



DEBATES

OF THE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

27 August 2003

Wednesday, 27 August 2003

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Wednesday, 27 August 2003

The Assembly met at 10.30 am.

(Quorum formed.)

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

**Petition
Block 12 section 2 Belconnen**

The following petition was lodged for presentation, by Ms Tucker, from 207 residents:

To the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

The petition of certain members of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly the inappropriate development on Block 12 Section 2 Belconnen, at the intersection of Coulter Drive and Nettlefold Street, and the threat to its magnificent remnant Yellow Box/Red Gum woodland.

Your petitioners therefore request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to withdraw the block from development and preserve the area as public open space.

The acting clerk having announced that the terms of the petition would be recorded in Hansard and a copy referred to the appropriate minister, the petition was received.

**Government Procurement (Principles) Guideline Amendment
Bill 2003**

Ms Dundas, pursuant to notice, as amended, by leave, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by acting clerk.

MS DUNDAS (10.34) I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

This bill is about the use of open source software by the ACT public sector, in place of proprietary software. The Australian Democrats have introduced similar bills in South Australia, New South Wales and the federal parliament to promote the purchase of open source software by governments.

The Hon. Ian Gilfillan in the South Australian Legislative Council used an excellent analogy to describe what is meant by the term “open source software”, and I will borrow that today. When you buy something you usually buy the right to use that thing in any way you see fit. For example, if you buy a car you can add roof racks or a tow bar, and you can paint the car a different colour if you want to. The key thing about buying

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something is that it becomes your property and you can do with it as you wish, even to the point of selling it on to someone else. You can even break a car into pieces and sell the pieces to different people.

Somehow we have been tricked into believing that software is a different kind of thing and many have accepted the idea that we do not own a piece of software once we buy it. In fact, some of the major suppliers of software have moved to a revenue model whereby it is necessary to continually pay rent for the right to use a product that has been purchased.

Even more strangely, we are not allowed to see the workings of the software so that we can check to make sure that it is doing what we expect or want it to do. If I continue with the car analogy, this would be equivalent to buying a car but never being allowed to look under the bonnet to see what is inside. It is indeed a very strange situation where people are paying astonishingly large amounts of money on an on-going basis for very few rights. In many cases people are not even allowed to talk about their experiences with using a piece of software because of the narrow terms of the licence agreement that comes with that software.

In response to this and many other problems in the computer software industry, a worldwide movement of people has developed a set of competing software products that do not have restrictive licence agreements. In fact, the most common clause associated with open source software is that you can use the software in any way you wish, and modify it as you see fit, provided you include a full copy of the source code every time you sell the software on to another party. As the source code of this software is available for anyone to see at any time, the code is robust and secure.

In the ACT, the open source software movement presents a wonderful opportunity for us. Our universities could teach computer science around open source products, allowing students to examine in intimate detail the workings of established products. Every student assignment has the potential to contribute to the body of functioning open source systems. Simply by forwarding their completed work to the relevant open source project, their code could become part of a greater work in publication.

It is worth noting that some of the world's most widely used and recognised pieces of open source software have been developed right here in the ACT. For example, the Samba project, which allows Linux computers to seamlessly integrate with windows networks, was developed by a team primarily based here in Canberra.

Because the open source paradigm uses a different business model, it is possible for student computers to be fully programmed with operating systems, development tools, and working application software at no cost to the student. A lot of open source software is free software. This fact alone could save the ACT education sector many thousands of dollars in licence fees.

Our local information technology industry is ideally placed to develop and maintain open source systems. Every government development project could leverage the efforts of previous projects by standing on the shoulders of the work that has been done before. Open source code is inherently portable and can be compiled to run on any computer

architecture, or be customised to suit any department's specific needs. Thus, work developed for one agency can easily be carried over to another under this paradigm.

It is also simple to shift from one software development company to another if the source code is readily available. Too often, a lack of access to source code has led to an expensive duplication of effort when customised software has required modification following purchase.

