unable to attract or retain effective public servants in our service. That is what this bill addresses. It is an appropriate step forward and Mr Smyth should have the courtesy of acknowledging that, at the same time as he does us the courtesy of passing the legislation.

MR QUINLAN (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism and Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming) (11.14), in reply: I will refer to Mr Stefaniak first and his reinvention of history—in fact, I would say the corruption of history. I want to introduce just one element to all of what Mr Stefaniak said.

The amount of Commonwealth funding this territory receives has doubled since 1998. If we talked about a deficit of \$344 million, which was brought to the territory by the Carnell government in 1995-96, we are, just by Commonwealth funding, half a billion dollars better off. So there ain’t no miracle there, I am afraid. Any claims that that was done by the sweat of the brow of the government of the time are utter and complete nonsense.

I was bemused by some of what Mr Smyth said. There is a certain lack of understanding. Mr Smyth had me with a couple of press releases in the frame for paying public servants before this bill went through. First of all, I advise this house

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that I am assured by my officials that each of the agencies had sufficient funds, at that point in time, to meet their salary bills.

That might mean that, if this Appropriation Bill were refused, they may have trouble paying their other accounts by the end of the year. However, people should be aware that, later today, hopefully, this Assembly will pass a number of gross appropriation lines. The Assembly does not—and I do not think it should—approve every line item in the budget, but it approves the budget in its magnitude by agency. The capacity was there.

It also shows a fundamental lack of understanding on the part of Mr Smyth about how the timing of payments will take place. Beyond 30 June, many accounts will still be paid. They will still be rolling in. We will not be closing the chequebook for this financial year on 30 June. In fact, there will be huge amounts paid after the event, as the bills come in.

Mr Smyth: So more back-pay will be paid after 30 June?

MR QUINLAN: I said all of the bills, Mr Smyth.

To compound the lack of understanding—if you want an indication of the lack of understanding he has of this process—Mr Smyth asked a question about why I am asking for \$19 million when \$13 million was budgeted. That shows a fundamental lack of understanding. You do not understand the difference between a budget and an appropriation bill. A budget is the estimate of all the money to be spent in the financial year. The appropriation is the requests for approval to spend cash.

Later, you will see a request to spend \$10 million. It will be an additional appropriation but it will be in the budget, Mr Smyth. Basic lesson—budgeting ACT 101. Unfortunately, you do not understand it.

As an aside, more than anything, as Mr Smyth was eager to put out a couple of press releases about what Mr Quinlan did wrong in relation to paying the public servants, you have the wrong bloke. He paid his; Mr Wood paid his; Mr Stanhope paid his and Ms Gallagher paid hers—I do not pay them.

Mr Smyth: So you did not approve the drawdown from the CFU?

MR QUINLAN: It is the nature of my portfolios, Mr Smyth, that I have few public servants directly working for me. You cannot help yourself. I am flattered by the attention, but we have seen a sequence of misunderstanding of the process exhibited by Mr Smyth. You do not even know the difference between the budget and the Appropriation Bill. That was the cornerstone of what you said.

I will relate something. I discussed your negativity with a couple of friends over the weekend. In conversation, I said, “Isn’t it sad that we have this negative opposition and they seem to have taken the political low road?” I used the word “grubby”, I have to say. I was corrected, because a rather wise person, for whom I have a lot of respect, said, “Have you thought of the obvious, Mr Quinlan?” I asked, “What is that?” They said, “Maybe that is all there is.”

Mr Smyth: Wise words.

MR QUINLAN: They were wise words, and they were borne out in your speech, Mr Smyth, where you show a fundamental misunderstanding of the process we are dealing with.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

Clauses 1 to 5, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 6.

MR QUINLAN (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism and Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming) (11.21): I seek leave to move amendments 1 and 2, circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

MR QUINLAN: I move amendments 1 and 2, circulated in my name together [*see schedule 1 at page 2425*].

I move these amendments because they facilitate the payment of cash money for the development of the National Centre of Excellence of ICT, or NICTA. This is an amount already budgeted for—however, we had intended that it would be by land grant, et cetera. I am advised that my people have provided briefings to everybody on this process. I understand it is necessary to put cash in the hands of NICTA to sell them land, in order to make sure the lease is not branded as concessional, and that NICTA can be an independent operation, as we want it to be.

The land component—the land we sell them under section 61—probably will not take anywhere near the full amount of \$10 million. Quite an amount of it will go into the development of the establishment to be set up there. Hopefully it will become the hub of a growing centre of activity.

As members have been briefed, I will not bore them with it when we are going to have a rather lengthy day. In closing, perhaps I can address any comments people might have.

Amendments agreed to.

Clause 6, as amended, agreed to.

Remainder of bill, by leave, taken as a whole and agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

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Paper

Mr Quinlan presented the following paper:

Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 13—Appropriation Bill 2002-2003 (No 3)—Supplementary Budget Papers 2002-2003 Appropriation—Addendum.

Appropriation Bill 2003-2004

[Cognate report:
Estimates 2002-2003—Select Committee
Report—government response]

Debate resumed from 8 May 2003.

Detail stage

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is it the wish of the Assembly to debate this order of the day concurrently with the government's response to the report of the Select Committee on Estimates 2003-2004 on the Appropriation Bill 2003-04? There being no objection, that course will be followed. I remind members that in debating order of the day No 2, executive business, they may also address their remarks to the relevant parts of the government's response to the report of the Select Committee on Estimates 2003-2004 on the Appropriation Bill 2003-2004.

Standing order 180 sets down the order in which this bill will be considered, that is, in the detail stage:

...any schedule expressing the services for which the appropriation is to be made shall be considered before the clauses and, unless the Assembly otherwise orders, the schedules shall be considered by proposed expenditures in the order in which they are shown.

With the concurrence of the Assembly, it is proposed that the Assembly consider schedule 1 by each part, consisting of net cost of outputs, capital injection, and payments on behalf of the territory, then the clauses prior to schedule 2 and the title.

Schedule 1—Appropriations.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.1—Legislative Assembly Secretariat, \$4,607,000 (net cost of outputs), \$436,000 (capital injection) and \$3,803,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$8,846,000.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (11.26): Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to confirm that the opposition will be passing the budget when the debate is concluded, but we will look at and make an example of one or two things in the budget that we think should not be there. I will get to those when they turn up in the consideration of the Chief Minister's Department and JACS.

In regard to the first line of the budget, I think it is about time that we looked seriously at ourselves and the way that we are funded and operate. A lot of the work that MLAs and ministers appear to be doing is done by their staff. I know that there is a process under way whereby we are setting up a new staffing arrangement. Indeed, there are some pay increases in that staffing arrangement. But there needs to be a consideration of the number of resources that one actually needs to do the job properly, coming from such a low threshold when the Assembly started in 1989.

We, as members of this place, do not only the job of a state or territory parliament, but also the job of a local government regime. We probably work harder than most jurisdictions in the country. I think I can say that because I have actually worked in two of them. As a backbencher in the federal parliament in 1995, I had three full-time staff. I had an office manager/PA, I had a media person and I had a senior policy adviser, probably three times the staff that the non-executive MLAs and non-leadership MLAs have in this place now. I have to say that it made my job as a federal MP so much easier, because I had the tools to do the job properly.

I think that we need to look quite seriously at the amount of funding that MLAs get for staffing and for the things that they need to do. For instance, I received a six-page glossy document from Annette Ellis the other day. Federal MPs and senators have an enormous budget to promote what they are doing and, more importantly, enable them to be in contact with their constituency and alert their constituency as to what they have been up to and what has been happening in their parliament on their behalf.

We are now about 14 or 15 years into self-government. I can understand the reticence in the very early days of self-government to attach what the public would see as the trappings of office to our budgets. We have started from a very low base and I think that over the next couple of years we will need to consider particularly our staff. Some of that will be done in the current round of negotiations. Our staff work long hours for very meagre pay. The allowances that we provide to them for overtime and basic things like a mobile phone and the resources we provide for them to do their job and keep them free from stress are somewhat meagre. I think that this line for the Legislative Assembly Secretariat is the appropriate point to make that comment.

The second area in which we have let ourselves down—we all understand the historical reasons for it; there was a lot of angst over the establishment of this place back in 1989—is the level of staffing and the payment of staff of the Secretariat: the staff in the chamber and, particularly, the staff in the committees. For instance, if you look at the estimates process, you will see that one committee, with one secretary, looks at the entire budget across a two or three-week period and then the secretary gets a report back to members for the discussion phase and the committee gets to table it in the Assembly.

It is interesting that there are, I think, eight estimates committees up in the big house when they do their budget. The Assembly process is an absolute credit to the committee secretariat, but I think that it is time to look at these issues in a more considered way. I welcome the process that is under way. I hope that it will deliver a lot, particularly for the staff, but I think that we need, in the long term, to be looking at the staffing of the Secretariat itself.

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MRS DUNNE (11.31): Mr Deputy Speaker, in rising to speak on part 1.1 of the appropriations schedule, I want to echo the words of my leader. I think that over the years, and I speak from the experience of having been a staffer, the remuneration for staff across-the-board in this place has not fairly represented the amount of work done, often done by very experienced people with a lot of background. As members, quite frankly, we cannot remunerate our staff to reflect the amount of work they do, the amount of expertise that they have built up over the years and the considerable efforts that they put in on our behalf and on behalf of our constituents. It is very difficult for members of this place to serve their constituents with the meagre staff that they have.

I would just like to draw some analogies between how we operate in the ACT and how members operate in other parliaments. In the ACT, we are members of multimember electorates. In the electorate of Ginninderra, as we all know, there are five members and there are 100,000 electors. I cannot say that I am only going to look after 20,000 electors. I am a member for all the 100,000 people in my electorate.

Bill Stefaniak and I cannot divide up the people between us and say that he will look after half the Liberal voters and I will look after the other half of the Liberal voters or divvy them up between the two of us. It does not work like that. You are there for every person in your electorate every day of the week, and your staff are there for them.

When you do not have the time to take the calls, your staff are the ones who are taking them and your staff are the ones who are dealing on a day-to-day basis with people's trauma, with people's incapacity to get their message through to government, and with solving their problems with the bureaucracy. Often times that extends beyond just the ACT bureaucracy, but it involves giving people a hand along the way.

I take as an example the South Australian parliament because it is something I know about as I have a friend who is a member of the South Australian parliament. Members of the South Australian parliament have an electorate of 20,000 people and a suburban electorate covers about six square miles. With 20,000 electors and six square miles, after two or three terms you actually know your electors; you know who they are and they know you very well. That means that you can deal with their needs.

Members of the South Australian parliament, although not as well served as members of the federal parliament, are much better served in terms of staff and allowances to get their message out to people and to help people than we are in this place, dealing with 100,000 electors and 100 square miles of electorate. And then there is the amount of work that is done in this place by the chamber secretariat and by the committee secretariat. Speaking on behalf of my own committee, I know about the work that is done by it and, therefore, the amount of work that is required to be done—

Mr Quinlan: Why don't you cut down on the questions on notice that never go anywhere?

Mr Corbell: It is volume masquerading as activity.

MRS DUNNE: Excuse me! Mr Deputy Speaker, we try as much as possible to listen to people in silence and when we are actually talking about the hardworking—

Mr Corbell: Oh, Mrs Dunne!

MRS DUNNE: I try as much as everyone else. We are talking about the work that is done by the hardworking staff of this place and all Mr Corbell can do is snipe and snarl. He may not like the work that is done by the Planning and Environment Committee, but it is important work and the people who do it and the people who support the committee are hardworking. As he spoke before, he should not show such discourtesy to the members of this place and the staff of this place.

As I was saying before I was rudely interrupted by the minister, the staff of the Planning and Environment Committee, who have just turned out their 19th report and are writing their 20th and 21st reports at the moment, do an enormous amount of work in a very underresourced area, and that is replicated on committee after committee after committee. We have seen the sterling work done by the Estimates Committee in providing its report. One committee secretary did so with some technical support, whereas in most other parliaments there would be a number of committees.

In the federal parliament there are eight, but in other parliaments there might be three or four committees doing the work of one committee here. Most importantly, Mr Deputy Speaker, the work here is done by one committee secretary, so that when members of the committee go home the committee secretary sits down to do the work, and that is the thing that is derided by this minister. It is about time that we sat down as a group and made some serious decisions about resourcing this place so that we serve the people of the ACT better.

MR CORBELL (Minister for Health and Minister for Planning) (11.36): I have to respond, Mr Deputy Speaker, simply to make the point that it is interesting that in the past seven years of the Liberal Party being in government, I do not think their members ever complained once about the allocation of resources to non-executive members, to opposition members or to crossbench members.

All of a sudden, now in opposition, they appreciate the reality of being in opposition and of what it means to be a non-executive member. They may well have an argument, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is quite amusing in many ways that it only takes the experience of a year or so in opposition to make them realise how poorly done by oppositions have been in the past.

MS TUCKER (11.37): We could talk about the crossbench members, who are even more poorly done by. I will make a couple of comments on this subject, considering that members of the crossbench have to cover every issue. I do think that it is very important that we be properly resourced to do the work required of us in this place. The Liberal government took no interest in that and I do not see the Labor government necessarily giving it enough attention. I know that there is a process under way at the moment and we are very hopeful that a decision will be made which is based on the understanding of the workload of the people in this place.

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I agree with Mrs Dunne at least on the point that members of the community are the ones who suffer if we are not properly resourced, not only in terms of our capacity to deal with individual constituents, but also in terms of the quality of public policy in the ACT, which obviously has an implication for everybody now and into the future.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.2—ACT Executive, \$4,071,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$4,071,000.

MS DUNDAS (11.39): I understand that it is under this line for the ACT executive that the Chief Minister's hospitality budget is funded. In questions during the estimates process it was discovered that the amount for the hospitality budget has ballooned from less than \$30,000 two years ago to \$70,000 this year. Even though I have looked, it is hard to find another budget line that has increased as rapidly as this one.

Spending decisions like the increased allocation for government media advisers breeds cynicism in the community, which sees politicians appearing to be putting themselves ahead of the people they serve. I do understand that the Chief Minister has explained the increase in this budget briefly in the media by saying that it is spent on community events, but we seemed to have lots of community events over the last two years managed by a more modest budget.

I think that \$70,000 for cheese and biscuits is a tad excessive for a financial year, given that we have had much debate already about where we should be putting our resources this year. I hope that next year we will see a return to a more modest allocation for stocking the Chief Minister's drinks and cheese and biscuits cabinet.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.3—Auditor-General, \$961,000 (net cost of outputs), totalling \$961,000.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (11.41): Mr Deputy Speaker, as chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, I point out that the Auditor-General's budget was brought to the attention of the committee for consideration. We considered the documents presented and did not send it straightaway to the Treasurer for approval, but had discussions with officers of the Auditor-General's Office and with other officers at a round table to discuss some of the issues about this budget.

Of particular concern to members was whether, in terms of audits, the consideration of social and environmental factors was being undertaken. Indeed, there have been a number of audits where it has not been mentioned at all. The committee was told that one officer attended a conference last year, I believe, at which the ability of auditors to take into account social and environmental factors was discussed. With that in mind, the committee asked whether there was a need for more training, whether it was appropriate that all officers of the Auditor-General's Office should receive this sort of training, and how that would be accommodated within the budget.

They have assured the committee that they do have enough money in their training budget to make sure that that sort of training is undertaken. It will need to be taken over time and it will be an evolving matter, particularly as to how social and environmental issues are audited. Just to confirm to the Assembly that the Public Accounts Committee is doing its job, I make those few points.

Members should also have received from me, on behalf of the committee, an invitation to morning tea on Friday to officially farewell the current Auditor-General, Mr Parkinson, who is retiring. I assure Ms Dundas that the money for that will be coming out of the committee secretariat's meagre cheese and bickies budget. I think that it would be appropriate for MLAs, given that many of us have had much to do with John over the years, to take the opportunity to come along on Friday and thank him for the work that he has done. I think that it would be fair to say that not all of us have agreed with him all of the time, but the work done is work that needs to be done and it is done to a high standard, as independent audits have proven over the years. With those few points in mind, the opposition will be supporting this line of expenditure.

MS DUNDAS (11.43): We all know that the Auditor-General is fundamental to the operation of our democracy. For example, it took a report by the Auditor-General before the criticism I raised about the misuse of the Treasurer's Advance was taken seriously. Without the Auditor-General's oversight of government administration, we could reasonably fear a decline in financial propriety. This essential role must be properly resourced and the Auditor-General must be able to function with fearless independence.

I note that the Auditor-General's budget has been increased by 2 per cent, which is less than the CPI forecast in this budget of 2.5 per cent. In light of projected inflation and recent enterprise bargaining negotiations that resulted in significant pay rises, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Auditor-General's capacity is effectively being reduced.

I hope that this will be addressed in future budgets, as we all do respect the work of the Auditor-General and recognise its importance in bringing people to account and keeping our democracy able to function. I do hope that we are not seeing a creeping shift through reduced accountability like was seen under Kennett in Victoria.

MS TUCKER (11.44): I endorse the comments that have been made, but I would like to add the comment that we have had, through the Public Accounts Committee, interesting conversations with the Auditor-General's Office about the relationship between that office and the Office of Sustainability and the potential for the auditor in doing performance audits and financial audits to take into account the triple bottom line situation.

I think that we need to keep this conversation going because, hopefully, we are heading towards a form of triple bottom line reporting which will require the check for accountability that the Auditor-General brings to financial management to be brought eventually to meeting social and environmental responsibilities as well as economic responsibilities.

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I am not saying at this point in time exactly how that should occur, but I think that it will require ongoing resourcing for the Auditor-General to pursue the possibilities and may lead eventually to an increase in resourcing being required on a permanent basis to allow that office to do this further work.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.4—Chief Minister's, \$60,220,000 (net cost of outputs), \$7,838,000 (capital injection) and \$3,000,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$71,058,000.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (11.46): I will speak to the general issue and then move an amendment at the end, if I may, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Chief Minister's is a very important part of the entire budget as it has so many areas that would normally warrant their own departments in other jurisdictions but, unfortunately, we cannot have them because of the small size of this Assembly, so what we have in Chief Minister's is everything from business through to multiculturalism, a women's area and the Office of Sustainability.

Chief Minister's is a very important part of the budget because it is a part of the budget that influences what so many of what we call the line departments will do. The lack of attention to some of the other areas clearly indicates a lack of drive by the Chief Minister in these areas or the ministers responsible for those parts of the portfolio. As Ms Tucker so rightly said following discussions in the Public Accounts Committee on the Office of Sustainability, it is a good concept, it has been put in place, but we are yet to see either the output of that office or the fact that what the government said it would do will actually take place.

That is certainly something the Public Accounts Committee will be keeping a very strong eye on, because if the Office of Sustainability is to do what it is intended to do it needs to be resourced properly, it needs to be given the respect that it requires to influence other departments, it needs to see the cabinet submissions and bills and it needs to be able to comment. That is certainly something the Public Accounts Committee will be keeping an eye on over the coming years.

One of the great disappointments of this budget is the number of reports which the government had before and released after the budget and reports which were tabled in this place before the budget and to which the government has not bothered to respond. Two spring to mind. One is the report of the Connors inquiry, which I am sure we will get to later. The other is the report of the Select Committee on the Status of Women, which reported to the government in late 2002 and which has been entirely ignored by the government in this budget.

There were 83 recommendations about half of the population of this ACT and which have an effect on all of the population of the ACT and they have been absolutely ignored. The evidence that unfolded in the Estimates Committee process—I am sure Mrs Dunne will have a few words to say on this a little bit later—about how not a single submission or bid was put forward near the budget rounds to attempt to address any of those specific recommendations was, I think, a sad indictment of a government

which made much of having a committee on the status of women but which has done nothing about its report. You could pretty much say that that is not a bad indication of the way this government reacts generally across-the-board.

The highlights of the Chief Minister's Department in the budget papers concentrated largely on the bushfire and bushfire recovery, as was appropriate. There is very little in this budget to encourage business and there is absolutely nothing that I can see that talks about women or, indeed, multicultural affairs; so there is the dilemma. It is awkward and it is hard to address all of those areas, but, the government having made commitments in the lead-up to the election and having not kept some of them, it certainly is the part of the Estimates Committee and then the opposition to bring those matters to the attention of the government.

One thing that particularly amused the opposition was the initiative entitled "enhanced whole-of-government communication" on page 145 of BP 3. I think it is important, just as a case, to speak briefly about it. It is important because of what it says about the politicisation of the public service. We all saw in, I think, Saturday's *Canberra Times* the little article from the Labor hierarchy berating the government for not removing all the apparent Carnell apparatchiks who are still inhabiting the upper echelons of the ACT public service.

We all make lots of comments about not politicising the public service and I think that, in the main, they are made in a genuine sense, but it worries me that halfway through the life of this government there is a realisation that perhaps their message is not getting out, probably because they do not have a message, and they are going to employ enhanced whole-of-government communications experts at a value of about \$1 million over the next four years.

It is interesting that when we asked the Chief Minister what they would do and how many there would be, the appropriate sorts of questions, he simply did not know. He gave us a delightful speech about the great strength of any democracy being measured by the level of connection between people and government. It is up to the ministers to go out and sell their message. Put out your press releases, have your cheese and bickie community events and do whatever you want, but do not politicise the public service by putting your spin doctors in place.

There are, I think, 19.4 media officers in the public service already. We know that there are also a number of contractors, possibly four, maybe even more. For instance, JACS recently put on a communications manager and I believe that there is a new one in the health department. Some of these positions are on contract.

At this stage, I move amendment No 2 circulated in my name [*see schedule 2 at page 2425*].

I have moved the amendment because we do not believe that it is appropriate to be funding spin doctors in departments, particularly when there is no clear idea of the need and what that will do. The case was put that the January bushfires highlighted the point that we did not have the media capability that we needed. I am not sure whether that is true or not, but hopefully events such as the January bushfires will be such a rare occurrence that you will not need that capacity in the near future. Indeed,

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given the growing number of PR people in the public service, I am sure that there will be a review of the emergency plans and that issue will be covered by how the media part of the strategy should be handled.

The amendment simply seeks to remove from this year's budget the provision of \$250,000 as start-up capital for an initiative that has not been explained and has not been justified. We do not know what this initiative will do, we do not know where or how it will be done and there is no justification for it except to say that the January bushfires showed up flaws. Hopefully, events such as the bushfires of January of this year will be very few and far between and, therefore, would not be justification for the government setting up spin doctors to do the job that others should be doing.

Another subject I wish to discuss—I am sure that Mrs Burke will have more to say on it in a few moments—is the announcement on page 144 of BP 3 that \$50,000 will be provided in support to Volunteering ACT, which is much less than they have received over the last five or six years. You can present it in any way you want, but the reality is that in the last three years of the previous Liberal government they got \$100,000 a year and were able to bid for other moneys.

Since the bushfires, Volunteering ACT have conducted numerous seminars and provided valuable assistance to the community and they have been thanked time and again by this government. The government's thanks was to formalise their payment—that is all that this line does—and halve the base pay, with the excuse that if Volunteering ACT wants more money they can go after it.

I think that it is really important that we look at how we fund our peak bodies. There isn't a line anywhere else in the budget for peak funding for ACTCOSS, COTA or any other peak body. Perhaps we need to look at that and ensure that the peak bodies that really do help coordinate the activities of the community sector are funded as best as they can be.

Many other areas of the Chief Minister's Department have been ignored. Multiculturalism, for instance has just been ignored; it does not even rate a mention. I cannot see any reference to the proposed multicultural centre. I am sure that Mr Pratt will talk about that later. I cannot find funding for the multicultural aged care workers that were promised. I am sure that they will be coming. Perhaps the government needs to check on its Gerritsen costing as to when they were meant to come and when they were meant to be delivered, but they are certainly not mentioned here at all.

One initiative that I have to say I do like is the one about the Monash awards. We are not being negative, Ted; we are praising you for an initiative. There have been two praises. I have said well done on the bushfire funding and I am now saying that the Monash awards, particularly, are a fantastic initiative in that, as a nation, we have not had the tradition of the Rhodes scholars or the Fulbrights. I think that it is quite worthy and quite reasonable to have in the budget a contribution by the government to these awards over the next two years. I think that the benefit that we as a nation and, therefore, we as a city will accrue from doing so will be all out of proportion to the small amount of money that will be going to them.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition's time has expired.

MR SMYTH: I will take my second 10 minutes to speak on the next line. The other area that is weak in this budget is the government's commitment to business. We are yet to see the government's economic white paper. It is a moveable feast; it seems to be sliding out from the end of this year to early next year. It will be interesting to see whether it is delivered early next year and what form it will take.

I heard Mr Quinlan say that it will be a useful reference document. I hope that it will not be just a useful reference document. I hope that it will be an economic blueprint and a plan that will actually outline where the Labor government intends to take the community through its business sector because, unless all the sectors work together and are in unison, every sector will suffer.

Without the business sector creating employment, creating wealth and paying taxes that feed back in the general economy, there are things that governments cannot do. I think that the lack of attention to business and, indeed, the number of charges that this government seeks to place on business and the moves not to raise the payroll tax threshold are disappointing.

I know that the business community is disappointed overall with any drive or push from the business minister. The tourism sector is accepting of the \$40 million in the following year, but not his response to questions about where, when and how of: "Dunno, dunno, dunno." We have promises for outyears that are vague enough to be avoided. What we do not have is the commitment or the drive from this government to ensure that they actually do happen.

Another area that truly concerns me is the apparent downgrading of initiatives such as Canberra Connect and making Canberra the city that uses e-government to its best effect. There is comment in the Estimates Committee's report about projects that are undertaken by government and making sure that the timelines that are put in are realistic. As far as I know, the recommendation on that is the only one that the government has accepted so far.

We do need to make sure that we get our communications and our software accurate, but my concern is about the whole attitude towards, for instance, Canberra Connect. On 18 January, Canberra Connect had something like 150,000 hits and proved its value simply on that day. It was a way for Canberrans to keep as up-to-date as one can in an emergency which was changing all the time. I suspect that it needs to be driven from the Chief Minister's office. It needs to be driven as something we accept.

That is not to say that we reject the old way of accepting payments at shopfronts. There will always be a role for shopfronts. But if we are to live up to the potential of this city and back up our business community in selling that potential round the world and round the country—we have proven that we can through Tower, Management Solutions and Wizard, to name just a few companies—we need government to say, "We will prove it, we will be a reference site and we will be the endorsing body that says that it backs up its firms." You do not see that sort of commitment in this budget.

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There are other areas that deserve some credit. Addressing elder abuse is one. I am sure, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you will have something to say on that shortly. It is an issue that I think will affect the ACT quite significantly in the long term, particularly when we get to 2015 and the percentage of aged people in the territory reaches the national average.

We are now in a position, 12 years from that time, to do something, and addressing elder abuse is one of those elements. Well done to the government for that. But we need to see a commitment and it will need to be driven from the Chief Minister's office to make sure that all the services, whatever they might be—accommodation, housing, health, libraries, transport, access to information—are driven in a way that is more coordinated than they currently are.

With those few thoughts, Mr Deputy Speaker, I commend my amendment to the Assembly. I think that it is a reasonable amendment. I think that it tells the government that governments do have a right, as a convention, to their budgets, but that does not mean that the convention is a blind convention or that the right is a blind right and it does not mean that we are just going to pass budgets out of hand. If we are going to do that, we certainly should not have the estimates process and we should not be having this debate; we should just pass the budget.

I think we have a right, as Assembly members, to scrutinise the budget and, if appropriate, make suggestions as to how we would change it. That is what the opposition is doing today. The opposition will continue to look at all the lines of the budget throughout the course of today and on Thursday and, where we think it is appropriate, make suggestions for change.

MRS BURKE (12.02): I have just a couple of comments. In the area of the Chief Minister's Department there are some good initiatives. I would like to congratulate the government on one in particular, that is, the one on fostering the development of small and medium business. It is really good to see money being spent into the outyears there. That is for the small end of town.

One concern, as Mr Smyth has alluded to, is about the payroll tax threshold. It was the dream, the desire and, indeed, the action of the former Liberal government to continue to raise that threshold and it is disappointing to see that that has been halted or slowed down. I do have a concern that this creates uncertainty within the business sector in the bigger end of town. The role of government should be about creating environments conducive to business growth and employment. I really believe that this simply is a deterrent to employment growth. It is disappointing to see that threshold not being lifted. A buoyant business community obviously means a buoyant economy, and we all benefit from that.

The other thing that I am keen to make note of for the public record is my extreme disappointment with the way in which Volunteering ACT are being treated. They play an incredibly valuable support role to government, I would suggest, and to the broader community. They save the taxpayers of the ACT millions of dollars a year. The sum of \$62 million has been quoted in this place for the 80,000 to 100,000 people, including young people, who contribute to the volunteering force in the ACT.

I am very disappointed. It simply is an insult to tell Volunteering ACT to be thankful for the \$50,000 and to go away and make up the shortfall through some sort of grant application. I believe that that has put an inordinate amount of pressure upon the executive of Volunteering ACT. I am just flabbergasted that a government with a strong social agenda should see fit not to give them another \$50,000. They have been on \$100,000.

I ask that this government look at that again. Obviously, we all benefit from the efforts of our volunteers and there would be an impost on us all if the current situation were to continue, so I urge the government to look carefully at the measure it has taken and reconsider it. I have been in touch with Volunteering ACT as I have noted the comment in the report that Volunteering ACT met with the department and was told more of the same: that \$50,000 will be it and it has to make up the shortfall. I think that that is being short sighted, and I ask the government to reconsider that.

MS TUCKER (12.05): I will make some general comments about the Chief Minister's Department and then respond to Mr Smyth's amendment. My first comments are to do with government strategy overall. I think that it is fair to say that the notion of a whole-of-government approach to sustainability is yet to permeate the whole of the government. Affordable housing is a case in point. I will address it in more detail later, but it is telling that a high-profile government project such as Kingston Foreshore has no affordable or public housing structured in it.

The partnership with the community sector is a whole-of-government activity. Whilst government funds the community sector to deliver services to the most marginalised people in our community, it has been a battle over the years to fund basic award entitlements for lower rated community sector workers, but even that commitment has not been made to those at a higher level.

Every Labor member would know that the Commonwealth Liberal government has continued the work of the previous Labor government in undermining the significance of award conditions and that, thanks to Peter Reith and the Australian Democrats, awards are now bare safety nets. In the ACT public service, real wage and salary levels, established through certified agreements, are around 40 per cent above award levels. This government has made much of ensuring that the most recent certified agreement at least reassured ACT public servants that they are not falling further behind their Commonwealth colleagues.

For the community sector, after a long battle with the Liberal government and then the Labor government in the ACT, this year's budget merely provides the necessary extra funds to cover these lower award rates. It is a victory of sorts but, unfortunately, the SACS award is still massively below real public sector pay rates and employment conditions and, whereas CA increases are factored into public sector appropriation as a matter of course, any new award has to be fought for in the community sector. The result, inevitably, is that senior and developing staff are creamed off by the public sector, or by business, year after year and the sector itself is in no position to train, develop or look after those people who are driving the community sector.

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Michael Pusey, in his book *The experience of Middle Australia*, makes the point that people in general are doing badly, working less effectively, being less happy, feeling less integrated in their community, all in large part due to the shift away from employment security and towards a more stressful and erratic work and social environment. That is happening to the community sector, but more so.

Whilst there are many government agencies which might imagine that the ideas and policy come from them, there is a growing body of research which emphasises the crucial role of non-government organisations in developing social and environmental sustainability. In fact, I have noticed that the Bush government in the United States are recognising the strong influence that community organisations and the non-government sector have and it has now become a target of their campaign, because they believe that somehow it is undermining democracy, which is rather ironic.

We depend on the community sector to drive, inform, invent or support our involvement in shaping a sustainable society, but we fail to resource it in any supportable manner. Despite the numerous initiatives that address identified need, that respond to analysis and experience, that can be found line after line in this budget, the sector that has driven so many of these ideas still does it on the cheap. That explains, for example, how Directions, a life and work skills provider run by Assisting Drug Dependents Inc, is still trapped in appalling accommodation. Whilst funded by government, Directions is not made up of government employees or government customers; so, year after year, nothing has to happen, and it doesn't.

Finally on the community sector, the lack of money is at times compounded by a lack of trust. The government review of statutory oversight and community advocacy agencies was established under the watchful eye of a tender selection panel consisting of the CEOs of the three government departments most likely to fund or deliver services attracting complaints or concerns. Community representation on that panel was ruled out by government. Several reasons were given in estimates. The Chief Minister denied that it was a result of a statement that there was a conflict of interest in their being on that panel, although I noticed that an official did still support that reason. That really is quite a spurious argument.

Now the review team has been selected, it will be working to a management group still consisting of the same CEOs. Despite requests, no representative of or member of any community agency or peak body will be invited onto the group. When I raised this matter in the Assembly or at estimates, the Chief Minister dismissed ACTCOSS as a mere interest group. I think we can see that there is a problem there.

At a nuts and bolts level, we could look at the introduction of the Charitable Collections Bill. The government gave a few of the larger charities a couple of weeks to comment on it. Once the legislation was passed, countless smaller community groups, such as P&Cs, preschools and scout groups, discovered that they would be captured by the act. We may now have negotiated a more satisfactory consultation regime for the regulations, but the surprise and distress only demonstrate how little the everyday reality of small community organisations is considered or understood by the team producing legislation.

Of course, it is not simply community organisations which suffer in such a situation; it is also members of the community, particularly the most vulnerable members of the community. For example, over the past few years there have been a number of deaths inside or connected with the psychiatric unit at the Canberra Hospital. The government's response, to summarise it broadly, was: "We have good staff, it's difficult work, mental illness is serious, and people die."

A long time later, after an inquiry by the Health Complaints Commissioner had confirmed what community organisations, consumers and their friends and loved ones had been saying, the need for appreciable real change was, to a degree, acknowledged. The results of the Mann-Laroche review of the PSU itself have now come out and that analysis has again been confirmed. I am still not sure that I have heard government say to the patients, the consumers, their carers and the organisations that support them, "We understand your concerns. We are committed to making change. We do want to look after you better. We need to earn your trust and hope that we will. We know that things have not been good."

In that context, the recent motion from the ACT Labor Party, directed at the government and calling for some kind of regime change inside the ACT public service, is quite understandable and welcome. Improving the relationship between government and the community is a question of values, commitment and resources; but if we are to develop social sustainability, a commitment to improving communication and trust needs to happen across the whole of government.

Next, there is the question of a whole-of-government approach to environmental sustainability. I will go into this in more detail in a later debate, but the point to make here is that it really does need to stretch across government. In terms of ecological communities, we have a responsibility to protect our grassy woodlands, for example, and for this government to sacrifice O'Malley, Forde and Bonner before it has signed off on a woodlands strategy and without providing a national context for this decision is scandalous. But environmental sustainability is more than a woodland strategy. It is about how we live together in the landscape.

Let's look at water, which is very much in our minds. Stormwater running into gardens rather than drains is still the exception rather than the rule, getting rainwater tanks linked to toilets and washing machines is still very difficult, grey water recycling is far too much of a curiosity, and Northbourne Avenue is still ridiculously and dangerously green. What is possible with solar passive design inside the house and in our backyards is so much more than developers and planning controls presently deliver. Our buildings continue to be quite primitive for the climate in which we live.

Environmental sustainability has a global dimension. There is growing acceptance that last year's record temperatures and the ongoing drought, key contributors to the devastating bushfires, were in part a product of global warming, while our habits of heating and fuel use are a part of that. The sustainable transport strategy is a good step in the right direction, but more freeways rather than bus lanes or railways and competitive taxis rather than ADART-like systems get in the way of making real changes to how we run our city.

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Finally, we get to the question of economic sustainability, which the past few years have shown is something more than bed nights, technology and wineries. ACTCOSS has contributed a couple of papers to the government's economic white paper process in which it has explored the value of creating employment for people facing long-term unemployment. In essence, jobs in the community sector have high value for the community, provide job pathways and skill enhancement, and tend to have a high local multiplier effect.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Your time has expired, Ms Tucker. Would you like to take your other 10 minutes?

MS TUCKER: Thank you. ACTCOSS also argued that the benefits to the community in terms of increased social engagement, lower crime rates and greater participation in volunteer activities are equally valuable in providing further promotion of employment and in bringing down costs.

The recent social and demographic profile of multicultural Canberra identified the key factor for poor health and employment outcomes as being poor English. Information and communications technology, blue rooms for multimedia games or national sports events will not help these people to give more and need less from our community.

This government appears to have no policy for creating employment for those who need it most. Obviously, as a boutique size, reasonably well off capital city we are well placed to develop a profile in emerging industries, such as environmental remediation and ecologically sensitive design, but if we want an economically sustainable society we need to ensure that the social and environmental base are strong first, and employment creation, lifelong education and social support are all basic to that formula. This budget does not appear to bring these ingredients together. I understand that the spatial plan, the white paper and the social plan are intended to do that job. Too many choices have already been made, however, that have the government pointing in different directions to be entirely confident that such a sustainable Canberra is on the cards.

Mr Smyth has moved an amendment. I will speak briefly to that. I will not be supporting it. I spoke to Mr Smyth about it and he said, "Don't worry, it won't get up." I do not think that that is satisfactory; you just do not play games with amending a budget in that way. The amendment could get up. The question that you would have to ask then is: what precedent are we setting here? I have not been briefed on this amendment. I am certainly not prepared to support an amendment to the budget that I knew nothing about until it was tabled and moved by Mr Smyth.

I remember that in the last Assembly we went through this dilemma with the Liberals because they had money for free school buses, which was stridently opposed by many of us in the Assembly. I remember we went through the thinking on that at that time, too. At the time, Mr Berry, I think, was going to move for the removal of the money from the budget and we realised in that discussion that there would be no real control over the outcome of that anyway, particularly with a small amount like this one. The government could continue to employ media people and have this media unit and the money could come from somewhere else because they have control of the spending.

I could seek to remove today all the money to be spent on the Gungahlin Drive extension. That sounds like a good idea to me, much better than voting against a media unit that they can have anyway. The basic point I want to make today is that it does not serve the people of Canberra to be playing games like this one, putting up amendments that you do not think will get up anyway so you do not worry about them, and not consulting with people in the Assembly.

MS DUNDAS (12.19): I will also speak to the Chief Minister's Department line in the budget and get it over and done with. I welcome the funding to tackle elder abuse, which follows the recommendations of an Assembly inquiry. However, there are quite a few areas where the CMD budget shows evidence of a skewed set of priorities.

The committee inquiry into the status of women came up with a long list of recommendations; yet there are no new initiatives in this budget to implement these recommendations. That shows that the status of women was not a priority for the Stanhope government. The discussion that was had during the estimates process about how women-specific initiatives were being considered as part of this budget was quite disappointing.

I do hope that the recommendations of the committee that inquired into the status of women and the work of the Office of Women will be picked up by this government, not ignored. That would mean targeting new money at women's programs. We still exist in a time where we do need to have a separate focus on how policy impacts on women and how women can have their voices heard in our democratic processes. That is something that does need to be considered in a budget context and it was disappointing to see that it was not a priority of the government this year.

Also, there was discussion when we were looking at the status of women and the work of the Office of Women about their role being to make sure that women's issues permeate throughout government and there is a whole-of-government approach to women and, as Ms Tucker has already discussed, a whole-of-government approach to sustainability. Despite the fact that these new offices have been in place for 18 months, there appears to have been little outcome from the work being done. We still do not have triple bottom line accounting in this budget. We are still lacking information on how the status of women in the ACT is improving or otherwise.

Both the Office of Sustainability and the Office of Women were not key players in the development of the budget. I would have expected them to have been. I find that disappointing. We are to a certain extent recognising that these two areas need to be prioritised by setting up offices to look into them, yet their role appears to be limited.

One of the key pieces of legislation that the government puts down every year is the appropriation bill, the budget, yet the Office of Women and the Office of Sustainability were resoundingly left out of the development of the budget and there is little evidence to show that sustainability and the status of women have permeated through the public service departments and these issues have been considered. I do hope that the government will reprioritise the work on that and place greater focus on these two areas of great need.

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To move on: the Chief Minister's Department also manages the grant to a professional AFL team, the North Melbourne Kangaroos. A substantial grant is given to an interstate team to play AFL in Canberra. It is much larger than the grants that we give to grassroots AFL teams, to teams that actually play in the ACT. There is a worrying trend with that. It indicates that the government may not be serious about improving the health and wellbeing of the ACT community on the ground, maybe just the entertainment aspects. To me, that is evidence of skewed priorities.

I am quite appalled at the decision to spend an extra \$250,000 on government spin doctors, which has already been discussed in this Assembly. It is a substantial amount of money that could have been spent on improving service delivery in any one of many areas of need. While it is important that the government and members of the Assembly communicate with the people who live in the ACT, how much money is really needed to be spend on doing that and will a whole-of-government media department actually achieve better outcomes in communication or better outcomes for the people of the ACT? I will discuss that further when I move on to discussing the Liberals' amendment to the budget.

More generally, I am concerned at the ongoing rollovers from year to year within the Chief Minister's Department's budget line. It seems that a number of these deferred projects simply disappear after spending has been delayed for a few years. We can actually see in this budget for the Chief Minister's Department the removal of 2001-02 rollovers of close to \$4 million. Projects that were appropriated for in the 2001-02 budget—I note that that was the former government's budget and not this government's budget—were never completed and the money has just disappeared back into the bottom line.

In the 2002-03 budget there was a substantial number of rollovers across the ACT public service, across the departments, but specifically there were quite a few in the Chief Minister's Department. I find this practice quite concerning. We get information about what the government is planning on doing in the year and we give the government money to implement those schemes yet, for whatever reason, these projects are not finished, they are continually deferred, and what the community expects from this government or any other government does not actually take place. Eventually, as evidenced by this budget, the projects and the money just disappear.

Specifically, in this year's budget we have knowledge funds being continually rolled over. I do wonder whether they will eventually be expended and the knowledge fund project continued or they will just vanish. I am also concerned that some of the economic white paper funding is disappearing.

I have previously expressed concerns that too little targeted consultation was done as part of the development of the white paper process to elicit views from the wider community about how the ACT should develop its economy. As a result, I fear that the final paper will be narrowly focused on the interests and needs of existing ACT businesses, instead of leading to an economic plan that delivers equity by improving employment opportunities for the people who are now unemployed.

I am also mystified as to why Volunteering ACT was singled out for mention in the budget papers, as it appears that no other community group that receives funding from the ACT government has been singled out for their own line item in the budget. But to single them out and say that this is an initiative, when Volunteering ACT has been receiving money from the government for a number of years, is quite mystifying, as I have said.

The government mentioned in its response to the Estimates Committee's report that it is working with Volunteering ACT on that. Hopefully, it will work through the problems, because Volunteering ACT provide a special service to the ACT community and they do need government support to be able to continue to do that.

The amendment moved by Mr Smyth seeks to withdraw \$250,000 from the appropriation for the Chief Minister's Department. As Mr Smyth has stated, it is specifically to do with the initiative about whole-of-government communications. I am quite clearly on the record in a number of different forums as not supporting the increased expenditure on whole-of-government media communications. I believe that this line item in the budget is excessive. I believe that the money could be better spent elsewhere.

I do think that it shows, again, a skewed set of priorities and does not do anything to reaffirm or actually promote the good work that this place is trying to do for the community. It reinforces the view that many people in our community hold that politicians are nothing but spin, that we do not listen to them, and that we are always trying to pull the wool over their eyes. I do not want to see that kind of attitude continue. I do believe that this reinforces that.

I seek to use my second set of time.

MR SPEAKER: Proceed.

MS DUNDAS: Ms Tucker did raise some important questions about how budgets are presented, how government sets priorities and about the role of the Assembly in debating and providing input to those priorities. There is concern that, if this amendment is passed and the Chief Minister's Department's appropriation is reduced by \$250,000, the government will find some other way of funding the proposal and some other project will miss out on funding, which would be going against what the Assembly is saying.

It is quite clear that the \$250,000 that Mr Smyth is seeking to remove from the Chief Minister's Department budget is specifically in relation to the whole-of-government media initiative. If this amendment is passed, the government should take note of the words that have been said in this debate and not implement the initiative. If this amendment is passed and the government chooses to ignore what has been said by this Assembly, as has been done in the past, it will show a worrying trend in how interaction takes place in the role of government and the role of this Assembly.

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I will support this amendment, as I do believe that it should specifically remove the extra funding for a whole-of-government media team. I do think that it is an excessive amount of money to be spending and the money could be spent better elsewhere. If this amendment is successful and the Treasurer wants to come back with Appropriation Bill 2003-2004 (No 2) showing where he wants to spend any extra money that he has then in his bottom line, I would be happy to consider it. I have considered carefully how budgets are done and the government's role in developing them. I hope that the government will consider carefully the words that have been said in the Assembly during this debate and take note of them for future debates on money bills.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.32 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice

Public service

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Chief Minister, Mr Stanhope, as the minister responsible for public sector management. I refer to a *Canberra Times* report of 21 June 2003 about a recent committee set up by the branch council of the Labor Party, and I quote:

In a strongly worded motion passed at last night's 42-member branch council meeting, senior Labor figures expressed their frustration at what they have described as continuing bad policy decisions within the top ranks of the ACT service.

Chief Minister, did you attend this meeting and, if so, did you strongly defend your senior public servants from this unprecedented attack by your Labor colleagues?

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, I did not attend the meeting.

MR SMYTH: Chief Minister, why is your government using public servants and office holders as scapegoats for your bad decisions, rather than accepting responsibility for them?

MR STANHOPE: It is not, Mr Speaker.