Software licence fees are a significant cost for our schools and our government departments. Increased use of open source software would reduce our spending on licence fees, and the savings could be used to improve our IT capacity. Open source software also needs less sophisticated hardware, so fewer equipment upgrades would be needed, saving yet more money.

The funds that could be saved on licence fees could then be used to expand the excellent digital divide program, which teaches computer skills to people left behind by the IT revolution. Our schools would also have more money for workstations and for better IT support for teachers.

The ACT government has declared that it is keen to promote the development of the IT industry. The discussion paper for the economic white paper emphasised the development of the IT sector. The bill I present today would encourage open source software producers in the ACT to develop products for use by the ACT government, because they would know they had a decent chance of winning software tenders. From that base, our IT specialists could develop software products for sale interstate and overseas, along with the support and training for their customers.

Some companies already make it their standard practice to supply source code with any delivered product, including a subsidiary of the international IT giant Fujitsu. Changing the licensing conditions to make these products open source would not be a significant imposition on businesses that operate in this fashion.

Where the impact would be significant is in reducing the enormous sums of money currently going to a small number of large American companies. It is common in the computer industry to hear frustrated IT specialists talking about the Microsoft tax—the extra charge paid to Microsoft every time a computer is purchased, no matter how that computer is being used.

Mr Speaker, this bill is a simple one, yet it has the potential to do great things for the ACT. As I have outlined, it simply requires procurement people in public authorities to consider the alternative of using open source software and, wherever practical, to adopt open source in preference to proprietary software. This would save us millions of dollars in the long term, support the ACT IT industry, promote more democratic principles in respect of how we use computers here in the ACT and lead the way across the nation.

I commend this bill to the Assembly.

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

Older Canberrans

Debate resumed from 20 August 2003, on motion by **Mr Cornwell**:

That this Assembly expresses its grave concern at the Government's lack of commitment to addressing the needs of Older Canberrans, particularly through the provision of aged care facilities and calls on the Government to:

- (1) give priority to aged care facility applications in planning policies and processes;
- (2) be proactive by listing twelve potential sites for future aged care facilities so that applications for Commonwealth funding for beds can be expedited;
- (3) plan a Step-Down facility for southern Canberra;
- (4) improve the location, frequency and quantum of respite care places.

and on the amendment moved by **Mr Corbell**:

Omit all words after "That this Assembly expresses its", substitute the following:
"concern at the increasing difficulties older Canberrans are facing in accessing appropriate accommodation and:

- (1) Notes that the ACT Government:
 - (a) has given priority to determining applications for direct sale of land for aged care facility proposals providing for approximately 269 beds;
 - (b) has been proactive in initiating work for sites in Belconnen and Tuggeranong with the potential for a minimum of a further 250 beds;
 - (c) has allocated \$5.15 million for a sub-acute facility for the ACT providing post acute rehabilitation, psycho-geriatric and transitional care services;
 - (d) provides respite care through the Burrangiri Crisis Respite Centre for the Aged and has provided \$450,000 for a new pilot program to provide flexible family support for people who care for older Canberrans.
- (2) Urges the ACT and Commonwealth Governments to continue to adopt and implement measures to address this growing level of demand for appropriate accommodation for older Canberrans and their families."

and on **Ms Tucker's** amendments to **Mr Corbell's** proposed amendment:

- (1) Add new point
- (2) Calls on the ACT Government to report to the Assembly on the extent to which the above measures meet the unmet needs in all sectors of the population of older Canberrans, and strategies and timelines to meet the remaining unmet need;"
- (2) and renumber point 2 as point 3.

MS DUNDAS (10.42): Mr Speaker, I will speak to all of the amendments and the substantive motion. This debate got quite heated when it was being conducted last week. I am glad that we have now had a week to perhaps cool off as we again address this very important issue of how we care for older Canberrans.

I believe that the original motion moved by Mr Cornwell was a tad prescriptive by specifying, without providing any backup evidence, the number of beds that are needed in a specific area. I think this could limit the government in respect of how it places future aged-care facilities across Canberra.