Public service

MR PRATT: Mr Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Chief Minister, Mr Stanhope, as the minister responsible for public sector management. I refer to a *Canberra Times* report of 21 June 2003 about a recent committee set up by the branch council of the Labor Party:

They have called on secretary Matthew Cossey to set up ... a reform plan "with the focus of all inquiries to be the management style and effectiveness of the public service and statutory boards and authorities ..."

Have you instructed, or will you instruct, senior public servants, statutory office appointees and boards to cooperate with what can only be described as a partisan witch-hunt?

MR STANHOPE: No.

MR PRATT: Chief Minister, who is running the public service—you or the old Left of the Labor Party?

MR STANHOPE: Me.

Smoke-free enclosed public spaces

MS MacDONALD: Mr Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Minister for Health. Minister, last week you issued the discussion paper, *Towards smoke free enclosed public places in the ACT*. Can you outline to the Assembly the objectives of this paper?

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, I was very pleased last week to release the public consultation document, *Towards smoke free enclosed public places in the ACT*. The paper consults the community on the proposed phase out of the smoke-free areas ACT exemption system. This discussion paper forms part of the process which will involve discussions with community and business organisations. Its focus is on how and when a phase out is best achieved. That is the subject of both the consultation and the discussion paper. The government is already on the record—

Mr Smyth: So you already have your position determined?

MR CORBELL: We already have our position determined? Yes, Mr Speaker, we have. The government's policy is to phase out smoke-free exemption systems under the act. The four options the government has stated as ways of addressing this commitment are explained in the discussion paper. They include: ending all exemptions on a designated common date at the earliest possible opportunity; ending all exemptions on a designated common date which allows for a longer phase out period; allowing current exemptions to operate until their expiry date, but with no further exemption granted; and allowing current exemptions to operate until their expiry date, but with new and renewed exemptions expiring on the common date of 30 November 2006.

In 1994 the ACT led the nation with landmark passive smoking legislation. This government believes it is now time to renew that policy commitment—after seven years of inaction on the part of our predecessors. There is now unequivocal and indisputable evidence that passive smoking is harmful and that there is no safe exposure level.

This is not about stopping people from smoking; it is about protecting public health—the health of people who work in and use places such as pubs, clubs and restaurants. Our review of legislation is timely, given that other jurisdictions, particularly Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, are also currently examining this issue.

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The current exemption system means that patrons and employees in a handful of restaurants and a large number of pubs, clubs and bars, are still exposed to the health risks from environmental tobacco smoke. We need to move towards a more complete and equitable health protection system. Unfortunately, because of seven years of inaction, the ACT is now behind many jurisdictions, both in Australia and overseas.

Mr Smyth: Not 18 months of inaction?

MR CORBELL: Let us remember who introduced the smoke-free exemptions regime in the first place, Mr Speaker—those opposite us. They brought in an exemptions regime which does not work, which is unsafe and which still exposes people to dangerous levels—in fact, any level is dangerous—of environmental tobacco smoke. That is the legacy we are now working to address, and the government is very pleased to be doing so.

MS MacDONALD: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Minister, what has been the initial reaction to the discussion paper?

MR CORBELL: The reaction has been quite positive, from a wide range of people in the community—certainly people who contacted my office. Recent surveys have found that 85 per cent of Canberrans support smoke-free restaurants and 63 per cent support smoke-free pubs and clubs. So there is a strong level of community support for phasing out the exemptions regime. Obviously, health consumer groups and medical groups also support such a ban.

The Australian Hotels Association has, of course, claimed that this will have a serious impact on their business. The same claim was made when it was proposed that restaurants go smoke free. It just did not happen. What is most disappointing is the view of the Liberal opposition. The Liberal opposition have indicated that they will be—

Mr Smyth: Mr Speaker, I wish to raise a point of order. Standing order 118 (b) does not allow him to debate or comment on behalf of the Liberal Party. We are quite capable of doing that ourselves. I would ask you to direct him to answer the question.

MR CORBELL: On the point of order: the supplementary question was: what has been the initial reaction to the discussion paper? I am outlining that, and I am about to outline the reaction of the Liberal opposition.

MR SPEAKER: I think he is entitled to deal with things in context.

MR CORBELL: It is interesting that Mr Smyth has said, in his media statement, that a total ban would be a big step. He went on to say:

But we have to keep in mind how such a move would affect the livelihoods of businesses like pubs and clubs.

He goes on to say in his media statement that the government cannot phase out the current exemption system without proving that it is not working. He said:

I certainly hope that there is not a pre-determined response already prepared that states we should ban smoking in enclosed areas.

This is interesting because, in 2001, the then leader of the Liberal Party and Chief Minister, Mr Humphries, gave a commitment to the people of Canberra that they would do exactly that, if they were elected to government. In fact, Mr Humphries said, on 17 September 2001, when announcing the Liberal Party's election commitment in relation to tobacco policy:

The ACT Liberals believe the ACT should be at the forefront of tobacco control. The current exemption system ... places a significant cost on business while failing to protect workers.

Mr Humphries made it clear that the regime failed to protect workers. He believed the exemption scheme did not work. He said that it may also be anti-competitive. He then said that none of the high-quality air filtering systems installed is capable of removing the invisible gaseous components of environmental tobacco smoke.

The Liberal Party went to the last election saying that they would phase out the exemption regime. We now have the current Liberal leader and the shadow minister for health saying, "Prove to us that the exemption scheme doesn't work." Your own leader said it in September 2001. He said that the exemption scheme fails workers. Mr Humphries said that it fails workers.

Mr Smyth: There are no fines—and you have your health workers out there. How many inspectors do you have on the job? How many fines have you issued?

MR CORBELL: I think Mr Smyth is embarrassed on this issue.

Mr Smyth: I am not embarrassed at all.

MR CORBELL: Mr Smyth is very embarrassed on this issue. So he should be, because his position is a back-down from the commitment the Liberal Party took to the people of Canberra. Their statement was that it was an agenda for removing current exemptions which apply to licensed premises and restaurants. That was the position the Liberal Party took to the people of Canberra at the last election. "We are going to remove exemptions," the Liberal Party said. "We are going to phase them out." We now have Mr Smyth on the public record saying, "Give us a reason why they should be phased out." Mr Speaker, that is a big back-flip on the part of the Liberal Party. Mr Humphries said:

The current exemption system ... places a significant cost on business while failing to protect workers.

Those are not my words but the words of the then Chief Minister, when he announced the Liberal Party's policy. That was the Liberal Party's policy.

Mr Humphries announced that the Canberra Liberals will "work towards completely smoke-free enclosed public places legislation for the ACT". That was your position—the phase out exemptions.

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Interestingly, Mr Smyth is now asking the government to demonstrate that there is a good reason for doing this. We don't have to, Mr Smyth, because you agreed with us, back in 2001, but you have changed your mind.

Come back, Mr Humphries—all is forgiven! Mr Humphries made it quite clear in his policy statement. Maybe it was his; maybe he did not have the backing of his party; maybe it was just a unilateral announcement on the part of Mr Humphries.

Mr Humphries said that one possible way forward for the task force the Liberals were proposing to convene would be for the task force to consider ending any new exemptions and allow a reasonable phasing out period for those who had already installed the equipment. Mr Speaker, we agree. In fact, it is in the discussion paper. That is one of the options.

What is disappointing about the Liberal Party's approach is that Mr Smyth is backing away from his commitment to phase out smoking in enclosed public places. He is saying that the government cannot complain about the current exemption system without supportive documentation to say it is not working.

In 2001, they did not think they needed any evidence, because they felt that the evidence was sufficient to show that the exemption system does not work. Shame on you, Mr Smyth—you know better. Public health is the number one priority. You are backing away to play crude politics with the clubs and pubs industry at the expense of the health of the public community. Shame on you! The government will continue to highlight to the people of Canberra your hypocrisy and your back-flip on this major issue.

Land sales

MRS DUNNE: My question, which is directed to the Minister for Planning, relates to land sales. On 11 June the Gungahlin Development Authority conducted a restricted land auction for a residential development known as Harrison 1 estate. Under the terms and conditions of the sale a 10 per cent deposit was supposed to be paid on the fall of the hammer. Is it a fact, Minister, that the 10 per cent deposit was not paid as required by the highest bidder? If not, what is the status of the sale? Will the minister advise the Assembly whether settlement is proceeding and, if not, what is proposed for the sale of Harrison 1 estate?

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, the company that was successful in that auction has paid its \$1 million deposit in accordance with the requirements of the contract.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. Could the minister explain to the Assembly how, if the sale price was \$38 million and the conditions of the contract provided for a 10 per cent deposit on the fall of the hammer, \$1 million equates to the full deposit required for the sale?

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, the company that was successful in the auction has been advised that the balance of the deposit, \$2.8 million, must be paid by bank cheque no later than 27 June.

Water conservation

MS DUNDAS: My question is to the Minister for the Environment. Minister, you have urged all ACT residents to conserve water and have noted that most drinking water consumed is used to water outdoor areas. Can you please inform the Assembly how much of the 30,000 or so megalitres of water that disappears between the supply and waste water treatment stages of the water loop is used for watering public places in the territory?

MR STANHOPE: At this stage, 4.6 per cent of the treated water at the lower Molonglo water treatment plant is recycled. I cannot say that that is utilised on public land. The majority of the 4.6 per cent of recycled water from the lower Molonglo water treatment plant is utilised by a Hardy's winery. Very little of the water is utilised at this stage for watering or irrigating public lands. It is the ACT government's intention to set a more rigorous target for the recycling of water from the lower Molonglo water treatment plant.

It is certainly one of the major challenges facing us as we move to the development of a water strategy to recycle grey water, not just from the lower Molonglo water treatment plant but also in our homes and businesses. These are major challenges facing the community; they are at the heart of the water strategy the government is developing. At this stage, we are recycling 4.6 per cent of the 30-plus gegalitres of water that runs from the treatment plant back into the Murrumbidgee. I am looking to raise that significantly over the next 10 years. Indeed, it is our intention to set a target of around 20 per cent.

MS DUNDAS: I have a supplementary question. Minister, you said that 4.6 per cent of recycled water is being used. Can you find out how much of that is being used on public land and how much water we use to water our public land? With your target of 20 per cent of recycled water being used, is that 20 per cent of the water going onto public land being recycled water or just 20 of the recycled water being utilised?

MR STANHOPE: I will seek to determine how much of the 4.6 per cent is utilised on public land. I think it is a minimal amount, but I will get the actual measure for you. At the moment, 4.6 per cent is the amount of grey water or recycled water from the lower Molonglo water treatment plant that is not pumped back into the Murrumbidgee but is used for all purposes.

The most significant user of that water is the Hardy's winery at Holt. I will determine what other water is used and whether any is used on public land. The target that I propose for the recycling of water is 20 per cent. It is a target I anticipate we should be able to reach within 10 years. That would be 20 per cent of all grey water emanating from the lower Molonglo water treatment plant to be used for all purposes.

We propose, concomitantly, to pursue a rigorous program across the board. The hope is that not so much of our household and other water actually reaches the lower Molonglo water treatment plant in the first place. That is part of the equation.

Vandalism of Chapman building

MR HARGREAVES: My question is to the minister for housing. I was disturbed to see in Sunday's *Canberra Times* an article about a building in Chapman that had been damaged by vandalism. What will happen to this wonderful asset in the future?

MR WOOD: That property, which many of you may know, was formerly leased by Disability Programs. It was vacated in May 2000 as residents were moved into smaller units provided by ACT Housing. It is a large property in a wonderful setting. Several groups undertook feasibility studies to see whether it suited their purposes, but it did not.

In July 2002 it was decided to use the property as a boarding house for older women escaping family breakdowns, including victims of elder abuse and domestic violence. The plight of older women escaping family breakdown, including that violence, poses difficulties. There are women's refuges in the ACT, but they are used mainly by younger women with children, escaping domestic violence, and they have not been found to be appropriate for this older age group, many of whom could be from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Transfield, one of ACT Housing's total facilities managers, has commenced management of the refurbishment works for the boarding house. It has engaged architects to design and document the refurbishment. I understand that tenders have been called for the refurbishment construction works. It is intended that the successful construction tenderer—I am not sure when that will be decided or announced—will commence work in mid-July and complete construction in approximately five months. By that time, this property will be returned to a very useful and identified need in this community.

MR HARGREAVES: I have a supplementary question. Minister, what is being done about the vandalism? How will the property be protected?

MR WOOD: The protection of the property has been raised by a number of people, including my colleague Mr Quinlan. Housing has taken action to secure the property with perimeter fencing and it has boarded up the windows to prevent unauthorised access. Security patrols also have been arranged. Nearby residents have been or will be informed of these arrangements and asked to contact the security firm or a designated officer in ACT Housing if they see anything that disturbs them.

Land sales

MR STEFANIAK: My question is also to the Minister for Planning in relation to the Harrison 1 estate land sale of 11 June. Minister, under the terms and conditions circulated to potential bidders by the Gungahlin Development Authority there is this clause:

The Successful Bidder must pay a deposit equal to 10% of the full amount bid at the time of the auction and the balance of the purchase price within 56 days from the date of the auction. Note that if the balance of the bid is not paid the deposit cannot be recovered from the Authority. Any failure to pay the balance due or part thereof will constitute a breach of condition of the agreement.

Minister, seeing as this condition seems to give you no leeway in relation to the 10 per cent, why was that 10 per cent not paid, and was the \$1 million that was paid forfeited as required? If not, why not?

MR CORBELL: Yes, what occurred on 11 June was that the successful bidder provided a cheque for \$3.8 million as the 10 per cent deposit, Mr Speaker. That cheque was dishonoured by the Commonwealth Bank at 5.00 pm on Monday, 16 June.

Since that time, the Gungahlin Development Authority has been in negotiations with the principals of the company, the successful bidder, after the authority received legal advice that it was legally able to do so, to vary the terms of the contract. The company made a part-payment of \$1 million on 20 June. The company has been advised that the balance of the deposit, \$2.8 million, must be paid by bank cheque by no later than 27 June this year. If these conditions are not met, the default provisions of the sale will apply and the property will be reoffered at auction early in the 2003-2004 financial year.

MR STEFANIAK: Minister, is the government by the actions of the GDA, in breach of its own regulations and conditions and also the national code of practice of the construction industry and, minister, will you table the advice you referred to by close of business today?

MR CORBELL: The advice I have received is that the authority is entirely within its rights to vary the contract.

MR SPEAKER: The standing orders preclude asking for a legal opinion, Mr Corbell, so I think—

Mr Stefaniak: I just asked him to table an advice.

MR SPEAKER: You asked if there was a breach.

Mr Stefaniak: Yes, I asked if, by the actions of the GDA, the government is in breach of its own regulations and conditions and also the national code of practice of the construction industry. Regarding the advice, I asked him to table it by close of business today.

MR SPEAKER: Yes.

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, I am advised that the GDA is acting lawfully and that its actions are consistent with advice provided to it. As this is an existing commercial transaction between two parties, I do not believe that it is in the public interest for the legal advice to be made available to third parties at this time.

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Disabled persons—motor vehicle modifications

MRS CROSS: Mr Speaker, my question is to Minister Wood. What is the current waiting time for those people with a disability who require vehicle modifications for their vehicles to be assessed so they can maintain their independence?

MR WOOD: It is an interesting question. I don't know the answer. I would have thought not much at all. They would present their vehicle with modifications. You ask an intriguing question to which I don't know the answer, but I'll find out for you.

MRS CROSS: Minister, is it true that there is only car with appropriate modifications available for training and testing in the ACT?

MR WOOD: Again, I don't know and I'll find out for you.

O'Connell Centre

MS TUCKER: My question is to the Minister for Planning and concerns section 78 Griffith, incorporating the O'Connell Centre. When community organisations first approached me about taking over the soon-to-be-emptied O'Connell Centre well over a year ago, I was advised that PALM was conducting a community facilities needs assessment of the section 78 area. I have since learned that, if the O'Connell Centre is found to be surplus to government requirements, it will be transferred to the new ACT Land Development Agency, presumably for disposal in light of the agency's commercial objectives.

Could the minister advise the Assembly when the community facilities needs assessment will be completed and made publicly available, how the development agency will take that assessment into account and whether the agency will first approach community organisations to assess the level of interest in this community facility?

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, Planning and Land Management have undertaken a community needs facility assessment in the inner south. I haven't seen the results of that work recently, although I understand it has been completed. I will undertake to obtain a copy for Ms Tucker.

In relation to the future of the O'Connell Education Centre: it is still currently leased by the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services; so it is not at this stage a vacant building, although I understand that the department will be vacating at some stage in the next 12 months. I'm not sure of the exact time frame.

In relation to future use of the site: the government hasn't yet taken their decision on the future use of that site.

MS TUCKER: I have been advised that none of the tenants of the O'Connell Centre really want to leave; yet one by one they are being relocated. Could the minister advise exactly who the tenants are and why they are all being asked to leave?

MR CORBELL: To the best of my knowledge, Mr Speaker, the key tenant is the department of education. There may be some other subtenants that I'm not aware of. I will take the question on notice and provide an answer to Ms Tucker.

Water contamination

MR CORNWELL: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, on Monday on radio station 2CC you were asked about the water contamination in Corin and Bendora dams. The host Mike Jeffreys asked you when you "first knew about these pollution problems" and you said:

Well I was briefed on them late last week and, I went through, of course Actew are probably building up to doing their testing et cetera but I got a briefing I think on Thursday night.

This would, of course, be Thursday 19 June. Treasurer, why then on 2CC this morning did the executive manager of water and regulatory affairs at ActewAGL say that you, along with the health department, would have been informed of the contamination late May, early June when the water supply was officially switched to Googong?

MR QUINLAN: Thank you for the question. I was advised that—and I think this was discussed publicly—there could be a turbidity problem. I forget the date but I was out at Weston at the "Stop the Drop" launch. There was discussion of the problem that as the weather got colder and as the air above the dam was colder than the water in the dam overnight you had virtually an inversion of layers within the dam causing some turbidity.

In regard to the discussion of manganese and iron content, I was only advised on that Thursday evening.

Mr Cornwell: There were two separate—

MR QUINLAN: There is a turbidity problem with the dam and that normally can be normally fixed with just a low cost addition of filtration. But some of the metallic elements are so small—there are a small number of microns; don't ask me to repeat the numbers because I forget—that in fact filtration will not remove them and there needs to be some process of sedimentation.

The turbidity problem with Corin and Bendora dams I think has been discussed on a number of occasions and I thought it was in the public forum anyway. Certainly, we talked about the amount of material in the dam. We know about booms and filtration skirts. Those sorts of things, I think, have all been in the public forum. But in regard to the metallic contamination—not contamination because it is not going to kill you; it is just going to affect water use in the household—I was advised on that Thursday, and that is one of the major problems that we have got to fix.

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Water contamination

MRS BURKE: My question, which is to the Treasurer, is also in regard to Actew. In the interview yesterday on 2CC, Mike Jeffreys also said to you, "Okay, so you're confident that the people in Canberra have been told as soon as humanly possible about this," to which you responded, "Yes." Minister, how can that be true when the executive manager of water and regulatory affairs at Actew said that the minister responsible, you, and the health department would have been told late May, early June?

MR QUINLAN: As above, I think.

Mrs Dunne: Turbidity is not a health problem.

MR QUINLAN: No.

Mrs Dunne: Why would the health department have been told in late May?

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mrs Dunne! Mrs Burke asked the question.

MR QUINLAN: Because within the ACT health standards there is a standard of, I think, five things that, regardless of whether you do or do not think it is a health problem, Mrs Dunne, precludes the supply of water with a content above five things. I think that in recent times we have had a measurement of 20 things.

MRS BURKE: Minister, is your idea of "as soon as humanly possible" three weeks after you were told?

MR QUINLAN: I hope that we are not trying to make a scandal out of this one. Dear me!

Mr Stanhope: When you're desperate.

MR QUINLAN: These are desperate days. With virtually everything that has happened out there, Paul Perkins, until his recent retirement, was not shy of getting onto the media and telling us exactly what was going on, giving us his opinion on future water prices and the whole bit; so I think that the whole process has been fairly open. All we did this week was to make sure, given that we had got to a point, particularly with manganese and iron suspension in the water, that we come to terms with the fact that we may very well have to spend a large amount of money on a treatment works and there could well be extended water restrictions and probably we will be at level 3 during the forthcoming spring and summer, which we wanted people to know about. We just tried to tell everybody what is going on. For God's sake, if you want to turn this thing into some sort of scandal, I am bemused.

Mr Stanhope: Mr Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Road funding

MR WOOD: Mr Speaker, I have an answer to a question about road maintenance funding that was asked a few days ago by Mr Cornwell. The rounded figures are: 1999-2000, \$17.25 million; 2000-01, \$19.5 million; 2001-02, \$19.3 million; 2002-03, \$18.7 million including bridge works; target 2003-04, \$20.5 million. I table that document. I present the following paper:

Cost of road maintenance for the period 1999-2000 to 2003-2004—Answer to question without notice asked of Mr Wood by Mr Cornwell and taken on notice on 17 June 2003.

Public Interest Disclosure Act

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, I took a question on notice from Ms Tucker on 18 June in relation to the Public Interest Disclosure Act. I undertook to provide Ms Tucker with a response to a number of issues in relation to that. I would like to table a detailed letter which I have provided. I present the following paper:

Public Interest Disclosure Act—Copy of letter from Mr Jon Stanhope MLA, Chief Minister to Ms Kerrie Tucker MLA—Answer to question without notice asked of Mr Stanhope by Ms Tucker and taken on notice on 18 June 2003.

Executive contracts

Papers and statement by minister

MR STANHOPE (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Community Affairs and Minister for the Environment): Mr Speaker, for the information of members, I present the following papers:

Public Sector Management Act, pursuant to sections 31A and 79—Copies of executive contracts or instruments—

Long term contracts:

- Lois Ford, dated 17 June 2003.
- Roslyn Hayes, dated 17 January 2003.
- Helen Fletcher, dated 11 June 2003.
- Douglas Jackman, dated 6 June 2003.

Short term contracts:

- Sandra Lambert, dated 30 September 2002.
- Colin Adrian, dated 30 April 2003.
- Robert Hutchison, dated 30 April 2003.
- Bronwen Overton-Clarke, dated 31 March 2003.
- Ian Hubbard, dated 31 March 2003.

Schedule D variations:

- David Butt, dated 11 June 2003.
- Ron Shaw, dated 11 June 2003.
- Jeffery Mason, dated 1 June 2003

I ask for leave to make a statement in relation to the contracts.

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Leave granted.

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, these documents are tabled in accordance with sections 31A and 79 of the Public Sector Management Act, which require the tabling of all executive contracts and contract variations. Contracts were previously tabled on 17 June 2003. Today I have presented four long-term contracts, five short-term contracts and three contract variations. The details of the contracts will be circulated to members.

Annual reports—declarations and directions Papers

MR STANHOPE (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Community Affairs and Minister for the Environment) (3.10): Mr Speaker, for the information of members, I present the following papers:

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act—Annual Reports 2002-2003—
Declarations—pursuant to sections 4, 5 and 8.
Directions—pursuant to sections 6, 7, 8, 10 and 11

I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the papers.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Review of ACT business regulation Paper and statement by minister

MR QUINLAN (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism and Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming): For the information of members, I present the following paper:

Business Regulation Review Committee—Review of ACT Business Regulation—Report to the ACT Government (*presented 21 November 2002*)—Government response, dated June 2003.

I seek leave to make a short statement.

Leave granted.

MR QUINLAN: Mr Speaker, in November 2002 I tabled a report on business regulation prepared by the Business Regulation Review Committee. That report was commissioned by me to satisfy a government election promise. This government is very aware of the important role played by local businesses in providing employment. These businesses provide a firm basis on which a dynamic Canberra economy can continue to grow and prosper.

The committee's report included a wide range of recommendations that could be adopted by government to assist local businesses through clarifying the need for

existing regulation and refocusing public service agencies on better meeting the needs of business.

I am pleased to be able to announce that the government has supported the adoption of most of these recommendations. The details of how the government agencies will implement these reforms are included in the government's response to the report.

Accordingly, I am pleased to present the government's response to the report and its recommendations, and I commend it to the Assembly.

Respite care project Paper and statement by minister

MR CORBELL (Minister for Health and Minister for Planning) (3.12): Mr Speaker, for the information of members, I present the following paper:

Sustaining Caring Relationships—Met and Unmet Needs in Respite Care Project—Final Report, prepared by Enduring Solutions, dated June 2003.

I seek leave to make a statement in relation to the paper.

Leave granted.

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, I am pleased to table today the final report of the met and unmet needs in respite care project. As members will be aware, the government made a commitment to “establish, through an empirical study, the extent of met and unmet need of various client groups and individuals now and into the future”. The government recognises that many carers are unable to access regular, adequate and appropriate respite services for their loved ones. Waiting lists for respite placements, difficulties in accessing emergency respite care in crisis situations, lack of flexibility for respite options and limited availability of respite hours are issues constantly raised by people in the Canberra community.

Through a 2002-03 budget initiative for respite care the government identified \$1 million to provide more respite care services for clients, families and carers covering aged care, disability and mental health. Funding for the empirical study was drawn from this initiative. In October 2002, Enduring Solutions were engaged to:

- map the existing respite services;
- using the AIHW 1996 model of needs analysis, undertake an empirical study of the current and future respite care met and unmet needs;
- undertake community consultations regarding access, equity and future directions for respite care delivery;
- undertake research into local, national and international best practice models for respite service delivery; and

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- make recommendations to the ACT government for planning service delivery over the next five years.

The review covered both territory and Commonwealth-funded programs and examined met and unmet need and ways to better coordinate existing respite care models.

The review was complex as respite care is provided through the Commonwealth Departments of Health and Ageing and Family and Community Services as well as ACT Health, the ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services and the ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services.

The report provides 28 recommendations covering the following areas:

- overall issues relating to service planning, data collection, community participation, equitable access and work force;
- system design issues;
- system efficiency issues;
- access and linkages to respite care;
- carer and consumer rights; and
- quality of services.

The report has drawn significantly from consultations with providers and carers to identify issues that are directly affecting the sector and its clients. The report shows that there is a discrepancy between the types of respite arrangements that carers and care recipients want and what is currently available.

Respite services are provided by a variety of organisations, including government service providers, non-government and volunteer organisations, and businesses. All organisations work hard to provide high-quality services, however fragmentation and gaps in service provision do occur.

The government notes that providing better respite services is not only an issue of providing more funding. It is also about broader cultural changes, greater flexibility, and more client-focused services for carers and care recipients.

The government is already in the process of addressing some of the issues around the provision of respite care through respite funding in the 2002-03 budget. Examples of this include:

- A cross-portfolio approach to innovative respite care pilot schemes which will provide flexible models of respite care. The pilot will begin in July 2003 and run over 12 months, and will be monitored to identify usage by clients in areas

of need for respite care. A family support model of respite care is being developed with three community agencies in this pilot. Participating families will be able to use respite funds for goods and services that meet their individual circumstances; and

- supplementing existing respite care programs for families at risk and kinship carers through Marymead and Barnardos.

These pilot programs will ensure that families maintain and strengthen their capacity to meet the needs of family members.

Mr Speaker, some of the other initiatives already put in place by the government include:

- the innovative dementia respite service, whereby ACT Health is working with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Carers Association to develop a pilot of innovative respite care for people with dementia. Funding of \$20,000 has been provided by the government to assist with the project. The project will provide day respite for carers of people with dementia and challenging behaviours. The service will operate from 8 am to 8 pm to meet the needs of working carers; and
- ACT Health is also coordinating a project to reduce fragmentation of respite care service provision by working with the Departments of Disability, Housing and Community Services and Education, Youth and Family Services, and other providers. This project will include development and provision of information to carers and providers.

The need for increased recognition for the needs of carers and people with mental illness was also identified in recommendations in the report. Funding has been allocated for individual respite care support and services to people with mental illness and their carers. This program focuses on providing respite care where the principal carer is a young person. A mental health carers project has also been funded over a 12-month period to promote and support the role of carers of people with a mental illness.

The need for rapid entry and easy exit emergency respite arrangements was identified in the report, and the government will continue to support the role of the Burrangiri Crisis Respite Centre for the Aged in the provision of crisis respite services for older people and their carers.

These are just some examples of what the government is actively doing to address respite care needs. However, I recognise that there needs to be more done to ensure that respite services are accessible, flexible, and meet the needs of carers and care recipients. The report will provide guidance for the government in addressing these

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issues. It is anticipated that the outcomes of the report will lead to a greater cross-sector understanding of respite needs in the ACT.

Cooperation and consultation will be required across the Commonwealth and ACT government and community service providers. I will be working closely with my colleagues Mr Wood, as Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, and Ms Gallagher, as Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, to address the recommendations from the report. A cross-portfolio approach is required to address respite care needs, as the study includes all areas of respite care, including aged care, disability, mental health and family services. Government agencies will work collaboratively in looking at the recommendations in the report, and how the care system and service provision can be improved to meet respite care needs.

Recommendations around flexible and innovative care models, improving data collections, ensuring that respite services provide quality care and the development of feedback systems to allow the carers and care recipients to have input to service provision are supported in principle by the government as a means of addressing the needs of carers.

Through the outcomes that will be monitored in the current respite care pilots in 2002-03, as well as the respite care funding that will come on line in 2003-04, the government is committed to ensuring that respite care services are improved for carers, their families and care recipients.

I commend the report to the Assembly. I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

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

Construction occupations legislation Papers and statement by minister

MR CORBELL (Minister for Health and Minister for Planning): Mr Speaker, for the information of members, I present the following papers:

Construction occupations legislation—Exposure drafts—
Construction Occupations (Licensing) Bill 2003 and explanatory statement.
Construction Occupations (Licensing) Regulations 2003 and explanatory statement.
Magistrates Court (Construction Occupations Infringement Notices) Regulations 2003 and explanatory statement.

I seek leave to make a statement.

Leave granted.

MR CORBELL: I am pleased to table the exposure drafts of the Construction Occupations (Licensing) Bill and Regulations 2003. This package of legislative reforms represents a significant proposal to improve the regulation of the building industry trades. The process of reform has been under way since 1998 when Planning

and Land Management released a discussion paper on the options for moving to a single licensing regime to cover architects, builders, electricians, plumbers, drainers and gas fitters.

Following that discussion paper, a national competition policy review of occupational licensing was undertaken in 2000. That review did not include consideration of the regulation of architects, as that profession was dealt with under a subsequent Productivity Commission report, but did include consideration of the building certifier and plumbing plan certifier occupations.

Mr Speaker, the previous government endorsed most of the recommendations of that review but did not proceed to implement the recommendations prior to the change of government in October 2001. This government has taken the opportunity to consider the relevance of the recommendations, given the time passed since the initial review was undertaken. We endorsed the implementation of reforms to the current licensing regime, as it is clear that there are substantial improvements that can be made which will benefit both licensees and consumers.

The architects profession has not been included in the coverage of this legislation as consultation with the profession has confirmed that there are particular issues which require consideration through a separate reform process. While I am disappointed that it is not possible to integrate the regulation of architects, I am confident that, just as with this reform process, the government will be able to work cooperatively with the architects profession to effect positive change consistent with the agreed national harmonisation principles.

Mr Speaker, in a jurisdiction the size of the ACT, with a unique structure of governance, we have the opportunity to be innovative when pursuing regulatory reform. Unlike some other jurisdictions, the regulation of the building trades is undertaken within the one organisation. This enable us to consider a single licensing system for the trades, which has enormous benefits, including administrative streamlining resulting in better customer service to our licensees.

The occupational licensing reform that this government proposes will affect builders, electricians, plumbers, drainers and gas fitters, building surveyors, otherwise known as certifiers, and plumbing plan certifiers.

The Construction Occupations (Licensing) Bill creates the framework for licensing matters common to all occupations. The new legislation will maintain the present levels of qualification as a condition of entry to the licensed occupations and will provide more effective forms of enforcement against licensees who do not work in accordance with the approved standards.

The bill establishes advisory panels to replace the statutory boards that have administrative responsibilities under current legislation. While the current arrangements provide for an electrical licensing board and a plumbers, drainers and gasfitters board, the other trades covered by this bill do not have licensing boards. The proposed arrangements will provide a consistent approach to the provision of advice on mandatory qualifications for licence applicants. There can be advisory boards established for each construction occupation, or a combination of occupations, such as

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builders and building certifiers. In addition to advice on qualifications for a construction occupation, the advisory boards will also assist the registrar in disciplinary proceedings and inquiries, and preparing codes of practice for the occupations for which they are responsible.

Mr Speaker, the bill creates a statutory position of Construction Occupations Registrar responsible for administering the Licensing Act and operational legislation. This includes assessing applications for new and renewed licences against prescribed criteria and administering the disciplinary processes with assistance, as necessary, from the relevant advisory board. The registrar is able to appoint deputy registrars for each occupation.

Perhaps the most significant reform contained within this legislative package is the creation of more flexible and effective forms of disciplinary action against delinquent licence holders. This includes a new demerit points system for licensees, and the capacity to issue infringement notices under the Magistrates Court Act 1930 against unlicensed persons who do work requiring a licence.

The demerit points system will ensure that licensed persons are held accountable for the work that they undertake by providing an effective sanction against persistent breaches, particularly where that work is not in accordance with approved standards. The infringement notice system will enable “on-the-spot” fines to be administered, where unlicensed persons are found to be doing work requiring a licence or where a licensed person is undertaking work not allowed under their licence.

Mr Speaker, the occupational licensing legislation also provides for new measures to improve consumer protection. A new “disclosure of insurance” provision will require a licensed construction practitioner to disclose their level of insurance prior to undertaking any work for a consumer. The advantage of this approach is that the government legislation is not compromised by changes to the insurance products offered by the insurance industry.

Licensees will also be required to include their name and licence number in any advertisement for the provision of a construction service. A formal complaints procedure has also been included, which provides a transparent and equitable approach to dealing with complaints about licensees.

Mr Speaker, the legislative reforms will ultimately include the repeal of the current licensing provisions in the Building Act 1972 and the Electrical Safety Act 1971, with the other provisions remaining, including those setting standards and approval processes for the work. The Plumbers, Drainers and Gasfitters Board Act 1982 deals only with occupational licensing, and will be repealed entirely. Standards for the work are already separate from the licensing requirements and appear in the Water Sewerage Act 2000 and the Gas Safety Act 2000. The Construction Practitioners Registration Act 1998 will also be repealed with necessary provisions being transferred to the Building Act.

It is important that the general public and those currently licensed within the building trades have an opportunity to consider this package of reforms. There will be a six-week public consultation period from 1 July to 11 August 2003. During this period a

number of information sessions on the legislative reforms will be held for interested licensees and consumers. Information fact sheets will also be available from the new ACT Planning and Land Authority shopfronts and on the ACT Planning and Land Authority website. Copies of the exposure draft bill on regulations and the associated explanatory statements will be available on the legislation register.

Letters will be sent to all current licensees advising them of the consultation arrangements and encouraging their attendance at the information sessions. Written submissions commenting on issues or concerns with the new licensing proposal will be strongly encouraged, and industry bodies will be offered separate briefings on the details of the reforms.

Mr Speaker, it is symbolic that this significant legislative reform will have a community consultation phase commencing on 1 July 2003, the commencement date for the new ACT Planning and Land Authority. This sends a strong message to the community that this government's commitment to high-quality, sustainable development is not merely a set of words in a policy document but a policy that permeates all levels of the building and construction industry.

We need to have a regulatory system that ensures the buildings we live, work and play in are constructed to the highest standards by licensed individuals or companies that have the necessary level of skills to undertake the work.

Mr Speaker, the exposure draft bill and regulations are a statement of intent from this government that we are committed to regulatory reform. They provide a clear framework for reform that will enable all stakeholders to understand and comment as necessary on issues for additional reforms to enhance the final legislative package. I will be happy to arrange for detailed briefings for Assembly members over the coming weeks. I look forward to receiving the views of both the community and my Assembly colleagues on this significant reform proposal.

Appropriation Bill 2003-2004

[Cognate report:

Estimates 2002-2003—Select Committee
Report—government response]

Proposed expenditure—part 1.4—Chief Minister's, \$60,220,000 (net cost of outputs), \$7,838,000 (capital injection) and \$3,000,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$71,058,000.

Debate resumed.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Mr Smyth's amendment No 2 be agreed to.

MR PRATT (3.31): Mr Speaker, I want to speak on multicultural affairs in this phase of our consideration of proposed expenditure for the Chief Minister's Department. The first point I would like to make is that I am concerned about the situation relating to multicultural aged care liaison officers. Recently I visited the Croatian seniors village out in the Woden area. One only needs to go to a place such as this to see the rather specific and particular concerns that aged people with a multicultural

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background have. You can get an understanding of what this means if you talk to the elderly and to the staff who run the Croatian senior citizens centre.

Many of our elderly citizens who have come from other countries do not speak English particularly well. Generally speaking they can understand what is being said but they are not quite in a position to confidently express themselves in English. Communicating with the general population is a problem for them as they go about their routine business or even when they simply go out to enjoy themselves. A lot of these folk do not have the same sorts of extended family networks that they might have had when they were younger and so there is a need for the community to try to provide as much assistance as possible.

It should also be noted that a significant number of senior citizens with multicultural backgrounds, particularly those of World War II vintage, suffer from a lot of stress and trauma. When you talk to the communities you find that there are too often clashes here and there amongst the elderly. Often these people still have to deal with the trauma of what may have happened years ago and they need somebody to be able to talk to, somebody to talk them through. If the multicultural community that they belong to does not have those sorts of skills then we need to provide them, the community has to provide that sort of service. So I would encourage the government to get on with identifying, designing and deploying that capability.

I would remind the government that in 2001, as part of the many election promises that were made, the then Labor opposition said that they would allocate \$150,000 annually for three years as part of a program to introduce multicultural aged care liaison officers. That has not happened—that is a broken promise. It remains to be seen whether the government intends to try to do something about that next year. But it will be a pity to have lost a couple of years building up and putting that capability in place. So I would urge the government to at least, even if it is a little bit too late, carry out that promise, because there is a very important need in this area.

The Chief Minister's Department says that it has undertaken a study into a multicultural centre. I do not know what the results of that study are but they would appear to be inconclusive, given that the interim reports do not seem to indicate where the government might want to be going with this. I hope the government is still genuine about trying to do something about a multicultural centre.

A multicultural centre is needed for a number of reasons. Firstly, the ACT multicultural community ought to be able to be showcased, and what better place to do this than in its own centre. It is extremely important that this should happen. Also, a centre that the multicultural community can feel proud of and have some ownership of would certainly go a long way to helping the multicultural community administer itself and take care of its needs and requirements on a day-to-day basis.

I might add that a centre would certainly go a long way in helping to develop perhaps a more homogenous environment for the community. We certainly have seen in recent times splits within the community that we would not prefer to see. So I would encourage the government to start putting down some ironclad plans, and start talking to the community and giving them some idea of when, how and where this might occur. Sites have been looked at. The previous government looked at ideas and

concepts, and we would like to have gone on with that. Certainly, we would like to see this government going on with that.

Mr Speaker, I would now like to turn to gender analysis in multicultural affairs. I must say that I was pleased to see the Estimates Committee make recommendations which would seek to raise the profile of our understanding of the multicultural female gender demographic—that is a mouthful, isn't it?—in the ACT. There is certainly an urgent need to identify the quite dramatically different circumstances that many immigrant women live in compared to their established Australian sisters. This is particularly so for women of Middle Eastern, some Asian, and some African, backgrounds.

I think we have a duty to know whether we as a community are successfully reaching out to women of these sorts of backgrounds—whether we are successfully communicating with them; whether we are letting them know what social, educational, legal and, for God's sake, business opportunities are available to them in this society. If the government is able to get on with perhaps grabbing that data and getting a better idea of what the gender profile looks like, in all of its different shapes and sizes, then that will give it a better understanding of what the situation is with regard to migrant women. The government will be able to have a better understanding of their backgrounds and their circumstances, and this will assist it to more effectively liaise with not only the multicultural council and other multicultural organisations but also with individuals with a view to ensuring that migrant women that we now have in this great society of ours are able to obtain the maximum opportunities that are available to them, and that is very important.

Mr Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to talk about multicultural affairs.

MR STEFANIAK (3.39): Mr Speaker, first of all I want to deal with some sport and recreation matters that relate to the Chief Minister's Department. I note that ovals et cetera come under Urban Services. As part of the Australian football initiative, I am pleased to see that the agreement to bring the Kangaroos to Canberra will continue. There was a scare back in about April, I think of this year, when the agreement was being renegotiated that instead of the ACT being up for \$750,000 over three years, as was the case under the old agreement, it could well be up for some \$2 million. I am very happy to see that that in fact did not eventuate and basically a very similar type of agreement to the landmark three-year agreement we had earlier will continue at the same amount of money.

Also, I am particularly pleased to see that the promotion and assistance given to junior footballers will continue. I think there is quite clearly a need for four matches to be played each year at Manuka. We recognised this need when the initial agreement was signed and it is good to see that continue.

It is also good to see under the sport and recreation part of Chief Minister's—although, of course, the Deputy Chief Minister is the sports minister—that money will continue to be given to Canberra teams in national competitions. A few sad things have happen along the way since that program was started. We have seen the demise of the Cosmos. Before that we saw the Comets thrown out of the national competition, despite the very best efforts of a lot of people. That money has been

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available for redistribution, as has the Cosmos money. Sadly, more recently we have seen the demise of the Cannons.

I am generally fairly happy with the way the money has been redistributed, but I make the point that I made last week during a debate on women's sport: when deciding on what to do with the extra additional money the minister and the government should look at the Canberra Eclipse, which has won the national women's soccer competition. They have extensive travel commitments and could well do with a further \$20,000.

Also, the Belconnen Blue Devils have a senior and a 19s team. They are in a very similar type of competition to the ACT/New South Wales Rams, who are funded to the tune of \$20,000—and I understand that funding continues, as it should. I would ask the government to look at this area.

In looking through the initiatives I could not fail to be reminded of one of the greatest botches I have seen with budgets and estimates. I refer, of course, to Volunteering ACT. The government has really put its foot in it. Volunteering ACT are funded \$100,000 a year. At page 144 of Budget Paper No 3 we are told that "this initiative provides for continued support to volunteering activities in the ACT". For the uninitiated, for someone who has just dropped in from Mars, that looks good—they are giving \$50,000 for the next three financial years to Volunteering ACT. There is nothing in 2006-2007. On the face of it, maybe that is something that should continue. But it does look like an initiative when, in fact, it was revealed in this Year of the Volunteer that that was a cut of \$100,000.

I would like to put on record my appreciation of the excellent work that volunteers do in the ACT and the excellent work Volunteering ACT does in arranging volunteers. My two colleagues on the Estimates Committee have said a lot in relation to this issue, and that is on the public record. But I think it is important to highlight these points as we go through this process.

Volunteering ACT did an excellent job during the bushfires. This is one of the more recent things they have done and it is another reason why it is quite perplexing to see this government cut their funding from \$100,000 to \$50,000. They organised a lot of the volunteers. In fact, Mr Pratt and I helped them out as volunteers during the weeks after the bushfires. They had teams of volunteers. Mr Speaker, I was pleased to see about 15 people from my old club, Royals, turn up on a Saturday to help in our electorate, not their own. There were other teams out in Weston Creek. There were all manner of volunteers, not only from organised sporting groups but individuals.

I am highly impressed by the way Volunteering ACT operates out of the old Norths Rugby Club, which is now an annexe of the Labor Club—that is a good initiative on the part of the club and it is all the more reason that we are utterly amazed that a Labor government is cutting their funding. So this is probably one of the unfortunate examples of negative initiatives in this budget.

Mr Smyth's amendment, which I will also speak to, sensibly makes an alteration. We have, of course, seen alterations in past budgets where spin doctors have been hired for government departments. I think it is a sensible amendment that is worthy of

support because it highlights the fact that, although funding has actually been cut for an organisation such as Volunteering ACT, the spin doctors have made it appear as though more money has been allocated.

Despite the government's protestations in its responses to the Estimates Committee report in relation to the senior executive service, this is something that needs to be watched. It is certainly true that there are not a huge number of senior executives, but a 15 per cent increase over a very short period is not insignificant.

Mrs Cross asked a lot of questions at the Estimates Committee about empire building. Certainly, we in the opposition have some very real concerns about this. There is a proliferation of senior executive service positions, and I think any government needs to keep a watch on significant increases in what is a small territory. Whilst not as bad as the proliferation of executives federally under, say, the Whitlam government, this is a slightly unhealthy sign and it is something that certainly I would suggest the government watch very closely. It is also certainly something that I think the Assembly needs to watch very closely. I think it is very important that the Estimates Committee has drawn this to the government's attention. Again, I am not super satisfied with the government's response.

Mr Speaker, I am happy to support Mr Smyth's amendment, which I think is eminently sensible. I would hope that he has the support of other members of the Assembly as well.

MRS DUNNE (3.48): Mr Speaker, in rising to speak on this budget line and my leader's amendment, I would like to refer to a number of areas in the Chief Minister's Department that have an impact on the whole of government and, through that, the people of the ACT. I must begin, Mr Speaker, by pointing out the complete failure of this government to come up with any initiatives in this budget in relation to women.

The government went to the election with an undertaking to set up a select committee—this was one of its many reviews; during the election campaign we came up with a list of, I think, 74 reviews—to look into the status of women. To their credit, and with commendable alacrity, in December 2001, almost before they had put a dent on the seats of the government benches, they came in here and set up this select committee. The committee worked for almost a year, and since then there has been nothing.

Is this what is going to happen with all of the 74 reviews that were forecast by the government in its election phase? We have had a review and a report by the select committee, but it is a damp squib. The women of the ACT have been heartily let down if they were expecting that, as a result of the work of nearly a year by three members of this place, contributions from the community and 83 recommendations, 82 of which were agreed to by this government, something would be done. But there is not a word in this budget about women. None of those 83 recommendations has been translated into money or into programs in this budget.

Budget Paper No 3 is full of initiatives but there are no initiatives relating to the status of women; there are no initiatives relating to grants programs for women, which were recommended in the report; and there are no initiatives to address issues of violence

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against women, which was a significant issue raised in this report. Not a word. When we asked the Minister for Women why this was the case, the chief executive of the Chief Minister's Department basically said, "Well, I thought about it, it was a pretty tough year, and I decided that women were expendable." That is what it boiled down to, Mr Speaker.

This is a disgrace. This government, which was elected to this place with the support of the crossbenchers by touting its credentials in favour of women, has done nothing, not one iota, not one jot. There is nothing in this budget to support their rhetoric in support of women. To people all around this town their rhetoric is now pretty much dull, cloying and powdery, because it means nothing.

Distinct commitments were made in this place. Motions were passed in relation to outreach workers for women at risk of falling into homelessness. Assembly members voted and agreed that this would happen. But they do not appear in this budget. The women of the ACT have been let down appallingly.

This sort of overarching policy infiltrates every part and every fibre of the government. They set out to have an open, accountable, women friendly, family friendly, workplace friendly government—and every element of the government would absorb and take it on as if it were a sort of living, breathing entity. But it has not happened, and this has been a complete and utter failure—an abrogation of what was promised to all the women of the ACT.

The Office of Sustainability was referred to in this budget and previous budgets. When the Treasurer came into this place in December 2001 and introduced a supplementary appropriation to set up the Office of Sustainability, members asked questions about how it would work and what it would do. In the estimates process that stemmed from that supplementary appropriation, commitments were made that by this budget we would begin to see triple bottom line accounting. This was a commitment made as a direct consequence of us appropriating money to set up the Office of Sustainability. I do not have a problem with the notion of the Office of Sustainability. I wish I had thought of it first. I think it is a great initiative, I think it is a fantastic step forward, but it is hardly even a teeny weeny baby step forward if you are not going to put any money behind it.

This Treasurer made a commitment in the estimates in December 2001 that we would begin to see triple bottom line reporting in this budget. Well, I sat through the estimates, Mr Speaker, I have been through BPs 1, 2, 3 and 4 and the supplementary paper on the bushfire, and I cannot see any evidence, not even the slightest notion of a twinkle in the Treasurer's eye, of triple bottom line reporting. It is not there.

At the time that the Office of Sustainability was introduced, and consistently since then, members in this place—Ms Dundas in particular and I—have said there are just not enough money and people in the Office of Sustainability to do what is proposed. Again, I think for the second year in a row there are recommendations in the Estimates Committee report that we find ways of putting more funding into the Office of Sustainability.

And what is the government's response? Again, they are weasel words that amount to a very long and drawn-out way of saying, "No, we're not going to do it." Nothing is happening in the area of sustainability, except the release of a very glossy brochure. Yes, it is a very pretty brochure and it has some very nice sentiments in it, but glossy brochures do not make a policy. Actions, words and real commitment from the people who stand behind it make a policy. That is what public policy is, Mr Speaker. Public policy is not glossy brochures about prosperity.

This is a sign of the single failing of this government. This government came into power and said, "We will be open, we will be accountable, we will have a culture change, we will do everything, we will do it with bells on." Every time you put them to the test, they fail. They have failed women; they have failed on sustainability. Over and over again, the question was asked: "Has the Office of Sustainability been involved in this aspect, that aspect? Was it involved in the formulation of the budget?" Well, no. And why, Mr Speaker? "Well, they're money bills and the Office of Sustainability can't possibly be involved in money bills because somebody might get to know what's going on." Don't they trust the Office of Sustainability to keep to the rules and bounds set by cabinet? Do they not trust their public servants? Why is the Office of Sustainability excluded from looking at money bills, in the same way as the Office of Women is excluded from looking at money bills? They obviously cannot trust women either, Mr Speaker.

We are told about things that should permeate the whole of government, and again this government has failed in this respect. But I will tell you what they are going to do, Mr Speaker: they are going to have a whole of government enhanced communication strategy. What for? They don't have any policies, they don't have many ideas, and they don't deliver on the ones that they have. But at the same time we are going to have to spend \$250,000 in this year and over \$1 million in four years for an enhanced whole of government communication strategy. That is Spin Doctors Inc.

We remember the times when we had aNiMaLS up on the hill, where a whole swag of spin doctors came around telling Labor government ministers what they should wear, how they should dress, how they should disport themselves and what was acceptable and not acceptable. We are going to have a baby aNiMaLS down here. The new haircuts that are being sported by most of the members of the cabinet are probably a sign of things to come. We now have the standard Labor haircut. I am waiting for Mr Wood and Mr Hargreaves to get the standard Labor haircut—short, pushed forward and a little bit of gel.

But more is needed than that, Mr Speaker. We need a little more substance, we need a little bit more policy. We already have, as Mr Smyth has said, 19 people in departments doing PR. If they cannot be put together in a holistic way to coordinate the message of government—

MR SPEAKER: The member's time has expired. Would you like to use your second 10 minutes?

MRS DUNNE: Yes. We already have 19 people involved in public relations in and across government.

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Mrs Burke: How many?

MRS DUNNE: 19.4 actually, and there are a few more consultants around who seem to be doing public relations as well.

Mr Smyth: 21.4.

MRS DUNNE: Any advance on 21.4?

Mr Smyth: Plus four consultants.

MRS DUNNE: There is a good quarter of a gross of people already in the organisation doing this sort of work. The question is: if we want to have an enhanced whole of government approach to communications, and we already have the resources, is it beyond the wit of the people in the department to have some coordination? I think, as Ms Dundas said, this is a waste of money—money that could be better spent on services.

I would like to turn to services and the community sector. Members have spoken about the appalling and shoddy treatment meted out to Volunteering ACT. Before I talk about Volunteering ACT, I want to talk about the initiatives. Constantly, during the estimates process, we asked about the initiatives—what was the thinking behind this initiative or that initiative? “Well, we thought it would be a good way to raise money,” or, “We thought it would be a good thing to do.” We asked, “Have you worked out how this will be implemented?” We were told no. Constantly the answer was: “Well, we thought of a figure and we put it in the budget and it’s a sort of guesstimate about how much it will cost. We have no idea how this program or this initiative will be implemented.” This has been a single feature of the budget. All the way through there are initiatives that have not been thought out.

Volunteering ACT looks like an initiative, but it is not the sort of initiative that you usually expect because, as Mr Stefaniak said, somebody who is untutored in reading a budget paper would come along and say, “Gee, an initiative. \$50,000 to Volunteering ACT—that doesn’t look bad, that looks pretty generous.” That is, until you understand what is going on and discover that in the past the ACT government has contributed \$100,000 per year to Volunteering ACT. What we have here, dressed up as an initiative, is effectively a 50 per cent cut to an organisation which, through its aegis and through its good work, provides millions and millions of dollars, tens of millions of dollars, of benefit to this community.

I think a third of all people in the ACT volunteer and organisations like Volunteering ACT keep this supply ticking over. They ensure that organisations that we might volunteer for know how to manage volunteers and look after and deal with volunteer problems. This Labor Party has just duded countless organisations—from sporting groups, such as our kids callisthenics classes that we might support, and scouts to a whole lot of really important undertakings such as Meals on Wheels and a whole range of environment programs and things that keep this town and this country ticking over—to the tune of \$50,000. Fifty per cent of the money that the ACT government gives and 20 per cent of all their income every year has just been taken away from them.

When we asked Volunteering ACT how they might deal with a 20 per cent cut in their overall budget, I think the answer was: “Well, in desperation we would only answer four calls in five.” This is not the way to build and grow our community. This is not how you have a civil society. We have money in the budget for spin doctors but we have taken money out of the budget for volunteering.

There are other issues in this budget, Mr Speaker. Ms Tucker talked today about the lack of commitment from this government to the SACS award. But really the issue that I want to deal with is the state of accommodation occupied by volunteer organisations. Across town people in the community sector are housed in old schools, old halls and abandoned offices of a sort that members of this place, ACT public servants and people in the private sector would not deign to occupy because they are cold and draughty, they leak, they are unsafe, the electricals are not great and there are computer cords running all over the place. There is a paltry \$400,000 in the budget this year for the upgrading of those facilities.

But when you go through the budget department by department, there is a million dollars here and a million dollars there for the upgrading of public service accommodation. Public servants should be working in good accommodation. However, we pay the community sector a paltry amount to do so much of the work that governments cannot afford to do, will not do, find too difficult to do or are not set up to do and then we expect them to work under substandard conditions as well. This is a disgrace.

This issue has been brought to the attention of the Estimates Committee and there is next to nothing in the budget to address it. This is why we really should be looking at the priorities in the Chief Minister’s Department. It is why I support the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition in relation to the spin doctors, or should I say the “enhanced whole of government communications strategy”. Instead of enhancing the way that these people sell their story, they should be out there providing services to the community. The \$250,000 this year and the \$1.1 million dollars over the next four years would be better off spent in the community where it would reap benefits to the people of the ACT rather than having them brainwashed by the spin of this government.

MR QUINLAN (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism and Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming) (4.05): Mr Speaker, I want to say only a couple of words in relation to this line in general. I have to say that, bearing in mind the record of the previous government on the subject of the SACS award, I am amazed at Mrs Dunne’s reference to the community sector. But still, I guess if you can reinvent history like Mr Stefaniak did earlier, anything is possible.

The one thing I do want to tentatively refer to is Volunteering ACT. I stand here as a former director of Volunteering ACT, as a former chairman of the finance committee, as someone who in fact organised the upgrade of their record keeping, arranged for a free suite of software and set up their systems. I know they do a worthy job. I know Mary Porter very well and her husband, Ian De Landelles—I have known them for many years. I understand that Ian is now working for the volunteer centre as well.

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They do a good job and there is no denying that. But it is not true to couple Volunteering ACT with all volunteers in the territory.

I was a volunteer in the territory before I ever heard of Volunteering ACT. I have given my time to junior sport and various other organisations. However, they have a role. Everybody who has jumped onto this bandwagon has said, “We’ve found a motherhood issue—let’s climb all over it.” I think every speaker who has lamped onto and spoken about this matter has been totally lacking in originality.

You have to ask: if you had one more bundle of \$50,000 in the territory to expend on whatever you wish, to give to whatever cause you wish and to meet whatever unmet need you wish, would it go to Volunteering ACT, which does enjoy concessional accommodation in a building, I happen to be able to say, that I bought many years ago as president of the Canberra Labor Club for the purposes of setting up as a community centre? So, Mrs Dunne, I think it is very difficult. I think it is pathetic that so many members have made this motherhood issue the centrepiece of their speeches, as if they are unable to cast around and find some other criticism to get worked up about.

That is all I wanted to say. I just wanted to clarify the point that they did receive additional funding in a year; there was apparently an expectation that it would continue; they now receive more funding than they did before the Year of the Volunteer; and we are not their only source of funding and we are not their only source of succour.

Question put:

That **Mr Smyth’s** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 9

Mrs Burke
Mr Cornwell
Mrs Cross
Ms Dundas
Mrs Dunne

Mr Pratt
Mr Smyth
Mr Stefaniak

Mr Berry
Mr Corbell
Ms Gallagher
Mr Hargreaves
Ms MacDonald

Mr Quinlan
Mr Stanhope
Ms Tucker
Mr Wood

Question so resolved in the negative.

Amendment negatived.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure part 1.5—ACT WorkCover, \$5,280,000 (net cost of outputs) and \$164,000 (capital injection), totalling \$5,444,000.

MR PRATT (4.14): I want to talk firstly about a couple of areas in WorkCover itself. I am pleased to see that the workers compensation relevant to terrorist attacks on work sites has been extended to April 2006. I think that is a sensible piece of work. The existing provisions of WorkCover seem to be successful. I do not think we have any

major concerns that government organisations in the ACT are suffering as a result of the OH&S compliance requirements.

The performance measures for OH&S compliance across the ACT seem to be adequate, and this important function appears to be adequately funded. However, I would like to see a lot more funding go into that requirement. I think this is a bit of a sleeping giant.

I warn the government that the level of funding to exercise, assess, carry out safety audits and check the compliance of organisations is not what we would like to see. I believe we need a more vigorous program for those types of audits. I suspect the government is not picking up enough of the inadequacies of safety management, which anecdotally do exist. The organisations themselves need to do a lot more work towards the raising of safety standards.

WorkCover is certainly doing an adequate job, but I would prefer to see a more vigorous program. I would like to have seen more funding made available, to enable those audits to be carried out a little more regularly. The anecdotal evidence around the place is that many organisations still do not quite understand the requirements they must meet. That is not a criticism, it is just that this is a learning phase for some organisations. I would like to see the government putting in a lot more in the way of auditing, not only to test compliance but also to enable further training and instruction to be undertaken by those organisations. In that way, their wardens and safety officers will be better equipped and will better understand the requirements for safety.

I notice the ACT is doing reasonably well in public enterprise safety management, but we are falling below the national average in OH&S in the retail sector. Clearly we need to be more vigorous in engaging with the retail sector, to ensure they understand the requirements. Should WorkCover be more aggressive in going out to the retail sector and offering its assistance to raise the standard of safety management, or should we perhaps be seeing more of an interventionist safety role—something they may offer the retail sector?

Certainly there needs to be funding put aside for a more vigorous advertising program, to ensure that all members of the ACT's free enterprise sector are aware of the safety requirements, and kept up to speed with the changed management aspects, of OH&S performance across the ACT.

Mr Speaker, turning now to industrial manslaughter: I understand the government continues to evaluate this concept. There might be only a small amount of money and energy spent on reviewing industrial manslaughter, but this money is still wasted. This is a concept which will not go down particularly well here in the ACT, so I question whether there is a need to go on with that.

Ms Gallagher: There is a committee inquiring into it at the moment.

MR PRATT: Yes, but efforts are still being made in government to have a look at some of those concepts. Existing industrial work practices are more than adequate. We know that the system now in place possesses all the provisions which need to be

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there, to ensure that employers organise and implement their daily business in a safe way, with the best interests of their employees in mind.

Shoving responsibility for all safety management in an organisation back up to the manager, and then the owners, is not the answer. People are hired to be middle managers and shop floor managers. They are hired also to be responsible supervisors in areas including safety. The problem I have with industrial manslaughter is that it takes that sense of responsibility away from people in the middle of the organisation and lower down the chain. We do not want to see that happen.

If the committee recommends the introduction of additional legislation the government may take on that recommendation or continue to go down that track. I do not think it would be in the best interests of the ACT. We would see the introduction of yet another level of unnecessary legislation, and the imposition of more penalties with the introduction of the industrial manslaughter package. It would not be good for business. I believe we would see business leaving the ACT.

Ms Gallagher: Isn't killing someone at work good for business?

MR PRATT: I do not sympathise with the concept of killing people at work, Ms Gallagher. There is common law in place at both the Commonwealth and state levels. A surfeit of laws exists to ensure that silly old managers and company owners do not behave negligently, dangerously, recklessly or anything else. If they do, they can be charged with manslaughter under common law.

Why is that wrong? Why is that system inadequate? It is not. Why spend more of the taxpayers' money developing another layer of legal lantana so we can frighten the bejesus out of employers? In frightening employers, we are going to drive them offshore—to use an international term—and we do not want to do that. The question I ask is: will the committee, or the government, be willing to see that, if they implement an industrial manslaughter package, it is going to be equally applicable to the public service and public enterprise as it is to free enterprise?

It would want to be, because there are suspicions that it is a bit weighted. So I linger with bated breath, Ms Gallagher. I hope that will be the case. Let us drop-kick industrial manslaughter into the basket of history.

Moving on to the issue of fireworks, I am concerned at the amount of funding which has been wasted on the disposal of fireworks. The amount of \$465,000 has been budgeted for the destruction or disposal of about 37 tonnes of fireworks. I am yet to be convinced that we need that amount of money to safely dispose of those fireworks.

I understand that the program of disposal involves tonnages of fireworks in many iterations. In other words, it may be the case that fireworks are being disposed of in one-tonne or half-tonne lots. I hope that is not the case. I would have thought you could dispose of five or 10 tonnes of fireworks in a safe manner, thereby cutting down your costs and also cutting down the timeframe required for the disposal of those fireworks.

The logistics and security required to continually run fireworks back and forth from wherever they are now to a disposal site is going to cost a lot more money because it will take a lot more time. The more time fireworks are lying around—we do not need that—the more likely they are to be knocked off or to become unsafe. Therefore, the quicker we can dispose of them, the better.

I make a suggestion to the government. You will save some of that \$465,000 if you examine a way to dispose of these fireworks in a shorter timeframe. If you talk to the defence force, the AFP or somebody, you will find there are better ways of disposing of this stuff safely. May I have access to my second 10 minutes, please, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: You may.

MR PRATT: I go on—with fireworks.

Ms MacDonald: Stop the fireworks!

MR PRATT: My mother used to say that! Mr Speaker, it would seem that, if we can find a way to quickly dispose of unrequired fireworks, then we will be doing the ACT a better service. It will be efficient, time saving and secure—and something we can put behind us.

I go to fireworks in the context of current policies. I would like to see the government move as quickly as possible. It will be a money-saving initiative to ban the retail sale of fireworks and focus more closely on the demonstrations throughout the calendar year, when the department can harness its resources, focus its energies and put in place a stringent policy which allows the community to enjoy fireworks in a safe way, with far less disruption than we are currently seeing.

The problem we have now is one we wrestled with in government—to be fair, Ms Gallagher—before you guys landed on the scene to start marching this great capital of ours forward. There is a major safety aspect. There are clearly hundreds of examples of unsafe practices which have been occurring for many weeks. All members in this place have had constituents call us, email us, write to us and knock us down in shopping centres saying, “For God’s sake, do something about this!”

The day-in and day-out banging away of what are clearly illegal bangers, as well as legal fireworks, is particularly disruptive to young children and the elderly. The problem I have with the retail industry is that, while I believe a number of those outlets are competent, responsible outlets and they do the best they possibly can, there are practices we question. It would seem to me, from the feedback I am receiving, that the trafficking of illegal fireworks is being allowed to occur under cover of the existing retail network, or because of the behaviour of some retail outlets, although not all of them.

This is a problem we have wrestled with for a long time. None of us seems to have the answer whereby we can allow retail sales to continue, so that people can use these things safely, without disrupting the community. The community is running out of patience, and I am sure the government is too.

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I am concerned about animal welfare as well. There are hundreds of stories of pets which have had a terrible time. It is bad enough that they have a rough time over the Queen's birthday weekend. However, when it goes on week-in and week-out in the period around the Queen's birthday weekend, it seems that an irresponsible minority is spoiling it for the majority. That is the approach we take on this.

I hate to say this because I do not have evidence, but I will raise the matter in this place. There are questions that there is criminal behaviour involved in the illegal trafficking of fireworks, which is of major concern. There are certain gangs in the region—they do not necessarily live here in the ACT—who, it is well known, are trafficking in other items and who are also happily trafficking in fireworks.

It has even been said to me that the trading of fireworks is used as a cover to conceal and traffic these other items. I will not say any more than that right now, but it is an issue I raise here that I think we, as an Assembly, need to look at seriously. We certainly need to get more evidence on that before I would say much more about it, but it is an issue.

Clearly, the strain has shown on the police over the past four to five weeks. There have been hundreds of calls to police saying, "For God's sake, can somebody come and arrest the guy who put this letterbox through my front window?" The police say they cannot go out, because they have to catch them on the spot.

This has meant unnecessary call-outs at a time when our police need to be focused on other issues, given the national and international environment in which the ACT finds itself. So I urge the government to look at this. We will have a lot more to say about the issue. We certainly want to consider introducing legislation. We will come back to that in good time.

A lot of what the government has in the budget for this area is fine. Nevertheless, in summary, I urge the government to look at putting more resources into OH&S compliance checks.

I do not think we should take for granted that all of our organisations—public as well as private—are as well educated as they ought to be and practising all the standards that should be practised with OH&S. There is a great deal of anecdotal information that people are still in the dark about how best to manage safety issues, and much more needs to be done. I have talked about fireworks and other matters.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (4.31): When the committee heard from officers of WorkCover, it was amazed to learn that not only had \$465,000 had been spent on the destruction of fireworks over this year—and in the proposed new budget—but that fireworks had cost us, as a jurisdiction, something like \$1.8 million over the 2002-03 and 2003-04 budgets. That is what it has and will cost, which is a matter of great concern. It is an enormous amount of money—it is money that would be better spent on things other than regulation.

A number of difficulties arise out of the fireworks issue. As the former minister responsible for fireworks, in 1998, in my attempt to do something with the system, I

said, "Okay guys. Those in the trade clean up the act; stop selling the illegals; sell only in the agreed time frame—and the industry can survive."

Unfortunately, that did not happen, so in 1999 we introduced tougher regulations which limited the period. We went for the permit—and tried to get people to behave in a responsible manner—but, again, that did not happen. I recall that, in Tuggeranong, in the 1999 and 2000 fireworks seasons, the then current line was that, on a Saturday night, it sounded more like Sarajevo than Tuggeranong.

People should be able to enjoy fireworks safely. In the main, we are a responsible community. I do not know of anyone who would deliberately go out of their way to hurt somebody. Nevertheless, the reality is that there are still elements who are willing to sell fireworks illegally, and there are elements who are willing to use them illegally.

We tightened it up in 2000 and it was tightened up in 2001. Congratulations go to the government on their attempts to tighten it up in 2002-03, but the reality is that it has not worked. Going through 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003, that is six years worth of tightening up a system which, for some odd reason, refuses to be tightened up. It is time to say, "Enough is enough. The money, time and effort being expended here is ridiculous."

There are dilemmas with some of the other acts, such as the Dangerous Goods Act. If my memory serves me right, the current act says that shopgood fireworks in this category can contain up to 40 grams of explosive material.

Mr Speaker, when you and I were kids, we were using thunders, penny bombs, po-has and tom thumbs. In those days, the explosive material was simple black powder. With the quantities contained in those fireworks, skyrockets and some of the other things we had available to us as kids, they were certainly dangerous, yet they were nowhere near as dangerous as some of the things being sold illegally on the market today. There are strike funnels, for which you do not need matches—you simply strike the abrasive edge on something and, if you manage to make contact, it goes off. Often you cannot tell whether or not it is a live firework until it explodes.

The more worrying trend is that the up to 40 grams of explosive material—black powder—which we used to get is now any concoction of chemicals that somebody can bung inside a paper casing. Therein lies the danger. Forty grams is not much, but 40 grams of a concentrated chemical compound will take your hand off—it will kill someone.

That is bad enough in its own right, but the sorts of fireworks that were going off across Canberra last weekend—and I have had several kinds identified to me—would indicate that professional fireworks, other than shopgood fireworks, are being sold by the industry.

These are the things that are dangerous. Some of the fireworks are called mortars. You can have two-inch, three-inch and four-inch mortars, to be fired out of a mortar tube and propelled several hundred metres into the air, where they explode. That is what we see at Skyfire.

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These are not the kinds of things people light and throw at each other. Yet I know of schoolboys who were able to access these things, and they were throwing them at each other. These fireworks will kill. If we continue to allow them to be brought into the territory, and to be sold, then we are being negligent.

There have been six years of trying to tighten up the law. However, the law can work only with the compliance, acceptance and will of those involved in it; with heavy-handed and draconian regulations and enforcement; or you need to change it and move away from it. The fact is that we have something like 37 tonnes of illegal fireworks. It is going to cost us, as a jurisdiction, \$465,000 to destroy those. That is a waste of government resources. It is money that could be better spent on hip replacements, education, providing shelter for the homeless and looking after our aged people.

We, as a party room, took the decision—based on the overwhelming number of phone calls, emails, letters, et cetera received—that it was now time to say to the industry, “We are sorry, but you have had six years in which to clean up the act. The act has not been cleaned up, so it should go.” That was the basis of the decision.

Several questions were asked of the commissioner, including some on the effectiveness of the workers compensation provisions put in place last year. Comments were made that things seem to be going well at this stage, although we have not completed a full year.

We are certainly only at the start of the new data sets, but it did look as if there was a downturn in legal action and an upturn in rehabilitation. That is probably a good thing. We are coming up to the first period of premiums. They fall due on 1 July. It will be interesting to see the effect of the new legislation on those premiums.

We did not get into a great deal of the detail because it was late in the day when WorkCover appeared. Nevertheless, the commissioner has always had some wonderful charts to show us of the progress of the WorkCover organisation.

The figures provided to the committee show that, in comparison with the rest of Australia, the ACT is doing well, but we should not be complacent. WorkCover is an issue that should be dear to the hearts of all Assembly members, simply because it affects all of our constituents. We certainly support the passing of line 1.5, which covers ACT WorkCover.

MR STEFANIAK (4.38): I will not delve into what the committee is presently looking at. It is yet to make its report, and we are yet to get fully into our deliberations. We are at the draft stage. However, there are a couple of points worth making in this debate. If I rely on some facts given to the committee in a peripheral way for the purpose of its inquiry, they are relevant to the issue of WorkCover and this budget item.

I am pleased to see significant advances made in the operation of WorkCover; how workers in industries are responding; and that we are seeing distinct improvements in the area of occupational health and safety.

I was impressed to hear the commissioner, Jocelyn Plovits, indicate that, in only about 5 per cent of instances in respect of businesses, does WorkCover have any great non-compliance problems. My colleague Mr Smyth says that we have a pretty good record compared with other states, and those sorts of figures bear that out. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement.

One aspect of a general nature that a couple of people mentioned in the committee inquiry is the effect—not only here but interstate—of a partnership between the business and the workers. In that situation, the groups, rather than getting into an us-and-them type of position or an adversarial situation, look constructively at ways in which the business and work safety on the shop floor can be improved.

Some of the figures I have seen recently bear out the success of that approach. That may well be an interesting consideration, when you look at what other legislative changes may be necessary, including matters such as industrial manslaughter. Those are important factors.

Like my colleague Mr Smyth, I was born in Canberra and grew up here. Because I am a little older than Mr Smyth, I remember things that you, Mr Speaker, might also remember about cracker night. I thoroughly enjoyed the cracker night period and probably did a few wrongful things myself. We lost our own letterbox on three occasions. I must confess that I might have blown one up myself at some stage. As Mr Smyth says, even though the fireworks then seemed big—the tuppenny bungler was a big bungler—they are nothing like those available now.

I have always enjoyed fireworks, Mr Speaker. As chair of the committee looking at the issue of fireworks, I feel that what we came up with in June last year was a pretty good solution. We reported well and truly on time on that one. It was presupposed by the fact that we recommended that certain things happen.

Initially, the government did not follow that completely. I think some of the training aspects there might have been followed but they were not. The government went on a slightly different path. One of the clear recommendations was to monitor the situation. The first opportunity to monitor it was the recent Queen's Birthday long weekend.

The report was done in time to ensure that, whatever happened, people would be able to order their fireworks for the recent June long weekend. It gave the fireworks industry time to order stocks of fireworks, had the committee recommended that fireworks should continue—and the government accepted that. It also gave the industry time to refrain from ordering fireworks, had the committee said that fireworks should not continue to be sold as over the counter shopgood fireworks. The government accepted that, so fireworks continued, with the restrictions imposed by the government in response to the committee's report.

I must say, even from the point of view of someone who thoroughly enjoys fireworks, that I can understand the exasperation of the events over the recent June long weekend. Both my colleagues have mentioned it. I was away for part of that weekend but I recall coming back on the Monday and hearing, in my suburb of Macgregor—in

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north-west Belconnen—some incredibly loud bumps and thumps which sounded almost like artillery and mortars.

It seemed it had not improved on years gone by. I can well understand the fear, and the problems caused in our community as a result of that. It is clearly something we all need to look at. It was also brought home to me by the reaction of my dog, so I can see where my colleagues are coming from.

Our animals do get flustered by fireworks. I have a dog which is going on four years of age. It is meant to be a kelpie/border collie cross but I think it is more kelpie/labrador. He is a big dog, yet rather gentle, with a nice disposition. I have never before seen the dog affected by Queen's Birthday weekend fireworks. He likes to come inside; he goes outside when he is told; and then stays outside.

The dog's name is Bluey. I could not get this large lump of a dog outside on the Monday. I thought, "This is peculiar. Is he being surprisingly disobedient?" I think it was the fireworks. The problem remained for a couple of days afterwards. After a few days, when there were no more bangs, thumps or anything, Bluey went outside when he was told. What struck me was: "Well, okay—maybe that brings home how disruptive the June long weekend was." Clearly, further reforms are needed in that regard.

My colleagues have addressed some of the financial aspects. Mr Pratt ably talked about the large cost involved in destroying fireworks. As a committee, we considered issues around the safe securing of fireworks. That matter is terribly relevant. I hope the government is taking all that on board. There are issues in relation to that, but I just mention those points.

I close by saying that WorkCover has gone through some fairly difficult periods. There is a strong need to redo a number of parts of the act and the regulations. Fundamentally, I am heartened by the figures. They show, generally, how effective the act is in respect of occupational health and safety and issues such as that in our territory. It has a pretty good record, from which we can all take heart.

MRS BURKE (4.45): I do not know if this has been said, but I would like to congratulate the minister. The fact that we have a female minister responsible for ACT WorkCover is excellent. This is an area that we would all have seen as a male dominated area. I congratulate Ms Gallagher on that.

Looking through the highlights that are to come, there are a couple I would like to pick out. I give congratulations with regard to health and safety month, which is an excellent initiative. It is one in which I have been personally involved. I look forward to seeing the end of the process—there is nothing like being involved—and how it works. I applaud the government for that.

Raising the awareness of workplace health and safety by encouraging people is really the way to go, rather than waving big sticks and dragging people along, kicking and screaming. That is a positive initiative. I am also looking forward to the "hypothetical" which is to be delivered on 25 July. I wait to hear more about that.

That is also a good initiative—thinking outside the square. I congratulate WorkCover on that initiative.

I refer to the 10 steps to safety program—an incentive program—which is what businesses need. Businesses need to be encouraged. WorkCover has done this in the past. I remember talking to many officers of WorkCover about this when I was in business myself—that it was like the jackboots, big-stick approach. That has diminished over the years. We now have a more inclusive and encouraging environment, and I am pleased to see that.

There is also the zero injury program. I think that is a positive step, when we hear talk about industrial manslaughter. Mr Pratt alluded to the fact that it puts great fear into the most honest, reliable and upfront businesses. I see that it casts a little slur upon businesses. Nobody wants to see employees maimed—and particularly not dying—in their workplaces. That is the last thing on an employer's mind. This has some serious undertones in relation to thinking the worst of employers, rather than thinking the best.

That is why I am all for the zero injury program—encouraging people to do the right thing and allowing the law to take its course if they do not—not the hope that people will fall through the gaps. I do not think that will be the case. If you push the positives, then I think you will draw people through the process.

In my 14 years in business, I believe I enjoyed a good relationship with WorkCover. I was always able to work well with the officers in a cooperative and responsible manner. I thank WorkCover for that. That has certainly been a great culture which has changed over the years. I hope to see more of that coming forward when I look at the strategic and operational issues to be pursued in 2003-04. That theme is coming through, so I offer congratulations on that.

Cooperation is the key to what this is about. I think that is the way most operators would want to conduct their businesses, and themselves. As I have said, the notion of industrial manslaughter can be insulting to many business owners and operators, who do their utmost to ensure the safety of their workers. Why on earth would they do otherwise?

I have spoken about the law not being on the side of employers who do not do the right thing. I agree with my colleague Mr Pratt that, if we go down that pathway, it will place yet another layer of red tape and a burden on businesses which the positive approach would not necessarily do.

Occupational health and safety compliance checks, which were mentioned earlier today, are the way to go. To take away that fear factor. I have talked many times with Jocelyn Plovits on this issue. The culture of WorkCover has certainly improved, in that their officers who conduct audit and compliance checks are definitely more amenable to working in a cooperative way, rather than waving a big stick.

I believe that adopting a collaborative approach is working well. It is certainly an excellent approach. I applaud WorkCover and the minister for pursuing that. We want

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to bring businesses on board and we want to bring the work force on board. After all, it is for everybody's benefit.

Much has been said about the fireworks issue, which I will touch on briefly. One thing that has been discussed is the expenditure of \$345,000, to get rid of 37 tonnes of fireworks. I am still at a loss to know why the cost is so high. That money could be used in the wider community, as far as I am concerned. There are many areas in community care, housing and disability that could well have done with that money. It is a vexed issue.

I am sure we have all been lobbied in this place regarding the banning of the retail sale of fireworks. I hope the government sees this as an opportunity to listen to the community and moves to ensure that we can all enjoy fireworks in a safe and controlled environment.

A positive move would be to issue community organisations with permits, to enable the broader community to come together. After the year we have had, I believe we need to keep our community moving forward together in a positive way, making sure we can set in train the steps to facilitate that.

Mr Speaker, I look forward to seeing the continued good progress of ACT WorkCover. I thank Jocelyn Plovits for her efforts—and all members of the team at ACT WorkCover. I wish them well for the coming year.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.6—Treasury, \$29,351,000 (net cost of outputs), \$4,861,000 (capital injection) and \$40,046,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$74,258,000.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (4.52): Mr Speaker, Treasury is a very important part of the government, and the significant document that it produces every year is, of course, the budget. I wish to make a couple of statements on the coming together of this budget and things that have happened since the budget was tabled.

We will—maybe tonight; more likely on Thursday—pass the government's budget. But I suspect we will be in the dark as to the true picture for this year; it will only really be available in September. But we will not know what it is at this point in time, and we certainly will not know whether we will be in deficit or surplus at the end of the year 2003-04.

It behoves the government to provide the Assembly with up-to-date information where it has it, so that we can all make judgments on whether or not a budget should be passed. The first recommendation of the Estimates Committee was that the Treasurer provide the Assembly with the most recent budget outcomes for 2002-03 and the estimate for 2003-04, and the reasons for the changes, as a matter of urgency before the budget is debated.

This is important because, when the budget was tabled, I, and my colleagues in the opposition, raised questions about some of the estimates—growth rates, CPI and some

of the other numbers contained in the budget. Since the first week of May, we have proved to be correct. Growth has not softened, and inflation has not got out of hand.

This budget is ill informed. It has taken a very conservative path to create a picture—the Treasurer is right. But we now know, through the Chief Minister—certainly not through the Treasurer—that the surplus expected for this year is at least \$40 million greater than had been expected. We were told of a \$61.6 million surplus this year; we now know it is closer to \$100 million. I could make a reasonable case that it is at least \$107 million, and I have heard other figures quoted that would bring it somewhere between \$120 million and \$150 million.

The end point for this year is, of course, the start point for next year. If this year ends much higher than expected, there is the potential that we will not be in deficit but in surplus next year. And we, as the Assembly representing the taxpayers of Canberra, have a right to know that. We are being denied that right by the Treasurer, who refuses to update where we are at.

I specifically asked if the budget had improved, and the answer I got was that the budget position “has not deteriorated”. The avoidance strategy of the Treasurer denies us the ability to debate this budget in the full light of what is known to the Treasurer. We should be given that information simply because it will have an influence on all the decisions that we make. It may lead to us redirecting some funds, increasing some funds or decreasing some funds. But we cannot do any of that unless we know what the number is.

There is also the question of when the Treasurer knew that things had improved significantly; I am told he has known for some time. Again, the Treasurer is very skilful in avoiding answering. He said, “Well, yes—things fluctuate. This goes up and that goes down and this changes and that changes really until the end of the year. When we do the audits and they are signed off by the Auditor-General and we get them back in September is the time that we will truly know.”

The Treasurer is updated, I suspect, weekly, and would therefore have a better picture of his \$61.6 million. His refusal to share that with members of the Assembly is a sad indictment of a government that boasted that it would be more honest, open, accountable and transparent. I guess they did not tell us when.

The budget supplied as a document has raised some issues for the committee. Some of these are hoary old chestnuts that are drawn out every year and recommendations that are made every year. But there appeared to be consensus among committee and other members—indeed, some of the ministers would concede this, given the tedious nature of the questioning when you are asked the same questions across all the portfolios—that some of the performance indicators are next to useless.

We have all promised, over time—perhaps we did when we were in government—that we would attempt to improve it. There is a real case now for looking at the performance indicators and making sure that they actually mean something. One of the performance indicators—the function of the Central Financing Unit, on page 90, I think—has been discontinued. To have a performance indicator to determine that you

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are doing what you are meant to be doing is not very useful. With examples like that in mind, it is really important that we get the indicators right.

Something else that was consistent across the questioning of the ministers was their inability to answer detail on initiatives. To the questions “Within what time frame?” and “What will the effect be?” a lot of it was: “We will work that out.” The enhanced government media centre was a classic: the Chief Minister was unable to tell us how many officers there might be and what they would be doing. You have to doubt whether we should pass initiatives like that when the detail is so sparse.

The proposed car-parking levy is another good example. We were told that the number of car parks was somewhere between 15,000 and 24,000, with a suggestion that the final number might be around 16,800. We were unable to get answers as to how they had determined that number, what work was being done, what concessions would be available and how it would be administered.

Instead of working out a policy from a policy sense of moving forward, the agenda was simply revenue raising, in that we were given a number. When the final number of possible targets was determined, number A would be divided by number B to give answer C, and therefore life would go on. But that is not good policy making.

Looking across all the initiatives, we may have some doubts about a large number of them. One that springs to mind is the own goal kicked by Ms MacDonald when we were asking about carers, where there was extra money. The extra money was simply to carry that to the end of the financial year. In the out year the money was to do the evaluation.

There is a recommendation in the Estimates Committee document that says money for evaluation should be included in pilot or new programs as a matter of course, so that adequate funding can then be identified that would be ongoing. I could go on with any number of examples, but members know themselves the examples they asked about and the answers that they got.

The sustainability of this budget must be severely questioned, and there are two clear objectives: the outyears for—

At 5.00 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.

MR SMYTH: The sustainability of the budget must be questioned. Two good examples of that are CTEC funding and the sustainability of the hospital in the outyears. If we look at CTEC on page 328 of Budget Paper 4, we will see the reduction of the \$4 million funding that they have had over the last four or five years to cover the V8 car race. But in the outyears it drops from \$16 million down to \$12 million. That is not sustainable. They have had the benefit of the extra \$4 million in this year, and that was gratefully received and has been used. But in the outyears it drops to \$12 million. It is a drop of a quarter, and you have to ask whether that is sustainable.

The hospital is a very different case and is of greater concern. Given that we know that Health goes up every year—I do not know of a single health budget that comes down—and given some of the growth quoted in Budget Paper 4 for the hospital, it is just inconceivable—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, wouldn't it be better to raise that under the part for the Department of Health and Community Care?

MR SMYTH: No, it is about the sustainability of the budget and the size of surpluses and deficits, Mr Speaker. You may hear me make similar sounds a little bit later in the evening, or maybe on Thursday, but if you look at the outyears, the percentage growth does not even match the Treasurer's own estimate of what the CPI would be. The Health index grows at a far greater rate than the CPI does. So, again, we have put forward some numbers that do not have any relevance to what is going to happen.

MR SPEAKER: The member's time has expired.

MR SMYTH: I wish to take my second 10 minutes, Mr Speaker. Simply from those figures, we need to have some worry about the nature of what is in these documents. Going to the numbers as well—ACTTAB, page 363, Budget Paper 4—there are several lines where the outyears columns are identical. There are numbers that do not change, and the answer was: "Well, that's what's going to happen."

You can imagine that with some of the lines that might well be the case but, when your total non-current liabilities remain exactly the same for four years, is it because of a wonderful, wonderful Treasurer, or are we just making guesses? I suspect it is guesses, because a number of reports were put in where it is clear that that is not going to happen. When the committee asked, we would get: "That's this or that or that," and they would resort to sometimes incomprehensible answers. In terms of clearness and transparency, it is very important that we get those numbers correct.

I now have to say thank you to Mr Hargreaves. There are some recommendations concerning when an initiative is not an initiative and when ongoing programs should be identified. Mr Hargreaves dredged out of his memory that in previous times any new initiatives were identified as such and any ongoing programs were identified as such.

That could be a good way forward here, particularly when so many of the supposed initiatives—an initiative is something one does of one's own accord, not something that one is compelled to do or has to do—are just ongoing funding. RecLink got some funding, which pleases me, but it is not a new initiative. There should be clarity there.

Correction of errors was of interest to members. Where it becomes apparent that a number in the document is incorrect, it would be much better—certainly, for the Estimates Committee and, I think, for the Assembly at large—if these corrections were made as quickly as possible. When you get there on the day and you are handed a correction sheet at the estimates hearing, it is impossible to do your own analysis and digest what you have been given on the spot, particularly when it is about some of the key performance indicators of some of the departments.

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There is some discussion about cycle and the Treasurer's love of creating his own economic cycle—which is probably being wound back to coincide with the electoral cycle. It is important that in using terms like this, we are not inventing economic terms but are using them as wisely as we can.

Overall, I believe Treasury does a fairly good job. There are some concerns about the low estimates for things like growth in the CPI, but that might be a Treasurer's call. I am still worried at the true state of the surplus or the deficit. What is the real position of the ACT? The final position for this year affects the start position for next year. It affects the cash that is retained. If some of your growth is understated, it will mean that, instead of a deficit, as expected, we will actually be in surplus.

That affects the decisions of those in the community who watch the budget and are truly affected by the budget—and that is most of the community. It also has an effect on confidence. If you are saying that, at the top of the cycle, with all the revenue that it could possibly gather and has gathered and the growth in revenue it has had, the ACT needs to go into deficit next year, that cannot but have an effect on confidence. Confidence is important. After the disasters of 1991 and 1995, it took us six or seven years to get that confidence back up and the economy rolling again. I would hate to see that shattered.

Supposedly, the reason for the deficit next year was originally the government's desire to get into land servicing. This year we found out that it was because of unexpected incomes and unexpected expenditures. The shifting story does not lead to any confidence either. It is important that at some stage in this debate the Treasurer will release the true figures.

Of course, 45 days after 30 June we will get the updated quarterly figures and that will be interesting. We know his numbers are not to be trusted, simply because they shift and change so much. If the Treasurer really wanted to stick to the government's election commitment of greater honesty, greater openness, greater transparency and greater accountability, he would release those figures to us this evening before this debate continues. Of course, we will not be seeing those figures.

MS TUCKER (5.07): I won't talk a lot on this line, as most of my comments on Treasury matters are also pertinent to other lines such as housing and the environment. Suffice to say that even Treasury needs to include itself in the triple bottom line matrix, and imagining that the environmental and social costs are matters for other departments rather misses the point.

It is worth making some brief comments here about the bushfire levy. I understand that the Treasurer was not aware that the Greens would have supported this levy. The fact that I had said we were looking at it and had asked for information on the cost to the territory of the bushfire might have given cause to the Treasurer or his staff to ask if there was any way they could assist us in our deliberations.

In fact, a very strong message from the Greens membership and from the community, which includes victims of the fire, was that the levy was a reasonable impost that was well enough supported across the community, particularly taking into account the awareness that exists in the community of the unmet need in so many service areas.

We are now looking at the increased costs of water purification, which is another consequence of the bushfire that was not factored into the budget. This is dealt with by Actew, but Actew is us, basically, and it will have impacts on the dividends.

I also raised with the Treasurer the notion of borrowing for public and affordable housing, perhaps by issue of bonds. I also asked him to explore investing some of the territory's superannuation funds in housing. I still have not got a considered response to that. Housing is such a critical social need in our community that I do not think it is a responsible government that just says, for the sake of it, that it won't investigate these different approaches when unmet need and social liability are accruing.

Responsible financial management requires that you focus on more than merely holding the line. Social and environmental benefits, as well as costs, need to be factored into the financial management formula. If we get that wrong, it will come back to bite the bottom line.

MS DUNDAS (5.10): The lead-up to this budget was marked by dire predictions from the Treasurer and the Chief Minister about the state of the ACT budget bottom line, due to the cost of the January bushfires. Some mention was also made of reduced investment returns from the troubled stock market. The fires became a default excuse for refusal to commit in many areas of investment that were urgently needed to secure the future of the ACT community.

What became apparent in the space of a few months was that the revenue projections from stamp duty and land sales were grossly underestimated. We have already seen the bushfire levy scrapped because the additional revenue was not required to balance the budget. What we have not yet seen is acknowledgment by the government that they would re-appraise the budget submissions they rejected to see where the surplus revenue should go.

I have previously mentioned that the community sector did not do well out of last year's budget, and I hope we will soon see a supplementary appropriation bill to allocate a chunk of the surplus revenue to restoring services in the community sector. But we need the information from the Treasurer about just how much money we will have at the end of the financial year and the impact that has on the 2003-04 budget. Then we can have the discussion about other initiatives that would benefit from resources, as we are continuing to do today.

There are also some welcome initiatives under the banner of ACT Treasury, as well as some glaring omissions. One of the stated highlights of the Treasury budget line is supposed to be the implementation of the government's strategy to provide accessible and affordable insurance for community and sporting organisations and small businesses.

However, I am hearing that a number of community organisations missed out on help to meet increased insurance premiums. This effectively means that services to the community will drop in the near future if they have not already dropped. It was up to the Treasurer to find practical solutions for our insurance crisis, but unfortunately the response appears to have been quite patchy.

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I would like to briefly talk about government business enterprises here, as the Department of Treasury appears to be the most adequate part of the debate to do this. I have welcomed the decision of the government to finally bite the bullet and tackle the massive losses of the International Hotel School and Totalcare industries. I have been continually troubled by the lack of transparency in the management of these ventures.

It has been a struggle to get a true picture of where things have been going wrong in the management of their finances and strategies, and I hope the government will be more forthcoming in the future when questioned about government-owned enterprises. We await the tabling of the working party report on Totalcare, which the Treasurer last week said he would table during this sitting period.