Mr Corbell has moved an amendment that urges the ACT and Commonwealth governments to continue to adopt and implement measures to address the growing level of demand for appropriate accommodation for older Canberrans and their families, and I think that is a very important part of what we are talking about today.

A number of elderly people that I speak to see nursing homes as a place to go to die and it is not the kind of accommodation that they are looking for. They are looking for support, but they are looking for it in their homes and in their communities as opposed to being continually forced to move into a place that they feel will limit their freedoms and abilities and that will prepare them for something that they are not looking forward to. I think the greater debate about future aged-care facilities needs to recognise this—that we are not just looking at nursing homes; that we are looking at supporting older Canberrans in the ways that they want to be supported.

Demographic profiles that have come out over the last number of weeks clearly highlight that our population is getting older and that in the future the bulk of our population will consist of people of older age. We are living longer. The baby boomers are now looking at retirement and looking at their future. I think we can all appreciate the fact that baby boomers do not want to be cooped up in a nursing facility. They would prefer to continue their freedom and enjoy the retirement they have been looking forward to.

But that does not mean we should be ignoring this significant problem. The amendment moved by Ms Tucker calls on the government to report to the Assembly about measures being taken to address that need. The strategies and the time lines that are being put in place are incredibly important. We need information for better future planning.

I will be supporting the amendments moved by Mr Corbell and Ms Tucker. The motion is quite prescriptive and restrictive and I believe that the amendments will make it broader and allow greater debate.

I would also like to comment on some of the things that were said earlier in this debate. As I said, it did get quite heated. I think Mrs Cross made the comment that we need to value older people, and I certainly agree with that statement. But she also went on to indicate that they are also voters and, hence, are very important. Aged persons do vote and that is important, but we need to remember the part of our community that does not vote. People under the age of 18 are just as important as everybody else in our community and should not be devalued because of their lack of legal status. I was just a bit concerned to hear that comment being bandied around. We have had that debate long and hard many times in this Assembly.

As I said, I welcome the debate on aged-care facilities. It is something that we need to be planning for. We need to be putting steps in place quite quickly to deal with the ageing population. That is why I think Ms Tucker's amendment to Mr Corbell's amendment is

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quite pertinent and hopefully will provide us with the information we need for better future planning.

MRS DUNNE (10.47): Mr Speaker, this is indeed a very important issue. Only yesterday the lovely mauve government publication *Towards the Canberra spatial plan* was released. We seem to be moving inexorably but very slowly towards a spatial plan.

There is a very revealing graph on page 19 of the publication which shows the change in the ACT population between 2000 and 2032. Just as an example, in 2000 the number of people aged 75 to 79 is about 5,500 but by 2032 that will increase to nearly 17,000. That is just one example of the shift in the demographic profile towards older age. The really revealing figures in this table show that this year the population in the ACT aged 85 and over is about 2,500 but by 2032 it will be 15,000.

I support Mr Cornwell's motion and oppose Mr Corbell's amendment, which goes against the spirit of the motion. It does everything to anodise the motion and becomes a self-congratulatory backslapping exercise. But I support finding a place in the motion for Ms Tucker's sensible amendment about process, requiring that the Assembly be reported to regularly on progress.

The issue of aged care is a very daunting one. I disagree with Ms Dundas that Mr Cornwell's original motion is unnecessarily prescriptive. The motion asks that priority be given to aged-care facility applications through the planning process. The Minister for Planning said he was not going to upset the planning process just for some old people and how dare we propose that these things be expedited. If it were in the interest of the government, it could be expedited through the planning process.

I propose to give some examples of where the planning process has bogged down and where we have not addressed the needs of aged people currently in the system and people aspiring to live in suitable aged-care accommodation. Ms Dundas is right, Mr Speaker: when we talk about aged-care accommodation, we are not talking just about nursing homes. Current research indicates that 7 per cent of the aged population will at some stage have recourse to a nursing home. But that means that there is another 93 per cent of the population who at some stage in their life will want more supported housing than the sort they currently have—housing which is more suited to their needs and not a rambling empty nest with an accumulation of memories and dust. They do not want a house and a garden that they cannot manage.

People need and want the flexibility to make choices. If they want to stay in their family home of 50 years, that is fine. But they need to have the opportunity at a time of their own choosing and not because of extreme circumstances to find something which is more suitable.

I would like to draw on a personal example. My parents have been married for 56 years and up until last year they had lived in the one house. I might say that this was not in the ACT. For some time my family had been saying that perhaps they should look for something else because their house was on a very steep block on a very steep hill and had become increasingly difficult to manage. Over the years they had adjusted their lifestyle and managed that block.

They came to us about nine months ago and said, “We think we have found the place that we want to move to.” For 15 years my brother and I had been saying, “Why don’t you think about this, why don’t you think about that?” They did not want to do it. But they found the right place and it was at a time of their choosing. They said, “What do you think about it?” and I said, “If you’re happy, do it. Don’t put it off because something might happen, you might get sick and that opportunity is gone and you will have to settle for something which is not quite right.” They have made a fantastic transfer from their family home of 56 years to the right place—the right place at the right time, at the time of their choosing, and they have made the right decision. But there are many people who are not that fortunate.

Mr Speaker, the whole process in the ACT is being bogged down by bureaucracy, and I will refer to a couple of examples. We have had an ongoing media war with the Minister for Planning over the application of Calvary Hospital for aged-care facilities, including 65 high-intensity beds. There are other things around that. We have had this minister putting out press releases saying, “We have made an in-principle agreement to do this.” This in-principle agreement had been in existence for nearly two years before Mr Corbell thought, because of the pressure he was under, he had to look like he was doing something. So he gave in-principle agreement to something that had already been agreed to in principle. But giving in-principle agreement to something does not progress the case of Calvary where ongoing Commonwealth funding for 65 high-care beds was approved almost two years ago. This only has a two-year life and after that the Commonwealth is quite at liberty to say, “Well, we’ll give the funding somewhere else.”

Two years have been wasted while Calvary has been trying to establish aged-care beds opposite the Calvary campus. There has been a whole lot of community consultation, which I think is very unfortunate. I know that the community’s role in this is very important and the community needs to be taken with us, but I do not think we have managed to do this. I think discussions in the community about the level of density are inappropriate when you are looking at what the long-term benefit for the whole community might be. A few residents in Bruce might be upset that a more dense building will be located close to their houses. They will stand in the way of a much-needed resource and the whole of the Belconnen and possibly the whole of the ACT community will be gravely disadvantaged if we do not make progress.

There are other examples. Members, and especially Belconnen members, would be aware of the proposal by Madison Lifestyle Communities to take over the decommissioned holes 19 to 27 of the Belconnen golf course. They have come up with what seems to be a very innovative project with high-quality, adaptable, supportable housing. They have a whole range of housing options, including nursing home facilities, so that if people need to they can make the transmission from one style of housing to another.

We have to consider the dislocation that is created when one partner has to go to a nursing home. If the partner who does not need to go to a nursing home can live close by, that person’s whole life and means of adjusting to their lifelong partner being in a nursing home are made that much easier.

Mr Speaker, the planning authorities and the planning minister have stymied this proposal for a whole lot of reasons, most of which are spurious. They say that the

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proposed development is unsuitable because of its isolation. But when you actually run the pedometer over the footpaths, it is in fact 1.5 kilometres to the nearest shop at Holt, whereas the government's proposal to build aged-care facilities down on Lake Ginninderra is 2.7 kilometres from the local shops.

So we have got one set of rules for the government, and that is okay. But if a private developer wants to come in and build high-quality developments, you are told no. The best reason that the planners have for rejecting this proposal, and I quote from a letter, is "concerns that agreement to the proposal would open the floodgate to similar proposals". Mr Speaker, dare I say that in this town, where imitation is the highest form of flattery and where there is a crying and increasing need for high-quality and flexible accommodation for aged people, we do not have that option.