On a more positive note, I had feared that my calls for changes to the stamp duty concession scheme were falling on deaf ears, but I am glad to see that changes are finally being made to make the scheme useful to more than a handful of low-income home buyers. I believe that this is a small step towards a solution to the affordable housing crisis affecting the ACT.

MR CORNWELL (5.13): Addressing the Department of Treasury appropriation: I would like to begin by referring to the government response to the Select Committee on Estimates. May I say I am heartened by that response in relation to at least one recommendation. Other members will remember—as, indeed, will the Treasurer—that the Treasurer and I had a number of run-ins about the fact that self-funded retirees were not going to be exempt from the bushfire levy or other imposts that were proposed. As we are aware, the bushfire levy has been abolished and that therefore no longer applies.

Nevertheless, the principle of not exempting self-funded retirees when other people were exempt—I refer specifically to the 1,940 ACT Housing Trust tenants who were paying full market rent—struck me as being unfair. It struck me as unfair that people who could be in receipt of a very good salary were going to be exempt from a levy that was going to be imposed on people who were on a fixed income. I did not believe that that was fair.

Mr Wood: You caught up with what was happening, I assume? Did you read the government's response to the reports?

MR CORNWELL: Thank you, Mr Wood. I have already acknowledged the fact—

Mr Wood: You're doing your duty here, Mr Cornwell, which is a significant sacrifice on your part.

MR CORNWELL: That the bushfire levy has been dropped. In fact, if you give me a chance, I was going to pay the government a small compliment.

Mr Quinlan: We don't need them. Move on! You can't filibuster without giving us compliments, Greg. You're losing it, mate.

MR CORNWELL: However, I am pleased that the matter has been resolved.

Mr Wood: I am disappointed in you, Mr Cornwell.

MR SPEAKER: Order, members! Mr Cornwell has the floor.

MR CORNWELL: Thank you for your protection against these people opposite, Mr Speaker. Recommendation 21 of the estimates report reads:

The Committee recommends the Government investigate ways of incorporating low-income self-funded retirees in the rate concessions granted to pensioners.

I was much heartened by the government response: "Noted." It did not reject it out of hand. The response continues:

The Government is currently reviewing all concessions and rebates available to low income groups. To the extent that the self funded retirees fall within low income groups which are provided Commonwealth Health Care cards, they are already entitled to a range of concessions and rebates—

which we know—

More work will need to be done to ascertain whether it would be feasible to extend the rates concessions to holders of Commonwealth Health Care cards to ensure equity and consistency in the application of concessions. The government needs also to consider the potential costs and the wider implications of an extension of rates concessions and rebates for other low income groups.

I will watch this matter with great interest. I hope that something can be done, in the name of justice, for a number of these people.

Some members received an email the other day from a gentleman living in Ainslie, who is a retiree. He pointed out the problems of rate increases for retirees. He pointed out that his rates would go up \$651 next year, an increase of 48 per cent on last year's rates. He claimed, however—and I think there is some sense in what he said—that the whole concept of rates being based on ULVs is stupid.

It has nothing to do with the services used or the ability to pay. There should be a fixed charge on every household for basic services. Added to that should be a pro rata charge based on the size of the house, so that someone who can afford to live in a 28 square metre house, compared with my 14 square metre house, accordingly, pays twice as much.

Members may not agree with this. It is, however, another suggestion that could be looked at. I trust that the Treasurer will be doing this when he re-examines the entire rating question, so that the government is not obliged to adopt what they had been talking about for so long as the "discredited Liberal rating system". We look forward to a new proposal for rates in this territory. The matter certainly needs to be looked at in some detail.

The other matter I would briefly comment upon is the continuous registration of motor vehicles which, again, is a revenue initiative. Whether this brings in the revenue that the government seeks and, more particularly, whether the government

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has considered all the problems associated with this continuous registration I, personally, have grave doubts.

I know that these matters will be discussed in due course, and I hope that the government takes aboard the concerns that have been expressed by members of this house and, indeed, the public. I do not believe the problems relating to continuous registration have been addressed adequately, and we may see another backdown by the government, like the bushfire levy. Who knows?

The other matter I could address under the general heading of “territories” is that of territory-owned corporations. I dare not say anything about the Australian International Hotel School or Totalcare Industries. Under this government, these two matters have become so sensitive that it would perhaps be wiser to hold my comments until we see what the final outcome is.

However, I can briefly address the Actew Corporation. The question on my mind, still—because it is effective from 1 July—is about the electricity rates upon introduction of full retail contestability. I remain concerned about the rates that will be charged for self-funded retirees, and I hope that the forecasts of Actew’s financial position will continue to improve with the onset of FRC.

If that is the case, I would hope that the government addresses the question of self-funded retirees being entitled to the same concessions and the same generosity that this government has extended to pensioners under full retail contestability. That remains to be seen. I, for one, shall be pursuing it, if only in the interests of fairness and equity.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.7—Central Financing Unit, \$10,857,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$10,857,000.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (5.22): The Central Financing Unit is a very important unit inside the Treasury. The major changes affecting the CFU in the coming year relate to the way in which the territory operates its bank accounts.

Following comments made by the Auditor-General, all relevant financial transactions are now made through the territory banking account. In this line of the budget we have what appear to be inappropriate performance indicators. I mentioned before one of the measures that have been deleted this year because it was the normal day-to-day functioning of the CFU. That is exactly the point. There must be some indicators that are more useful in demonstrating the performance of the CFU.

More broadly, the government has indicated that the CFU will be completing a review of investment strategies and other matters in the coming budget year, 2003-04. It will be important to consider, in relation to the outcomes of such a review—when it has been finalised—that there have been a number of disruptions to the ACT’s investment strategies over recent months, culminating in substantial increases in assets being in cash and near-cash forms during the year 2002-03.

In summary, I believe there are more appropriate ways for the Assembly to monitor the activities and the performance of the CFU, and it is incumbent on the government to encourage more relevant indicators and other matters to be implemented. That will enhance overall accountability and responsibility in the management of the operation of the CFU. We all look forward to the outcomes of the review, when it is finalised.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.8—Home Loan Portfolio, nil expenditure.

MS TUCKER (5.25): For me, this line represents missed opportunities to deal with housing affordability. In one sense, the crisis in affordability in the ACT is the result of the fact that we live in a society that is predominantly shaped by market forces. It has been quite disturbing to see how the price of houses and of building houses has increased since the bushfires. Rent has also increased.

This is against a background of alternative investments looking shaky and dodgy and people investing in housing. The reality of people's lives is that, more and more, housing is taking a very large proportion of their income, putting people in poverty. It is disappointing to me that this budget had not addressed this issue in a much more proactive way. I know I have already said this tonight, and I will be speaking even more about it at more length later on.

The home loan portfolio was an old way of making available more affordable loans to people to buy their ACT housing property. The loans were structured, as I understand it, in a way that recognised the economic circumstances of the beneficiaries. It was a way to compensate for the market system and bring social justice into it. We do not do it any more, and that is unfortunate.

MS DUNDAS (5.26): This was investigated a little bit in estimates, when we discussed what was going on with the money—that you cannot scrutinise an appropriation that is used by the ACT home loan portfolio. Most of it is stored in bank accounts spending a lot of time doing not a lot at all.

I still have questions about the \$120 million of accumulated Commonwealth-state housing funding. I would have liked to see more being done this year to improve access to affordable housing. We could have done that using the earnings from the accumulated funds in the home loan portfolio and establishing the trust to invest in property in a whole lot of other ways. But, as has been said, this appears to be a missed opportunity and does not do anything to make the housing situation in the ACT any better.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.9—InTACT \$6,271,000 (net cost of outputs) and \$5,920,000 (capital injection), totalling \$12,191,000.

MS DUNDAS (5.28): As with the Chief Minister's Department, rollovers appear to have become a regular feature of the InTACT budget line. I hope that this year the projects we are appropriating money for in this budget in InTACT will

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run smoothly and that the funds will be expended as this Assembly has been told they will be.

Eight initiatives from last year were rolled over in InTACT to the next financial year. Some were completely withdrawn from the budget; some were partially under way but were not looking to meet their spending targets; some had their funding given back to the government, so that the government could spend elsewhere. Yet all of this information—about how InTACT was operating and if it was meeting the targets this Assembly had been told it was going to meet—was not received until the next budget was then presented.

Failing to commence projects is one way of returning a budget surplus, but it is better to commit funds only to projects that will be commenced because there are always areas of need that are inadequately funded. We need to know how much money is actually being spent. If the government decides that these are projects that are priorities and if it is willing to appropriate millions of dollars to them—and this Assembly believes that is going to be the case—then we will have a reasonable expectation of seeing these things take place and not seeing continuing rollovers.

What InTACT is doing is particularly concerning. As I have said, I hope that this is looked at and that we can have more faith that budget 2003-04 and the initiatives contained therein will take place, as opposed to being rolled over so that we can have this debate again in the 2004-05 budget.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (5.30): Ms Dundas makes a very appropriate point, particularly in relation to InTACT. One of the recommendations of the committee, and one of the few that the government has agreed to, is recommendation 16, at paragraph 3.4, which says:

The Committee recommends that departments and agencies adopt realistic deadlines when undertaking projects running over a number of financial years and appropriate funding for the financial year in which it is genuinely expected to be spent.

This gets at giving a realistic picture of what state the budget is in and what is hoping to be achieved by the government. I am pleased to see that the government response to recommendation 16 is “Agreed”. Perhaps what we will not see next year is the large number of rollovers that, as has been so rightly pointed out, do occur.

That is not to say that difficulties will not be encountered. Sometimes the parameters of projects change, and we all appreciate that. But setting unrealistic amounts of money in budgets, with unrealistic timetables, is something that we should all endeavour to avoid.

I have some concerns about the rollover of the 2002-03 voice technology upgrade review initiative, which is going to cost \$300,000. I am not sure how you justify \$300,000 to review a voice technology upgrade; it seems an inordinate amount of money to be spent on what, in theory, is a commercially viable product that can be bought off the shelf. If a voice technology upgrade is worth \$300,000, I would be very surprised—that is just the review; it is not the technology itself.

As has been pointed out, \$2.9 million was to be spent this year on the data communications strategy initiative. It is a shame that project has not gone ahead. I think it is important that we commit ourselves to timetables and stick to them so that we do not have uncertainty in the budget process and we achieve the purpose of the appropriation. When money is put aside it is important that it is spent on that target. It is most important that we achieve that.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.10—Superannuation Unit, \$68,800,000 (capital injection) and \$43,968,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$112,768,000.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (5.33): There has been an enormous amount of interest in the superannuation accounts these years, and I think it is warranted. It is a very important account because it holds the futures of all our public servants as they choose to retire. With the state of world markets and the fluctuations we are all aware of, we are all looking forward to what already appears to be occurring: the improvement in the returns on this account as global equity markets slowly improve.

We are concerned at the impact of the reduction in the asset of the SPA due to the reduction in investment earnings during the year 2002-03, which at this stage appears to be about \$10 million. We are waiting for the update and are all optimistic that this will turn around during the 2003-04 year. Indeed, the budget papers anticipate a gain in investment earnings during the year 2003-04 of around \$59 million.

At the same time, the employer contributions to the superannuation provision account are scheduled to continue increasing in the year 2003-04 and in the outyears. In the coming budget it is \$14.1 million, \$14.7 million the year after, then \$14.9 million, and \$15.1 million in the following years. This is supported by separate contributions from the government, as a strategy to build up the asset of the SPA so that, by the year 2039-40, the ratio of assets to liabilities will be around 90 per cent. There is a continuation of the strategy that the previous government set.

In the year 2003-04, there will be a contribution of close to \$69 million, increasing to \$73 million then \$75 million in the next two outyears. It is worth noting, however, that the budget papers do not reveal all the details that are necessary to evaluate the performance of the superannuation provision account. It would be beneficial if there was information at an aggregate level on the transactions that take place within the SPA, particularly on the realisation of assets and the outcomes of these transactions.

Also, included in Table 5 at point 2.9 of BP3 are details of the interest received by the superannuation account on its assets. Again, unfortunately, it is not possible to identify these funds, because they are aggregated with other amounts. The need for greater clarity and transparency in these transactions is worth consideration.

I would also question whether there are more appropriate performance indicators than those shown on page 125 of BP4. The indicators, particularly on this page, are virtually worthless as they appear, and we need to put some thought into developing

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more relevant indicators. One of the indicators is to monitor and review the investment performance of the superannuation investment portfolio. One would have thought that was the whole purpose of the superannuation unit.

Mr Quinlan: Right on the job.

MR SMYTH: “Right on the job,” the Treasurer said, and he is right. We should not dismiss the day-to-day, because you have got to monitor that as well. To monitor what they are actually achieving through this monitoring would be more appropriate.

Superannuation is important. We need to ensure that, if we are going to make the year 2039-40 targets, the moneys are still being put aside regularly. The continuation of this strategy is important, and the government is to be commended at this stage. The opposition will, however, continue to monitor that the moneys, as promised, do appear. Any attempt to slow down the amount of moneys going into this account will have dire consequences in the years to come.

This is particularly so after about 2015-16. If you check the staffing profiles across all the departments where the information has been provided, a large number of ACT public servants are approaching the 55 year mark, and a large number of them will be taking early retirement or moving off to take their superannuation. We need to make sure that those amounts are there to cover their needs into the future.

MR QUINLAN (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism and Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming) (5.37): I will take this opportunity to let members know that superannuation returns are shakily improving. I might as well confirm what I have already said in this place in response to something Mr Smyth said at an earlier line, which is that the latest estimate of the surplus for this year is about \$100 million. It could be higher, but it is a case of what happens at 30 June in the stock market. It is dependent upon taxes.

Of course, the fluctuations between what is expected and what happens in the last few weeks have all compressed. In fact, the real answer will not be known until all the accounts are in and the accounting arguments are had well into the next financial year when the final financial statements come out.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.11—Health and Community Care, \$429,099,000 (net cost of outputs), \$25,432,000 (capital injection) and \$8,436,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$462,967,000.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (5.40): This line constitutes the largest single line in the budget. It beats the education budget by about \$7 million and, therefore, is a very important line to consider, not just in terms of the money that will be spent in the Health and Community Care portfolio, but for what it provides for the people of the ACT.

In an economic sense, looking at the outyears for the health budget and, in particular, the hospital, Canberrans should be quite alarmed that in the current financial year the portfolio is going to record the worst ever operating loss by far against budget since accrual accounting was implemented in the ACT.

Mr Corbell: Come off it, Brendan; you know what that is about. You are just misrepresenting the position.

MR SMYTH: Mr Corbell interrupts that I know what it is about. The answer is that it is all depreciation.

Mr Quinlan: It's not really a profit centre, Brendan. It's not a profit centre, let me tell you.

MR SMYTH: The Treasurer also interrupts, saying that it is not really a profit centre. I have not said that. I have not said that at all. But, if you are going to apportion money to this line, you need to apportion the amount which will cover what is required, so the arguments put forward or the interjections put forward one can only take as embarrassment, rather than an accurate comment on what I am attempting to say.

The latest portfolio estimate, including extraordinary items, including the excuses given by the minister, is of a loss of \$18 million. Looking at that against the outyears, where we fail to see real growth, either against CPI or, indeed, the health index, I think that Canberrans need to be very worried about the state of the Department of Health and Community Care.

This government made great hoo-ha in the lead-up to the election about their simple injection of \$6 million fixing everything. Indeed, they have injected large amounts of cash into the Health and Community Care budget over the last two budgets, and that is commendable. What is not commendable is the lack of results. If you are spending large amounts of money in health but not achieving outcomes for ordinary Canberrans, you have to question why are you spending that money and why you are spending it in the way that you are spending it. Unless we start looking at the outcomes of this expenditure, we will have a health system that will fail and continue to fail under the current government.

A perfect example of that is the funding reductions to Calvary last year. Calvary came up \$3½ million short on the previous year. The government said, through the previous minister, "We'll bear the pain. We knew there would be pain." So a conscious decision was taken by the government. To the credit of the minister, he has managed to claw it back \$2 million this year. But, if you take into account real health growth and the fact that you are still \$1.5 million short, Calvary is still not at the level where it was two years ago.

That is against the backdrop of significant increases in the population of Gungahlin. Those people see Calvary as their primary source of health care, of accident and emergency care, before they have to go further afield to something like the Canberra Hospital. If we continue to have the sorts of blowouts in the budgets that are predicted

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here, you have to cast some doubt on the availability of this government to create a sustainable health system.

As to some of the things that need to be looked at: the budgets for future years are now showing that the situation will be unsustainable in the outyears. The increases are much less than required. They are much less, in the main, than CPI for the hospital. One has to question whether that is the reason for Mr Corbell's refusal to sign up to the new health agreement proposed by the Commonwealth which would see significant growth, 17 per cent real growth over five years, in public funding for hospitals. That is a very reasonable offer.

What the Commonwealth is doing—Commonwealth governments of either ilk have done so—is asking the state and territory governments to match those contributions in some way, shape or form and for increased reporting. That is what the current Health Minister baulks at. He has not got the capacity in the outyears to meet the agreement.

We will get CPI increases, which will come in at, I think, just under half a billion dollars, so there will be extra money in the budget for hospitals, courtesy of the generosity of the federal government. But we will not have an opportunity for real growth because this government has not made allowance for that to occur. I think that that is a shame.

The problem then is what happens into the future. An Under Treasurer once said to me, "Your hospital is your eyes on your budget and whether your budget will work in the long term." If you look into the eyes of the hospital budget you will see a very sick part of the budget, simply because it does not have the ability to cope in the outyears with what we know is going to happen.

We know that, as the population ages, there will be a greater need for hip and knee replacements and those sorts of operations. We know that the Gungahlin population will still continue to grow. The ACT's population continues to grow basically at about one per cent. The majority of that will be in Gungahlin.

We all know that the costs of health go up every year, and they do go up beyond the CPI. A large driver of that is the cost of pharmaceuticals and, of course, that is absorbed by the federal government through the growth of the pharmaceutical benefits scheme, which, in a decade, has gone from about \$1 billion to, I think, about \$4.5 billion. So we should not be hearing the excuse later that it is all because the cost of health goes up and the federal government does not carry the load.

The federal government does carry the load through the pharmaceutical benefits scheme; it is carrying a significant part of it. The people who aren't carrying the load and aren't making an appropriate allocation of funds are the members of this government, who, fundamentally, do not understand how the health budget works. They said that they could fix it. I think that the evidence is that they have failed.

During the estimates process, the minister refused to give the committee the numbers for the waiting lists, which is a matter for another day. Those waiting list numbers have since been released and, I think, show an alarming trend in the growth for the

hospital. We do not have in any of the documents provided for this year's budget an indication of how the Health Minister is going to cope with that.

The other sad thing, and Mr Corbell has written to me about this, is that the document that he finally released as his new accountability measure for hospital waiting lists is, in fact, a far cry from what we used to release in terms of detail. I think that the minister should go back to the old format. At least it provided a consistent monthly indication of where the waiting lists were at so that people could work out where they were on the list and what was the likely opportunity for them to receive the treatment that they wanted.

The future financial performance of the health portfolio is something that the Assembly will need to take sharp note of, simply because without it we will have an absolute looming black hole in the budget. But, worse than that, we will have an enormous impact on those Canberrans who need and desire services and deserve those services when they want them. Perhaps we need to have a fundamental rethink.

It would appear that the changes that the then health minister, Mr Stanhope, was attempting to achieve when he said that he would get rid of purchase/provider and dragged the hospital back into the department have failed. I think you could make a clear link that those have failed. We have seen huge increases in the health budget and we have seen a reduction in real terms in the number of services across-the-board provided to Canberrans.

We are spending more on health and we are getting fewer outcomes in health. It is not sustainable to spend more and get less. You have only to look at the chart released that shows the growth in waiting lists. Something like 230 Canberrans were added to the waiting lists for the month of April, an enormous increase.

The minister will, no doubt, get up and bleat about the waiting lists not being an appropriate measure. They are one measure that is used. The other measure that should be used is the mean waiting time. All the mean waiting times in categories 1, 2 and 3 are going up, and they have been going up quite steadily and constantly since Labor came to office. I am sure that the Chief Minister ditched the health portfolio and gave it to Mr Corbell because his solution did not work.

We had the extra injection of cash, we had the abandoning of purchaser/provider and we had the hospital drawn back inside the department. What has been the outcome? We have spent more money and we have had less in the way of service. We have had radically less in the way of service in category 1, where there has been almost a doubling of the mean waiting time. Category 1 patients are the ones who require surgery within 30 days and we are now seeing category 1 patients slipping outside the 30 days. That is a direct consequence of Labor's health—

Mr Corbell: The mean waiting time is not outside 30 days.

MR SMYTH: We are seeing category 1 patients slipping outside the 30 days. We are also seeing category 2, semi-urgent, and category 3 growing. The waiting times are growing, and they are growing under Mr Corbell.

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MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition's time has expired. Would you like to take your other 10 minutes, Mr Smyth?

MR SMYTH: I would love to take my other 10 minutes, Mr Deputy Speaker.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Proceed.

MR SMYTH: The minister revealed that the average waiting time for category 1 surgery at Canberra Hospital had risen from 12 days in February 2001 to 13 days in February 2002 and was almost reaching 23 days in February 2003.

Mr Corbell: Oh, gee!

MR SMYTH: The minister moans, groans and whines about that. He is right; the wait is 30 days. In February 2001, when we were in office, it was 12 days. It was 13 days in February 2002 and it was 23 days in February 2003. Let us look at category 1 for Calvary, for instance. It went from 14 days in February 2001 to just 11 days in February 2002, so there was a better performance there, but rose sharply to 27 days in February 2003. If the minister thinks that that is okay, I think that the minister is in for a big shock. We are not seeing as large an increase in category 2 and category 3, but are seeing a trend that says that they are increasing as well. I think that the minister should revert to the former system of reporting so that we can gauge these numbers over a period, which would be much better.

The other thing that concerns me significantly about the health portfolio is the apparent decline in public health funding for primary health care measures out in the community. Unless we undertake this activity—in fact, unless we increase this activity, unless we reinforce this activity—we will end up with more and more people in hospital, the old line about prevention being better than cure. I am concerned that such funding appears to have been reduced in this budget. It looks like the fall for public health has been from \$19.3 million to \$17.65 million, about 8 per cent.

I think that that is a shame because it means that the government does not have the foresight to see that, unless you start increasing primary health care, get Canberrans to be fitter and healthier and look after them when they are well, you will have this added burden on the health budget in the outyears because people who can be looked after now will be much worse and much sicker when they get to hospital. I think those programs need to be looked at.

I note that today the minister released his report on respite care. I have not had a chance to look at it but, from what the committee heard during the estimates process and the contact I have had with the community, there is a need for extra places in respite care. I am not sure that we are getting that in this budget. Some of the measures have been changed and the department was unable to answer questions asked of it through the minister and took the questions on notice. I am not sure if those questions have been answered yet. Contrary to what the minister has said, quite a substantial number of questions that were taken on notice or placed on notice in the health portfolio still have not been answered.

The aged care places that the territory has should be of concern to all of us, particularly as they are hard to come by. If you do not use them quickly and you do not keep to your undertaking under the contracts, you can run the risk of losing them. It would seem that very little progress has been made with the aged care facility on the other side of Haydon Drive, opposite Calvary Hospital.

One of the recommendations of the committee was that this matter be expedited with all urgency. I think we all agree that that should be the case. There are some difficulties with planning in terms of some trees and, I think, access to and egress from the site. I would simply urge the minister to make sure that we get that site happening as quickly as we can, because I think that we would all agree that we need to be going after the Commonwealth for more and more aged care facilities and places as best we can.

I turn to a couple of other issues that were not addressed in this budget. I refer particularly to the aged care liaison workers that were promised, the dual diagnosis workers for the indigenous community that were also promised and the additional breast cancer nurse. I understand that there is provision for one in the budget. The government had promised to provide for two in its first year in government. We are yet to see the second breast cancer nurse and we are yet to see the aged care liaison workers or the indigenous community workers. I think that that is a shame. These are areas of great need. Indeed, these are, hopefully, areas of prevention so that we can make sure that we take the burden off the hospital system by keeping people in place and fit for as long as we can.

Among the other issues that I think we need to take into account in relation to the health portfolio—I am sure that Mrs Burke will comment on them quickly—is the amount of notification that is given to community groups that their grants are to be stopped, halted or amended. We heard in discussing the budget for Chief Minister's about the terrible state that Volunteering ACT have been put in and the terrible way that they have been treated. Apparently, the hepatitis C group has also had their funding stopped or reduced. Mrs Burke will canvass that as well.

Mr Deputy Speaker, if the former Under Treasurer was right when he told me that the hospital was your eyes on the budget and you need to watch the funding of the hospital because it is an indicator of where you are going in the future, the people of Canberra should be very scared by this budget. The health component is not sustainable. The figures for health indicate a huge lack of regard for what will be coming in the outyears when we all know, as I have said previously, of the burdens facing the ACT.

We are faced with a budget that is not sustainable and will eat rather significantly into any surpluses that Mr Quinlan is able to create through other means. I suspect that much, if not all, of it will be sucked into the health system. Health is something that deserves all the funding that we can give it, but the government is going into denial and saying that the figures in the budget are sustainable and it is going into denial and saying that the health system is getting better. It needs only to talk to the people on the growing waiting list and needs only to talk to the people who are asking the questions as to why we are spending more money in health when we are getting fewer services.

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MS DUNDAS (5.57): There are certainly some valuable initiatives in the health area, most particularly this year in the area of mental health. The modest allocation of services to clients with dual diagnosis is very welcome, as is the new funding for mental health services for Gungahlin, funding for mental health assessments for people in the justice system and the funds for early assessment of mental health services at Calvary.

I am also glad to see funding to cut the public dental health waiting list. This spending will greatly reduce human misery and it is an initiative that I wholeheartedly support. However, it is very disappointing that there is no funding this year for recruiting nurse practitioners, with only machinery changes to be made this year to facilitate future recruitment of these valuable professionals. A marked increase in presentations to emergency wards has led to a \$422,000 funding increase for Calvary Hospital in this budget. This rise in demand strongly suggests that measures to alleviate our GP crisis, such as new nurse practitioner positions, are needed sooner rather than later.

It is disappointing that there is no commitment in this budget to re-establish community medical centres. We need general practitioners back on the ACT payroll, supported by health workers who can provide referrals to preventive health and healthy lifestyle facilities. So far, the government's health initiatives have been fairly limited in their vision and I do believe that we need further examination of bringing back community medical centres and having nurse practitioners working there with general practitioners and other health care workers and professionals to help the people of the ACT stay healthy.

MR STEFANIAK (5.59): The health budget is something that always worries me. I can remember in the first Carnell government, I think our first budget, a valiant attempt to live up to a party promise, living within our means, and it was not long before a \$14 million appropriation was necessary as a result of a blowout in health. I do not think that I have seen quite so many blowouts in health in the short space of a government as I have with this one. It is disconcerting to see graphs like the one in the Estimates Committee report and, more so, to hear what people who work in the system say at the coalface.

This is a classic case, as we have seen in a few other areas of this budget, of spending more but actually getting less and it is happening in such a crucially important area because, if you look at the demography of Canberra, which is probably a bit more advanced on the demography of Australia and similar to the demography of a lot of the western nations, you will see that we have a rapidly increasing aged population that is going to be around for a lot longer and will need quite extensive health care for a number of reasons. We are seeing a decline in births, so a lower taxation base for the people actually paying the taxes to provide for people who are going to live a lot longer but who will have very distinct health needs.

There are, obviously, lots of preventive strategies that we need to take. I am not going to go over what my colleague Mr Smyth spoke about, but I think that he was very much spot on in terms of planning for the future and looking at ways in which we can keep people out of the health system. But when we see large sums of money being expended for a result which is not super-brilliant, there is real cause for concern.

I was interested to see the graph for the operating performance against the budget. Some of those figures are a little bit better than I would have expected or recalled. According to page 35 of the Estimates Committee report, we were \$1 million or \$2 million over budget in terms of the operating performance for 1997-98 and then there were some reasonably healthy figures before there was a bit of a drop to about a \$2 million or \$3 million operating performance against budget in 2001-02. In the last financial year there was a drop of about \$14 million—in fact, \$13.639 million was the figure there. That is very worrying.

Yes, the waiting lists are only indicative, but they are a recognised factor, one of the main factors, in seeing how the health system is going. If you look at graphs like the graph on page 39 in terms of mean waiting times, you will see that in virtually all categories they are actually going up, that they are going the wrong way, that the number of days is increasing. For category 1 there was a significant increase. For category 2 there was an increase over the past three years. For February 2001 there was a figure under 200. February 2002 was up, as was February 2003. For elective surgery, there was a bit of a decrease last year, which was promising, but there was another big increase this year. All those indicators are very worrying signs.

What also concerns me, knowing, as I said, people who have been in the system for many years, is to hear stories of how nurses who have done a lengthy shift and gone home have been called back in because other nurses simply cannot go to work. I have heard a number of stories of nurses working well over 100 hours a week at Canberra Hospital on a regular basis and heard stories, too, in relation to how, when they had hoped things would be getting better, there seemed to be more and more problems and things were not getting better; if anything, they were getting worse.

I have heard those stories when others have been in government. There were lots of people complaining about problems in the system when we were in government. It is interesting to note that the very same people are now complaining that things are getting far worse. That is a real problem for any government. It is something that we really have to come to grips with, and come to grips with early, because, as Mr Smyth says, column 3, relating to the net cost of outputs, is the single biggest item of expenditure, bigger even than education.

The line item totals show education to be a bit higher than health, but health is such a significant part of our budget, it is such an important area, that this Assembly should have real concern about the way it is tracking under this government. Little wonder Mr Stanhope flicked it to Mr Corbell. The health situation is of real concern. I will be very interested to see what the figures bring for next year. I must say that, on the performance to date of this government, I do not hold out a huge amount of hope.

MS TUCKER (6.04): I will make some comments on this line of expenditure for Health and Community Care. First of all, I want to comment about indigenous health, which is one of the things that I am not happy with in this budget. Such comments have been made before, obviously, but I want to restate that it is well understood that indigenous health is underresourced in Canberra. Commitments have been made by this government to deal with the issue, but they are yet to properly do that.

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We have a situation where, in particular, Winnunga Nimmityjah are struggling to deal with their client load. They have had an increase in the number of non-indigenous clients which, after this budget, they feel they can no longer support. That links in with the question of the availability of bulk-billing in Canberra. It is obvious that a number of people are going to Winnunga because they can get medical attention there whereas they cannot get it anywhere else. They could, of course, go to accident and emergency if they had the capacity to get there.

Another reason that those people go there is that they receive treatment and support which is non-judgmental. That is an interesting observation and says a lot about what our mainstream services are doing. Much as I acknowledge the quality of so many of the people working in the health services, the unfortunate reality is that stigma is still being experienced by some people, particularly those marginalised and on the edge of our community.

I think it would be worth while for this government to reconsider its approach to bulk-billing. I understand that Commonwealth failures have created this situation, but I feel that we have a fundamental responsibility to ensure that people in our community can access primary preventative health care, which is basically a GP, and that the costs to our community, once again, are not carried by the ACT budget, but are carried by the Commonwealth.

The social costs to a community are significant when its government, its parliament, is prepared to say that the problem is not its problem because it has no financial responsibility and leave it at that, because the reality for the human beings involved is dire. Lots of innocent people are caught up in this regard. I include children in that, because I know that some of the families I have dealt with in Canberra are on the breadline literally but have not been able to access doctors for their children.

Some are on the breadline and do not have a health care card because they earn a bit more than they can for that and others do not have a health care card because they are actually right out of the system. That happens for various reasons, mostly Commonwealth related. But we come back to the fundamental situation, that is, if the Commonwealth is failing in its processes and, through its processes, through breaching people and so on, it is unable to meet these really fundamental needs, then we have to do so.

I was really pleased to see the government acknowledge the issues in dental health. Once again, they are picking up on some of the Commonwealth's failures, and I commend them for that. I am still concerned about the need for mental health workers, particularly outreach workers. We have seen a fair bit of debate about the need for outreach workers for women and where, exactly, the money is going. I know that Toora have been very concerned about the lack of support for their work in this area and the rather vague expenditure here in terms of whether it will reach the women. Providing mental health outreach workers is about prevention. Once again the financial, social and human costs are much greater in the long run if people cannot be supported with their mental illness.

Mental illness can be absolutely devastating and leave people vulnerable and fragile. People who are experiencing mental illness deserve our absolute compassion, support, care and love, if I can use that word in the Assembly in a budget debate. I have to say that I find it overwhelming when I am working with people with mental illness to think that we are not doing absolutely everything we can, because it is so painful to see the situation that people can get into. We also know that they can get out of it, quite often, and that if they have the support at the right time there is a greater likelihood that they will get through episodes of mental illness with reduced long-term effects, whether it be stigma or turning into a chronic illness.

I am also interested in discussing briefly the hospital situation. I have followed with interest the debate on the hospital and the ongoing discussion about whether we are having reduced health outcomes. I have to admit that I find it difficult sometimes to establish in my own mind actually what is going on here. We have this debate every year. It appears from the waiting lists that there have been reduced health outcomes, but then I hear the government's explanation and it, to some extent, deals with my concerns, although I have to say that I do feel at this stage of this debate that it does appear that there have been reduced health outcomes, if you take waiting lists as a measure.

The other point I want to make about the hospital is that we know that the HealthFirst contract is coming up again. I have been watching that and, in terms of the load on the hospital, I can see from the surveys done that it has reduced the load on accident and emergency, which is a good thing. Interestingly, I noticed also that there has been an increase in the 000 calls. Apparently, that is because often men will ring up and say that they have a bit of a twitch in their chest or something else, but they are not too worried about it and they would not bother to do anything about it but, because HealthFirst is there, they do something about it now. They make the call and HealthFirst says that they need to go to the hospital right away. That is an issue about gender and health that is quite interesting, I think.

The other thing about HealthFirst, as I said, is that it has reduced the load on accident and emergency. While we have such unmet need in terms of after-hours GP services that people can afford, or even just after-hour services, we know that it is going to be critical that accident and emergency be available, but also acknowledging the costs of that. It is really good to have a system like HealthFirst that will enable that load to be reduced where it is responsible for it to be reduced.

I just wanted to put that on the record. I am not sure what the government's thinking is about HealthFirst, but I know that the contract is coming up for renewal. I just want to say that I have only ever had really good responses from the community on that service.

MRS DUNNE (6.13): Probably one of the most important lines in this or any other budget is the health line. We can see that it is \$462 million all up, which is a big slug out of what the ACT taxpayer pays for. Because it is about a large sum of money, but it is also about the health and wellbeing of everyone in the ACT, all our families and our children, we need to pay particular attention to what is happening in the health budget.

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The story told in the Estimates Committee report is a pretty sad one, really. I think that the most crucial thing that tells you just how parlous our health situation is becoming is a look at the mean waiting times. When the Liberal government was voted out of office in 2002, the mean waiting time for category 1 surgery was 14 days. It was half the clinically desirable time. It has now extended to 24 days.

As with all things, there are statistics and there are statistics, and the minister will be able to stand up and say that it is within the clinically approved time of 30 days and we are still under the clinically approved time. But in one year the waiting time for people in category 1 surgery has doubled. That is a scandal; it is an absolute scandal. The waiting time of people who are critically in need of urgent medical attention has doubled under the tutelage of Mr Stanhope and Mr Corbell. It has gone from 14 to 24 days, which is a complete and utter scandal, and they cannot rest behind the mantra that it is still within the clinically approved times.

That is a scandal, and it is a symptom of all that is happening in the hospital system in particular and the health system in general. The government talk about the work force and say that they have spent money that they said we would not spend. The money was in the budget but it was not spent because, for whatever reason, the work force at one of the hospitals would not negotiate. But we had already delivered wage rises at Calvary and we have seen delivered by this government substantial wage rises to nurses, which no-one begrudges, in the rest of the public hospital system, but we are not seeing anything for it. We see better paid nurses, and no-one begrudges that. At the same time, we are not seeing more throughput, we are not seeing more patients being seen, but we are seeing a blowout in the waiting times.

I am not going to talk about waiting lists because the minister keeps saying that they are not a valid measure and that we should look at the waiting times, so I am looking at the waiting times and what I see is a scandal. When we pursued that in estimates, one of the questions I asked was whether, with the new enterprise agreement, there was any discussion about adjusting the shifts, because the doctors will always say that they could perform more surgery, but at 4 o'clock at Canberra Hospital the nurses go home because there is no flexibility in the shift.

The answer was: "Not in this EBA, Mrs Dunne. In the future, we may do that." But at the moment, there is still no flexibility, there is no scope for staggering the start of shifts so the quantum of time available for surgery in the course of the day is longer. It is happening at Calvary, but there is not enough money in Calvary to keep the theatres open, which is another thing. But at Canberra Hospital, where most of the higher level intensive surgery happens, there is a very rigid rostering system that militates against having more surgery performed. As a result, we are seeing a blowout, an unconscionable blowout, in the waiting times.

That has been contributed to by the fact that in the last financial year the funding at Calvary Hospital was so measly that the hospital had to close down for 12 weeks. They closed their elective surgery lists for 12 weeks. One of the initiatives this year, which is a sort of initiative, is the provision of \$2 million for increased throughput at Calvary Hospital for elective surgery, increasing by CPI in the outyears, but essentially \$2 million extra for Calvary Hospital to have an impact on the waiting lists and the waiting times that have blown out unconscionably in the last year.

That will mean at Calvary that, instead of the theatres closing for elective surgery for 12 weeks, as happened this financial year, next financial year they will be closed for seven. It is a measly increase in an area which has a huge impact on the health of all the people in Canberra. Most of the orthopaedic surgery in Canberra is done at Calvary Hospital, but there is a huge impact on the health care provided to the people of Belconnen and Gungahlin in particular if there is no throughput because there is no scope for beds and other services are held up as a result of that.

The parents and the children in my electorate are being let down by this health minister because there are not enough resources going into Calvary Hospital to provide for their basic needs. People who need to have surgery in a short period are now having to wait double the time they used to wait in February 2002.

That is a symptom of everything that you see with this government. There is more money going in. Almost every time we have had an appropriation bill in this place or a supplementary appropriation bill since we have been here, there has been more money for the hospital. In the first supplementary appropriation bill after the government came to power, there was money there that urgently had to go into the hospital. Extra money eventually dribbled into the hospital, but we are not seeing extra services. We are paying more and more and getting progressively less out of the hospital. That is not what the people of the ACT need and it is not what they demand, and this government will pay a high price for that because the services that are being provided, basic services, are going down the gurgler.

There are a whole range of other things in this budget that, from time to time, we have seen members commenting on—things which look like initiatives but which, when you dig deep, are not really initiatives. Take the growth in the cost of pharmaceuticals. Pharmaceuticals are pharmaceuticals; they are things that you have to buy every year and provide to people in hospital. The spending of another \$250,000 this year is not an initiative and is not a new idea; it is just something that the government has to do. The same applies to the cost of surgical implants.

I do have to pay credit to the hospital because they have looked very closely at how they can better manage their costs and they are trying to do good things and make sure that there aren't massive costs overruns in areas like pharmaceuticals and surgical implants, but in other places there seem to be massive cost overruns where there is no control over the spending.

The government has a range of initiatives across the community for additional registrars, which is a good thing, a very good thing, but there is still a long way to go because they are still not addressing adequately—I reinforce that; they are still not addressing adequately—the unconscionable hours that registrars and young doctors work in hospitals.

They put their own careers and their own health on the line and, when they are working long shifts and back-to-back shifts, they are putting the health of their patients on the line. The practices that have occurred in hospitals across this country and across the world for years and years must be brought to a halt.

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This government and successive governments need to put money into ensuring that the people who work at the front line of emergency medicine as registrars, who work late at night covering for other doctors who have gone home, do not work the shifts that they have classically worked because it is not good for them and it is not good for the health of the patients.

In looking at the initiatives in other areas of the budget I found that, despite resolutions in this place and support across the Assembly, there is no provision for mental health outreach workers, as requested by the Toora women's group.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member's time has expired. Would you like to take your other 10 minutes, Mrs Dunne?

MRS DUNNE: Yes, thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. From recollection, there was a unanimous vote in this place to provide assistance for particular programs for mental health outreach workers, for people at risk of becoming homeless. That money has not appeared in this budget.

Mr Corbell: Don't give us that after your dismal record of mental health funding.

MRS DUNNE: I don't have a dismal record on mental health.

Mr Corbell: You do. Your party has an outrageous record on mental health funding.

MRS DUNNE: I don't have a dismal record on mental health.

Mr Corbell: The Liberal Party has a dismal record.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Somebody will have a dismal record of staying in this chamber if they are not careful.

MRS DUNNE: If we prick them, do they not bleed? What we have here is a dismal record in the performance of health, a dismal record, and all you need is this one figure to tell you: if a constituent of mine or any person in this place needs elective surgery and falls into category 1, once upon a time, not very long ago, a mere 18 months ago, they would have waited 14 days and now they wait 24 days.

MR PRATT (6.25): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to raise one issue regarding the delivery of health in the ACT. It is an issue that I am sure that Mr Wood would be aware of; it is a Brindabella issue. I talk about the issue of there being no Lanyon medical centre.

Mr Wood: There is one about 400 metres away, you know. There are a number of doctors there.

MR PRATT: Yes, but it is not sufficient and it is not meeting the needs of Lanyon people, according to Lanyon people. Lanyon is a significant central shopping centre, yet it is without a doctor's surgery. I receive a significant proportion of correspondence from constituents decrying the fact that we do not have a service in

the shopping centre there. That is where people shop. It is the most significant marketing area in that region and that is where a medical centre would be best placed.

I know that the government has tried its best in recent times to do something about that, but clearly we are getting nowhere. We would prefer to see market forces determine who sets up shop and in what shape and we would continue to support that approach to the establishment of viable, efficient community services. But when that has not happened and time has passed, I think government does have a role to step in and provide the incentives needed to find it somewhat more attractive for a medical partnership to turn up in that area. The people of Lanyon would like to see a cross-discipline capability existing there and it is something that is well and truly due.

Mr Deputy Speaker, with the generous grant of Liberal Party inspired and implemented GST revenues, we would like to think that this government was awash with resources in terms of the delivery of services to both medical and educational areas. After it has come to realise that, we would encourage the government to try to find the resources or to redeploy some of those resources to provide some form of incentive scheme to allow the well overdue establishment of a medical centre in that area.

Sitting suspended from 6.28 to 8.01 pm.

MRS BURKE (8.01): There are just a few general observations I'd like to make and things I'd like to say about the Department of Health and Community Care line that we're discussing now. I think, as has been said, health is another area where it's simply not a matter of throwing money at a particular problem. I was pleased to see the very lofty and admirable health objectives which hopefully the government will be meeting, working very hard to meet or continuing to work very hard to meet and deliver a high service to our community.

In fact, I do have information that suggests it isn't about money. I think most of us would agree that simply throwing money at a problem isn't always going to be the answer to it. It is about, I think, people in leadership—and particularly ministers—needing possibly to work harder to ensure a more effective use of resources, and that's probably what we've been hearing about as well. It's about how we better use money, how we channel it, how we assess the needs and how we listen to the community and focus our attention on addressing those needs in a practical way.

It is like any business. We need to continually change with the times and, in this case, the changing needs of our community. I hope that the government—and I keep saying it—keep listening to the community and hearing what the community is saying.

I look at the objectives, as I said, and hope that some of the budget goes some way to meeting some of those objectives. I'm not sure that the minister is totally achieving all of the things here at the moment. We give him probably a small star, but I think there's always room for improvement.

I am very sad to see that Winnunga Nimmityjah have been let down again. They were promised two workers before the last election. It now seems the goalposts have changed slightly. I think I've heard the Health Minister saying that it will be before

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the next election; that you will fulfil the promises; that the Labor Party will fulfil the promises; but we've changed the goalposts a little bit. That's a little sad because it was an election promise that they were certainly believing in and trusting the Labor Party to deliver. I feel that you've let them down a little there.

Toora is another example. I know that Mrs Dunne has spoken at length about women's services in the ACT and how their needs are being addressed or not addressed. I'm disappointed to see that there are no outreach workers per se. I think I remember Mr Corbell saying something like Winnunga and Toora could tap into the resources given over four years for drug and alcohol workers and mental health workers.

It seems as though many people have been told that they can tap into a single bucket of money. I'm just not sure how that's actually going to work. I'm sure that the minister will correct me if I'm wrong on that. I hope that, again, with a surplus of cash flowing into the territory, the Health Minister will be able to lobby the Treasurer hard for outreach workers particularly. It is a really great and urgent need in our community.

I think funding issues have negatively impacted on those providing such a crucial service to our community. There has been the 11th hour notification of funding for organisations such as Volunteering ACT. I mention their role and capacity in community care in terms of delivery of service and care as many volunteers are, of course, as we all know, carers in our community and save us millions of dollars a year, as I think I've already said tonight.

We've had the report in regard to respite care handed down. Again, I think it's sad really that we have money wasted on that report when the media release, I see, already alludes to the fact that we know there are many problems there. Why weren't these problems addressed in the budget? I think the minister or the government has stated they have been waiting on this report, when in fact their own media release states that they already knew the problems. I'm disappointed that in 2002-03 we see \$1 million allocated to respite care, yet in this financial year, 2003-04, we see \$35,000 a year, making a total of \$140,000 over four years. I believe there needs to be a greater shift towards some of these things.

Again I urge the government—and I hope that it's not too late—to use the forecasted \$100 million surplus that we may find ourselves with. I probably think that's a conservative estimate, given the things that we already know and those that we don't know. I hope that the Health Minister and the Treasurer will actually be able to get together and address some of the really deep-seated needs in our community.