You would stop someone doing it out of mere jealousy. The developers are told, "You have a high-quality proposal for aged-care people and if you get away with it somebody else may want to do it." This is the politics of envy brought to a high plane, Mr Speaker, and it should be stamped out. The planning processes need to be reflective of the increasing needs of the ACT community to have high-quality aged-care facilities and they should be made to adjust to those demands.

MR PRATT (10.57): Mr Speaker, I rise to support Mr Cornwell's motion. We are fast becoming an aged community and it is essential that governments around the country make all efforts to ensure that infrastructure is keeping pace with the growing trend of increasing numbers of aged who will be dependent on others, who will be dependent on the community.

Twinning this concern with another, I would also point out that we as a community must all lament the breaking down of the traditional family unit as the building block of society. We have to recognise that this is simply a fact of life. The family unit in more traditional times instinctively looked after their elderly for longer periods, up to that excruciating moment when it was necessary to place them in collective community care.

The mobility of society is a reality and this has placed great pressure on families and has led to an even greater need for collective community care. Like all Australian communities, we, too, in the ACT face these increasing pressures and demands. The Labor government has a responsibility to get to grips with these challenges, but I am afraid that all I can see is prevarication by our planning authorities and this Labor government.

Mr Speaker, to demonstrate the concerns expressed to me by the community, I want to talk about a particular project in Monash which is at least on the drawing board. I refer to the Christian City Church. It has been demonstrated that the government is unable to make a decision about the price of the land for this project and this is needed before any further planning and development can take place. The initiatives that have been planned for this land by the Christian City Church are worthwhile for the Canberra community and, in particular, my electorate of Brindabella.

I refer to the long drawn out saga with PALM over identified blocks of land in Monash, adjacent to the Mary MacKillop College. I believe that the Christian City Church initiatives include aged person units, community and youth infrastructure, vocational

education and training facilities and, of course, religious facilities for the community. This is a very valuable all-embracing community program.

Mr Speaker, while the government is stalling on this project they are denying the people of the Brindabella electorate a wide range of services that are planned to be on offer. This is simply not good enough and demonstrates typical Labor government prevarication.

Why has the government stalled on this project? This begs the question: is the government deliberately not making a decision on the value of the land or is it simply unable to be decisive on such planning and land management issues? Is this a cynical pricing exercise or is it just bureaucratic indecision? The community is frustrated with this stalling and support the Christian City Church in their plight. Groups such as the Tuggeranong Community Council have expressed their concern to me and they urge the government to make a decision on the value of the land to allow the Christian City Church to begin developing these services for both their own use and for the good of the community.

I support Mr Cornwell's motion. I deeply criticise Mr Corbell's amendment as being merely a load of meaningless padding. It is important that we move quickly to get to grips with the ACT community's aged-care program. I would urge the government to move quickly to sort out these pricing issues and to make decisions which are going to benefit our aged care.

Ms Tucker's amendments to Mr Corbell's proposed amendment agreed to.

MR STEFANIAK (11.02): Mr Speaker, I will make some brief comments on Mr Cornwell's motion and on Mr Corbell's amendment, as amended. I think it is painfully obvious that the ACT is going to see a dramatic increase in the number of aged persons. Every western society is experiencing that and we are no different here. In fact, I have seen figures that indicate that by 2025 the number of persons over 65 will probably double. The number is certainly going to go up a lot. There will be more and more demands for APUs and other appropriate accommodation for aged persons.

Mr Pratt spoke of a proposal in his electorate. There are a number of potential sites and proposals in relation to our electorate of Ginninderra. One site I have some knowledge of is the proposed development of part of the Belconnen golf course. Obviously golfers have concerns about some supposed improvements to the existing 18 holes. I went to a very well-attended meeting back in June at which the developer spoke about making some improvement to the golf course which were part and parcel of his proposal for an aged complex. He certainly took on board the suggestions, the comments and indeed the fears in relation to the golf course. People were particularly keen to save several greens and I think that was very much achieved.

But I do not think there were too many people there who did not realise and accept that holes 19 to 27 were very much surplus to requirements, were an absolute drain on the club and the club's future viability, and had no real other recreational use. Indeed, yesterday we heard the government's comments about the use of water and, of course, golf courses take a lot of water, be it normal or even brown water. With that in mind, it

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would be really quite ludicrous to be watering an unproductive third nine. So there seemed to be pretty much a consensus that holes 19 to 27 were gone.

This proposed development was run past me some months ago, and it seemed to have a lot of merit. PALM and the minister seem to be putting up a whole lot of opposition—perhaps even for opposition’s sake—to what could be a very sensible and very good development. Maybe certain things need to be modified. Mrs Dunne has shown me a list of issues raised by PALM. One was that “the proposed development will create a small isolated pocket of development on the extreme western periphery of Belconnen”. I do not think the developer or indeed the people at the golf course are particularly concerned about that. Indeed, a lot of other parts of Belconnen are on the extreme western periphery. I live in a house very close to the periphery, as indeed do you, Mr Speaker, and I do not think that particularly concerns a lot of people.

I was quite impressed with how the proposed development would assist people. There was talk about even running their own bus if ACTION was not going to get involved. I saw it as being potentially excellent for not only the aged people but for other people in the region. The nearby Kippax Centre, probably the Charnwood shops and a number of other people would significantly benefit from that.

PALM commented that residential areas need accessibility to recreation, retail, public transport, et cetera. I have addressed some of those issues. They also said that allowing the proposed development would mean the loss of an existing restricted access recreation area. I do not think anyone is using it at present. I do not think anyone is really complaining about the loss of the nine holes because they regard that as inevitable. At any rate, I think we are probably going to lose a lot of other recreational areas through water restrictions.

This actually seems to me to be an example of a sensible proposal. I am sure there are many others which, with maybe some further tweaking—yes, I’m sure it probably needs that—would actually work very well. I think PALM and the minister need to think a lot more laterally in relation to this issue of aged care; otherwise we will have an even greater crisis on our hands in terms of the increasing number of aged persons—and a hell of a lot of us are getting into that category. A lot of our fellow citizens in Canberra are. That is simply something that’s just going to continue.

I think we do need a much more creative approach to this problem than is currently being shown by the government or by the department.

MR SPEAKER: If we were to deal with this amendment now, Mr Cornwell, when we come to the question that the motion, as amended, be agreed to, you could close the debate then.

MR CORNWELL (11.07): Yes, that’s tidier, thank you.

MR SPEAKER: You can speak to Mr Corbell’s amendment on its own, if you want to.

MR CORNWELL: I might do that, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: But you will confine yourself to Mr Corbell’s amendment, won’t you?

MR CORNWELL: I shall indeed, sir, of course.

The term “self-congratulatory” has been used in respect of Mr Corbell’s amendment. I can do no more, sir, than support it, because it is a most appropriate term for the amendment that the Minister for Planning and Minister for Health has moved. Frankly, nothing in your comments when moving this amendment, nothing in your defence, has justified the inaction of this government in relation to these aged-care beds, and nothing in your motion would justify faith from the people of the ACT that you are going to do something about it.

Let me just analyse what you’ve said in here. The first point is: “ ... notes that the ACT Government ... has given priority to determining applications”. The second dot point is: “ ... has been proactive in initiating work for sites”. A third point is: “ ... has provided \$450,000 for a new pilot program”. These are not initiatives; these are ideas; these are plans. There is nothing tangible in anything that you have placed in your amendment; there is nothing tangible, I would suggest to you, in what you have said. There is nothing definite at all.

I was puzzled that you also said in your speech—and I was heartened by this, I might add—that you had agreed to request the federal Minister for Ageing, Mr Andrews, to engage in and to ensure that ACT officials and Commonwealth officials engage in joint planning exercises. I was much comforted, Mr Speaker, by that because at least, with the Commonwealth involved, something might be done. If it’s left to this ACT Labor government, nothing will be done.