It isn't good enough to simply tell groups like the Hepatitis C Council at the 11th hour—or a week before, or whatever it may have been—about their funding. I really think that's a little unfair, it's a little harsh on these groups to actually plan and project forward how they can best meet the needs of the community and help governments as well. Those community groups and other groups are there to help us all. I think that they have a fair point. They have been left hanging. Many of these people in these organisations are under extreme stress and pressure as a result.

I do acknowledge that there are some very good things in the budget. I'm always fair in saying things like that. But again, I think it's just something that we need to be mindful of; that it's not just shoving and pushing money at a problem; that we need to really look at the whole structure of what we're doing from the administration down, making sure. It's been talked about as empire building, but I probably see it as more chiefs than Indians. So we need to make sure that it's not top heavy in any way there.

I sort of commend the government on some of the initiatives but note with disappointment those things that are obviously very missing from this particular line of the appropriation.

MR CORNWELL (8.07): I just want to make a few comments in relation to aged care in the health budget. I am disappointed that, despite the request of the Select Committee on Estimates that the government takes all possible steps to ensure the aged care facility at Calvary is operational in the 2003-04 financial year, the government's response states:

The Land Group of the Department of Urban Services is currently negotiating the details of the siting of the development footprint and issues relating to the environmental and land use constraints. This process is being fast tracked within the overall constraints of the need to obtain Government approval to the allocation of land and the planning approvals necessary for the development to proceed. Given these constraints, it is not likely that Calvary Healthcare will be able to have this facility operational in the 2003-04 financial year.

Eighteen months have elapsed since, in 2002, this Labor government was given 65 beds from the Commonwealth for aged care at Calvary, and this government has the temerity to say:

The Land Group of the Department of Urban Services is currently negotiating the details of siting the development footprint and issues relating to the environmental and land use constraints.

What a load of public service gobbledygook! And then it goes on to say—and I can hardly repeat it, Mr Speaker, because I am gobsmacked:

This process is being fast tracked ...

After 18 months of doing virtually nothing!

Mrs Dunne mentioned earlier, Mr Corbell, a certain scandal in relation to health. I believe we have another scandal here now. Sixty-five beds have been sitting there for 18 months, with nothing going on—except people are mucking around about trees or something of that nature. In the meantime we have lost \$12 million.

Mr Corbell and I had an argument publicly on the matter after he kindly advised me how much it would cost to keep people in a hospital bed as opposed to one of these 65 beds that were being provided for aged care. The hospital setting costs \$968 per day for fewer than 35 days. The total cost of a residential aged care bed is \$203.95.

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Mr Corbell accused me of a beat-up when I made this matter public, but I didn't take the figure of 60 beds, Mr Speaker; I took the figure that was given to me in estimates by an officer of Mr Corbell's department, who said that perhaps 20 to 30 people might be able to use such beds. I based it upon not the 60 beds but the 30 beds. It worked out some \$12 million had been lost over 18 months.

That money has been lost to the hospital system because the people who didn't need to be in a hospital bed have been in one, which means that other people who should have been in a hospital bed have not. Never mind about waiting lists or waiting times—

Mrs Burke: How shocking.

MR CORNWELL: Yes, how shocking indeed, as Mrs Burke said. In other words, people who should have been in a hospital bed were denied that opportunity because we are arguing about a siting arrangement for these 65 beds. I understand that there was a discussion with Calvary because they wished to expand the 65 beds to a higher figure. The minister might like to confirm this at some later time, if he responds to our comments.

The fact remains that 18 months is too long to wait on this matter, and something should have happened. We are now told, however, not only that there has been an 18 months delay but also it is not likely that Calvary Healthcare will be able to have this facility operational in the 2003-2004 financial year. So what are we looking at now—another 18 months, another \$12 million, Mr Speaker? \$24 million down the drain on beds in hospitals. I can only assume that is going to be the case because I haven't heard anything to the contrary.

In addition to that scandal, we have the question—and I applauded the decision—of \$5.15 million being allocated for a sub and non-acute aged care facility. I applauded that; I think it's an excellent idea. It was suggested by the Estimates Committee that, given that the 65 beds at Calvary have not been taken up for 18 months and will not be taken up presumably for another 18 months—that's three years—every endeavour be made to adhere to or improve upon the December 2004 completion date, which was the date provided by the government for this facility to provide sub and non-acute aged care services.

However, the government response to the Estimates Committee is:

The design for this project will be commenced in the first quarter of the 2003-04 financial year ... should be completed by the end of 2004.

However, the sub and non-acute facility is not an aged care facility. It will contain 20 psycho geriatric beds and 40 rehabilitation beds. The purpose of the facility is to provide rehabilitation services to people who no longer require "acute" rehabilitation that is provided in the Rehabilitation ward at the Canberra Hospital or the services provided at the Rehabilitation Independent Living Unit at Gaunt Place. It will not be a long-term accommodation option.

It will contain 20 psycho-geriatric beds and 40 rehabilitation beds. Minister, when the question was asked by me, in estimates, this facility was confirmed, in estimates, to total 60 beds—30 for rehabilitation, 10 for transitional care and 20 for psycho-geriatric dementia-type patients. We now have 20 psycho-geriatric beds, which is the same as told in estimates, but we have 40 rehabilitation beds.

You may like to correct this. Maybe we're just arguing words, Mr Corbell, but you did tell me 30 for rehabilitation, 10 for transitional care. I accept that it may not be a long-term accommodation option in this facility, but I still maintain that the removal of people from hospital beds into this 60-bed facility must release needed hospital beds. I urge you again to facilitate the fast tracking of this.

MR SPEAKER: The member's time has expired.

MR CORNWELL: I will take the rest of my time, Mr Speaker. I will not be long.

I do urge you to facilitate the fast-tracking of this. In terms of hospital beds and aged care: the more elderly people we can move out of hospitals, the more beds that are freed up for other people who need them. This is not rocket-science approach; it's something that we should be able to accept.

I am appalled, as I say, at the delay in the taking up of the 65 beds that were given to Calvary. I hope that you will be able to speed that up and I would hope also that this other facility, which is much needed for sub and non-acute aged care, will also be fast-tracked. We cannot have enough aged care facilities in this city, with our population ageing, Mr Speaker.

MR CORBELL (Minister for Health and Minister for Planning) (8.19): Mr Speaker, this budget is a strong budget for health, contrary to some of the claims that other members have made. Of course there is always unmet need in health; there always will be regardless of the amount of money you put into the health system. The same can be said for education, the same can be said for almost any other area of service delivery, but it's particularly the case in the health portfolio.

Mr Speaker, it's interesting to hear the comments from those opposite, particularly in relation to their critique that we're pouring lots of money in but we're not getting any improved service outcomes. At the same time they criticise the government for not putting money into particular services. Really they're trying to have it both ways, Mr Speaker; they're trying to say, "Look, money isn't the issue," but then at the same time they're saying, "You should have spent money on this."

Mr Speaker, they can't have it both ways. Really the opposition's critique of the health budget is just one from the party of the cliché; that's all it is. Mr Smyth's got to be the king of the cliché: spend more; get less; a whole series of other references; keep repeating it and hopefully someone will eventually believe it.

Mr Smyth said he's not seeing any improved outcomes in relation to the health budget; he's not seeing any improvements in service delivery. I draw to the attention of members the initiative around elective surgery—\$6 million over the next three years to improve access to elective surgery. Mr Speaker, 600 Canberrans extra every

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year for the next three years will get access to the elective surgery they need. That's 600 families benefiting directly from one of their members being able to get the access to elective surgery that they need.

You talk to me about getting outcomes on the ground. I can't give you a more concrete example than that. That is a very solid commitment by the government—a significant increase in funding for elective surgery.

The opposition would like us to measure the health budget by the capacity of our hospitals in relation to elective surgery. What a shallow and obscure analysis of a half a billion dollar budget—that the health of the health system itself will be determined, Mr Speaker, by whether or not people are having to wait certain periods of time for surgery. Yes, waiting times for elective surgery are important. But to use them as the only measure of the effectiveness and the capacity of the health system is shallow in the extreme; but unfortunately, Mr Speaker, that's all that the shadow minister for health can come up with.

Mr Speaker, he makes the claim that the government has cut funding to Calvary Hospital. That is simply wrong, and he knows it's wrong. I will put on the record again tonight that the issue was that Calvary Hospital, under the previous government, received a specific amount of money under the CUTS funding, as it was called, to improve elective surgery at Calvary Hospital. They got that, Mr Speaker, as a bribe for signing up to the Australian Health Care Agreement early.

They didn't spend any money themselves; they weren't interested in spending more money on elective surgery but they were quite happy to take the Commonwealth's money; and they were going to spend it. But the real test is: if they were serious about that ongoing provision, why didn't they take it out of the territory's own resources when they knew it was going to come to an end? Why didn't they take account of it in the outyears? Why didn't they put it into the budget in the outyears? They knew it was going to run out; it wasn't a bottomless pot of money. They knew it was going to run out. Did they make any provision in the outyears? No, they didn't, Mr Speaker.

They weren't serious. They weren't serious about spending additional money on elective surgery, but we are, Mr Speaker. And we put our money where our mouth is: an extra \$6 million; 600 Canberrans every year extra, on top of the 4,000 or so who are treated every year in terms of elective surgery, are getting access to the elective surgery they need, Mr Speaker—real outcomes for real people on the ground.

Mr Speaker, it is interesting that along with waiting lists of course comes the issue of the reporting on waiting lists for our public hospitals. Mr Smyth said we should go back to the old system of reporting because that way people can find out how long they have to wait and where they are on the list. Well, I don't know whether Mr Smyth has actually ever looked at one of these documents, but it doesn't have a list of everyone telling you where you are in the list. You've got to ring the hospital to find that out. So a bit of basic research by Mr Smyth would probably have helped him in relation to that matter.

Mr Smyth makes a lot about the increase in mean waiting times for all categories in our hospitals. The test is, Mr Speaker: are we treating people within clinically appropriate times—the times determined nationally by the medical profession to be the times within which you should get treatment for particular types of surgery?

The reality is, Mr Speaker: for category one, we are well within the clinically appropriate time. But in relation, Mr Speaker, to category 2 and category 3: yes, we've got a problem, just like the previous government had a problem, just like the government before that had a problem. We are going to focus our resources on improving outcomes in category 2 and category 3. That's what the \$2 million per annum is about; it is targeted at category 2 and category 3 patients—people needing orthopaedic treatment, people needing ophthalmology, people needing a whole range of other types of surgery. That's where it will be focused, Mr Speaker—on improving those categories.

Mr Smyth also made a lot about questions on notice. He said that the government hadn't answered all his questions on notice; it's outrageous, et cetera, et cetera. What he doesn't acknowledge of course is that at a drop-dead date—at 7 o'clock in the evening of the last day of Estimates Committee hearings, after the committee secretary had gone home—the opposition lobbed on the committee secretary's desk 60 questions for the health department. On drop-dead day, that's what they did. Is it any wonder that we're still following up those questions?

During the Estimates Committee processes themselves, they asked about 14 questions on notice; but come the last day, one minute to midnight, they lob 60 on the table. And that's very interesting, Mr Speaker. That is the reason why the government is a little bit slow in responding. Interestingly, the committee secretary advised that the timelines would not be strictly adhered to and wouldn't need to be in this case. But that of course ruins Mr Smyth's story, Mr Speaker, so he obviously doesn't mention that.

Some other points came up in the debate. There was some criticism that the government had stopped funding to the Hepatitis C Council. That is simply wrong, Mr Speaker. The reality is that all funding for the Hepatitis C Council comes from a Commonwealth initiative. The Commonwealth has confirmed funding for half of the Hepatitis C Council. So we've indicated to the Hepatitis C Council that half of the funding has been confirmed by the Commonwealth but the other half hasn't. So guess what, Mr Speaker? We can't advise the Hepatitis C Council that the other half is coming yet. We think it's coming; the Commonwealth has told us it's coming; but we can't guarantee it, Mr Speaker. So the criticism of the government in relation to hepatitis C is just wrong again, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, I move on to two comments from Ms Tucker. I thank Ms Tucker for her comments in relation to the government's initiatives. There are two comments that I'd like to respond to. The first is in relation to bulk-billing.

Ms Tucker raises a very serious question of the availability and access to bulk-billing in the territory. Ms Tucker says that, whilst she acknowledges it's the Commonwealth's responsibility to address access to bulk-billing, at the end of the

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day, if we in this place believe that people aren't getting that access and people are suffering as a result of that, we need to do something about it.

Mr Speaker, the government has never ruled out doing something about it, but what we will do first and foremost is make the argument to the Commonwealth that they should be providing the necessary support to GPs in this city so that they can provide the bulk-billing services that our community needs. First and foremost, we have to try to negotiate that outcome with the Commonwealth because the bottom line, Mr Speaker, is that the people of Canberra have paid their taxes already to the federal government to get that service.

I'll take my second 10 minutes, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: You can speak for as long as you like. You are the minister in charge.

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, the reality is they're not getting it. They've paid for it, they've paid their income tax but they haven't got the service. So we need to do everything we can to make sure that the Commonwealth lives up to that obligation.

If they don't, Mr Speaker, we'll look at all the other options. In the context of a negotiation which is happening now, about the Australian Health Care Agreement, we have to try to force the Commonwealth to live up to their obligations. That will be a task that I am setting myself as Health Minister in terms of negotiating the Australian Health Care Agreement with the Commonwealth government.

Mr Speaker, I was disappointed that Ms Tucker did not give greater credit for the significant additional resources the ACT government has put into mental health services. Since coming to office, recurrent mental health funding has increased by nearly \$3 million per annum. That's this government's commitment to mental health services, a very significant commitment in the budget. You only have to look through the budget papers and you see that there's a significant level of mental health resources—whether it's additional counselling services in response to bushfire recovery; whether it's Gungahlin outreach services or people with mental health concerns in the Gungahlin area; whether it's an upgrade to the Calvary link activity between Calvary public hospital and the mental health services there; whether it's additional drug and alcohol or mental health workers; whether it's forensic court liaison workers; whether it's expanded community mental health teams; whether it's all of those put together.

Mr Speaker, that's the government's commitment to mental health services—a significant expansion of capacity, close to \$3 million per annum funding for mental health services. So the government is continuing to focus on this very important area.

Mr Speaker, it was interesting to note—and I love this one; it just shows how oppositionist they can get sometimes—comments from Mrs Dunne about when is an initiative not an initiative and when does it become a major scandal that's worthy of a mention in the Estimates Committee report. It's interesting that Mrs Dunne claims that an initiative is not an initiative if it's an expansion of an existing program; it's something that you're already doing.

Mr Speaker, I just draw Mrs Dunne's attention to page 7 of the government's response to the Estimates Committee report, where it points out that in the 2001-02 budget the previous government described the following initiatives as initiatives: an expansion of the out-of-school education program; additional funding for the enhancement of Indigenous Youth Centre's services; expansion of the learning for life program; and enhanced indigenous health services. I think it's a case of the pot calling the kettle black, Mr Speaker, but of course that won't stop, Mrs Dunne.

Finally, Mr Cornwell makes the point about aged care services. He first of all criticises the government for the period of time that it's taken to resolve the planning and development issues for a new aged care facility opposite the Calvary Hospital in South Bruce. Mr Speaker, that is a very complex issue. It's complex for a number of reasons. I would happy to give Mr Cornwell a full briefing on that matter so that he understands the issue more fully.

Initially Calvary proposed a much smaller facility. When they went to the government initially they said, "We're only going to have a 60-bed facility." That then changed, and it became over 100 beds. When they wanted additional land, we couldn't give them that land. The previous government wouldn't give them the land either, for the same reasons: they were under a commitment to the community also in that regard. So Calvary had to adjust their expectation; they had to adjust their plans.

I'm pleased to say that project is still making good progress, and I anticipate, as I've announced publicly, to go to cabinet within the next month or so with a proposition to direct-grant the land to the Little Company of Mary to provide that very important service. So, Mr Speaker, that is ongoing.

Mr Cornwell tries to make a scandal out of the fact that, because these people are in our hospitals, they're costing more than if they were in our nursing homes. Well, this is a nationally recognised problem, Mr Cornwell; it's not unique to the ACT. Yes, it is a scandal. And the reason it's a scandal, Mr Speaker, is that the Commonwealth government does not fund the number of aged care beds that according to its own formula it should fund for the ACT. Mr Speaker, they do not fund aged care beds to the level that they are required to fund even according to their own formula. Nationally, right around the country, state and territory governments are saying to the Commonwealth government, "You must improve in this area."

Mr Speaker, let me just make this point: in the next Australian Health Care Agreement, the Commonwealth proposes one-off capital funding only for these facilities; it does not propose recurrent funding for aged care beds. That's what the federal Liberal government is proposing to deliver to the citizens of Canberra and to the citizens of Australia. "No recurrent funding for aged care beds," is what they're saying, Mr Speaker. That is an outrage when we all know that it's the Commonwealth government's responsibility to provide those aged care beds. It has been since the Medicare agreements came into existence.

Mr Speaker, those are the sorts of dilemmas we would like to negotiate with the Commonwealth about. It's a pity that the federal minister just doesn't show up for meetings, because that makes it pretty hard to talk to them. Mr Speaker, maybe it

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means she knows she doesn't have a case and she's not prepared to have an argument because she knows she'll lose.

Mr Speaker, this budget is a strong budget for health. It delivers expanded services in mental health, in community care, in elective surgery and in dental health—strong initiatives that deliver practical, on-the-ground differences for the Canberra community.

The opposition focused a lot on this in the Estimates Committee report. In relation to some other portfolio areas—education, for example—there's hardly any commentary at all for a budget appropriation of similar size.

Ms Gallagher: Two pages.

MR CORBELL: Two pages, for an appropriation of nearly half a billion dollars, is all we got from the Liberal Party when it came to that department. But when it came to health, the interests of the shadow minister dominated the Estimates Committee, I'd have to say.

Mr Speaker, at the end of the day, the shadow minister hasn't been able to demonstrate exactly what it is he would do with the health budget, nor has he been able to demonstrate where the problems are. He has not been able to demonstrate what it is that the government is doing wrong, because the reality is, Mr Speaker: the government's on the right track; it's investing more in health; it's getting more outcomes; it's improving service delivery; it's making a difference for the people of Canberra; it's building our community; and it's focusing on improved health care.

This is a strong budget for health, and I commend it to the Assembly.

Mr Cornwell: I seek leave to speak briefly, Mr Speaker, again.

Leave not granted.

Suspension of standing and temporary orders

MR CORNWELL (8.38): I move:

That so much of the standing and temporary orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Cornwell from again addressing the Assembly.

All I wish to do is respond to Mr Corbell's offer. I was refused leave to do that. Hence my reason for seeking to suspend standing orders.

Mr Corbell: You don't need to respond to my offer. I know you've responded to my offer, you goose.

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order: I think it's entirely inappropriate that Mr Corbell calls Mr Cornwell a goose, and I think he should withdraw it.

MR SPEAKER: If that is the case, Mr Corbell, would you withdraw that, please.

Mr Corbell: I withdraw the comment, Mr Speaker.

MR CORNWELL: I simply wish to make the point that I'm happy to accept the offer of Mr Corbell for a briefing on the matter of the 65 beds. That's all I wanted to say, and I was refused leave.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that standing orders be suspended.

MR CORNWELL: I withdraw that motion, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: You'll have to seek leave to withdraw the motion.

MR CORNWELL: Very well, I seek leave to withdraw the motion. I have made the comment I wanted to make.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.12—Urban Services, \$229,807,000 (net cost of outputs), \$83,084,000 (capital injection) and \$44,664,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$357,555,000.

MR CORNWELL (8.40): I must admit that it's always difficult to know where to start with Urban Services.

MR SPEAKER: It's okay, Mr Cornwell; it's not compulsory.

MR CORNWELL: It is difficult because it covers such a broad spectrum of, if you like, roads, rates and rubbish, which, in spite of what many people in this Assembly believe, are of greater importance to the average person out there in the community than a lot of the bigger issues that we argue and debate.

I'm happy to participate in this discussion. I think the first thing, of course, that we should bring up, referring back to the Estimates Committee, is the government's decision not to agree, Mrs Dunne, with the recommendation that sufficient free parking be provided for the students of Lake Tuggeranong College.

What sort of discrimination, Mr Speaker, is this? This is the only college in Canberra that is located within a CBD—the only college, essentially. Think of the other colleges. Ms Dundas, you are more aware than I of the young; you are closer to them. The point I'm making is that the students at Lake Tuggeranong have a legitimate concern in relation to their parking. Hawker, Erindale, Narrabundah, et cetera, don't have these same problems.

All that the government has done, Mr Speaker, is provide some parking for teachers. Then, in the response to the Estimates Committee report, they talk about:

... "3 for FREE" spaces will be available in the ... carpark opposite the College.

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Ms MacDonald: We have provided parking for—

MR CORNWELL: I'm reading from the government's response, Ms MacDonald; you might have bothered to do so yourself.

It continues:

College representatives have indicated this would be of particular benefit to College students, many of whom drive to school with their friends, and will encourage sustainable transport practices.

However, as we know from the television, there was something of a demonstration at the Lake Tuggeranong College recently. The students made the same point as we did: not everybody attends college at the same time. Therefore, the idea of three people travelling together in a car, whilst it may seem sensible in terms of petrol consumption and the ability to share vehicles, is not necessarily practical if you are attending a course which doesn't start for an hour or two.

The interesting thing was this: Mr Hargreaves was on that television program, suggesting that the government might have to re-examine the situation in terms of parking at Lake Tuggeranong College. Hello, it's gone very quiet over there.

I believe, Mr Speaker, that the matter does need to be looked at fairly carefully, because it is not fair to these students from one college—I repeat, in the ACT—to be discriminated against. This is a government that is constantly bleating about discrimination of all shapes and sizes, except, it appears, for students from Lake Tuggeranong College. It doesn't matter whatever you are, they will defend your right not to be discriminated against, provided you're not a student of Lake Tuggeranong College, in which case it doesn't matter.

I would also be interested, however, if the minister could advise me about another matter—an email, Mr Wood, sent to you, about paid parking at the Westfield Shopping Centre. This was from a retail worker at the Westfield Shopping Centre. He was wondering how he was going to pay for his parking because, as he pointed out, he doesn't earn much money. Talking of himself and his retail colleagues, he said:

... we do not get paid the high wages as you do I can not afford to give up two or three weeks pay for parking my car as when I start work there is no other way to get to work but use my car we should have free and safe parking you must come up with something to help retail workers if it was not for us there would not be any shopping centres.

You might like to respond sometime, Mr Wood, as you are a member of the government that is always interested in and has a total commitment to the workers.

I turn now to the question of refurbishment of shopping centres. At Budget Paper 4, page 177, half a million dollars has been provided for the Holder shops refurbishment. That is certainly welcome. However, it is significant that an upgrade of the Deakin shops in this financial year, despite a suggestion by the Chief Minister that this was going to happen, did not take place. Furthermore, the Duffy shops, which has been the

subject of considerable pressure, Mr Speaker, from local residents—in the form of petitions seeking an upgrading in view of the tragic fires that have occurred there and promises by the government, this government, to make bushfire areas a priority—have been ignored.

I find myself, therefore, in the position of accusing this government of being insincere, insensitive and inflexible in terms of addressing real issues. I would urge you again to reconsider the situation in relation to the Duffy shops in terms of compassion. I would suggest that you reconsider the situation in relation to the Deakin shops just in terms of a broken promise.

I'd now like to briefly address the Gungahlin Drive extension, although this is really a matter for Mrs Dunne. I'm concerned in a general sense, Mr Wood, about the number of road developments that take place and seem to go on forever, interminably. It's a bit like the Chief Minister answering a question in question time. We have a situation where a lot of these developments go on and on. Of course there is a blow-out in costs.

We are told that \$32 million is going to be expended on the Gungahlin Drive extension. I am wondering whether this will be enough for the entire length of road required, because I understand that it's not only Gungahlin Drive, it's also the extension of Caswell Drive and the work involved there. I would like to have some assurances in relation to that.

Horsepark Drive, of course, is a similar situation. We're not sure just how much this is going to cost. It began at \$7 million, it's now \$10.4 million. The extension of time for Horsepark Drive to be completed now, I understand, is June 2004, that is, if it's on schedule.

The Fairbairn Avenue improvement is another initiative which has been announced. I must say I was over there at Campbell—

MR SPEAKER: The member's time has expired.

MR CORNWELL: I'll take my second 10 minutes, if I may, Mr Speaker.

I was over there the other night looking at the proposals. I must say that a fine job has been done. The problem with the hump just before Treloar Crescent, coming from the airport side, will be removed; the Truscott Street intersection will be made safer, according to local residents; and Creswell Street will be aligned to the Treloar roundabout.

Nevertheless, we have a situation where a two-lane road going up the hill to Treloar Crescent then becomes a one-lane road for the rest of Fairbairn Avenue in the direction of the airport. I don't see that as a problem for local traffic, but I am very seriously concerned that it will not relieve the heavy traffic going to Fyshwick and various points.

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I ask the minister: when are you going to upgrade Majura Road? This seems to me to be the sensible way to approach this whole question. We do need to take the heavy traffic off Fairbairn Avenue because, if we don't do it by making it a double lane all the way along Fairbairn Avenue—and I don't suggest for a moment that that's a sensible idea—we may find that that traffic is re-routed down Anzac Avenue and, therefore, around the Russell roundabout. I repeat: I think the solution is the Majura Road upgrade.

The last comment I'd like to make, Mr Speaker, relates to road cycling. I commend the government for providing \$2.5 million for the Woden to Dickson cycle path and \$600,000 for on-road cycling on Belconnen Way and Barry Drive. However, I do think it would be useful if we could encourage cyclists to use their special cycle paths as opposed to using the roads. I have made public statements about this. It does appear to me that most cyclists are using the special cycle paths, and I commend them for that.

I'm heartened, I must say, by the fact that Pedal Power has been in touch with me on this matter. Minister, I would welcome a comment from you, if it is possible to make a comment, about the problem that Pedal Power have drawn to my attention. They have said that one of the reasons why cyclists don't use the cycle path, the cycle area, the cycle lanes that have been created for them is something called glass—broken bottles and such like. I don't know what the answer to that is—whether more regular street sweeping or something like that might be required—but you might like to give your attention to it and address it a little, with about the same enthusiasm as you are applying to the book you are reading at the moment, minister.

Seriously, I think this is a matter that should be considered, Mr Speaker, because clearly cyclists won't use the lanes that are provided if some lout has hurled a few bottles down there and broken glass, et cetera, for them. You may like to address it. I will now conclude on that point and trust that the minister is finishing the chapter he's reading.

MR HARGREAVES (8.55): Mr Speaker, there are a number of things I like about the game of politics. One is being misquoted; another one is being selectively quoted; and another one is being Gary-ed. I really get annoyed when people try to Gary things that I've said.

Ms MacDonald: Were you Gary-ed?

MR HARGREAVES: I was Gary-ed, Ms MacDonald—grossly, unabashedly and unashamedly Gary-ed.

I'd like, if I could, Mr Speaker, to set the record straight. I do notice that, with respect to these students at Lake Tuggeranong College—Mr Pratt was there, and I think it is good that he was—Mr Cornwell wasn't there. Mr Cornwell obviously relies on that infallible source of information, WIN Television, or possibly that even more infallible source of information, that amount of absolutely brilliant bedtime reading that we know he gets engrossed in when he gets sand in his eyes, the *Canberra Times*. I'm sure that he goes to the cartoons and then works his way back to the important bits, skipping over the crosswords because that's really difficult in the middle of the day.

Mr Cornwell: WIN Television, Mr Hargreaves!

MR HARGREAVES: I note the interjection coming from across the chamber, but I shall treat those remarks with the contempt that they're due.

Mr Speaker, when I saw these students—and there were many of them—they had one placard between them. It had a great expression of their ire. Written in that grey and literary style were two words “Pay Parking”. I thought, “Great education, this.” Nonetheless, the message got through, as did their chants and their screaming. It wasn't lost on me, Mr Speaker.

But, Mr Speaker, I did something this time that I haven't seen those shallow, cowardly lot from across the park over here do in all of the time I've been here, and that is go down there, deliberately front them and explain it to them. As I said to them and to the media there, Mr Speaker—and I pass this message on to the minister—when there is a decision which affects people and they regard it as a problem, the government of the day has a responsibility to find a solution; or if a solution can't be found, explain why it can't. That's what I was doing down there, Mr Speaker; I was explaining the issue.

As you would know, Mr Speaker, there are a whole series of things that the people down there didn't know. I'm surprised that Mr Cornwell didn't actually mention these things. What he didn't know, Mr Speaker, was that this issue's not new; it was actually raised 12 months ago by a now ex-student of that college and now a student of the Australian National University—excelling, I might say. He brought the issue forward.

From that issue, Mr Speaker, ensued a consultation process. I can actually vouch for this because I was there. On a number of occasions the Minister for Urban Services sat down with these people and listened to their concerns, and out of those concerns a number of issues followed, a number of significant changes to the general rule of pay-parking. For example, Mr Speaker, the three-for-free hour over at the Lake Tuggeranong foreshore car park area has been extended by an hour to two hours. The students weren't aware of that. They are now, because I went down there and told them.

Mr Speaker, they weren't aware that when you got your ticket there it was a whole-day ticket; they could come and go, parking spaces being available, all day long if they wanted. They weren't aware of that, Mr Speaker. Why? Because no-one told them. Nobody on this side of the house, however, would go down there and rabble-rouse.

Ms Gallagher: Was somebody grandstanding?

MR HARGREAVES: Yes, there might have been a dose of grandstanding; there could have been, but I don't know.

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They didn't know, Mr Speaker, that from 5.30 pm until 8.30 the next morning pay-parking didn't apply. They didn't know for example, Mr Speaker—and this was particularly salient to them and they actually thought, “Oh, fantastic”—that on a Friday night at half past 5 the pay-parking regime ceased and commenced again at 8.30 on Monday morning. That meant that the majority of students at that college that had part-time jobs, casual jobs over the weekend, Friday night, Saturday and Sunday were not burdened by a pay-parking regime.

Mr Speaker, I invite those people who are spouting thoughts on this to go down and have a current look at the car parking in that particular area. I don't think for a moment that too many members across the chamber have actually been down there.

A casual observer would find that the car parks down there are full most of the day. The ones that you call a free car park all day are not filled, Mr Speaker, with students' cars; they're filled with commuters' cars. If you go in and out, the chances of getting a space are pretty, pretty slim.

Mr Speaker, the fact is that, when I spoke to these students and informed them of those two particular issues, it changed the view of some of them. I undertook to take their concerns back to the government and further examine the issue. They were grateful for that. These sorts of issues will plague governments of all persuasions from time to time. We do need, as I said before, to find a solution to explain to people why governments come out with that, and that will occur.

Mr Speaker, I now turn to the fetish, obsession, that those opposite have with the bushfire victims in Duffy. My heart goes out to all the people in Duffy, Chapman, and Holder. Indeed, Mr Speaker, as members will know, my father lives in Duffy. The house next door to him went up. I do know how they feel. It isn't far from the shops either; so I know all about that.

But I'm starting to get heartily sick of people suggesting that, through the sin of omission, the Weston Creek area was the only area that got savaged by the fire, because it isn't. I never hear from those people opposite about the pain and destruction that were visited upon the Colquhoun Street part of Kambah or the Allchin Circuit part of Kambah.

I hear bleatings, screamings, and mutterings about putting up all manner of memorials. Where? In Weston. I don't have a problem with putting them up in Weston, but I'll be damned, Mr Speaker, if I'm going to sit idly by and just see Kambah forgotten altogether. It just ain't going to happen, Mr Speaker.

We heard it again tonight. Did Mr Cornwell talk about the other parts of town that got savaged by the fire? No. There are only three reasons for this. One is that he could be a very besotted member from Molonglo, in which case I congratulate him. The other one could be that he thinks that that's the only place the fire went, in which case I don't congratulate him. The other one could be that he's just being cute about it, and I really don't think that's the case. But I put on the record that, if that is so, I'm not happy with that either.

Mr Speaker, with respect to things that I say: I've got no problem with standing up and copping it if people don't like it. But I will exhort members of this place to quote me properly, in context, not selectively quote me or misquote me and not use their skill—developed in this place by the former Chief Minister and now senator, Gary Humphries—of selectively quoting news of their own work. It belittles this place.

Mr Speaker, I find any suggestion that I don't have an awful lot of sympathy for those kids at Lake Tuggeranong College, or the people in Kambah, grossly offensive, and I take serious exception to it.

MS DUNDAS (9.04): With reference to the appropriations that we are dealing with for the Department of Urban Services: I do believe that the government has taken a few positive steps to improve infrastructure to promote cycling and walking but, unfortunately, public transport has been sorely neglected and there is still far too much money being spent on roads compared with the combined spending on alternative transport.

I am astonished that this government, which professes to be committed to public transport, appears to be intending to cut scheduled bus services in the coming year. Whilst there is money going into ACTION for the new services in Gungahlin, in the outyears the funding for ACTION actually drops. I hope that some of the revenue received that exceeds expectations will be directed to increasing the frequency of bus services, making our public transport system more attractive and encouraging more Canberrans to truly understand the pluses of buses.

Roads is another area where far too much money has been rolled over from last year. Once again, it looks like consistently poor project management or it indicates a cynical way of appearing to deliver to the community at budget time and asking for a pat on the back at the end of the financial year when a surplus is returned because the promised services or infrastructure have not been delivered.

When I was participating in the Estimates Committee there was some discussion about just how far behind schedule the capital works program for the 2002-03 budget was and the need to follow through on commitments and to get the infrastructure and capital works rolling in this city.

On an equity issue: I note the rising revenue from short-term vehicle registrations. I find it hard to believe that the \$25 administrative fee for the purchase of a short-term vehicle registration sticker does not represent profiteering at the expense of residents who are least able to afford the impost. Clearly, nearly everyone would opt for a year long vehicle registration if they could find the money. It is people who cannot find the money who are being slugged an extra \$100 a year, and that isn't fair.

Also in relation to registration: I do have concerns about continuous registration and the introduction of such. The Estimates Committee discusses that in depth on pages 56 and 57 of its report. The concerns are, as the committee report does say, that the assumption is being made that those people who have not paid their registration are continuing to drive their cars unregistered, which I believe is not always the case.

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Again, we are putting an impost on those people who can least afford it, those people who are waiting an extra pay to get the money for their registration and the extra \$25 because they are paying it short term, or people who go away for the winter and do not need their car and hence leave it in their garage. They have not needed to pay registration for it, but they will also be asked to pay more now through a continuous registration scheme.

I am happy with the government's response to the Estimates Committee report that it will carefully consider implementation arrangements over the next two months to ensure that the policy intent can be achieved in an equitable and consistent manner. I am greatly looking forward to seeing how the government thinks that it will be able to do that.

I believe that the deal for the taxi and restricted hire vehicle owners presented as part of the 2003-04 budget is unsatisfactory. The members of this industry have made a fair case that they should be given the option of having their plates bought by the government at market rates if the government insists on pressing ahead with the deregulation of their industry. They are rightfully doubtful that the compensation they will receive from revenue raised through new plate sales will be sufficient to offset ongoing losses of earnings in a market where more players will be competing for limited business. It appears that the government has ignored the protests of these battlers.

On the issue of waste management: I remain concerned that so much money is going into the construction of a new landfill trench, because it is money that could be used to improve the sorting and treatment of the waste stream currently going to landfill, including biowaste. The no waste by 2010 target is now very close and we are not reducing our waste fast enough to meet that target. Digging trenches and filling them with liners so that they can hold more waste is one way of managing the waste problem, but if we are serious about the "No Waste by 2010" strategy we will need to be a little bit more innovative than that.

Like the nurse practitioners initiative, it is not clear why the wood heater buyback is being delayed until next year as it is already clear that the government is almost certain to return a larger surplus in the coming financial year than predicted. There are many ACT residents, particularly in Tuggeranong, who are suffering respiratory problems caused by wood smoke. It is not fair to make these people wait another year for action if the government has already identified this area as one in which something needs to be done.

On a positive note: I am delighted that funds have finally been allocated to the construction of a Kippax library. It has taken decades of campaigning by local people and it seems that their battle is now almost over. I hope that the site selection and building planning process will run smoothly and the government will be, as they were in putting up money to build this library, willing to listen to the community about their concerns with regard to the site of the library and the development of the library. Also, I hope that this capital funding will not get sucked into rollovers, like so many other infrastructure projects, unfortunately.

I am also delighted that money has been allocated to a feasibility study for a Belconnen cultural centre, as it is a proposal I have publicly supported and worked on with members of the Belconnen community. I hope that the minister will proceed promptly with this feasibility study and that we will see the people of Belconnen having the space to express the many great forms of art and culture that they have.

MRS DUNNE (9.10): Where do I start? I will start at the beginning and work my way through.

Mr Pratt: Did I hear a groan?

MRS DUNNE: Members will be groaning by the end of it. There are so many issues in Urban Services which, as Mr Cornwell has rightly said, go to the heart of making this city what it is and, in many cases, there have been many failures by this government.

The bushfire initiatives are commendable. They address a whole lot of important issues. I hate to sound like a cracked record, but I am going to harp on it: these are not initiatives. This is money that this government had to spend and they are making a virtue out of necessity by saying, "Look how generous hearted we are." For the most part, this money is going to come back to them in terms of insurance or disaster relief money and we are making great play of how big hearted we are, but these are things that we have to do because of the adversity of the situation in which we found ourselves.

But there are some good initiatives here. I am particularly pleased that money has been put aside for weed suppression, mainly in areas directly managed by the ACT government, such as Canberra Nature Park, Namadgi and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. But there also has to be considerable money going to assist rural lessees with weed suppression because, especially in the spring, if we have any rain at all the weeds will really rear their ugly heads. I hope that the extra \$250,000 in this year's budget will be enough. If it isn't, I would expect the Minister for the Environment and the Minister for Urban Services to be coming back in here to tell us that it isn't and asking for more money, because this is a really vital issue that we have to deal with.

A whole lot of the issues that have come about as a result of the bushfires show us that we need to take a more careful approach to our environment and that sometimes we have to be cruel to be kind. I note that there will be \$500,000 this year and a lesser amount—\$250,000, I think—in the outyears for extra bushfire fuel management issues. It is sad that we have come to a realisation of the importance of these issues only after the horse has bolted.

There are many land managers and many land users in the ACT who are now regretting that we did not have a more active bushfire fuel management program before the event and were not looking at the possible extinction of species like the corroboree frog, the possible permanent degradation of the sphagnum bogs and areas around our valuable catchment and areas of Namadgi National Park which may never, in our lifetime or in our children's lifetime, be the same. These are great losses which, wise after the event I might be accused of being, could have been mitigated if we had had a much better bushfire fuel management program than we had.

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The bushfire also highlighted, as far as I can see, some issues of demarcation that we need to address. The one that I am particularly concerned about is the role—not necessarily a conflicting role, but a not absolutely synchronised role—of Actew and Environment ACT when it comes to catchment management. The current situation is a longstanding one and I do not attribute any blame to it but, now that we have seen how things work, perhaps we should be revisiting it. As things currently stand, Environment ACT is the land manager in the catchment area and Actew's responsibility starts at the waterline: Actew looks after the water, Environment ACT looks after the land.

I think that this relationship is one which, with all the best will in the world, has not served us as well as it could, because we have been focusing on the catchment in terms of land management issues and not in terms of water issues. We have seen in the last few days that the precious and most important resource in the ACT after our land and our people is in jeopardy for decades to come. We have been told by the experts that it will take in excess of 20 years, closer to 30 years, for us to have anything like proper regeneration. Until that happens, every time it rains we will have problems of turbidity in the Bendora-Corin-Cotter system.

There have been lessons about bushfire fuel management and there have been lessons about access to remote areas like that that we have not learnt in the past and I hope that we will learn them now, because we have had media reports today from CSIRO experts, I think, pointing out that our Googong catchment is also at risk of fire and the possibility of arsenic contamination from Captains Flat. They are all things that could affect the Googong catchment. What would happen if, in two, three or four bushfire seasons, we had a devastating bushfire that ravaged the Googong catchment? Where would we be then?

The Commonwealth set us up very nicely with water supplies to meet our needs for decades to come and, at the moment, these precious resources are very much under threat. Although the government is doing some things, it would seem tardily, it is still not doing enough. At this stage, this government seems to have no policy for water efficiency. There are no water efficiency measures, except in the most abstract terms, being talked about by this government. We have to have a concerted effort from today to turn around and harness the goodwill of people in the ACT who have responded so well to water restrictions and have done their bit, as much as they can, to recycle water and to reuse water.

An instance of that is that, over the drought period and through the summer, every time the hardware stores got in supplies of the equipment for diverting washing water from a sink to outside they sold out quickly, simply because people were committed to recycling and reusing water. I heard Ms Tucker say yesterday that the notion of reusing grey water is still a bit esoteric. I agree with her because, for the most part, the technology is not available to us.

There are many ways to skin this cat and we will probably have to have many mechanisms for using grey water technology, but I agree with Ms Tucker's statement yesterday, I think it was, that we should not be using our highly valuable potable water for watering our lawns, watering our gardens and a whole range of things like

that, and that we should be saving our potable water for that for which it was designed—for us to drink. I have not seen any innovation from this Minister for the Environment about where we are going to go and what we are going to do about that.

The same thing extends to energy efficiency. The minister for energy, of course, is not here; he does not want to know about the budget. He certainly does not want to know about energy efficiency. We have seen in this place on a number of occasions this government being dragged, kicking and screaming, to the table when they have been required to do things in relation to energy efficiency. It is always too difficult and it is always too hard. The only real energy efficiency initiative that they have brought in since being elected to government is the failed solar hot water rebate scheme.

I hate to say that I told you so, but I told you that it would not work. It is middle-class welfare and even the middle class cannot afford it. The Minister for the Environment has now tinkered with the system in the hope that it will get better in the future but, as things stand at the moment, people are not taking up the scheme. People are not taking up the scheme because it is still too expensive and nothing substantive has been done to sell the benefits of having free hot water supplied by the sun. People have to be educated and have to find a way over the thing.

In estimates, Ms Tucker raised a question about what this government is doing about financing schemes so that people can buy solar hot water systems and other things that will improve the energy ratings of their houses without paying out one big slug of money at one time. The answer is that this government is doing nothing.

MR SPEAKER: Order! The member's time has expired.

MRS DUNNE: I wish to take my second 10 minutes.

MR SPEAKER: Proceed.

MRS DUNNE: While this government has been sitting on its hands doing nothing, this opposition has come forward with a policy of solarisation. It has come up with a means of financing solar and energy efficiency additions to homes so that, even though you might have to go out and spent \$15,000, that debt will not be a great burden to you. It has been put together in such a way that even a landlord might find it appealing to improve the solar and energy capacity of a house that he is renting out for the benefit, not only of himself, but also of his tenants.

As well as preaching to people about how good it is and how morally upright they would be if they did that, you have to appeal to their hip pocket nerve. The solarisation policy which has been put forward in this town by scientists and people working in the industry and adopted by the Liberal opposition is one of the ways to go to improve the solar and energy efficiency of houses in the ACT. But, so far, we have not had anything concrete from this government.

One of the other things that we need to do is take a really serious look at our house designs and come up with houses which are better suited for the extremes of climate in the ACT. At this stage, despite all the chest beating about HQSD, there is not enough being done to improve—

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Mr Corbell: You are opposed to compulsory HQSD.

MRS DUNNE: No, I am not. Not enough is being done in this territory to address the way that we build our houses to improve them. I will say it again: we can beat our chest about HQSD, but HQSD is only a start and nothing substantive will come out until we actually come up with a very strong policy on better house design that is appealing to people. HQSD ain't appealing to people; that is why it is being rejected and that is why there is such resistance to it in the community. Think again, do it better, do it smarter.

On public transport: there are some initiatives which are to be applauded, but they are only a part of the picture and there is a lot more to be done. If we are going to put all these together—improve our water efficiency, improve our energy efficiency, improve the efficiency of our transport and cut down on our greenhouse emissions—there is a long way to go and this government is really light years behind what other people are doing. I do commend the government for at last coming up with some policies in relation to demand responsive public transport and I will do all that I can to support it and ensure that we do have proper demand responsive public transport in the years to come.

When we talk about public transport, this government loves to say that the most important thing that we can do about encouraging people to use public transport is to have pay parking. Pay parking was supposed to be introduced in Belconnen and supposed to be introduced in Tuggeranong in this financial year but, as with many things, the policy has been so ill-thought out that it is late. The policy is one that goes to show that it is not really about encouraging people to use public transport; it is about revenue raising.

What is the model that they have chosen? It is the model that we have everywhere else in ACT run car parks. It works like this: you go into a car park and say to yourself, "How long will I be here? Probably two hours, but I might be held up, so I had better pay for 2½ hours." You pay for 2½ hours and you only use two, so you pay more than you need, but if you actually pay for two and you are there for 2½ hours a parking inspector comes along and fines you \$65 for overstaying. It is merely revenue raising. Almost everywhere in the private sector where you go into a car park you pay for what you get. You go in, you get your ticket, you leave, you put your money in the bin, and you pay for the amount of time that you have used.

Mr Stanhope: What was it under the Liberal government?

MRS DUNNE: It was wrong then and it is wrong now.

Mr Stanhope: If it is revenue raising under the Labor government, what was it under the Liberal government?

Mr Stefaniak: We did not have pay parking in Belconnen. You introduced it.

MRS DUNNE: You introduced pay parking. The system in government car parks was wrong then and it is wrong now.

Mr Stanhope: Why didn't you desist over your seven years in government, Bill?

Mr Stefaniak: We did not do it in Belconnen or Tuggeranong, Jon. You did.