Indeed, my doubts were confirmed in the very next sentence. After the talk about the Commonwealth and the ACT engaging, Mr Corbell then went on to say that he had asked the Land Development Agency to initiate a review. Here we are, back again to the artilleryman’s defence: we’re gunna do this and we’re gunna do that.

I am extremely disappointed, given that we face a crisis in this city in relation to aged-care beds. We have 200 phantom beds at the moment; we have another 100 coming online. I would remind members that, for every person in a hospital rather than nursing home-type accommodation, the cost for fewer than 35 days is \$968 per day. In a non-pensioner, high-care residential aged-care setting, the cost is \$203.95 per day. \$968 or \$203.95? Source? A letter from Mr Corbell dated 4 June this year, in response to a question I raised in estimates.

How can any responsible government allow that sort of money to be wasted by accommodating nursing home-type patients in a hospital setting and then have the temerity, Mr Speaker, to jump up and whinge about the lack of funding that the Commonwealth is providing for health care in this territory? It simply is not justifiable. I would like an explanation why you continually drag the chain on these nursing home beds.

Of course, an initiative was taken, Mr Speaker—no doubt, part of the amendment moved by Mr Corbell—strangely enough, yesterday. With the debate coming up this morning, what do I hear from your radio station this morning, Mr Corbell? Approval has been given to Southern Cross Homes for an aged-care facility in Garran. I am aware this has

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been in negotiation for some time. Naturally I was impressed. However, I obtained a copy of Mr Corbell's media release. I'm sorry, we're back to the old square again—in principle.

Mrs Dunne: In-principle agreement. How long has this been going on—3½ years?

MR CORNWELL: At least. Once again, we're determining, we're initiating, we're having pilot programs, we're agreeing in principle—nothing definite. Nothing has been brought forward that we could possibly say is a tangible move on what is an existing crisis in aged care in this city, and which will be an escalating crisis as time goes by. We have already waited, years in some cases, for these facilities to come online. They still haven't come online. It's only reasonable that, as our population is ageing, the demand will increase, while this Labor government does nothing to solve the problem, except, as I say, have in-principle agreements, have arrangements to determine applications, to initiate work looking for sites and new pilot programs. This is simply not acceptable.

I am disappointed that it looks as though Mr Corbell's amendment is going to be supported by the Greens and the Democrats I have no comment to make on their input. Ms Tucker did criticise Mr Corbell and me for a lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reference in these aged-care facilities. All I can say in response, Ms Tucker, is that I don't discriminate.

Therefore, I would simply remind the Greens and the Democrats that those who support this Labor government will have to live as well with the consequences of the inaction of the Labor Party in doing nothing in this crisis of aged-care accommodation. I repeat: it can only escalate as the number of our aged people increase. I can assure you that this side of the house will be unrelenting in our determination to see that you people fulfil the responsibilities of any government in relation to the aged, vulnerable people of this community.

Question put:

That **Mr Corbell's** amendment, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 10

Noes 7

Mr Berry	Ms MacDonald	Mrs Burke	Mr Smyth
Mr Corbell	Mr Quinlan	Mr Cornwell	Mr Stefaniak
Ms Dundas	Mr Stanhope	Mrs Cross	
Ms Gallagher	Ms Tucker	Mrs Dunne	
Mr Hargreaves	Mr Wood	Mr Pratt	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

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

Question put:

That the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 10

Noes 7

Mr Berry	Ms MacDonald	Mrs Burke	Mr Smyth
Mr Corbell	Mr Quinlan	Mr Cornwell	Mr Stefaniak
Ms Dundas	Mr Stanhope	Mrs Cross	
Ms Gallagher	Ms Tucker	Mrs Dunne	
Mr Hargreaves	Mr Wood	Mr Pratt	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Landcare awards

MR HARGREAVES (11.22): I move the motion standing in my name on the notice paper relating to the 2003 ACT Landcare awards, which reads:

That the Assembly congratulates the winners of the 2003 ACT Landcare Awards and recognises the great work done by those involved in the Landcare movement to address the serious environmental challenges facing our region.