Mr Stanhope: Seven years of fraudulent parking you have undertaken.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mrs Dunne has the floor.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I do not mind saying that I think that the system of parking—I do not care who introduced it—is wrong and is unfair to the people of the ACT. It is purely about revenue and it is not about changing one's habits. Again, we have a range of matters that would need to be addressed by the—

Mr Stanhope: What gross hypocrisy that is. It was okay for seven years when you were in government. Gross hypocrisy.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mrs Dunne has the floor.

Mrs Burke: Somebody has rattled the Chief Minister's cage.

MRS DUNNE: He's had his sugar hit, I can see.

Mr Stanhope: How are those scratchies going, Mrs Burke?

Mrs Burke: I don't know. You would know more about that than I, Chief Minister.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mrs Dunne has the floor.

Mr Stanhope: Are you still cracking down on fun?

Mrs Burke: Are you being irresponsible, Chief Minister?

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MRS DUNNE: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: is it possible for me to seek leave to speak for another minute because the Chief Minister has been interjecting for a full minute?

MR SPEAKER: You can seek leave to speak for longer, if you wish, but wait until you run out of time before you do.

MRS DUNNE: Now that the Chief Minister has had his fill of rubbishy comments to make, I will move on to rubbish and to the issues that have been raised by Ms Dundas and others about whether we will be able to achieve the task of meeting the no waste by 2010 target. I think that the commitment of the Minister for Urban Services is lacking here. I would encourage him, when he goes on his jaunt in July to look at various initiatives, to act decisively and to act quickly so that we end up with a strategy that will do something about our putrescible waste, an issue which has been

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hanging around his neck ever since he became the minister and about which he has done nothing.

I will close by rubbishing this government for their appalling treatment of Clean Up Australia. What did they do in the budget? They made another mean-minded cut, just for the sake of it. We took away 50 per cent of the budget of Volunteering ACT and we are now going to take away 50 per cent of the budget for Clean Up Australia because, against competing priorities, a decision was made to reduce levels of sponsorship for Clean Up Australia.

Here we have another example of ACT people working for the benefit of the ACT community and improving the land on which they live and this mean-minded government, whose members are walking around saying that the budget surplus could be \$60 million or it could be as much as \$100 million, cannot be big enough to give \$8,000 to Clean Up Australia. This is the measure of this government. It is mean minded, it is low and it spends its time cutting out of the volunteer sector, which is a disgrace.

MR STEFANIAK (9.29): Mr Speaker—

Mr Stanhope: Bill, you promised me before that you wouldn't gasbag like your colleagues.

MR STEFANIAK: Jon, your lot were the first to introduce pay parking in Belconnen. Mr Speaker, contrary to what I heard upstairs, the minister is not reading a Harry Potter book; he is reading another work of fiction instead. In fact, I thought of bringing Harry Potter volume 5 along tonight.

In relation to Urban Services, I have a number of comments. Firstly, in relation to capital works, it is disturbing that a number of projects for which money was put in there several years ago still have not come to fruition. I might as well start with some of the arts projects.

Mr Stanhope: Start with the Belconnen pool, Bill.

MR STEFANIAK: Chief Minister, I hope that you are going to do the right thing tomorrow, because it could be under threat from a certain thing that is happening in this Assembly. An interesting thing about the Belconnen pool is that it is still happening, very slowly, Chief Minister, even under your lot.

Mr Stanhope: Hey, Bill, it's got the roof on.

MR STEFANIAK: Hopefully, Chief Minister, we will be swimming in it soon, but the project has taken an inordinate amount of time to complete. It continues to go ahead, but a lot slower than I would have hoped for under our government and under your government, Chief Minister.

The glassworks project, a wonderful project, was initially funded two years ago, I think, and lo and behold, we still have \$2.52 million to spend on it this year. That project should have been completed by now. I understand that only \$200,000 or

\$300,000 has been spent to date. I think that that is indicative of the capital works budget. I find it particularly worrying in relation to the two projects I have just mentioned.

The budget is a little bit light on in some respects for capital works. As a Belconnen representative, I am always very keen to see a fair spread throughout electorates, especially the northern electorate. I was a little concerned to see that. There are some good works there, a lot of them a continuation of things announced several years ago. The William Hovell Drive extension is absolutely essential.

Mrs Dunne: At last.

MR STEFANIAK: At last. Money was put in initially a couple of years ago and, finally, it has been going ahead only in the last six or seven weeks, but at least it is going ahead. It is good to see some projects which have been there for a while actually coming to fruition. It is good to see that the Kippax library is finally going to be a permanent library.

Mrs Dunne: But read their lips.

MR STEFANIAK: That is a good point, Mrs Dunne. I anticipate what you are going to say.

Mr Stanhope: Thank God for the Labor government.

MR STEFANIAK: Chief Minister, your Labor government predecessor was going to get rid of the temporary library back in 1994 and it was only because of a lot of community activity that that was stopped. Indeed, its future was assured by the previous government when it finally got over the absolute abomination caused by the Labor government and the complete lack of money in the kitty. We were so far in the red that it was unbelievable for about six years, but we actually got to put some money in it. To your credit, you are actually going to complete it. But you are not really listening to the community on that, because you are putting it on a site where most of the community do not actually want it to be. So much for consultation. At least there is money in the budget for it and, hopefully, it will occur. It would be nice if it were built on the site where most people want it to be, but at least it will be actually happening. I will give you some credit for that, but only some. I am not going to go overboard on that.

There are a couple of real problems with the Urban Services part of the budget.

Mr Stanhope: A new police station, an arts centre.

MR STEFANIAK: The Chief Minister mentions an arts centre. Chief Minister, there is a real need for an arts centre in Belconnen, and what have we got here? We have \$60,000 to look at something somewhere north of the lake, that is, Lake Burley Griffin.

Mr Stanhope: What did you do, Bill? Nothing.

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MR STEFANIAK: Actually, Chief Minister, I put \$200,000 into refurbishing the community centre for a theatre a couple of years ago, which was not a bad little start.

Mr Stanhope: There was no arts centre under you, Bill.

MR STEFANIAK: We did not have any money, Chief Minister, because we did not have anything in the kitty when we took over. Now that we actually have a very good financial situation as a result of the hard work done by the former Liberal government, what are you doing?

Mr Speaker, a real problem here—one which I was absolutely flabbergasted to see because I thought that we had had enough evidence to show that such things are just unworkable—is the target in relation to sports ground and asset maintenance. Sports ground and asset maintenance costs a fair bit of money. Water costs are going up in this budget—I do not think that we would quibble with that—as a result of the scarcity of water resources in the ACT. I think that everyone accepts that. I was amazed to see on page 186, under sports ground and asset maintenance, a target for 2002-03 of \$4.878 million and an estimated outcome, because of the drought, of \$5.493 million, close to \$5½ million, and a target for next year of \$4.868 million, \$10,000 less than the target for this year and about \$600,000 or \$700,000 less than was spent this year.

The drought is not breaking, water costs are doubling in many instances and we will not be having fewer sports grounds. The minister has conceded that this government will not be going down the disastrous path that the Follett government took in 1993 when it made 27 ovals low maintenance ovals. It took us a considerable amount of time and effort to bring most of them back to full maintenance. No, they are not going to make the full maintenance ovals low maintenance again, yet they have allocated a lesser figure than they targeted for last year, which blew out considerably. I find that just inconceivable. You cannot actually water the ovals less. That was suggested to me back in 1996, and it would have been absolutely disastrous.

Ms MacDonald: Kate Carnell thought you could.

MR STEFANIAK: No, she did not. It would have been absolutely disastrous. You cannot do that because you would actually kill the root systems. Ovals cost money, which was why we increased our budget, otherwise you will blow your budget.

That particular part of this budget is an accident waiting to happen. Minister, you will have to have a virtual deluge on a fairly regular basis to meet your target there. It simply is not going to work and I think that it is absolutely crazy to put a figure like that in your actual budget. I have no idea why that occurred. It is simply unsustainable. I think that it is indicative of a lot of wishful thinking in that area.

Mr Stanhope made a number of comments about pay parking. I think that Mrs Dunne has made a number of valid points there. Parking offences are probably about the third or fourth most serious offences in the ACT, because if you do not pay your fine your licence or registration and third party insurance are taken away and it is an absolute hassle to get them back.

Mr Stanhope, we might have introduced some parking zones, but we did not go down the path of introducing paid-parking in Belconnen, your electorate, or Tuggeranong. The bureaucrats were always wanting to do that. I can recall our first budget cabinet in 1995 when that came up on the agenda. It was knocked off by Mr De Domenico and me and by our other two colleagues, the then Chief Minister, Mrs Carnell, and Mr Humphries. That was something we resisted. You have now done that as a quick money grab.

We have seen some attendant problems with that. I have already had some complaints from people in my own electorate about that. Without going over the discussion that has been had here today, other members have spoken about the problems in relation to Lake Tuggeranong College and the problems that are occurring at Tuggeranong as a result of that. Yes, there has been a quick grab for a bit of cash there, not a huge amount, but there will be a lot of dislocation and it may not be the smartest thing to do.

Mr Speaker, there are a number of problems with this Urban Services budget. There are some things that, quite clearly, are unsustainable. There are some projects in the capital works area which are good to see. They have taken a long time, far too long. This government is amazingly slow in doing anything, it moves at a glacial pace, but there are at least a couple of items there which are good to see and I certainly hope that we will see them come to fruition this time.

MS TUCKER (9.39): The Urban Services part of the budget contains several aspects of concern to the Greens. In particular, there is the further work on establishing the government's new land planning and development system, there is the land release program and there is the Labor government's continuation of the Liberals' 1960s-thinking road-building program in the construction of the Gungahlin Drive extension.

I have already said that we support the move to a new planning system and to public land development, and commend the government for that, but I am concerned to see that the agency and the government do not get too carried away with the commercial focus of maximising returns at the expense of other important policy objectives, such as making housing more affordable and protecting the environment.

On the Gungahlin Drive extension: we said in last year's budget debate that the government should be rethinking the whole rationale for this road, rather than spending its energy on defending its ill-considered election promise to build it on the western route. We still say that. Now that the government has caved in to the NCA's ruling on the route that the government will be allowed to choose, it has decided not to take this setback as an opportunity to review the original thinking behind the road and apply the principles contained in its issues paper *Sustainable Transport for the ACT*.

As this paper acknowledges, building more roads is one answer, but not a very strategic one. Experience tells us that over time more and wider roads lead eventually to more cars and a return to congestion, oft times worse than before. That is what we can expect to achieve from the expenditure of the many millions of dollars being committed to these environmentally destructive roadworks.

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It would be very useful if the government undertook a real cost-benefit analysis of the potential of spending the money on public transport and dealing with the transport issues in alternative ways against building a road. That would be, I would have thought, a basic requirement of the expenditure of such a large amount of money. However, no government, Liberal or Labor, has seriously done that work.

The government says blithely in its statement on budget consultation in budget paper No 3:

The community requested the development of the Gungahlin Drive extension and called for the immediate construction of four lanes...

A part of the community might have said that, but is the government seriously saying that this sums up the information that it uses to develop the policy or that it is actually representative of the whole community's view? This sort of pretence just inflames the anger and betrayal many who supported Labor at the last election feel. Many are bitterly disappointed with this government's priorities, as exemplified by this decision and some others I will highlight.

I acknowledge that the government is doing good work on improving cycling infrastructure, but I note that no new capital works money was allocated for cycleways in this budget.

Another poor decision I will highlight is the putting forward of Forde, Bonner and East O'Malley for development. I have mentioned that already tonight and I am disappointed that it was not framed in the context of our national responsibilities to the endangered ecological community there. I acknowledge that Gooroo and Callum Brae are to be protected, but that is to be expected. I cannot say that we should be extremely grateful and say therefore that we do not expect better. I do not believe that we are in a situation to talk about balance any more because there is so little of the community left in southern Australia. The time for balanced discussions has gone. There is less than 5 per cent in the region and even less across the nation.

In response to a question of mine about some other yellow box/red gum trees in Belconnen that the government felt justified in scrapping, Mr Stanhope did say to me, "Individual trees by themselves, as beautiful as they are, do not a woodland make." I was not suggesting that they did, but that was his response. I would like to say to the government that a glossy brochure does not a sustainable government make and I and others will continue to criticise government decisions that we see to be in conflict with what the government espouses in these areas. Sorry, I just realised that I have said a lot of this before.

I will talk briefly about greenhouse emissions. I would like to know what the Chief Minister has in mind to make things move more quickly on the greenhouse strategy. He has acknowledged my criticisms of the delays and the lack of tangible progress in implementing the greenhouse strategy. He did acknowledge earlier underspending and delays in completing the first review and expressed his frustration at the long and torturous process. He further acknowledged that we have not put a serious enough focus on making pro rata gains in relation to our commitment to reduce greenhouse

emissions in the ACT and he has agreed that we need to be tougher and more assiduous in meeting the targets and the aims of the plan.

I do look forward to seeing a much stronger response to this issue now from the Chief Minister and the department and I look forward to seeing the final report of the first review and, following that, the government's revised greenhouse strategy at the end of the year. I hope that we will soon know how we are travelling towards the target set by the previous government in the existing strategy.

Talking to some of the comments in the Estimates Committee's report and the government's response, I note that the Estimates Committee recommended that funding for the Commissioner for the Environment be increased to enable that position to be filled on the basis of at least 12 days of the month and that the government's response was that a review will be undertaken of the office of the ACT Commissioner for the Environment.

I am aware of that already, of course, but I would just like to make the point tonight that I think that we need to acknowledge that we have in Canberra a state of the environment report which is an excellent example of environmental reporting. I think that it is probably the best in Australia. It is an incredible resource. It is one that I do not think any of us use enough or acknowledge the value of. I intend to have a whole debate on it in the next sitting period so that we can take the time to value that work.

I want to do that because I would be very concerned to see this office downgraded in any way. Obviously, the commissioner does not have just the reporting function—he has the complaints function as well—and the independence of the office is incredibly important in ensuring the accountability of the government of the day in terms of its performance on the environment.

I also noticed that the committee recommended that Environment ACT renew its efforts to ensure that only appropriately licensed merchants are able to sell firewood and the government has responded positively to that as well as to the recommendation that the government work further to reduce community and debt demand for timber species, such as red and yellow box, which are under ecological pressure.

I was very concerned to see the government say in the response that one option raised at the workshop was the State Forests of New South Wales proposal to use logging residue to replace sourcing firewood from remnant vegetation in western New South Wales. Anyone who has taken even a vague interest in statements from State Forests of New South Wales on what they call residue from forests will know that they mean cutting down big, strong trees. That is exactly what they said about the charcoal plant and they were made to look ridiculous. It is because the charcoal plant has folded that State Forests are attempting to find another way of destroying the forests of the south-east coast of Australia.

I know that there is a proposal before the Braidwood council at the moment. It is complicated further by the fact that State Forests poisoned a large number of trees for the charcoal plant, which they denied and then had to admit. They have absolutely no credibility on this issue and I am happy to supply any member with a series of contradictory articles and statements by State Forests about the poisoning of trees on

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the South Coast which we could be burning as firewood here, of which, according to the chemical company Dow, they cannot guarantee the safety and about which I am still waiting to get a letter from Minister Corbell.

We also know, apart from the complications of the poisoning, that State Forests does not have a good record at all in terms of being able to state accurately what it calls residue of the forests, so I am extremely concerned that the government has swallowed this line. I will be putting more information before the Assembly on this issue and, hopefully, persuading the government to rethink its attitude here. Of course we need a sustainable supply of firewood and I would support any way of pursuing how to find one, but I can assure the Assembly that the State Forests proposal is not the way to go on this one. It will actually result in further destruction of the forests of the South Coast and it is not sustainable use at all.

I wish to make a quick comment on the question of continuous registration. I responded to this—

MR SPEAKER: Order! The member's time has expired.

MS TUCKER: I will take my next 10 minutes. I did raise comments about continuous registration, on the tabling of the budget. I do not believe that it is a just policy. I think that it will hit hardest people who are economically disadvantaged and do not see it, therefore, as a good policy.

I think that covers most of the comments I wished to make on the Estimates Committee's report. We have only had the government's response since today and I have not had time to go through it thoroughly and see what they have said in detail on some of the recommendations of the committee.

I will make a quick comment on water. I did mention it at the beginning of this debate on the budget. I would just like to stress, as have other members tonight, that it is a critical issue for the ACT. I acknowledge that the government is working sincerely on the issue, but it is something on which we cannot afford to be slow.

MR PRATT (9.51): I rise to speak on a couple of issues relative to DUS. Firstly, I want to say that I reckon that the green areas around suburbs are not as well looked after as they once were. I know that we have had a drought and, therefore, one might think that mowing is not important, but it is. I am glad that the government have put funding into the budget to take care of ground and area maintenance, but I do not know whether they have put enough there. Either they have not put enough in to keep up with operational growth, for want of a better term, or they are being let down by their contractors, I do not know, but the place is looking just a bit untidier.

In wandering around the tracks in the Farrer and Fadden hills region, close to my place, and over toward Wanniasa, I noted that, despite the dryness, there had been an unacceptable undergrowth all the way through the last summer. Firstly, it looks untidy and, secondly, it is clearly a fire hazard, so it is very important for our DUS capabilities to get out into these areas and keep up with the mowing, thrashing and general trimming of these areas because—

Mr Corbell: Slashing, not thrashing.

MR PRATT: Thank you. What did I say?

Mr Corbell: Thrashing.

MR PRATT: That is what an opposition does late at night. I would like to see that being more regularly attended to. Going on from there—

Mr Quinlan: A good thrashing would do them no harm.

MR PRATT: I think there was something thrashing around in the undergrowth over there in the Treasury, Mr Speaker. Are the contracts being well looked after? Are they being supervised? Do we have sufficient quality assurance to ensure that the subcontractors carrying out these services are providing the contracted service?

We on this side of the house continue to support privately contracted out maintenance services as opposed to departmental services because we think that they are more efficient. They are certainly cheaper and there is certainly less industrial strife with the use of those sorts of services, but they do have to be supervised. We have to make sure that the department has sufficient quality assurance measures in place to make sure that those capabilities are well looked after.

If I could just give one example—the green buffer immediately south of Monash, between Monash and Isabella Plains. That area has been constantly an eyesore. I have had people complain to me about it and I have written about it. It is not so much that it is a bit jungly down there. It is more to the point that often people find used needles and other rubbish and garbage there. That area is one where people take their dogs, and young children go to play. I think that that reflects a lack of care and that is something of which I would like to see DUS take more care. That is one example. That is the starkest example of an area that I think has been neglected and probably needs closer inspection and supervision.

Mr Speaker, if I may go on to the issue of student parking at Tuggeranong College. Some weeks ago, I was asked by an exasperated Tuggeranong College students council to come down and receive from them a petition. Yes, this issue has been discussed tonight, but there has also been a little bit of misrepresentation about it and I am going to set the record straight. I must say that this issue has been hovering around for about 12 months. I know that because the college raised it with me a long time ago and we talked publicly about the need to put in place a more equitable arrangement.

It is the only student body in the whole of the ACT which does not have free parking. That is a fact and it is something which needs to be rectified. I must say that the government have taken steps at least to do something about it, but they are moving very slowly on this issue. The three for free parking scheme is at least a start, but it is inadequate. You cannot go on for month after month with students saying that they simply cannot find a place close to the college to get to school on time; something needs to be done about it. It was against that background that I was very happy to go there and receive the petition. We support them wholeheartedly.

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Mr Speaker, I thought that Mr Hargreaves' description of the students was a little bit harsh. I was there on Friday and was very happy to see Mr Hargreaves there. It was a good opportunity for both sides of the house to talk to students and receive an important petition, but I think he was being a little precious when he said that the students only had one lousy looking sign. The fact is that the students were passionate about their cause. They were certainly fun loving, but they were also quite serious about the cause and I thought that they behaved pretty professionally. They were not a bunch of yahoos, an impression you might have got if you had heard Mr Hargreaves.

Mr Wood: He didn't say that at all.

MR PRATT: No, he did say that they had a sign that you could not read and were leaping around the place and asked whether they got their message over. The fact is that they did get their message over, Mr Wood, and they were quite serious and quite professional about that.

I congratulate the students and I congratulate the teachers who guided them to organise their protest in a rather professional manner. I have asked the student council and the group of students that I spoke to there to fully research their needs and to submit a plan. They can do that to the government. They can also drop me a copy, if they like. In fact, I would like to see a copy. I have also spoken to the principal so that he is kept in the loop and people are not unsure of what is going on.

My view is that the students need at least 45 dedicated parking spaces in the car park immediately adjacent to the college. Mr Hargreaves was quite right in his speech earlier in saying that there is very little parking available. On a Friday, you cannot find a parking space if you drive down there. You have to wait for somebody to die or leave before you can get one.

We cannot allow that to continue. These students need dedicated parking. I would suggest that a zone be set aside and a voucher system of parking be allowed so that only the right people can use that zone. I congratulate the students. I look forward to more representation from them. I look forward to handing down a petition on their behalf, hopefully, tomorrow.

MR WOOD (Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services, Minister for the Arts and Heritage and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (9.59): This debate has been a nice opportunity for everybody to regurgitate what they have been saying on a whole range of issues for the last year. I do not think that I have heard anything new tonight. Some of these things have been said many times.

There was one thing I had not quite heard before, that is, that Mrs Dunne, if returned to government, proposes to do away with paid parking. That seems to be her idea. She says that it is wrong and unfair. She did not quite say that she was going to do away with paid parking, but that is the obvious inference that one may draw from what she said. That is an interesting notion that I have not heard before. It would have some quite interesting repercussions around the city if that were to happen.

Mr Cornwell began with a comment that is quite correct—I know that Mr Cornwell's correspondence to me over a period bears it out—when he said that, when it comes down to it, people are very interested in roads, bike paths, rubbish, shopping centres, parking and all the other local issues. Most of us at some time have trekked around the shopping centres and displayed ourselves there listening to comment and, almost universally, what I get and what I think other members get reflects those issues.

I would want to bring Mr Cornwell to task. He said that we had broken a promise about Deakin shops. I am not aware that there has ever been a promise about Deakin shops. It is certainly the case, as I think has been said, that, through the agencies of government, refurbishment of the Deakin shops and the surrounds has been ordered and given an appropriate priority, but it is another step then to go to the next level of actually finding the funds. I think that that is the story of the Deakin shops. Their turn may come.

As for the Duffy shops, we have all been out to them. Duffy has a nice little shopping centre. It is probably one of the smallest in Canberra and the government has done a reasonable amount of work since the bushfires. It has put in a new playground there. The service station must be down by now. We have done or are about to do some painting around the place to tidy it up. Maybe the owner could do something as well. But there has been a deal of work around the place. It certainly isn't a major refurbishment, not that the size of the place would ever suggest a major refurbishment. I think paving would be the main thing that the shops would be interested in, but there would be a few other things.

Since Mr Hargreaves has walked back into the chamber, I should revert to the subject of parking. Mr Hargreaves has been persistent in his representations on behalf of Lake Tuggeranong College students and teachers—don't forget the teachers—as we look for a way through that problem. Ms Gallagher has assisted in that respect and parking sites are to be put onto the college grounds, so there is some action under way. Whether it will totally satisfy the demand, I would not care to indicate. Time will tell with that.

Ms Dundas spoke about having to pay \$25 for a shorter term registration. I understand that she is going to move a disallowance motion on that, so we will come to that in due course.

I am delighted to see Mr Stefaniak's half conversion—not quite the full road to Damascus stuff—in that he is now spokesman for the arts and is starting to talk about issues of the arts. I do not think he has stopped going to rugby matches, so we will have to wait for that full conversion. When he no longer goes out to Bruce Stadium for that strange game, he will be well and truly converted to the arts.

Mr Stefaniak asked an interesting question about the glassworks. There is a large amount of money there yet to be spent. It is a difficult proposition. It was a wonderful idea to install in the old Kingston powerhouse a glassworks to draw on the great quality of glassworks in the ACT, but it does need to be done carefully. It is a very expensive undertaking to which the Kingston Foreshore Authority are giving quite a substantial amount of money, as they should, because they are featuring it, they are making an advertising plus of having a glassworks there. But it is a very expensive

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undertaking and we need to be sure that it is financially viable, so a very careful look is being had at it. Glass is a natural for that sort of industrial area, but I think that the time we are taking is justified. It has concerned me. I would like to move quickly, but I do not think that we would do well if we were to do that.

The Kippax library is coming. I happen to think that the site is a good one. I happen to think that there will be plenty of discussion. For heaven's sake, there has been discussion about the Kippax library for years and years. I think that the site is just terrific. It is a nice connector between the two sides of Kippax and I would hope that the community will have a second look at it. Certainly, the Chief Minister, Mr Stanhope, has been quite instrumental in securing that facility for Belconnen, as he has been with respect to arts facilities.

What we are now doing with \$60,000 is we are surveying the arts scene in Belconnen, seeing what exists in all of that area, and then we will see what we might do further, what the needs are, and then the third and great stage will be to determine how best to fit in those needs. Mr Stanhope is the person who has been pushing that very strongly.

Ms Tucker talks about the GDE. The GDE was drawn on the plans in the 1960s or thereabouts and I do not think that it is giving due respect to circumstances just to say that we should look at alternative ways. By all means do so, but what are those alternative ways in a city that stretches for over 50 kilometres north to south that was specifically designed for the car?

Ms Tucker would understand that if we were only starting off the city of Canberra today we might have a very different design. If we had that very different design and were much more intensely developed, much more contained, a whole range of other transport options might present themselves, but that was not a decision that was taken then and it is very hard to move away from that.

Mr Speaker, I will not go into every issue of the regurgitation that we have had here tonight, but I do welcome the interest, not just of members of this Assembly but, as reflected to them, of the community at large in the good work that the Department of Urban Services does.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.13—ACT Forests, nil expenditure—agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.14—Disability, Housing and Community Services, \$71,429,000 (net cost of outputs), \$1,425,000 (capital injection) and \$21,668,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$94,522,000.

MRS BURKE (10.08): Mr Speaker, at the risk of regurgitating a bit more for the minister, Mr Wood, I will make a few short comments on this. I am sure the minister does not need to hear about the problems and challenges he faces within the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services right now.

There has been a restructure of the department. I am sure that will benefit the operational and strategic approach to future service delivery. That is encouraging to see. There are some positives in this budget. I do not intend to go into detail because others will probably make some comments in that respect.

I welcome money for the provision of increased short-term supported accommodation for families and single men in crisis. The single men in crisis area is of great concern to me, in that we still have some issues within the community in that regard. I am sure the minister knows only too well what they are. I hope he will listen to the voices of the community and continue to try to address those needs in a greater and more enhanced way.

The fact that moneys are to be used for extended outreach services for homeless people, and capacity enhancement of the existing supported accommodation assistance program, is indeed commendable. I welcome the initiative to respond to the critical funding request for people with disabilities who have been assessed as having high and complex unmet support needs.

Correct me if I am wrong, Minister, but I believe the funding will now follow the individual, rather than it being at one place. I probably have not explained myself well there, but I am sure the intent of that is to look after the individual more, with the focus being more on the individual. I welcome that.

Although the government has allowed \$3 million for affordable housing and community housing, I thought the original commitment was \$5 million, and that it was to be a year sooner. I stand corrected if that is not the case. In any event, we are now looking at \$3 million some 12 months later than promised. Whilst I applaud these funding measures, I have some areas of concern on which I believe I have made myself clear over the last little while.

Whilst the future of some of our housing stock is still uncertain, I have concerns about the condition of some of our other stock, and about the delivery of services to our housing tenants. This excludes the properties listed for upgrades, which I have seen.

I have again tonight had a look through the minister's media releases. There are a lot of warm and fuzzy things, and that is really nice. However, I do not feel that this budget comes anywhere near to hitting some of the core problems faced by the housing tenants living out there. They are doing it extremely hard, in many areas.

I ask that further consideration be given to some of the tenants who are doing it tough and whose needs are not being addressed under this budget. The highlights of this government's budget are commendable. I always give credit where it is due, as does the minister for housing.

When I look at the objectives of the department, I am aware that they are high. The objectives are lofty, and they are commendable. We talk about engaging and involving our clients, improving outcomes for our clients, building better community partnerships, serving and contributing to good governance and performing as a best practice organisation.

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Turning to housing: we see supporting tenancies through effective tenancy management; allocating properties to eligible applicants and community organisations, in a way that ensures long-term housing solutions; assessing the eligibility and needs of our clients; and managing public housing assets, including the provision of appropriate and timely maintenance. It is a portfolio which best meets the existing and emerging needs of clients, supporting the community housing sector and providing information that is clear and relevant, and offers choices to applicants and tenants.

We must ensure that many of these objectives are given the resources needed to make them work. I am concerned that, whilst they are excellent things to be aiming for, there will be a struggle to get some of these up and running in our community. This is one of the areas at which money is simply being thrown, in an effort to band-aid and mask a more deeply underlying situation. I know the money allocated in this budget will go some way towards addressing that, but we are not meeting the needs of many people out there.

We must ensure that we do not treat our tenants like second-class citizens. Minister, you may or may not know that many of them feel like that right now, simply because of the system—and often because of the way people are treated.

Maybe there is a mechanism there. Maybe there are unmet needs in the area of training. I do not see the budget addressing that in any great detail. I will talk about that later. We should be sincere in our approach when dealing with tenants. I wait with interest to see how the minister will ensure that the strategic and operational issues are followed through. I will be watching carefully.

One of the biggest challenges facing this minister and this government is that of affordable housing—indeed we would all acknowledge that. As previously mentioned, \$3 million will be made available for affordable housing and I commend that. There will be \$13.4 million over four years for increased short-term supported accommodation.

I am also pleased to hear about the rental bonds assistance program. Whilst I do not fully understand the ins and outs of that, I look forward to hearing more about it. I am to receive a briefing, and I thank the minister for that. Hopefully, this will address some of my issues in relation to people on low incomes wanting to access accommodation. That is a good start.

I have many questions with regard to the real and true commitment of this government, and the minister, to providing the people of Canberra with safe, affordable and appropriate social housing that supports the needs of clients in a sustainable environment.

From the things I am seeing, and the issues I hear raised, I am not sure we have put enough money into resourcing that area. If the minister can point me in the right direction and show me where he has done that, then I am sure I shall feel comforted. I believe this government is currently falling well short of many of these objectives. I will be vigorously pursuing these areas of unmet need.

I do not believe we are providing the department with the resources it needs. It is my understanding that we have many good people in our department. However, we seem to be top heavy in management, and people at lower levels are getting stressed out, with A not talking to B. I do not see money in the budget to address some of the practical things that would help to ease the needs of our clients—our tenants. That is one area where I believe this government does not meet the needs of the people out there.

I understand that some half a million dollars has been spent on staff retraining and upskilling of the specialist housing people. That is commendable. I know the company well, and they will do an excellent job. That will certainly help, but really, Minister, half a million dollars is not enough of a commitment to staff training. Maybe there is some built-in money you can tell me about which I have not picked up on. I would appreciate that information.

We must equip our public servants within housing sufficiently to deal with the changing and complex needs of many of our valued tenants. We face special and different needs from those we faced two years ago, 18 months ago, or even five years ago. Hence, we should be looking at the way human resources are being used.

I do not believe this government is meeting many of the objectives in a targeted and strategic manner. We need a coordinated approach. This budget is a bit thematic. I see running through this budget a cross-departmental approach, which is commendable. We need to make sure that A talks to B. We must make sure that this minister drives that, and that he does not take a back seat. He must take a leadership role in that area to make sure it happens. The objectives need to be addressed, as a matter of urgency.

I would suggest that, whilst many of these people are on low incomes, they are not stupid. Many people feel as though they are being pushed from pillar to post. Is there a human resource problem, Minister? Do you have sufficient resources within the department to enable it to deal with these people in a humane and expedient way?

We must ensure that, with good rent-paying tenants, we are facing up to all our responsibilities as landlords. We need to be making sure our tenants get the best level of service from us as landlords. Mr Wood and Mr Stanhope, that does not include inducing, by the patronising handout of a scratchy ticket, our tenants' participation in a measure to find out how they feel about their future and where they live. I know you found that highly amusing. However, if you thought deeply about it, you would fully understand my sentiment and where I am coming from.

MR SPEAKER: The member's time has expired. Would you like to speak for another 10 minutes?

MRS BURKE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am not a party pooper—I do not want to spoil anybody's fun. Nevertheless, I feel that was an irresponsible way of doing it, given that there are more and more cases coming to light of people who were concerned about what happened there. It is a pity that this government will not come clean and tell the people about the future of the Currong Apartments. You probably know what you are going to do, and I do not think anybody would slate you for the decision you make.

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Simply be truthful with the people, Minister. Do not keep them hanging on. Many of them know, in their heart of hearts, what is going to happen to the Currong Apartments. We cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Just let the people know—be truthful with them. Other than that, as I say, there are some good initiatives. There are areas where money should have been spent, and I have alluded to those areas.

MS DUNDAS (10.20): I will touch on a few points under this departmental appropriation. The waiting list for assessment by the Child Health and Development Service is of ongoing concern. I recognise that the government is trying to deal with the backlog of children awaiting assessment.

In view of the fact that the problem cannot be resolved quickly, it does not seem fair to continue to deny children on the waiting list access to support services. Denying services to children now creates a bigger problem down the track—and the cost to the individuals concerned is impossible to quantify.

The money allocated to action on homelessness is laudable, but I am concerned that too little has been allocated to assisting people who are currently in acute housing stress, who may end up homeless in the near future. This is an important point. There was a lot of discussion by the Affordable Housing Task Force about those in housing stress.

We have been targeting the people who are currently homeless. Focus is needed on that, because these people are sleeping rough. There are a number of people in our community who exist from day to day in housing stress, not knowing whether they will be able to pay their rents, rates or mortgages in the coming week. These people, who are trying to manage their families and their houses, are constantly on the cusp of poverty and homelessness. There are a great number of people in our community who need our support to stay in their homes so they don't become people who need our crisis services. We must support them so they do not live in a cycle of poverty and stress.

I hope this is something to which the government pays more attention in the future. I am also disappointed that the government held off expending allocated community housing funds until right near the end of the current financial year. I hope the money allocated for implementing the Affordable Housing Task Force recommendations is expended promptly in the coming year.

The impact of the introduction of full retail contestability in the electricity market is an issue of ongoing concern. Although I appreciate that the government has softened the blow to small customers by introducing a transition scheme with a regulated tariff, I am unsure that the tiny allocation of \$245,000 for expanding electricity concessions will be adequate to ensure that lower income customers are not adversely affected. I will be monitoring this issue, to see how it impacts on our community, in the coming year.

MR WOOD (Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services, Minister for the Arts and Heritage and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (10.22): I thank Mrs Burke for her comments. She said we need to listen to the voice of the community, and indeed we do. I re-formed the disbanded Housing Advisory Committee, which is one mechanism for doing that. The homelessness strategy is being drawn up with much input by the community. I accept that.

It was a theme of Mrs Burke's, as of Ms Dundas', that tenants are doing it hard, and that non-tenants—people without homes—are doing it very hard. Ms Dundas spoke about acute housing stress. I think we all know the extent of that, because we are contacted repeatedly about it. My office certainly is, and I note from the mail I get from you people that you also experience that.

I pray every night that interest rates do not go up. I shudder to think what would happen if interest rates went up by a point—or two or three—because there would be dire circumstances for many people.

In talking to a real estate agent this morning, he assessed that, in order to get into the lowest part of the housing market, the family income needs to be \$80,000. For many families, that negates the chance of getting into the housing market. Everybody talks about affordability, and I certainly do. Ms Dundas was talking about that, as was Mrs Burke.

It is interesting that, when I became minister 20 months ago, the public housing asset in the ACT was \$1.2 billion and it is now assessed at \$2.2 billion. That reflects what is happening in the market in Canberra—it has just about doubled in 20 months. All the other figures we get indicate the same story.

Mrs Burke commented on the excellent aims laid out in the documents. She wants to know if we are meeting those aims. Well, we certainly set out to do so. Mrs Burke wanted to know if we are putting in enough money to back up what we are saying. I do not think we will ever have enough money, because it is a difficult area. With the asset we have, finding sufficient money is difficult indeed. I will not claim that we have enough money.

I was interested to hear Mrs Burke say I should not take a back seat—that I should show leadership. Well, let me show you some leadership—modestly, if I can. I believe I am the first housing minister in a long time to give top priority to public housing.

Mrs Burke said that some of the tenants feel like second-class citizens. That is not coming from me. I promote good stories about public housing tenants. I promote strong stories, as I should, as there are many good stories about public housing tenants. I repeat that, as minister, I believe I have given a priority to housing that has not been given for a long time. I am doing everything possible to promote the need for public housing.

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The people in public housing are fine citizens. In the past couple of weeks I have tracked down people from Pierces Creek, now living in the city area, who lost medals given to them after the bushfires in 1984. At that time, there were extensive fires sweeping around Canberra, and one firefighter was the Canberran of the Year.

Those fine citizens lost their medals in the recent bushfires. We wanted to be helpful. It was wonderful to be able to present them with the new medals we had had printed for them.

Those are the sorts of people we have in our houses. I have a few more medals to give out to the people from Pierces Creek, because those people formed a significant part of the bushfire brigades.

We have wonderful tenants in our houses. They are not second-class citizens. I have never stood up publicly in this town and made any suggestions that would give that indication. I have shown leadership—I have no doubt about that. Housing is essential, and I am aggrieved by the stories I hear, far too often, of people in severe stress because they have difficulty accessing a home. That is their right and it is the duty of the government to deliver to them. I will continue on this course for as long as I am the minister.

It is correct for Mrs Burke to say that we should let people in Currong Apartments know what is happening. I point to what we do. We did not say, as some other people who sit in this place did, that we will pull them down. There are difficult decisions to be made regarding Currong, but we went and asked the residents. We sought their views as to what should happen. I think it is good that we have involved the affected community.

We are not far from making a decision. I said in estimates that it would be by December. I believe we will be in a position to say something more definitive well before that. Whatever the future is for the building at Currong Apartments, the tenants are assured of continuing to be our treasured tenants. Whatever happens, they will be looked after.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Suspension of standing order 76

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

That standing order 76 be suspended for the remainder of the sitting.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.15—Housing Services, \$32,895,000 (net cost of outputs) and \$4,400,000 (capital injection), totalling \$37,295,000—agreed to.

MS DUNDAS : I seek leave to speak on part 1.15.

Leave granted.

MS DUNDAS: I wanted to speak specifically about ACT Housing and housing services. As I have said elsewhere, I am disappointed that the combined target for the number of community and publicly owned dwellings is 90 dwellings lower for the coming year than it was last year.

The ACT population continues to grow, and the number of people in desperate need of affordable housing has grown even faster. I hope the government will move beyond its narrow election promise of maintaining the number of public and community dwellings and start expanding the number of dwellings as our population grows. As has been discussed repeatedly, the government should be looking after the people who are in acute housing stress. The minister spoke basically on that under part 1.14. The government should be providing support for these people.

I refer to the Estimates Committee report—specifically recommendation 6.23—the estimate in relation to the future of Currong Apartments. The government’s response to this recommendation is that the minister will make a decision as to the future of Currong Apartments prior to the end of December 2003, as he stated in the Estimates Committee hearing.

I remind the Assembly that the minister has repeatedly said he will be making a decision on the future of Currong Apartments in the near future. He said it in the Estimates Committee for the 2002-03 budget and we expected a decision by the end of 2002-03.

He said it to the Planning and Environment Committee, when they were looking at annual reports, and we expected a decision soon after that. We are still awaiting an outcome on that decision. If we are still waiting for an answer on the future of Currong Apartments in December, I will not be surprised—but I will be disappointed.

MS TUCKER: I seek leave to speak on this part.

Leave granted.

MS TUCKER: Obviously, housing services are an important topic in a budget. I was interested to see how the Western Australian government dealt with questions of affordability. They did it within the broader framework of homelessness. They had a task force, driven by the community, to prepare a plan. The government—I understand from its public statements—is taking on those recommendations, overseen by an ongoing committee drawn from the original task force.

Each department within the government was addressed separately in the report. Their current contribution to homelessness and affordable housing was analysed and recommendations made for their contribution to the remedy. Targets of timelines and clearly identified responsible agencies are listed. However, here, in this budget, the Land Development Agency is to be run with a commercial focus alone.

The government’s response to the affordability task force shows a sometimes shallow grasp of the problem—for example, saying that, simply by releasing more land, the affordability problem would be reduced. However, releasing land with record high prices being paid has not demonstrably contributed to affordability.

Arguably, if the primary objectives of land development are commercial, then why would you try to sell off land that is more affordable—and why would you choose areas which already include housing at the lower end of the market? The government does need to be intervening and to recognise that the market will not look after our social and environmental needs on its own.

The government's budget packages on housing, whilst useful, include a mix of the programs carried over and the new initiatives. It was not always clear which was which. The same comment applies to the government response to the Estimates Committee report. I cite, for example, the rental bond scheme announced in last year's budget. That is not yet up and running, but it got a run in the list of responses to affordability problems.

The government's promise, in its response to estimates, to release an implementation plan on affordable housing is certainly welcome—various mechanisms at particular sites and further investigative mechanisms, including the recommended three to four per cent hand-back option in new multi-unit development sites. On the last point, I would have hoped the government could have done that by now.

Money for homelessness is welcome, but there is confusion surrounding the form of implementation. In its budget papers, the government has promised to spend \$13.3 million to target priority areas identified in the homelessness needs analysis. Women's needs were not adequately canvassed in the needs analysis. Perhaps the fact that there was a committee inquiring into the needs of homeless men and their children led to an excessive focus on that area of need.

The report did canvass the needs of women. It says that while the needs analysis conducted by Morgan Disney for ACTCOSS accepted that there is a level of unmet need for men with accompanying children, the study did not identify this work as a priority need, in comparison with other groups.

At paragraph 4.5 the committee notes that all crisis accommodation services for men report that they cannot accommodate the demand. It goes on at paragraph 4.6 to say that the situation is no better for women. Yet the government has specifically stated that it is addressing the question of money for homeless families, men and couples.

In the first year, there will be an additional 15 supported houses for individual families. This has been consistently identified as an area where there is a huge gap, not just unmet need. There are an additional 10 medium-term places for single men, and crisis accommodation for six couples, but where are the single women? There is nothing specifically for women, even though the needs of women and men are the same. Why is that? How does this happen? Is it swayed by a loud voice?

Toora's submission to the Estimates Committee was articulate on this issue. The representatives said that the government has failed to fund outreach workers for women with mental health and other complex needs, to assist them to access and maintain housing and address a range of other issues. They also said that the government has failed to provide the limited funding needed for an effective outreach

service for women, and that the government's supported accommodation initiative is unlikely to be implemented in the form announced in the budget.

This is due to current moves by Mental Health ACT to allocate these funds according to its own priorities, rather than in accordance with the government's announcement. It is also likely to be implemented in a way that will further increase the gender bias regarding supported accommodation funding within Mental Health ACT.

What is needed, as in the Western Australian analysis, is action on all underlying causes of homelessness. It must be coordinated, targeted and done now. I share Shelter's hope that the people doing the work on homelessness will take the view that many homeless people are simply in need of secure and affordable housing, and that funds should be allocated for capital acquisition of housing.

While the Commonwealth component of funding has declined and will continue to decline for capital works, I note the government's media release today. It says:

While we welcome the longer five-year agreement, it will not provide enough funding to address the unmet housing needs of low income households in the ACT, nor will it provide the necessary capital funding to meet the high cost of rejuvenating our ageing public housing stock.

In the 2003-04 ACT Budget, the ACT Government has provided an additional \$4.4 million to purchase properties destroyed by the recent bushfires. It also provided \$3 million to expand community housing options and \$13.2 million over four years to combat homelessness.

However, the component of funding for ACT Housing has also declined. The DV 200 variation includes a relaxation of the unit titling restrictions in suburban areas for supported housing. That is for affordable housing, as I understand it. This is something which can take effect immediately.

This government does show a greater commitment to housing, but there is a lot that could and should have been done already. I urge the government to do a gender analysis of its proposals for immediate expenditure for supported accommodation. I also urge the government to take seriously its commitment to work with the community housing sector in its reforms, and especially with regard to the proposal that Community Housing Canberra become the investment intermediary.

MRS BURKE: I seek leave to speak once more on the housing line.

Leave granted.

MRS BURKE: I have already covered many aspects with regard to the housing sector. However, I reiterate my total commitment to ensuring that all people in this territory have access to affordable public housing.

Mr Speaker, I would like to correct the minister on one matter. I never suggested the minister had ever said that people were second-class citizens. I said they simply felt like they were treated like second-class citizens when being dealt with by an often stressed, overworked department or members of that department.

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Of course we have some wonderful tenants. I would concur with the minister. I am a big fan, as he well knows, of the tenant of the month program. I believe that is a magnificent way of lifting and building the esteem of tenants. It is a great initiative.

Mr Stefaniak: The previous government started that. It is good that it is continuing.

MRS BURKE: That is right. My colleague Mr Stefaniak has just confirmed that the previous government established the tenant of the month scheme. Mr Stefaniak was the minister at the time. The people who receive that award make sure they tell me how well, and good, that makes them feel. Nevertheless, even some of the wonderful tenants I have mentioned tell me they feel like second-class citizens. This is not about pointing fingers at anybody; it is the reality, Minister—a reality within the department you must face and address. If people are feeling that way, they cannot all be wrong.

I will continue to work as much as possible with the minister and his department to bring about continual improvement in our public housing sector. I am extremely committed to this area. I have a passion for it and want to see it improved. We can have the best public housing system in Australia—why not?

Like most people, I have a query about the \$10 million Treasurer's Advance. I would say that housing is now surely awash with cash. We seem to have had a dash for cash, but then we did not need it. What was the rush? I would ask that the minister now call on the Treasurer to say that we could utilise some of that money, as a matter of urgency, to be spent on the unmet needs I talked about earlier.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.16—Justice and Community Safety, \$110,852,000 (net cost of outputs), \$20,373,000 (capital injection) and \$90,687,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$221,912,000.

MR STEFANIAK (10.43): Mr Speaker, I will speak generally to this part of the budget and I will also make some comments on the proposed amendment which my colleague Mr Smyth will move in relation to this line.

Mr Speaker, it is concerning that, again, we are seeing an example in this budget of the general theme of spending more and actually getting less. I recall that several years ago some crime prevention programs were launched. Indeed, in the previous year some 14 crime prevention programs were operating and I think the amount envisaged to be spent was \$1.075 million. I also recall that not necessarily all the programs were completed or all of the money was spent, which is a bit of a pity and rather surprising from this government that makes a big issue of crime prevention, attacking the root causes of crime and the like.

There were some 14 programs and I am disappointed to see only 10 programs forecast for 2003-2004. The anticipated cost had increased to about \$1.15 million, I think, for the present financial year. But next year the anticipated cost of 10 programs is about \$8,000 more, I believe, than actually was spent this year. Effectively, the figure for 10 programs is the same as what was budgeted for 14 programs. One has to ask oneself: why is that so; why is effectively more money being spent for fewer programs? Indeed, that is very concerning.

I am also particularly concerned at the government's response to getting meaningful information out of our court system. This has been an ongoing problem and the now Attorney was quite rightly concerned about it when he was the shadow minister. It was something I thought we would have finally overcome with the new computer systems that we put budget money into two or three years ago and which are constantly being upgraded. But it still seems to be amazingly difficult to get facts—there should be a simple ability to do this—on how much things cost and what judgments were made in various matters.

The Estimates Committee made a recommendation that the costs and workload details for each of the courts within the ACT system be provided separately but, again, this task seems to be too hard to carry out. I think the government's response to this recommendation is just so much gobbledygook. The response was:

It would be artificial and/or misleading to make gross estimates of the proportions of the total costs of the operations of the Supreme Court that are attributable to the Court of Appeal.

The response then went on to state the bleeding obvious, that we all know that judges of appeal are drawn from both resident judges in the Supreme Court and visiting judges and, of course, that there are common support services. I find that disingenuous in the extreme. I do not think it would be all that difficult to provide estimates of actual costs. There needs to be a better system so that we can see how effectively and efficiently our courts are tracking in an administrative way.

It is also important to have additional information in respect of the decisions that are made at least in the superior courts, the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal. It is not rocket science, it is not all that difficult, and I am very disappointed to see the government's response to that matter.

Part and parcel of any system of justice is a well-run police force which is responsive to community needs. I am concerned about recent reports that—and this affects my own electorate of Ginninderra—the number of police officers in North Canberra, Belconnen and, of course, Gungahlin has been reduced by 19 and that the Gungahlin station is not going to be open all the time. Of course, 19 officers less for Belconnen and Gungahlin will have a not insignificant impact on the ability of police to apprehend criminals and respond to community needs.

I receive on a fairly regular basis complaints from residents in Belconnen about the difficulties experienced in getting enough police to respond to requests from citizens. I certainly hope we don't go back to the bad old days of the Follett government when police services were cut. Nonetheless, it seems that this is happening. It is absolutely essential that the community is protected. One of the most important tasks of any government is to ensure the security of its citizens. In fact, its predominant and primary task is to do just that. At the national level that means a strong defence force and at a state and territory level a strong and properly resourced police force. There are some very worrying signs in relation to that.

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I know that this government is left wing. As such, it probably has a particular ideological bent and police probably do not register very prominently on the radar screen. But this is a crucially important matter. The men and women of our police force do, and always have done, a very good job. I think it is very disturbing in the extreme to hear of cuts, and especially cuts that impact at the operational level. I certainly want to put that on the record.

There is nothing particularly startling about the remainder of this part of the appropriations. Perhaps there could have been a bit more money for things like legal aid, which seems to be just treading water. I note that the Attorney has recently made an announcement in relation to Commonwealth and ACT funding. As I said, the rest of this line is fairly uninspiring. However, there are certainly some worrying aspects in relation to crime prevention projects and also the great inability to get proper data from our courts.

It was somewhat pleasing to see the government at least address the need for a new Supreme Court/Court of Appeal building. There are a number of ways in which that can be done quite effectively, and it seems the Attorney has changed his mind and his attitude about what he stated a couple of years ago. However, it is good to see that he has listed a priority in respect of capital works.

On the subject of capital works, it is disturbing, again, that the necessary disabled access improvements to the Supreme Court building have still not been made. The building is only 40 years old but it has a heritage classification and is difficult to deal with. The only disabled access is by way of a few ramps—one put in some years ago and one a bit more recently. There have been delays and work that should have been completed in this financial year will not be completed until January. So, again, there have been delays in this most important area, and that obviously affects the ability of people to use the courts. At this stage it is still impossible for someone with mobility problems to get up to the first floor to file documents, attend the registry, or whatever. So there are problems in relation to disability access.

If we are not going to get a new building in the immediate future it is crucially important to ensure that proper access is provided. Indeed, other works might need to be done. The building floods and there are all sorts of other problems in relation to liveability and operations. If we are not going to get a new Supreme Court building, these immediate and ongoing problems need to be attended to.

I would like to address Mr Smyth's amendment. I do not think the government's response to the committee's recommendation regarding the proposed human rights act is at all satisfactory, and some very interesting comments have been made in relation to that. The budget, of course, came out on 6 May and, lo and behold, on Wednesday 21 May the ACT Bill of Rights Consultative Committee brought down its report *Towards an ACT Human Rights Act*. It is rather remarkable that in the budget itself reference is made to a human rights act. The Chief Minister asked the committee to look at whether we needed a bill of rights, and at issues around a bill of rights, and it is interesting to note that the Estimates Committee stated that it was less than convinced by his answers in relation to the coincidence of this matter.

MR SPEAKER: The member's time has expired. Do you wish to continue?

MR STEFANIAK: Mr Speaker, I will use my next 10 minutes, if I may. Anyone who has served in the military—and Mr Pratt will appreciate this—will have been taught what is called the appreciation process. The appreciation process is pretty simple. It is something that we do every day of the year. It involves something as simple as using a lift—you press the button and you appreciate you don't walk into the lift until the doors are open; you do a quick mental appreciation. When solving more complex problems, you look at and work out after being in command of all the facts such things as what is the best course open, and then you set upon that course and go to it.

There is also something in the military called situating the appreciation—to start with, you work out the decision you want to rely on and then you justify it; you use a process aimed at leading to the conclusion you started with.

Mr Stanhope: Like you invent weapons of mass destruction.

MR STEFANIAK: In other words, you know exactly what you want to do to start with, and you just try to justify it. And I think—

Mr Stanhope: That's right. You decide to bomb the crap out of a country so you imagine something exists like nuclear weapons and chemical weapons.

MR STEFANIAK: The Chief Minister talks about weapons of mass destruction. At least they got rid of a particularly vicious dictator, Mr Stanhope. But in terms of this document, this is a classic case of situating the appreciation. It is a classic case of "this is where we want to end up; let's work out some convoluted process to justify getting there".

Basically, this is a classic case in point. The budget comes out with a human rights act, and lo and behold, some two and a bit weeks later the consultative committee says, "We recommend a human rights act." I suppose this is not surprising when you consider that before the last election this government made a huge deal in its justice policy about wanting to go down the path of this particular piece of legislation. So there has been a great, convoluted effort to arrive at this.

I cannot think of too many instances where extra money, over and above normal departmental resources, has been put in to get legislation up and running. Yet in this case the government is doing exactly that. The Estimates Committee quite rightly recommended that "the human rights education program be funded from internal resources". Of course, the government does not agree with that. The government talks about its "commitment to the introduction of some form of legislation". It goes on to talk about "developing public sector awareness". It then talks about a "lack of understanding of the bill of rights"—at least it calls it a bill of rights here rather than, as it did in the budget, the human rights act—might lead to failure to understand potential breaches in service provision by the government. It also talks about the need to educate the judiciary.

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This is something that the government obviously wants to do. It is obvious, too, from what is contained in the act that this is something that the government should be able to fund from its resources. You are not dealing with idiots, Mr Stanhope. You are dealing with intelligent people—your government officials and, indeed, the judiciary, who will be looking at this measure. There should not be a need for this extra money.

Of course, there is the more substantive issue of this territory being the first state or territory in Australia to go down this path. Mr Stanhope says, “What about rights? Don’t you want rights?” Yes, I do, Mr Stanhope. I cherish rights, I cherish our democratic tradition. But first and foremost, I am really worried that any act you bring in here will take away more rights from more citizens than it will give to other classes of citizens. I am not alone in feeling that. I have some immense worries about how that act will work.

On balance, I cannot see how it can possibly be a positive rather than a negative, and I do not think I am alone in holding that view. The position taken by the opposition has some very powerful supporters around Australia, not the least of whom are Premier Carr, that very sensible premier; and another Labor man who happens to reside across the border, Premier Beattie, also has some grave concerns.

The Australian public has looked at this issue before. It has probably not done so to the extent that you are putting on the table, but certainly it has looked at issues around this that were raised in the 1988 referendum. The Australian public has consistently rejected ideas of going down this path and it has done so for very good reasons—indeed, reasons that go back to our system of common law, starting with Magna Carta; our own development as a nation; our constitution; and the fact that human rights-type legislation has been incorporated into legislation over the last 50 years and certainly, in a very big way, over the last 20 or 30 years.

We have developed bodies like scrutiny of bills committees to look at these issues. Not only do we have a legal system and conventions that go back 800 years, but also we have a system of statute law that continues to evolve and develop and move with the times. It seems to me that in every single country that has gone down the path advocated by the government there are more problems than there are benefits.

I know that this is a pet project of yours, Chief Minister, but no-one in the community, except maybe a few academic groups and certain members of the Labor Party, is calling for it. What utter nonsense it is to say that it is one of the things you were elected on.

Mr Stanhope: We campaigned on it.

MR STEFANIAK: Yes, you campaigned on that and a number of other issues. I am darn sure, Chief Minister, that that was one which no-one in the community was remotely interested in, and I am sure that should tell you something about our very advanced, highly sophisticated system of democracy in this territory, which you tamper with at your peril.

Mr Stanhope: Bill, it was the issue which tipped us over the line.

MR STEFANIAK: Oh, I'm sure it was!

Mr Stanhope: It's why you're in opposition, mate.

MR STEFANIAK: I would suggest it might be something like you said on Bruce Stadium. I don't think anyone was remotely interested. No-one in the community has ever come up to me and said, "Look, we need a bill of rights." When you first started canvassing it, when you first started having your public meetings, four people turned up at Tuggeranong, and I was one of them. That really shows the volume of real interest. You can single out groups, and it is interesting to do that.

At this stage I am not going to get into a detailed argument about all the pros and cons of what is in your document. Obviously you are going to bring in an act and we will leave that argument for another day. People came of their own volition to six public meetings. This was not a deliberative poll; it was not someone speaking to a certain interest group. The biggest of these meetings was attended by about 40 ordinary citizens.

We need to compare that with the 400 or 500 people who crammed into Aranda Primary School because they were a bit worried about the construction of a road which would affect their suburb. That is something which you were stuffing up. You could say that we might have stuffed up in the case of school closures, where 400 or 500 people attended meetings because they were worried about what was going to happen to their school. People get out and attend these meetings because they have a real interest in these sorts of things.

But, Mr Chief Minister, that is not the case in respect of what you are advocating. Whether you want this legislation or not—and I will be strictly neutral now—whichever way you look at it, it will probably, if passed, be the most fundamentally important piece of legislation that this Assembly has introduced since self-government. That is why the opposition feels something like this should be put to a referendum. Like any question, it should be properly argued out and this can be done quite easily at the next election.

This legislation is of fundamental importance and it will affect many other pieces of legislation that come through this parliament. Even if you have a proviso in an act that says, "Right, bill of rights, the human rights act not to apply to this," it will still affect every piece of legislation that comes through this place. It will affect the way our courts operate and it will affect the relationship between the parliament, the executive and the judiciary and the way in which they operate. It is absolutely crucially important, fundamental legislation in terms of its effect not only on this parliament but indeed on our society. That is why, Chief Minister, I think you have gone about this in very much the wrong way.

That is why, on behalf of the opposition, my colleague Mr Smyth is moving an amendment. First and foremost, he is doing so because of the very issues around whether we need this and whether you have gone about this in the right way. Also, the

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committee has highlighted that the human rights education program should be funded from internal resources. I would commend my colleague's amendment to the Assembly. Thank you, Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to comment on this line item.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (11.03): Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, I move amendment No 3 circulated in my name [*see schedule 2 at page 2425*]. Mr Stefaniak has made the case for this amendment so I do not think I have to go over it again. We do not believe that money should be put in the budget in this manner. We think it is presumptuous that an act such as the human rights act may be passed by the Assembly.

We think it is an enormous coincidence—and I think comment has already been made about this—that, just after an inquiry recommended that the bill of rights be changed to a human rights act, the government managed to also put in its budget more than \$800,000 as resources for the proposed human rights legislation. We believe, given that it really is the role of the department at large to promote all of its acts and all of the things that it is responsible for, that it should—

Mr Stanhope: What, on the smell of an oily rag? What a joke!

MR SMYTH: Well, if there is a problem in the department with its resources, Chief Minister, you have the opportunity to expand its resources. Mr Corbell told us, “We have set our priorities.” So you have set a priority that says that proposed human rights legislation resources are more important than breast cancer nurses, dual diagnosis workers for the indigenous community, and age care workers in the migrant community. The community will know how you have set your priorities and you will be judged according to that. That is why I have moved the amendment.

MS TUCKER (11.05): I want to make a few comments on this line. We know that restorative justice works for victims of crime and for society as a whole. Also, it reduces the recidivism rate, and the best results are in the area of violent crimes. An ANU study of randomised control evaluation, with evaluation conducted by someone entirely separate from the people conducting the study, showed that there was a reduction in the rate of re-offending violent crime among those who went to a restorative justice conference compared with those who went to court.

I want to raise this issue and say that I would love to see the government take the initiative on this and invest more in this kind of visionary transformative work in the justice system. With a hold on constructing a prison in the ACT, there is certainly an opening for such work here. If we get this part of the justice system working effectively then our offending population will be reduced. If we get it established as the foundation of our justice system, we will have a healthier community.

Similarly, if we, on the basis of carefully designed programs and on the back of careful analysis, put into practice in a big way parenting support—not just a list of child protection measures to cope with emergencies which just cannot keep up anyway, but actual child and parenting support in the very early years when it matters the most—then we could see children growing up healthier in the broader sense of the word, and that is what hard analysis is showing needs to be supported.

I placed a question on notice regarding this project but I have not received an answer yet. The government's recent series of reports on addressing disadvantage in the ACT—which is welcome but which I have not yet had time to read carefully—includes a review of current literature on youth crime prevention. I hope that this important work will be taken up and implemented.

MS DUNDAS (11.07): Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, there are some initiatives in the appropriation for Department of Justice and Community Safety that I do support, specifically the sexual offences response program. I also commend the allocation of money to the upgrading of the Belconnen Remand Centre. However, I will be waiting to see whether or not the government recommits to the prison project, bearing in mind that the excuse of a lack of available revenue has been, I think, clearly invalidated even before the new financial year has begun.

We have an ongoing spatial planning process and in discussions several sites for a prison have been identified. So it is a matter of the government allocating the money to build our own facilities so that we can finally have direct management of our prisoners and can maximise their chances of rehabilitation as part of the ACT community. This is an area where investment now could reap rewards in the long term and could go a long way to reducing recidivism.

We need a greater focus on prevention and diversion in justice and community safety. I specifically refer to output class 2.2 of Budget Paper No 4, which indicates that the number of community crime prevention programs has actually dropped. It is noted that this will be reviewed by the department in the forthcoming year. So I wait with bated breath to see where this government will be picking up its commitment to crime prevention and what new programs it will be initiating so that we can see the positive benefits.

We need to have a strong focus on diversion. There also needs to be a strong focus on how we work with young people through our school system and with people of all ages in the community to make sure that they have adequate support, that they do not feel that they need to turn to crime to make a living and that they have adequate entertainment so that they do not commit almost random crimes out of sheer boredom.

These are things that need to be addressed and can be done as part of a whole-of-government approach across departments. But the Department of Justice and Community Safety has a role to lead in this approach. Unfortunately, a drop in the number of community crime prevention programs is not the way to proceed.

I am also disappointed about the lack of funding to support Neighbourhood Watch groups. They are suffering and continue to suffer following the rise in public liability insurance premiums. I have been informed by groups that they may not be able to hold on and may have to close in the near future.

We are seeing greater budget increases for prosecution than for prevention. However, there is funding under the youth services portfolio, and this program can be expected to reduce crime. As I have said, we do need to have that focus across the whole of

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government, but it does appear to be the exception rather than a strong theme of this budget. We need to reconsider and reorder priorities so that we are tackling the causes instead of the symptoms of crime.

I would now like to comment on Mr Smyth's amendment. I think it has been put quite clearly on public record for close to 25 years that the ACT Democrats are supportive of the concept of a bill of rights. There are concerns about an excessive show of optimism by the government to allocate four years worth of funding to implement a proposed human rights act, when there has not been a lot of discussion about the bill. However, I believe that human rights is important and that it is something we should definitely be allocating money to.

I have had discussions with the Chief Minister's office on this matter. Even if the money in the budget that is specifically targeted for human rights legislation does not relate to the bill of rights report, we will at least be focusing on some form of promotion of human rights. The money is there to promote human rights, to provide greater support for making people aware of their rights and to perhaps rethink how the ACT deals with human rights both as an Assembly and as a community.

So I will not be supporting Mr Smyth's amendment. I commend the government for the bill of rights discussion that has gone on over the last financial year. I hope that in the next financial year we can build on and protect people's human rights here in the ACT.

MRS BURKE (11.12): I will just make a very quick comment in relation to the point that Ms Dundas finished on, and that was, of course, the human rights act. This title has been very subtly changed from what was formerly known by the broad community as the bill of rights. I have had many calls to my office from people wondering if they are one and the same thing. It is well known that this legislation is the Chief Minister's pet project.

I am very concerned, Chief Minister, that your open, accountable and transparent government is going about dealing with this legislation in this way. I think you have got minority support for what you are trying to do. You do not have the majority of people on side. Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, I feel very concerned that we are spending money in the way that we are. Everybody needs to have rights. However, I do not see mention of a corresponding bill of responsibilities.

Mr Stanhope: What about the detention centres? Do you think those people should have rights?

MRS BURKE: I think the Chief Minister is trying to be the first chief minister or premier to set up a program like this. He is trying to wave a flag or something and say, "Look at me." I think it is a dreadful slur on the rest of this intelligent, articulate community that he boulders ahead with this pet project without properly consulting people. He has had the audacity not to take into account the full views of the community. He has consulted a handful of people and received 380 submissions, or whatever.

It is absurd to say that you have a mandate to run a pet project in this way. The arrogance of this is really beyond comprehension.

Mr Stanhope: How do you spell “human rights”, Jacqui?

MRS BURKE: I cannot believe we have a Chief Minister who would do this. I guess this arrogance will be manifested at the ballot box at the next election. You will continue on this course at your peril. I really believe that a lot of the community will not stay with you if you continue in this manner. People want to have an input.

Mr Stanhope: Will you win a third time, do you think, Jacqui? Get in here on your merits?

MRS BURKE: This isn’t about me. The Chief Minister keeps interjecting very rudely. He needs to stop and listen to the community. He needs to also know that there are many people against what he is trying to do, but he won’t listen. This is typical of this government. They will not listen to the community, they are not listening to the community and they arrogantly push on with projects. They say, “We’ll listen to you and then we’ll do this anyway.” Ministers stand up in this place and say, “Well, I’ve heard what you’re saying but I’m not going to take a blind bit of notice of you.” How audacious is that? It is absolutely ridiculous to fly in the face of the Canberra public in this way.

Mr Stanhope: It’s like buying a can of VB from a scratchie winning.

MRS BURKE: The Chief Minister so childishly keeps interjecting. I have obviously hit a nerve—what a shame.

Mr Stefaniak: And he can’t even get it right. It’s two bottles of Tooheys, for goodness sake!

MRS BURKE: No, he can’t get it right. It was two long necks, I think, Mr Stefaniak—let’s get it right. I think he has worn that joke a little thin. However, what the Chief Minister is doing is not a joke. It is something that he will live to regret.

MR PRATT (11.16): Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, I rise to pick up a couple of issues in the emergency services and police area. In regard to the emergency services part of this debate, I would congratulate the government for at long last moving on with the development of the computer aided dispatch, or CAD, concept. I certainly welcome and support the payment of \$500,000 to the ambulance services for the new skills program. I also congratulate the government for the decision to do something about the Belconnen joint emergency centre. So there are a number of good things in this budget, but there are some areas that we need to comment on.

Firstly, there are some problems with computer aided dispatch in respect of command and control. The genesis of this problem goes back to 1999-2000 where, in anticipation of Y2K, decisions were made to put this system into service. I am concerned that, although the tendering was completed in June of 2002, it has taken to

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May of this year to get the contracts signed. You would have thought that the lessons from the December 2001 fires would have been pretty stark, particularly the lessons going to the heart of command and control, and that the need for the immediate introduction of a computer aided dispatch system would have been very clear. But it has taken all this time, and that is just not good enough.

The concept and the equipment have been identified. In fact, it was really only a case of looking at what the New South Wales forces had in service, and I see that we are now looking at perhaps adopting a system similar to what they have. Why could not the Treasurer's Advance or supplementary appropriation bills been brought into play to hasten the acquisition and introduction of this vital system?

Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, I also note that there are questions about the actual funding and the spending of the funds applicable to that program. The government will have to answer all of those questions about CAD funding. Mainly, though, the government is on notice to expedite the outstanding CAD system and, more broadly, to do something about command and control generally right across the range of different activities carried out by emergency services.

Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, I would like to speak about the lessons to be learnt in respect of how the Emergency Services Bureau may need to be reorganised and what will need to be done about its equipment. A recently handed down audit report talks about a number of interesting areas. This report, which was commenced after the fires of 2001 and was completed I think a number of months ago, points out some very serious issues that relate to the acquisition of emergency services equipment. It states, for example, that funds have not been made available for the purchase of major equipment and that this was not specified in budget documents—certainly for last year, and that would seem to be the case now.

The report points out that the management of funds for the acquisition of equipment is insufficient and inefficient. It goes on to say that current annual funding for the replacement of the Emergency Services Bureau's ambulances, fire appliances and other operational vehicles is considerably less than what is needed to simply maintain bottom line resources. So there does not seem to be an acquisition plan in place to make sure that the essential core equipment is replaced and kept up to speed.

Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, the report goes on to say that the bureau has no approved program to replace its operational vehicles and major operational equipment, and in that context we can talk about communication kits as well as fire fighting appliances. We have seen for some time a lot of concern and complaints expressed by people in field emergency units about the state of communication equipment. We have talked about that a number of times in this place.

It would seem that at least there is funding now in place to expedite the outstanding issue of operational communication equipment. But I would implore the government to get on with it. Don't conduct another two-year trial but see if we can hasten the introduction into service of this badly needed equipment, certainly in time for next season. Like the computer aided dispatch equipment, it has been a long time coming. The sorts of issues that are a concern are frequencies and reception capabilities.

Another concern is the compatibility of equipment so that each of the agencies can talk together efficiently.

A further concern is the interoperability between fire services and police units and also, of course, between ACT fire units and New South Wales fire units. These issues need to be addressed. I hope that the Chief Minister and this government will get off their bureaucratic bums and get on and expedite these outstanding issues.

Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, we now know that funds need to be spent on streamlining communication and operational equipment. We now know that the speed of situation reporting in the field needs to be addressed. We now know that the accuracy of information in terms of situation reports coming out of the field needs to be addressed. So, not only do we need appropriate equipment which is capable of carrying any load under extreme emergency pressure, we also need to make sure that the operational systems are in place, and that means training as well as reorganising our headquarters units that take care of these types of things. I am hoping that all of these lessons will come out in the McLeod inquiry and other useful studies which are currently under way.

Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, I would like to refer to the functional ability of the Emergency Services Bureau. The recently completed audit questions and is concerned about the bureau's functional ability. The auditor talks about demobilising the Emergency Services Bureau as we currently know it and creating a more functional and a more operationally responsible organisation.

If the government wants to do something proactive, it might like to consider this: one quick and reasonably cheap and cost-effective way of achieving streamlining to make ESB a more operationally responsive organisation might be to split it into operational units and an administration support base. The operators—for example, Peter Lucas-Smith and his fire units—would be able to operate unencumbered, they would be more responsive and the organisation would be less bureaucratic. Administration and support would be picked up by an administrative unit so that the operators can be more lean and mean and get on with the business. In fact, this is a model that we might look at and we would be very happy to share our views with you later, Chief Minister.

Chief Minister, we would want to see, well before next summer, the government moving to do something about the organisation of ESB, making sure that the emergency and fire units have the appropriate fundamental equipment and ensuring that the fundamental operational procedures are in place. Let's see if we can hasten a few processes.

Mr Stanhope: Leave it to us, mate, we're fixing up your mess.

MR PRATT: Good on you, Chief Minister, you're a champion. Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, I am disturbed that there is no money in the budget—at least, it is not identified as a stand-alone expenditure function—for bushfire education in schools. I would like to see, and I think the community would like to see—

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MR TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member's time has expired. Would you like to take your second 10 minutes?

MR PRATT: Thank you, Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker. I welcome the funding that has been allocated to trial a community firefighting capability. I think that is a very good move. Whatever shape this community firefighting capability eventually takes, it will be fundamentally important to preparing this community to better fight fire threats in the future. But we would want to see that trial finished before summer. I urge the government to move forward on this trial and mobilise the trial's recommendations so that new capabilities are well in place.

Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, I welcome the government's selection of Mr McLeod and, of course, the establishing of the McLeod inquiry. This inquiry has an important role to play in finding all the lessons that need to be learnt. It is a pity, though, that that inquiry is not independent. It is a great pity that there will not be public hearings, unless, of course, Chief Minister, you get written responses from Mr McLeod indicating that he may, in fact, go on and do that. It would be good if that could be done.

The government must manage the outcome of the McLeod inquiry wisely and expeditiously. The community cannot wait months, with the government sitting on the McLeod report. The lessons need to be urgently applied so that the community and its emergency services can be best prepared for next summer.

Mr Speaker, I would now like to address police matters. Clearly, the ACT has one of the best police forces in the world. The ACT police force is certainly one of the best led, best organised and best structured police forces in this country. That is a credit to the police and I congratulate the minister for keeping things moving in that direction. Clearly, the ACT police force is also well backed up by a very good federal police force, the AFP.

Mr Speaker, the realities are that there have certainly been successes in reducing crime rates—and I will get back to that later—but, of course, some other crime rates continue to climb. It is a bit of a furphy that crime can be brought down to such a level that we can rest on our laurels. That will never be the case.

Criminals are certainly becoming much more audacious. Attacks on the vulnerable are becoming much more vicious, and the statistics are proving this. Of course, there is another issue that we have to face up to—this has to be raised and we have to talk about it—and that is the war against terror. This is part of the landscape in which this community sits.

Mr Speaker, the government and the police are to be congratulated for some of the changing crime rates. Total personal rates have certainly fallen in the reporting period to, I think, July 2002 from 7.7 in 1998 to 5.9. But in terms of personal crime rates, the ACT still remains the second highest in the nation.

It is important to note that the assault victimisation rate is still one of the highest in the country. Car theft rates are dropping but they are still above the national average. So

the picture here is very clearly that there is always plenty of work to be done, and we must ensure that our police have sufficient capacity and are adequately equipped to be able to keep on top of these issues.

Thanks to Operation Halite—and I personally thank Deputy Police Chief Officer Andy Hughes for his good efforts—burglary rates have fallen by one-third. That is quite a remarkable drop. The government is also to be congratulated. There are ups and downs, but it is important that the graphs are showing that the rates are continuing to fall. Canberra clearly is one of the safest cities in Australia but I repeat, for the third time, that we cannot just leave it at that. We have to make sure we keep the pressure on the criminal class who would otherwise try to ruin our lives.

Mr Speaker, I am concerned about persistent rumours of police numbers being chopped or being allowed to waste. We saw reports at the weekend of the northern district establishment being reduced by 19 officers. There has been persistent feedback about this and about possible net cuts in frontline police strength. I would not like to think that this is simply an AFPA political stunt during an EBA negotiation, as has been claimed by certain people who are dealing with this area. You have to wonder why these claims have been made. However, these concerns need to be cleared up very quickly.

The minister said in estimates that there will not be any net police losses, and I am willing to take that at face value. That is what he keeps saying, and that is what I hope will be the case. There are 21 new recruits coming into the force, but what we do not know is whether those 21 will simply replace the 19 lost in the north or whether they will go into other positions. So I would flag that as a concern that we have at the moment.

Can the minister continue to guarantee that there will be no net loss in front-line police numbers? You did that in estimates, and I hope you can continue to give that guarantee. I note that the Deputy Chief Police Officer has said that there will be no net cuts, although I did notice that in last weekends Canberra *Sunday Times* he talked only about losses occurring, but losses which will not necessarily affect community policing. I don't know whether he means by that that there would be a drop in establishment or that there is simply a shift in numbers.

I was puzzled to see Mr Hughes say that there is a movement down of numbers in the northern district, and that movement only reflects what I think he meant was a levelling out of what was a previously high number. So there is a way to go before we get clarification of what I think is a very important issue. I certainly respect Mr Hughes' opinions and actions. He has got a good track record. By the way, can I just add that he will be a fabulous ambassador for this country in Fiji.

It is reported that there is a 50 per cent cut in patrol cars at Belconnen city police station. Again, is that just a concern that has not been properly put to bed by the chain of command, or is it reality? The question needs to be asked and we want to hear the answer. I look forward to the government getting back to setting us straight on those issues.

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I now turn to community policing. We have seen, as part of this chop in the northern district, that Gungahlin police station will lose its 24-hour status. Why would that be? Does that make policing better? If we are all about community policing, if we are all about preventing crime, we should be talking about maintaining a presence wherever we possibly can. If the police can demonstrate that they attain efficiencies by shutting down that police station for 12 hours of the 24, well fine, but let us be convinced, and I am not yet convinced of that.

Mr Speaker, I am concerned because while at least this steady, safe but bland budget is on course, we are not seeing too many value-added initiatives. In estimates I asked Mr Wood whether he would be honouring a pre-election promise that the ALP government would restore police numbers to the national average. He definitely moved around on that. I don't know whether he was trying to say that they already have, or whether he has an intention to try to achieve that target. So let us see where we go from there.

The only value adding I have seen so far is that undertaken by the police themselves in respect of their own internal reorganisations and their own very good training. I would like to see more imaginative budget management in place which would seek to make the police that much more effective and increase new capabilities. But at least they are in good hands with John Murray and with Mick Keelty backing him up in the AFP. The government has certainly at least got them going in the right direction, and I guess we should be pleased to see that. But let us get the answers on these questions about numbers.

MR STANHOPE (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Community Affairs and Minister for the Environment) (11.36): Mr Speaker, I thank members for their support of this particular line of the budget. A couple of interesting issues have been raised, particularly by Ms Tucker and Ms Dundas, in relation to restorative justice and issues around corrections and punishment, and I will take the opportunity to respond to them quickly.

Ms Tucker quite rightly raised the issue of the need for us as a community to concentrate much harder and be more committed and devoted to issues around restorative justice. That comment does strike a chord with me. I think there is much more that we should be doing in relation to true restorative justice initiatives and principles. I don't think we do enough in relation to that, just as we as a community need to concentrate more on youth justice. I accept the comments that Ms Tucker made in relation to that.

There is a road for us to travel in relation to alternative approaches to justice, and to corrections in particular. The days of lock 'em up and throw the key away should be well and truly past, but to some extent it always seems to me to be an easy option for jurisdictions, and indeed perhaps for courts and for the community generally, just to say, "Oh, well." I acknowledge the points that Ms Tucker made in relation to that.

Ms Dundas expanded on the issue of corrections by raising issues around the government's commitment to the construction of a new remand centre and prison. Certainly, Mr Speaker, I think it does need to be iterated that the government's

commitment to the construction of a remand centre has been clear and quite patent since we came to office, and that is a commitment we have not walked away from for one second. Indeed, for purposes of planning there is a \$50 million allocation in the capital works budget in the outyears.

We are quite absolutely and firmly committed to the development and construction of a remand centre. Work is well progressed and the government is certainly quite focused on this particular project. Indeed, as part of our commitment to the construction of a remand centre—an absolute commitment; a commitment that we back with money—we are also continuing to progress issues around the construction of a prison in conjunction with our decision to replace the Belconnen Remand Centre.

It has been said by my colleague Mr Quinlan on many occasions over the last year—and it is a call that I reiterate—that the remand centre at Belconnen is simply unacceptable. The government is determined to replace it, and we are actively pursuing that. We simply cannot as a community persist with the Belconnen Remand Centre as a correctional institution. It is simply not fit for the purpose and we are determined to deal with that.

Before concluding, I will just make some comment around the excitement within the ranks of the opposition in relation to human rights. I am intrigued by the virulence of the opposition's position on a human rights act or on a bill of rights. I don't mind whether you call it a human rights act or a bill of rights; call it whatever you want—it is essentially a bill of rights, it is a human rights act, it is a commitment by this government and by this community to human rights. I cannot see an earthly thing wrong with budgeting for the prospect of the passage of a whole new regime in relation to human rights and, indeed, in relation to the education that would be associated with a further expansion of our human rights regime or our commitment to human rights.

I guess it doesn't come as a surprise in this place to see the two issues that have simply horrified the Liberal Party, over and above a desire to communicate with the community. Their first objection is set out in their amendment. The second, of course, once again highlights their abhorrence of egalitarianism, equality of opportunity and opposition to discrimination. I suppose, at first blush, one is surprised that Mr Stefaniak, Mr Pratt and Mr Smyth should stand up in this place and express their lack of support for human rights. But then one does need to remind oneself of from whence they spring, and what springs immediately to mind is little children being held in mandatory detention in concentration camps in the desert. That is what springs immediately to mind.

When one sits here and wonders, at first blush, why does Mr Smyth oppose education in relation to human rights, why does Mr Stefaniak stand up and vehemently oppose a move to a greater support for or commitment to human rights, why does Mrs Burke stand up and scorn human rights, one suddenly recalls little children in detention centres, in concentration camps, behind barbed wire, and one loses one's surprise. We view with some sorrow the prospect that we have facing us here those very same preachers from whose breast springs this desire to lock up little children in concentration camps in the middle of the Australian desert. That is where you spring

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from. Those are your antecedents, that is who you are—the Liberal Party, incarcerators of children in concentration camps.

Mr Pratt: Crap.

MR STANHOPE: That is who you are, Mr Pratt. You lock up little children. That is what you do, Mr Pratt. You and your party lock up little children in concentration camps in the middle of the Australian desert—a shame the like of which we will not escape from for the rest of this century.

We still talk about the concentration camps that the Boers were placed in 1901. I think these analogies are interesting. We still talk about them; I still read about them. We still talk about how the 20th century was born with the psych—

Mr Pratt: It might be an issue to be debated but be reasonable about it, Chief Minister. Don't get so dramatic or melodramatic about it.

MR STANHOPE: Melodramatic? Locking up children? We are being melodramatic about little children being locked up in concentration camps? It is what your party, the Liberal Party of Australia, does. It is where you are from, it is what you stand for. Here you are, arguing against a bill of rights, or human rights, and moving an amendment to the ACT budget to remove \$200,000 that might be used for human rights education. For God's sake!

Your great intervention in relation to the ACT budget is to move an amendment to remove moneys to be utilised for educating the community in relation to human rights. "There is no need to educate us in relation to human rights. We're an intelligent community," Mrs Burke says. "What education do we need in relation to human rights?" And then you sit there and justify locking up little children in concentration camps.

Mr Pratt: No, we don't.

MR STANHOPE: You take it to the High Court. After the Family Court says it is unconscionable, illegal and unconstitutional, you appeal to the High Court. "Oh, we can't have this. We've got to keep those little kiddies locked up in concentration camps. We'll appeal this to the High Court. We'll get the High Court to say it's okay to lock up these little children." That is where you are coming from. So I am not a bit surprised that you want to amend this budget so there is no money in it for educating about human rights.

Mr Pratt: Mr Speaker, I take a point of order. This is misrepresentation. We on this side have never talked about locking up kids in concentration camps or any other camps. We don't necessarily support that crap, Chief Minister, so don't get carried away.

MR SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

MR STANHOPE: Anyway, Mr Smyth has moved an amendment that would remove from the ACT budget the capacity of the ACT government to engage in human rights

education. That is his major intervention. That is what this budget is all about for the Liberal Party. This budget so offends the Liberal Party that they have moved an amendment to remove from the budget the capacity for the ACT government to run education campaigns on human rights.

This is the great philosophical position of the Liberal Party. This is the alternative government. This is their vision. These are the policies that the Liberal Party, the opposition, is putting forward during this budget debate. It is a policy around: "Let's actually not have any of this human rights nonsense because we're the party that locks up little kiddies in concentration camps. We're the party that does those things. We're the party that suffers Australians to be locked up in places like Cuba without charge and without access to legal representation. That's what we stand for. That's what it means to be a member of the Liberal Party in Australia in 2003."

MR SPEAKER: Mr Pratt, I heard you use the word "crap" earlier. That is unparliamentary. Withdraw it.

Mr Pratt: I withdraw, Mr Speaker.

Amendment negatived.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.17—Education, Youth and Family Services, \$422,138,000 (net cost of outputs), \$56,936,000 (capital injection) and \$127,001,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$606,075,000.

MR PRATT (11.48): Mr Speaker, I rise to support the education budget but firstly to speak about a number of concerns. Mr Speaker, last year Labor's excuse for a totally visionless education budget was the anticipation of the Connors funding inquiry. This year, two years after an election, there is no excuse. Mr Speaker, during the election the government boasted that it had a vision for education. So far the ACT public has not seen that vision.

I would like to again reiterate my concern and disappointment in respect of the abolition of the interest subsidy scheme, a scheme which has been relied upon by the non-government schools to educate 40 per cent of our school kids and to help facilitate their infrastructure—not picnics—and core functions. It is a kick in the guts for a sector which provides us with annual savings of around \$28.5 million.

Mr Speaker, whilst I welcome the government's funding for class reduction programs in non-government schools, I note that it has come at a high cost. It is still not clear whether that funding has come from the remainder of the \$27 million or instead is to be funded out of what will be saved in the future from the now-defunct interest subsidy scheme allocation of funding.

Mr Speaker, there is other money which has gone missing from the \$27 million—money which was supposed to go into capital injections for class size reduction. Bang, it's gone, disappeared somewhere into the ether. Maybe it will turn up again in the government's election promises next year.

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Mr Speaker, then there is the \$67.5 million injection into education—again a forgotten promise. Mr Speaker, we're still waiting with bated breath for that promise to materialise. Indeed there are many sections of education which could really do with that sort of money.

Mr Speaker, the Liberal opposition supports the initiatives that have been introduced in this budget from the \$7.4 million which should have been spent in last year's budget. But the bureaucratic Stanhope government spent nearly \$500,000 on reports and reviews—for example the Connors report—just so that they could tell the government how to spend over \$7 million. I don't know whether that's a good operational ratio, Mr Speaker: \$500,000 for basically \$7 million.

If there were going to be inquiries run, perhaps a fraction of that money could have been better spent on other inquiries—for example, ways in which we could value-add to government schools and why there is a drift, and has been a continual drift, of students from the government sector to the non-government sector since 1992. That might have been a wiser and a more effective way of allocating some of our meagre resources in the ACT.

Mr Speaker, indeed one of the best funded new initiatives that we are very happy to support is the \$900,000 over four years to help preschools with cleaning, insurance, and consumables. A paltry \$460,000 has been allocated to evaluate school performance and achievement, while a nearly useless \$1.5 million has been allocated for a class reduction program for non-government schools over four years. Nor has it been explained to non-government schools exactly how that \$1.5 million is going to be allocated.

Ms Gallagher: They make their minds up about that, Steve; we don't tell them.

MR PRATT: Well, there's no guidance in terms of what's going to happen regarding portable classrooms or not and what sort of assistance.

Mr Smyth: So they can spend it on interest subsidies.

MR PRATT: Yes, that's right. Why not?

Mr Speaker, I also welcome the increased funding to provide more support for disruptive children at risk. I hope that we will be able to look over the 2003-04 annual report and see that this funding has been implemented in a worthwhile fashion.

Concurrent with that, I also welcome the government's plan to introduce welfare officers into schools. I know that they've only been able to put a small number in, but at least it's a start. Dealing with those children who are disengaging from school is a good thing, and we support that.

Mr Speaker, meanwhile there is nothing other than those issues that I've just talked about that really leaps out and strikes us as being something really new and something really value adding in terms of things such as boys education; declining numeracy;

languages; and other performances in high schools relating to those core subject. Of course there's nothing new to show why we have this 9 per cent drop in government school enrolments since 1992. We need to find out why that's happening.

We on this side of the house are very keen to see the public sector, the government sector, viable. We want to see it enhanced so that that sector is there to ensure that we've got not only a safety net but in fact an excellent schooling sector which provides high standards of education for all families in the ACT if they so choose to go to that sector. We are concerned that some of those standards are beginning to slip.

Mr Speaker, there's no substantial attempt to address, for example, how a cultural change might be undertaken in schools because it's too much of a challenge. Parents do want cultural change in their schools; they do want their schools to be safer. Our schools are safe, our schools are respectful; but we want our schools to be safer, we want them to be more respectful and we want them to be respected places to learn. Parents would like to see their kids go to an uninterrupted learning environment where kids are able to understand and learn values and where schools are upholding positive values.

Mr Speaker, parents do not necessarily want to pay teachers more. This is the interesting feedback we get when we look at surveys, particularly interstate, which do say that parents don't necessarily want to pay teachers more, but they do want them to be unencumbered by violence, unencumbered by policing tasks, and by administration. Again, this is a case of the Stanhope government spending a lot of money for meagre results. Opportunities are being lost.

Mr Speaker, I would encourage government to strive to find the funding to pay teachers more money. We would strive to find the funding to pay teachers more money, but we would want to be trying to find that from efficiencies, from savings through efficiencies. We would also like to increase our teachers pay, but we would like to see that accompanied by substantial productivity increases.

Why are these initiatives not mentioned in the budget? Why do we not see these sorts of initiatives undertaken in this budget, Mr Speaker? We don't see any initiative in this budget; we don't see any vision; we don't see any bold steps by this government to try to lift the performance indicators in our schools. These are simple things. They might be a bit tough because they do involve cultural change; they involve leadership; they involve strong management. They don't necessarily always involve money either. But we don't see any signs of those sorts of initiatives.

Mr Speaker, more needs to be done to attract good role model teachers to the ACT. In the estimates process Mr James Coleborne, the executive director of school education, said that, in order to address the problem of boys education, recruiting the very best teachers was an important issue. He said that, and he's a man whom I greatly respect. Yet this budget shows no new initiatives to attract teachers of excellence to the ACT system.

Mr Speaker, in addition to attracting excellent teachers to the ACT we need to be looking at offering those teachers already working in our system the very best support

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mechanisms. I regularly receive complaints from constituents about our teaching staff being overworked, undervalued and not respected. Mr Speaker, I recently received a letter from a constituent concerned about the circumstances of her friend, and I wish to quote from it now:

As a background, my friend is currently in her fourth year as a classroom teacher, and is regarded as an excellent teacher by her peers and her principal. She works hard, is always at school early in the morning, and is often still at school long after her students and other teachers have left in the afternoon/evening.

May I claim my next 10 minutes, please, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: The member's time has expired. Yes, a further 10 minutes, Mr Pratt.

MR PRATT: She goes on to say:

She sometimes spends several hours at home in the evenings and on weekends preparing for her classes. She is caring, disciplined, and committed to the schools and the children that she teaches.

She goes on to say:

She is also exhausted and unhappy from several years overwork, too little classroom assistance, too much responsibility, and a lack of professional and career support and development. Whilst my friend loves teaching the conditions under which she has to work on a daily basis, makes it more difficult for her to sometimes see a future for herself in classroom teaching, and not surprisingly, she has already started considering alternative career options.

That's something that we've heard a number of times, Mr Speaker, and it's becoming an even more critical issue now that we are approaching that time when the cohort of those in their early 50s is declining. What strategies does this government have in place to keep those teacher numbers up? We don't see too much evidence of what they have in place to take care of those issues.

The author of this letter goes on to point out the problems which her friend has faced since she commenced her teaching career.

Mr Speaker, good teachers are deciding that our education system is not offering the support mechanisms which they need. It is not focusing on their professional development; they are not being rewarded for excelling in their positions; and they are leaving. The PD program was a good start, but it needs a lot more bolstering. There are not too many more—

Ms MacDonald: Well, it's more than you guys gave.

MR PRATT: We started that program. Research your history rather than just speak rhetoric.

We on this side of the house, Mr Speaker, would like to look at the possibility of performance-based pay. We totally support pay increases to teachers, but we think that's got to be tied to guarantees that teachers do self-develop, they do complete personal development courses and they are assessed through a performance appraisal system.

Ms MacDonald: Professional development. The "P" stands for professional.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Pratt has the floor.

MR PRATT: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, let's turn to the subject of male teachers. There's nothing in the budget which would indicate any form of affirmative recruitment of male teachers. We know from all the evidence available to us that there is a growing gap in the performance between boys and girls: 11.6 per cent is the gap between boys and girls getting through to and getting an appropriate UAI to enter university; 4 per cent is the gap between boys and girls attaining a year 12 certificate. These statistics have been constant for a number of years.

That gap is not a blip; it is a trend. So we know that there is a problem, and I do not see anything in this budget which seeks to address those sorts of deficiencies in the ACT schooling system. We know what the initiatives ought to be, and if this government had imagination, and if they had a drive and a force to push up those good levels that we currently have to excellent levels, then they would have strategies in place. But we can't look to these guys to exercise any imagination, because they're only bland managers—keeping it safe and keeping it straight, but not keeping it value-added.

Mr Speaker, we know from all the empirical evidence that it is very important to intervene in the early primary school years to assist boys who are disengaging before they do disengage. We know that the statistics in the ACT show that, on average, primary schools have only 15 per cent of male teachers. We know, Mr Speaker, these are facts. These are the facts that we would have thought the government would have seized upon, looked at, assessed and developed strategies as a result of.

We know that a significant number of little boys going into primary schools are from single-parent families, and we know that they do not—

Ms Gallagher: Shock, horror!

MR PRATT: Fine. If it is shock, horror, do something about it, please.

Mr Speaker, we know that those young boys do not have male role models. We also know, from all the evidence available, that little boys and little girls must have male and female role models; they must engage as they develop. Mr Speaker, our female teachers are fine; they are some of the best teachers in the country; and they are also important role models. But we know that our female teachers cannot represent the

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very important male role model which must be exercised. Yet this government continues to remain in self-denial about boys education.

Mr Speaker, in regard to discipline in schools: I spoke earlier of worn-out and overworked teachers. We know that part of the problem of the burden on our teachers is the trend that the discipline has begun to deteriorate in all schools in the ACT. We're talking about both collective and personal discipline. We're talking about the collective discipline, which allows our students to feel proud of their schools, to feel proud members of teams. Then there's the personal discipline, Mr Speaker, which we have to inculcate in all of our students so that they can equip themselves to be able to focus on their studies and make all the right life decisions, both personal and academic, in the years ahead.

We believe that that is an area that needs to be addressed, and we don't see any indication in this budget that those issues are being addressed, other than the very good initiative undertaken by the government, as I said earlier, to introduce welfare officers to some schools, to provide a bit more support to those beleaguered teachers, to address those students who, we know, are disengaging from schools.

Whilst we're talking about that, we also know that our disengaged students, particularly young boys, don't really have any great desire, as they see the schooling system now, to go onto a year 12 finality. We know that they need to be looking at VET options. We would like to see the curriculum fine-tuned in early high school years which perhaps would allow a number of technically oriented subjects to be introduced.

Of course, these are not certificate subjects; they are technical subjects nevertheless, which might be there so that 14 and 15-year-old boys, who might be considering a technical career stream, might be able to be introduced to those subjects, with a view to following the pathways into the VET stream. That's an area that needs to be addressed.

Mr Speaker, we go on to talk about testing and quality assurance regimes, and we don't see too much in the budget about that.

Mr Speaker, I would finish by saying that, on this side of the house, we support a viable government sector, as well as supporting the choice for families, if they wish to, to take their children to non-government schools, and to be able to move their children, at appropriate ages, from non-government schools back into the government sector. We do support diversity; we do encourage colleges on both sides of the non-government/government divide to take on skills and capabilities that they know other colleges can't have. Some families are already doing this; some families have been doing this. They send their children between the sectors, depending on the individual child's needs. To be able to achieve that schooling environment, we must ensure that both sectors are viable.

It's a great shame that the ISS has been ripped out of the non-government sector, and it's also a great shame that there hasn't been sufficient reform built into this budget to go in and test, and to see how we can improve and uplift levels to those of excellence in all of our government schools consistently right across the ACT sector.

Wednesday, 25 June 2003

MS TUCKER (12.08 am): One of the features in the report into ACT education funding released earlier this year was the warning signs identified by author Lyndsay Connors, namely:

1. allowing pockets of poverty and social differentiation to take hold in the ACT school system will diminish the system's capacity to provide quality schooling across all schools and communities; and
2. a high proportion of the territory's teaching force is approaching retirement age.

In regards to poverty and social differentiation: clearly, the moderate increase in the small equity fund is a step in the right direction, but there are other forces involved. The reality is that all of Australia's education systems are extensively funded by government. The difference is that the public or government systems are required to accept all students in their area, whereas the independent and Catholic systems have the freedom of choice, the right to choose whom they accept and whom they don't.

As increased government funding has become available to the selective school systems, a flow-on competition between government schools, encouraged by the Carnell government, has become established in the ACT. The problem is that, if the easy, bright, middle-class, healthy kids all congregate in the selective systems, too many government schools will be left with just the kids who need the most support or become residual.

Innovative programs, such as high schools for the new millennium and schools as communities, are constructing initiatives, although the level of outsourcing is too low. Government has also picked up on the Connors recommendation to invest in curriculum support, which is yet another example of this government having to undo the damage caused by the last one. But unless there is more release time for the teachers, the value of that initiative remains uncertain.

There has been much discussion also of the youth workers in schools initiative that arguably picks up on numerous recommendations over the years to government to fund individual support for young people who need it. As the chair of a number of different inquiries on related matters, I would like to put on the record that those ideas were usually driven by the idea of bringing the youth sector expertise into the school environment, while softening the edges between school and community.

The problem with the education department itself employing the youth workers and then placing them permanently in a school is that the employee will owe their loyalty to the school and the department rather than the student. For many students, the question of confidentiality is crucial, and previous experience with staff in schools has made them cautious. I understand that the issue is still in negotiation, and I urge the minister sincerely to really consider the outcomes of the students before all else on this one.

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In the context of the Connors report, the ongoing work on tools to assess the individual needs of students with disability in all systems, and so establish some funding equity in that area at least, has a particular significance. I stress “in all systems”. I am interested to know whether Mr Pratt would be supportive of this. I’m sure he would, but it would be interesting to know what his position is on this. Unfortunately he’s not listening to me. At least he’s not interjecting if he’s not listening.

Mr Pratt: I am listening.

MS TUCKER: But I think it’s really important that we have, with the non-government schools calling for—no, he’s listening; there you go—disability funding that they do use the same tools assessment model. Mr Pratt, I was just wondering whether you supported that, that we do have the same assessment model to determine the needs of people with disability. Not so vocal on that one, okay.

While the major issues of funding relativities are yet to be addressed, requirements for improved accountability and financial reporting for non-government schools are also welcome.

The issue of an ageing workforce is still unresolved. If we are to attract new teachers and hold onto good existing staff, we need a school system that does provide release of curriculum development; that does provide opportunities for staff to try new ideas; that does reward creativity and initiative; and that will allow ideas to percolate through the system. Lyndsay Connors did not address these issues in her report, but it is probably necessary that someone do so now.

Moving into youth and family services: the initiative for strengthening statutory response to children and young people at risk of abuse and neglect is overdue and welcome. It is a standard comment in the community sector, unfortunately, that Family Services still only has time and staff for really small children and babies and that anyone over 10 or 12 has to fend for themselves.

The question of relationship between the bureaucracy, consumers and the community sector is again important. Following prominent media coverage of a coroner’s inquest earlier this year and through changes of staff at least, I think that the government has acknowledged that some changes in procedure or approach may be in order. There have been, however, a few more cases come to my attention recently that indicate that people on the ground and their advocates are still a long way from totally trusting the bureaucracy.

It is not simply a question of trusting the bureaucracy, although trusting institutions was one of the features of the roadmap to social sustainability that Walter de Oliveira laid out for us at a forum here in March. It is also about community development, about people having the opportunity to shape the services and activities that are available to them and to participate in the construction of their society.

With that in mind, this government’s decision to put the expanded Belconnen youth services out to competitive tender deserves a little closer analysis. The result of the

tender in fact was that the existing fairly small-scale Belconnen Youth Centre lost out and the contract was awarded to the more professionalised Belconnen Community Service. I'm sure the process was conducted carefully and the selection panel's indicators would point very clearly to the winning organisation. I doubt, however, that the capacity for young people to enter into the structure of the organisation, the relative flatness of the structure, the capacity for teams to respond to new possibilities and the sense of ownership participants enjoy were criteria that the panel evaluated the applicants against.

While the larger, professionalised services can undoubtedly put a good tender together and can easily acquit every dollar and have no trouble negotiating with government at a high level should the occasion arise, it is the micro NGOs that really provide the oxygen for community development.

MS DUNDAS (12.14 am): Just briefly on the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services: I welcome the money allocated to the upgrade of Quamby and the money allocated to a statutory response for children at risk of abuse and neglect. I think these are two very important initiatives and show a focus on youth outside of schools.

A concern that I had with last year's budget was that in the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services there was a strong focus on what we were doing in our schools, at the education end of that department. We need to recognise that our young people just don't spend all of their time at schools, or the majority of their time there, but we do need to be focusing on youth services and what happens outside the school gate for our young people in our community.

I also welcome the funding for new youth workers in schools, in high schools specifically. But I believe that they should be employed by youth services rather than the education department, so that we can see a greater trust of these youth workers. We already have a number of programs throughout high schools where youth workers are working quite well in the school environment and are being well responded to by the students.

I had the privilege of attending a function last week with the Belconnen community about youth services in Belconnen, and one of the things that the young people there expressed was their great attachment to the people who came from outside the school to spend time with them and to work with them. That is something that they are desperate to see continue. So there is a lot of work that needs to be done into the implementation of what is a very welcome initiative.

But to move onto the education end of the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services: I'm still concerned that there is too little money going into support for primary school students with behavioural problems. I'm not convinced that the across-the-board cuts in class sizes, specifically the year 3 initiative, have yielded the best educational outcomes, because this costly policy has reduced the amount available for one-on-one assistance to kids who are struggling at school. It could even be argued that we need actual reduction in class sizes at the more senior end of our schooling, through high schools. That is something that hasn't really been looked at,

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though the department did say in estimates that is something they were looking at for into the future.

The modest allocation of additional funding for preschools has clearly been met with tremendous enthusiasm by parents of preschoolers, and it is good that the government has fixed the strange anomaly that required parents to pay for cleaning and consumables in preschools. It's definitely an issue that has resulted in many pieces of correspondence to my office about how preschools are being maintained in the ACT. I do welcome the funding from the ACT government to this end.

My last concern in terms of this particular line relates to the CIT budget and how it is apparent that the funding for CIT is not keeping pace with inflation. It is difficult to discern from the information presented in the budget whether they will be in fact worse off. There have been questions raised about money that's been appropriated through the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services for vocational education in CIT, but it is not showing up in CIT budget papers.

I have had this discussion with the minister a number of times about how CIT is working at maximum capacity and maximum efficiency for the money that it has, how it is managed and how we do promote vocational education into the future and work to allow our vocational providers to actually meet the demand that is in our community and do something that we'll be looking at into the future.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (12.18 am): Mr Speaker, just a few words on two issues: I think Ms Dundas has it right in terms of where the youth workers in the high schools should be employed. I think potentially what could be a great initiative has the potential to be damaged by the location of the workers. The feedback that I'm getting, certainly from the sector—and indeed from students—is that they do appreciate the independence of youth workers who are not employed by the department.

If we have a situation where kids are in difficulty with what's going on in the school, and the next logical place to seek help is part of what is apparently the system—and indeed the people are employed by the education department—I think that we run the risk of undermining what could otherwise be a very, very useful initiative. I would ask the minister if he'd certainly agree to consider where they should be employed. To see them employed in the youth part of the department rather than the education part of the department, I think, would be a very fruitful exercise.

The other alternative, of course, would be to put it out for the community sector to provide it. That would be useful also, because it then provides some linkages. These kids not only need assistance during school hours but after hours, on the weekends and school holidays and at other times. It's important that they know that somebody's there for them, because the time that may have their dilemmas or their problems or the incident or whatever it is that causes them the grief that they're going through might not necessarily coincide with the time of somebody who's employed by the department of education. So I think the flexibility that might be available and might enhance the project would be better off being provided by the community sector or, if not the community sector, not the department of education in this case.

Mr Pratt, I think, detailed very clearly the majority of our concerns with the education budget and the direction of education under this government. I just wanted to concentrate on the dilemma that we face as a city where parents are choosing to remove their children in large numbers and in growing numbers from our high school system. There clearly is a problem there. Something like 44 per cent of high school students from, say, years 7 to 10 are now not in the government system. The apparent indifference by the minister during questioning in estimates, I think, is a matter of very, very serious concern.

The previous government realised that we needed to work on our high schools. We set up the high schools for the new millennium project to give them the impetus, the kick on, to raise the standard, to make the high schools more attractive. That project did some work, but I think that work needs to be continued.

It's curious that the government doesn't seem interested in supporting the non-government sector as much as other governments have. When we queried the minister as to what would happen, she said, "Well, thank goodness, for the non-government sector; they can pick these kids up."

Ms Gallagher: I don't think I said that.

MR SMYTH: Obviously there is this need for the sector when the government can't supply it. But when the government doesn't want it, that sector doesn't get the funding; they whip the ISS scheme out late on a Thursday night. I think that's a shame.

If the minister thinks I've paraphrased her incorrectly, she can grab the *Hansard*, but I think the *Hansard* will prove that that's basically what you said. If you want me to withdraw it, you prove it and I'm happy to come back here and say I got it wrong and we'll discuss your words exactly. If you want, I can grab a *Hansard* as well.

I think the point here was that there is nothing in the directions that the minister is taking or the government's taking to address the obvious bleed from the government sector into the non-government sector in high schools. I think that should be of concern for all of us.

Conversely, when you get to the college years of 11 and 12, there is a movement back. What is it that makes years 7 to 12 attractive to parents to move their children out of the system, and what is that makes it attractive to move them back in years 11 and 12? We need to capitalise on the good things that the government sector does in the primary sector where I think it's about 33 per cent of kids go to the non-government sector. Then you've got this dramatic move out in the high school years and then you've got a move back in the college years. There is a dilemma there.

What we're not seeing from this government is any leadership on the issue; what we're not seeing is any apparent concern at the bleed; and what we're not seeing is any initiative, certainly in this budget, to address that issue. I think we should be addressing it and I think it's a shame that, with an opportunity in a budget like this, there isn't something to bolster the efforts that we make in the high school years

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because they are very critical years for the future of our students. These are the years in which they are starting to form the directions they will take in life.

Often courses in years 11 and 12 at college have their basis in the high school years. Those students who want to start on vocational education are often starting it in years 9 and 10. What we have is a dilemma, for which the government has no answer.

We will certainly keep an eye on what it is that happens there. We will be monitoring very closely the numbers to see what does happen with this movement out of the government system into the non-government sector. We will be looking for some leadership on this issue from the government, but I don't expect we will find any.

MS GALLAGHER (Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, Minister for Women and Minister for Industrial Relations) (12.24 am): I rise just briefly to address some of the issues that have been raised during this debate. This budget has been a good one for education. I disagree with Mr Pratt that it lacks vision. This government does have a vision for children and young people in the ACT, and it's one which is providing an environment for children and young people which supports them to achieve their full potential. This budget has a range of initiatives which support that vision.

Importantly, the core business of the education budget is to teach. So I'm not sure whether vision needs to be displayed through initiatives. The fact is that the vision for education and the vision for our children are delivered by teachers, which take up the vast majority of the money allocated to the education budget. However, we did have some significant initiatives in this budget which will support the vision that we have for children and young people:

- continuing on the class size reductions;
- the career education initiatives to support young people transitioning through those years from high school to college, which will support both young people in the government and non-government sector;
- the pre-school initiative;
- the school excellence initiative, to continuously look at what our schools are doing, how they're doing it and reporting to parents;
- the youth workers in schools; and—

very, very importantly—

- the curriculum renewal.

It's through the curriculum that our children learn, and it's so important that we provide a curriculum that is up to date and engaging for these young people. I see that as one of the most critical initiatives in this year's budget. I think it is fair to say that, in previous years, cuts were made to the central office of the department of education and they lost a lot of their curriculum expertise from that department. As the years have gone by, we've realised that—and we've realised that in this budget—and made good on the commitment to ensure that our schools are providing the best possible curriculum that's up to date and supports the engagement of our young people.

Again, as the non-government sector uses our curriculum, the government system's curriculum, there would be significant benefits from that initiative that flow on into the non-government sector. I believe the department has been communicating with non-government sector stakeholders to work out how best they can be involved from a very early stage in that initiative.

Also with regard to students with disabilities: whilst not in this budget, we are doing the work there in terms of assessing the level of need in the government and in the non-government systems. Certainly there is a commitment there for the information that we get out of the student-centred resource model being used to inform the budget for next year, if needed.

Contrary to a lot of the claims that Mr Pratt puts forward about cultural change needed and all these schools not being safe or not being as safe as people want them, I think the ACT offers an education system where students are supported. They are supported individually. It's a system which supports inclusivity; it's one which welcomes diversity. I think, on the whole, school environments are safe and welcoming for our young people and encourage them to seek to achieve their full potential.

I'm not really sure where Mr Pratt was going with the cultural change needed. Whilst certainly in the government system we have 37,000 children and young people attending schools every day of the school term, I wouldn't say that there's a big crisis out there. That is something that Mr Pratt's alluding to. But anyway!

In relation to boys education: again, Mr Pratt says there's nothing in this year's budget. I would say things such as the curriculum renewal, the youth workers, the school excellence initiative, the career education, the extra support in the school equity fund are all things which will deliver for those boys that need it. You've got to be careful when you talk about boys education, Mr Pratt, because it's not all boys that aren't doing very well. You can easily use your concerns to address some of the girls in our system who may not be achieving at a level that they should be either.

I just question whether Mr Pratt's actually read the evidence that came out though the improving the educational outcomes of boys report because, Mr Pratt, I think you say in your speech that all the empirical evidence says these things. Certainly this report, which I just happen to have by me—luckily, once you started talking—has got a whole section on myths. The myths include that boys, as a group, are mainly academically inspired through male teachers.

Your line, Mr Pratt, was that we need more male teachers because there's this whole range of single parents out there that are predominantly women—I presume that was your point—and those children aren't getting that male role model. This is a myth. The evidence is supported by three—

Mr Pratt: Who wrote the myth, JK Rowling?

MS GALLAGHER: The references actually cite three pieces of research, Mr Pratt, so you can question that. That'll be four, because you're questioning Andrew Martin as well. The references are Ludowyke and Scanlon, 1997; Pallota-Chiarolli, 1997;

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Smart, 2000; and Andrew Martin, 2002. If you're an expert on boys education, I'll leave it open to you to question all the evidence that they've put forward.

Here's another myth: boys as a group are mainly interested in being taught to be masculine, feel the need for male role models, aspire to a "it's cool to be a fool" mantle and do not admire achieving students. Again, that is another myth. All the evidence that came out of this report, which I'm sure you couldn't have read otherwise you wouldn't have said all those things in your speech, says that there is no need to have gender specific teaching.

In fact there are a range of things that need to be done to improve the educational outcomes of boys, but they shouldn't be done at the expense of girls. So there is nothing in here which supports your arguments, Mr Pratt. If you've got a PhD in boys education I—

Mr Pratt: We don't support doing anything at the expense of girls; we've never said that.

MS GALLAGHER: In terms of support mechanisms for teachers: I think, again, Mr Pratt questioned support for teachers and questioned professional development. We currently have, when you look nationally, one of the best professional development schemes in the ACT for our teachers. We have a range of teaching fellowships. There are a range of issues that are currently on the table in the enterprise agreement currently being negotiated with the AEU which will certainly look at increasing supporting mechanisms for teachers.

Mr Pratt: Okay, keep your head in the sand. Self-denial.

MS GALLAGHER: Mr Pratt, I don't know what you want to do. An enterprise agreement would not necessarily be outlined in the budget. Negotiations are under way. That is the appropriate place to have those discussions. The department doesn't unilaterally decide what is required for teaching conditions and then put it as an initiative in the budget. It's something that is negotiated with the AEU.

Mr Corbell: With the workforce, with the teachers.

MS GALLAGHER: That's right. We talk to people. We welcome those discussions with the union. They're ongoing and, whilst there are a whole range of issues on the table, certainly the view of the government is very much to support teachers because it's through teachers that our children learn—not through initiatives. Initiatives support the work of teachers, but it's through the teachers that children learn. We understand the important role they play and those discussions in regard to the EBA will certainly be concentrating on some of those issues such as the fellowship professional development; whether there are better things we can do in terms of supporting beginning teachers; and teacher equipment, et cetera.

In relation to the youth workers in schools: it is something that I've considered long and hard. I have done quite a bit of reading on it. I've met with the Youth Coalition. I can't say that I am convinced that who employs the youth workers is a critical issue for the young people who may use them. There are a range of differing views on this

in terms of the reading that I've been doing. We think it is important that they be employed by the department. By employing them we will have a range of flexibilities in terms of some of the other work that can be done, including outside of school hours, school holidays, all those sorts of things.

The fact is that there are going to be eight coming on and then 17. I think there would be significant issues with 17 different employers of those youth workers, which may be the way it turns out.

MR SPEAKER: The member's time has expired. Do you want a second period of 10 minutes?

MS GALLAGHER: Yes. I'll just finish on this point, Mr Speaker: there are a range of employment-related issues which would be problematic in relation to how this initiative is implemented. However, I acknowledge that, unless it's implemented properly, there are a lot of risks associated to this not delivering the outcomes that it's intended for. Certainly we are continuing discussions with the Youth Coalition on the best way to ensure that the intent of the initiative is delivered through the schools and that it benefits the young people.

But on a whole this line in the budget, the education line, has got a range of very good initiatives—a range of initiatives that have been informed by the inquiry into education funding. Again, I notice Mr Pratt said, "This is just not even worth the money we paid and it's really come up with nothing." I went through this. Every single recommendation has either been met through this budget or is in ongoing discussions, such as the students with disabilities—apart from the one to adopt an interim funding model for the non-government schools. I don't think that's one that the non-government sector disagrees with anyway.

If we look at the Connors report, it has done its job; it's informed this year's budget; and we've made decisions about initiatives accordingly. I think, on the whole, the initiatives support the vision that this government has for the children and young people of the ACT, which is to ensure that all children and young people in the ACT can experience educational opportunities which support them to achieve their full potential.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—total appropriated to departments, \$1,435,298,000 (net cost of outputs), \$279,669,000 (capital injection) and \$365,813,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$2,080,780,000.

MR QUINLAN: (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism and Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming) (12.37 am): I move amendment No 1, circulated in my name [*see schedule 3 at page 2426*].

MR SPEAKER: Do you want to explain the amendment?

MR QUINLAN: Only in as much as it is in the total lines and it is the next best thing to a typo. As the moneys were being split between net costs of outputs and payments

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on behalf of the territory—which is, as we all know, a very important differentiation, which we are all on top of—one amount was shifted in the line items but not in the totals. It does not affect the bottom line at all; it just affects the part.

MRS CROSS (12.38 am): I must apologise. I did have a speech prepared for this morning, but I was in a briefing with Minister Gallagher, so I am going to give a very brief speech. Mr Speaker, as part of the process of the Assembly I have had an opportunity to scrutinise the government's budget through the Estimates Committee and have my input into the report of that committee—a valuable process for me.

Now, after the committee process, I feel there are many areas in which this budget has major failings. Unfortunately, there are many missed opportunities, where the people of Canberra could have better outcomes and should expect better outcomes from the spending of their money. There are other areas, where the government has funded programs that are innovative and progressive. There are also areas where the government has continued very positive programs developed in previous years, even by the previous government. For those areas the government deserves praise.

While following the theme of empire building throughout the estimates process, I found that there has been a steady and substantial increase in the senior executive service over the past two years. In fact, the increase is in the order of 17 per cent. I am now left wondering what the increase has been in the overall size of the public service. My main concern with such a large increase in the senior administrative areas of our public service is that there does not appear to be a commensurate increase in output in terms of services for the people of Canberra. Had more money been spent—more senior public servants employed—that resulted in better community outcomes, we would all be in a position to rejoice and say, “Money well spent!”

Spending more money is always easy, and it worries me that so many members of this government seem to think that achievement can be measured in terms of how much money is spent. Spending money to achieve outcomes is one of the main roles of the government, and one of the main roles of this Assembly is to see that it is spent well. It should be of great concern to this Assembly, in approving this government's budget, that so much money is being spent but so little money is being spent well.

Even with the concern about the poor spending of money by this government, my philosophical stance on budgets is that, when governments are elected by the people and appointed by the Assembly, they must take executive responsibility. They are beholden to the people of Canberra to fulfil the promises they made during the election campaign and to complete the work of government, which is ongoing—whoever is in control.

Let's not forget that this government went to the election promising to be open and accountable. To do this, governments need to have money. They need to have their budgets appropriated so they can get on with the job that they have been elected to do. Having accepted the role of executive government, the governing party should be judged on its ability to manage the territory's finances.

At appropriation time, this Assembly puts its trust in the government to prepare its budget to tell us in detail how money will be spent for the next year and to allocate

that expenditure to a range of areas within its responsibility. We also provide, through appropriations, substantial money for unforeseen circumstances, in the Treasurer's Advance. The estimates process has given me substantial concern about how seriously this government takes the process of the allocation of expenditure. I am concerned about whether this government has the ability to live within its own budget and ensure that the budget we have before us today is meaningful.

Within the next few months the annual reports from the various departments will be tabled, and they will reveal whether the government can live within its own budget. I believe that the indicators thus far do not bode well; they show that there is a substantial blowout in a number of areas. The most notable area of the budget blowout is health—I covered this in the estimates process.

The electorate of Canberra will judge the government in months to come on the substance of the budget and the way it is delivered. Most importantly, the government will be judged on whether it is delivering promised services, better outcomes and whether it can live within the budget it has set. We will see whether this year will bring a huge budget blow-out, and we will see whether this government will need to top up the money with more appropriations, as it had to do this morning for the 2002-03 financial year. We will all wait to see what the real bottom line will be next June.

Amendment agreed to.

Proposed expenditure, as amended, agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—part 1.18—Treasurer's Advance \$20,800,000.

MS DUNDAS (12.44 am): After the way the Treasurer interpreted the Financial Management Act in this current financial year, we will have to be quite watchful of how he will be looking to spend this \$21 million of taxpayers' money. The Assembly has had a number of debates over how Treasurer's Advance has been spent in the last financial year, and it is clear that we believe that appropriations taken out of Treasurer's Advance need to be unforeseen and urgent requirements.

Whilst that might not be specifically laid out in the Financial Management Act, I believe that that is the understanding of this Assembly. I look forward to the Treasurer being more aware of that in the future and spending Treasurer's Advance on things that are clearly unforeseen and clearly urgent.

MR QUINLAN (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism and Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming) (12.45 am): I would just ask members, when they look at the \$20,800,000, to think of it as \$400,000 a week.

Mrs Burke: Trust you, you're the Treasurer!

MR QUINLAN: Trust me. Exactly. In response to Ms Dundas: I would appeal for some flexibility in remembering that it is a territory out there, and there are many dynamics occurring as we speak. I have done budgets in smaller organisations and let me say—I think I coined the phrase—it is like trying to land a jumbo on the footpath trying to get the result predicted 15 or 18 months before the year washes up.

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I am actually pleased that, for one reason or another, whether it be pleasant debates or pleasant press releases flying around, there does seem to be a little bit more appreciation of the variability and the flexibility that can occur in the normal course of doing the particular job that we are charged with.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Proposed expenditure—\$1,435,298,000 (net cost of outputs), \$279,669,000 (capital injection) and \$365,813,000 (payments on behalf of the territory), totalling \$2,101,580,000.

MR QUINLAN (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism and Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming) (12.47 am): I move amendment No 2 circulated in my name [*See schedule 3 at page 2426*]. This simply flows on from the previous amendment, and flows through to the absolute bottom line.

Amendment agreed to.

Proposed expenditure, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 1 to 12, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Schedule agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill 2003 (No 2)

Debate resumed from 19 June 2003, on motion by **Mr Quinlan**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

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

Rates and Land Tax Amendment Bill 2003 (No 2)

Debate resumed from 19 June 2003, on motion by **Mr Quinlan**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (12.50 am): The opposition will be opposing this bill because it is an attempt by the government to turn back the clock, given that it did not get it its own way with its proposed rating system. The government defeat on the proposed rating system has to be sheeted home to the government's lack of ability to put together a fiscal policy in a bill that works. It was a bill that was supposed to deliver equity that did not.

There seems to be a trend, when the government does not get its way, for it to throw up its hands and say, “We’re not going to do any more work; we’ll go back to where we were.” We heard that threat from Mr Corbell on the DV 200, where it was this or nothing, and we now seem to be having from the Treasurer the same sort of fit: “If I can’t have my way, we’ll go back to where we were.”

That is a poor attitude for the government to have. There is more work to do. If the inequities in the existing system—it is called the “1996 system”—were such that it was so desperate to move away from that system that it went to an interim system before coming up with the government’s new rating system, you would logically have to ask the government why it wants to go back to a system that it was so desperate to get away from. The answer is that either its policy locker is empty or it does not have the wit to come up with a different system.

We believe that what we should do is maintain the interim system. Since the last rate notices went out under the old system, we have had an interim system that has changed the way we look at rates. It is now a system where all residents now pay CPI. My concern is that the large increases in unimproved value, exacerbated by the government’s shift from system A to system B back to system A because we cannot have system C, will mean that people will now pay very large increases.

I do not think that is the way we should be going about fiscal policy. The government seems to be saying it will not do anything between now and the next election to address what was such a pressing need before the last election. The problem that was perceived to exist is now exacerbated by this delay and by something that none of us believed would have continued as strongly as it has—the Canberra property market, which seems still to go from strength to strength.

Until the government does the work that the public accounts committee has suggested it do, surely it would be better for the interim system to remain in place. Otherwise, we are going to go from system A, system B, system A to system U—four different variations in four years. The amendments that have been circulated in my name leave the interim system in place.

This will force the government to do some work, which is no bad thing. They have not done the work to date to justify the need for change; nor have they been able to justify the system that they have put forward. What we saw, particularly in the inquiry that was undertaken into the proposed new rates system, was the inability of the Treasurer to answer very simple questions like: “How will the concessions work? What concessions will there be? Where is your proof? Where is your evidence? Where’s the modelling?” We went through that debate last week, so I will not go back to it in great detail except to say that it is now time for the Treasurer to do some work.

If the previous system was so bad that we had to move away from it quickly by implementing the interim system, why would you want to go back to it? That is a question the Treasurer has to answer. And, if the interim system is so poor that you do not want to continue to use it for at least another year, why was it implemented in the first place? That is also a question that the Treasurer has to answer.

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The government continues to insist that there are flaws in the 1996 rating system. I understand from the chief of Hansard that all members present at the time voted for it as being the best and most equitable system that you could put together in a very difficult area—that of rating. Given the number of systems that exist around the world, the question is: when will the government do the work that it should have done in the first place? None of us know, because the Treasurer won't tell us. He simply says we will go back to the old system. This roller-coaster effect is indicative of the government's slipshod approach to policy. They will try to ram something through. "If we can't ram something through, well, we'll throw up our hands and go home."

The amendments are done on the advice of the parliamentary draftsmen. They believe this is the best way to maintain the interim system, as I call it, and members will be aware that that expires on 1 July 2003. These amendments, if moved and accepted by the Assembly, will move this forward another year, until 1 July 2004. That will give the government plenty of time to do the work they should have done, before they introduce their interim system and their new rates system, which was so comprehensively rejected by this Assembly.

MS DUNDAS (12.56 am): I would like to talk about rates and land tax. The debate about the equity of proposed changes to the ACT's property rating system has raged loudly in this community. It is the issue that has generated most of the calls to my office in recent months, and I have been contacted by many home owners who are currently struggling to pay their rates bill and by people who feared that they would be prevented from moving house because of the new rating system that the government had proposed.

From the outset I have agreed with the government that there are many people who may be forced to sell their homes and move because their rates have become unaffordable. However, I did not agree that the government's proposed rating system was going to provide relief to a significant proportion of these people who are struggling.

Worse still, the government's proposed system would have given cheaper rates to many people who are both cash rich and asset rich—to those very people who can afford to contribute more to ACT services and should be making this contribution as part of this community. Money that is not collected from rates would have to be collected through other taxes.

The bill that we are now debating, introduced by the government following the defeat of the original rates bill last week, returns us to the rating system that operated under the last government. I am disappointed that this government has failed to make any attempt to revisit the inadequate concession scheme that currently operates. But I am willing to support this bill because it is less unjust than the government proposal that preceded it.

The affordable housing task force report documented many cases of acute housing stress among home owners. Of the 9,200 households in housing stress, 44 per cent of them were either purchasing their home or owned it outright. Shifting to a CPI increase, whether or not that CPI increase is associated with a rates bill directly

correlated with property values, will not be enough to help these people. Working people on low incomes need a concession scheme if they are to be able to keep their homes.

The current rates concession scheme only applies to pensioners, and concessions are limited to a 50 per cent concession or \$250 per property, whichever is the lesser. This concession does not go far to reducing a rates bill in the inner south or inner north. Once this bill passes, many of the people the bill is designed to help will still be struggling. Of course, that would have been equally true under the old bill, and a new pattern of inequities would also have been introduced. But I am trying to make the point here that work on the concession system in relation to rates is urgently needed.

A threshold of 30 per cent of household income going to housing costs could be the basis for a concession scheme. Alternatively, the scheme could be based on a measure that divides household income by the number of people supported by that income. I have not had the time or the resources to find a position on the most effective eligibility criteria, but I believe that this work could and should be done and I hope it is something the Treasurer will be looking at in the near future.

I am willing to support this bill because it does not have the worst flaws of the original bill. It does not create arbitrary differentials in rates bills between neighbours. It does not punish people who are forced to move house due to a relationship breakdown or those who need to move to a larger or smaller house following a change in household size or job situation.

Moving house and the events often triggering a move bring huge financial strains. Hitting those households with a higher rates bill than better-off neighbours would not have been fair. It would also have had a detrimental impact on people who are trying to enter the market. Young people, who so many people claim are our future, would have had a much worse situation trying to get into a housing market that is already under much stress and is over inflated.

The government developed a rating proposal without consulting the community or business. The system was criticised by both ACTCOSS and the Property Council, among many others. I am relieved that the bill was defeated last week and that the government has returned to the original system for the interim.

I agree that we cannot continue to just say that rates will increase by CPI, which is what we have been doing for the last year, because we will reach a point where we need to go to a new system, as hopefully the work is being done in Treasury to develop and perhaps rethink the system. If we then go back to property values that have been increasing astronomically and say that they will be the basis of our rates scheme, when CPI has been increasing at a much lesser rate, we will have reached a point where it would have been quite difficult to reconcile the two figures.

I believe this is a more stable interim measure; I see it as an interim measure. I do hope that the work is being done, specifically on the concession scheme. This morning I have just put forward a few ideas, and I hope that the people in Treasury, who have the time, the inclination and the resources, can spend more time looking at these ideas than did my office.

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I hope that these and also the report by the Public Accounts Committee are listened to. They also suggested that this is an area of grave concern, which needs further work. I hope that all the work that has been done on the rates legislation so far is not just thrown out but is built upon. That said, I am happy to support the bill. I will not be supporting the amendments, for reasons that I have already outlined.

MS TUCKER (1.02 am): The Greens will be supporting this bill as it seems to be a workable fallback position for the government to raise the required land rates revenue, given that its earlier bill to change the rating system more radically was not passed by the Assembly and given that to continue with the interim scheme that was put in place would mean a greater shock to ratepayers when it would eventually have been moved back to a system where a form of valuation was occurring.

With this bill the government is essentially reverting to the old rating system with an increase of \$20 in the fixed charge component, which it says is to account for inflation, and the changed rating factor, to account for the significant changes in the value of ACT property. Although we support this bill as an interim measure, we support the view put by ACTCOSS that what is really needed is a full review of rates, not in isolation but as part of the more comprehensive overhaul of the suite of ACT land taxes.

I understand the government may feel a little miffed at its preferred scheme not being supported, but I trust it will take the responsible course of revisiting the rates issue in this broader way. The original principle underpinning this rates system is sound, in that it is based on relating the rates people pay to the wealth that they hold in their land lease and increases in its value over time.

However, I accept that there are problems with this system, one of which is the pressure it can place on low-income older people, the value of whose property has risen steadily, leading to difficulty in paying rates. The concession arrangements are not as effective as they should be in alleviating this problem, the concessions not reducing the burden adequately and many people unwilling to take up the deferment option and reduce the value of what may well be their only significant asset.

Further, the formula used to calculate rates in this bill is something of an anachronism, owing more to its history than to a supportable rationale for the present. For example, the threshold of \$19,000 that is subtracted from the unimproved value no longer has any particular meaning or justification.

It is for these reasons that I support ACTCOSS' call for a comprehensive review of rates—as well as other land taxes—that will make a real attempt to grapple with equity considerations across the board. I accept that the government has attempted in good faith to develop a better system, but in the end the Assembly was not satisfied that it was an equitable or a necessarily efficient arrangement.

While I support this bill as a stop-gap measure, I urge the government to take on board the feedback and suggestions that it has received through the Public Accounts Committee, and its own consultation processes, and to consider the issue of rates broadly and from an equity perspective in the context of the full suite of land taxes.

There were a number of submitters that suggested we could look at improved value. That was one thing I was interested in hearing more about. That is, obviously, one of the things that the government could look at.

I won't be supporting Mr Smyth's amendments. I did not hear him actually argue against the government's position. He wanted to use maintaining the interim scheme as a lever to force government to take action. But, in my view, that would mean that the community would suffer. That is why I am prepared to support Mr Quinlan's bill.

MR QUINLAN (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism and Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming) (1.05 am), in reply: There are a couple of things I need to say in closing the debate. One or two people said in the inquiry that was held by the Public Accounts Committee that there is no perfect system. This is not a reversion to a perfect system.

I am a little bemused by Mr Smyth's approach. He can be quoted in this place as having said, "The approach should have been to implement a sound and robust rating policy, such as we currently have." That is what we are going back to. Talking about my proposed system, he said, "It seeks to replace a policy that has not been shown to be deficient." I would have expected your support, Mr Smyth.

The point has been made by both Ms Dundas and Ms Tucker that we must revert to a value-based system before there is too much disparity between a simple, linear, CPI system and a value-based system. There may be debates, but I think there was only one person who appeared before the committee, and who might have been talking out of shorter term interests, who actually said anything other than, "The system must be value based."

Quite a substantial amount of work has been done before on rating in the ACT, and the system we are going back to is a product of that work. Yes, the government will seek to improve the system, to engender fairness in the process and to come up with alternatives that redress some of the inadequacies of the current system. But that is not just going to pop out of the air. It clearly did not pop out of the air for the Public Accounts Committee.

We will be trying—effectively immediately—to come up with a rating system that is fair to everybody but that remains progressive. Until somebody demonstrates to us otherwise, it will remain value based—whether that is improved or unimproved value remains to be seen. But we must revert, before the time when we find a system that is inevitably value based finds us with much greater shocks. I think that was the well-chosen word Ms Tucker used.

While I am on my feet, and hopefully to save a bit of time, Mr Smyth's amendments obviously do not have the support of the house—and we won't be supporting them, Mr Smyth, you will be surprised to know. I would also like to point out that they are deficient, as well, and the amendments overlook the treatment of commercial land. That would be rated at the current—2001-02-03—AUV at a rating factor unchanged, which is a historic rating factor, whereas under the amendment bill it would be a lower rating factor. Mixed commercial residential blocks to be unit titled will be rated at the historic rating factor—residential—of 0.782, which, similarly to the

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commercial, is much higher than the rates in the amendment bill. So the amendments are deficient.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

Bill, by leave, taken as a whole.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (1.10 am): Mr Speaker, I seek leave to move all of my amendments in a block.

Leave granted.

MR SMYTH: I move amendments Nos 1 to 6, circulated in my name, together [*see schedule 4 at page 2427*].

As the Treasurer so rightly points out, these amendments will go. But the Treasurer has made no attempt to improve the apparently deficient 1996 act. Why? Is he unable or unwilling to? Or do they not have the wit to change it? Ms Dundas made the point that, if there are flaws in the 1996 bill, why have we not seen an attempt by the government to amend it? The answer has remained in limbo because the Treasurer does not choose to tell us.

We have already made the point that there will now be system A, followed by system B, followed by system A, followed by something modified. The policy deficiency and the ad hoc approach of the government have been clearly shown up by what has happened tonight, and the people of Canberra need to be aware that we have a Treasurer who does not have the ability to put together financial bills that work.

Amendments negatived.

Bill, as a whole, agreed to.

Bill agreed to.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Assembly adjourned at 1.11 am (Wednesday).

Schedules of amendments

Schedule 1

Appropriation Bill 2002-2003 (No 3)

Amendments circulated by Treasurer

1

Clause 6, heading

Page 2, line 18—

omit the heading, substitute

6 Additional appropriations of \$33 993 000

2

Clause 6 (2)

Page 2, line 23—

omit

\$842 000

substitute

\$10 842 000

Schedule 2

Appropriation Bill 2003-2004

Amendments circulated by the Leader of the Opposition

1

Clause 6, heading

Page 2, line 20

omit the heading, substitute

6 Appropriations of \$2 101 130

2

Schedule 1

Page 5—

omit

Part 1.4

Chief Minister's	Chief Minister's	60 220 000	7 838 000	3 000 000	71 058 000
Department					

substitute

Part 1.4

Chief Minister's	Chief Minister's	59 970 000	7 838 000	3 000 000	70 808 000
Department					

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3
Schedule 1
Page 6—

omit

Part 1.16

Department of Justice and Community	Justice and Community Safety	110 852 000	20 373 000	90 687 000	221 912 000
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substitute

Part 1.16

Department of Justice and Community	Justice and Community Safety	110 652 000	20 373 000	90 687 000	221 712 000
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4
Schedule 1,
Page 6—

omit

<i>Total</i>	1 435 298 000	279 669 000	365 813 000	2 080 780 000
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*appropriated
to departments*

substitute

<i>Total</i>	1 402 460 000	279 669 000	398 201 000	2 080 330 000
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*appropriated
to departments*

5
Schedule 1,
Page 6—

omit

<i>Total</i>	1 435 298 000	279 669 000	365 813 000	2 101 580 000
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appropriations

substitute

<i>Total</i>	1 402 460 000	279 669 000	398 201 000	2 101 130 000
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appropriations

Schedule 3

Appropriation Bill 2003-2004

Amendments circulated by Treasurer

1
Schedule 1,
Page 6—

omit

<i>Total</i>	1 435 298 000	279 669 000	365 813 000	2 080 780 000
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*appropriated
to departments*

substitute
Total 1 402 910 000 279 669 000 398 201 000 2 080 780 000
appropriated
to departments

2
Schedule 1,
Page 6—

omit
Total 1 435 298 000 279 669 000 365 813 000 2 101 580 000
appropriations

substitute
Total 1 402 910 000 279 669 000 398 201 000 2 101 580 000
appropriations

Schedule 4

Rates and Land Tax Amendment Bill 2003 (No 2)

Amendments circulated by Leader of the Opposition

1
Proposed new clause 3A
Page 2, line 9—
insert

3A Imposition
Section 13 (1)

substitute
 (1) This section is subject to section 13B (Imposition—rating system 2003-2004), section 24A (Unit subdivisions) and section 25A (Unit subdivisions—rating system 2003-2004).

2
Clause 4
Page 2, line 10—
[oppose the clause]

3
Clause 5
Page 2, line 16—
[oppose the clause]

4
Proposed new clause 5A
Page 3, line 6—
insert

5A New section 13B
insert

13B Imposition—rating system 2003-2004

(1) Section 13 does not apply in relation to a parcel of residential or rural land for the year beginning 1 July 2003.

(2) For the year beginning 1 July 2003, rates are imposed for a parcel of residential or rural land in accordance with the formula:

$$R \times 1.029.$$

(3) In this section:

R means—

(a) for a parcel of land that was rateable for the whole of the previous year—the amount of the rates payable for the parcel for that year; or

(b) for a parcel of land that was rateable for only part of the previous year—the amount of the rates that would have been payable for the parcel for that year if it had been rateable for the whole of the year; or

(c) for a parcel of land that was not rateable for the previous year—the amount of the rates that would have been payable for the parcel under section 13 for the year if the parcel had been rateable throughout the previous year.

(4) This section is subject to section 24A (Unit subdivisions) and section 25A (Unit subdivisions—rating system 2003-2004).

(5) This section expires on 1 July 2004.

(6) The Legislation Act, section 88 (Repeal does not end effect of transitional laws etc) applies to this section.

5

Clause 6

Page 3, line 7—

[oppose the clause]

6

Proposed new clause 7

Page 3, line 27—

insert

7 New section 25A

insert

25A Unit subdivisions—rating system 2003-2004

(1) This section applies to a parcel of land to which section 24A would, apart from subsection (2), apply.

(2) Section 24A (3) and (4) does not apply in relation to the year beginning 1 July 2003.

(3) For the year beginning 1 July 2003, rates are imposed for a unit that is part of a parcel of land subdivided by the registration of a units plan in accordance with the formula:

$$R \times 1.029.$$

(4) In this section:

R means—

(a) for unit that was rateable for the whole of the previous year—the amount of the rates payable for the unit for that year; or

(b) for a unit that was rateable for only part of the previous year—the amount of the rates that would have been payable for the unit for that year if it had been rateable for the whole of the year; or

(c) for a unit that was not rateable for the previous year—the amount of the rates that would have been payable for the unit under section 25 for the year if the unit had been rateable throughout the previous year.

(5) This section expires on 1 July 2004.

(6) The Legislation Act, section 88 (Repeal does not end effect of transitional laws etc) applies to this section.