I'm moving this motion basically for two reasons. The first reason is to draw the public's attention to Landcare issues, generally speaking; and, secondly, to give public recognition to people who have indulged themselves in their free time in looking after the environment and land generally. I wanted to actually take the opportunity of naming them in the debate, and I encourage other members across the chamber and on the front bench to actually follow suit in terms of recognising what benefit Landcare groups actually do.

I don't propose to use this motion for anything more than that, Mr Speaker. I'm not trying to make any political points. I just wish to point out to the general public that Landcare is a way in which people can get involved. It costs next to nothing. You won't see the fruits of your labour for 20 years, but when you do see the fruits of your labour it's a brilliant experience.

Mr Speaker, I wanted to relate two specific experiences I had in recent times, since I've been in this place, in contact with Landcare groups. The most recent one was out on the Cotter Road some months after the bushfires had been through. It was only a couple of weeks ago that I did this. I went out to what could only be described as a mega tree planting exercise. A whole stack of people went out there, gave up their time and planted row after row of eucalypts on this particular property.

Mr Speaker, I spoke to the people out there and asked them why on earth they would be doing that. They said, "Because we just want to look after the land; it's where we live." It was as simple as that. I think I might have mentioned to Ms Dundas, when the Planning and Environment Committee went to Crookwell recently, I actually noticed in

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quite a few places we went past that row after row after row of trees had been planted. They wouldn't have been anything more than 30 centimetres high.

Clearly, there's a movement right across the country for people to just put their labour into putting trees back where, over the 200 years that we've occupied this bit of ground, we've actually mowed the things down.

The other occasion, Mr Speaker, was—I would have only been in this place about 12 months and Mr Smyth might have been Minister for Urban Services at the time—when we had this stouch over Templestowe Avenue at Conder. He would remember that one. I wanted to have Mentone View continued and completed. The government of the day said, “No, we're not going to do that. Blah, blah, blah.” We had some discussions about what is now Conder 4A. We talked about some land at the back of Templestowe Avenue, which has now been developed.

But, I have to say, you've got to give credit where it's due in these sorts of subjects. There are a pair of creeks that come together in a V, and in there were some remnants of old growth woodland. If my memory serves me correctly, they were yellow box. There might have been some red gum, but I think it was yellow box. When we pointed this out to Mr Smyth, he readily took that off the plan for residential development.

What that did was actually create a sort of mindset. The Conder Landcare group—and this is the relevance of it—decided to take on the idea of developing the wetlands there. I confess, Mr Speaker, I had never heard of Landcare before I came across the Conder Landcare group; I'd seen the product of their labour with what looked like plastic tree factories all over the place—not understanding, of course, that there was a little sapling in each one of them.

But what they actually did was agitate and badger the then government, badger us and badger everybody to have a seamless piece of the environment go from Tom Roberts Avenue right up into the hill. It meant that the government of the day, instead of putting a road right through the middle of this, actually turned the road to the left and joined up Templestowe Avenue with Tom Roberts Avenue, allowing, I have to say, the progression of the wetlands at the bottom of the hill, through grasslands and into the forestry and the nature park.

You have to congratulate the government for actually doing it, which I do quite readily. But of course the major amount of credit has to go to the Conder Landcare group, because without them saying this is what it should be like, this is what it was like, this is what we want to put it back to, even if it means re-creating it, it would possibly have never have happened.

Mr Speaker, the Landcare awards provide an ideal opportunity to recognise and celebrate the great work done by those involved in the Landcare movement to address serious environmental challenges facing our region. I had the great pleasure of presenting the 2003 ACT Landcare awards on behalf of the Chief Minister and Minister for Environment at a ceremony last week at the Brassey Hotel.

For the entertainment of guests, Mark Carmody was the MC. I did have a discussion with him about when you plant your tomatoes. We are agreed, in fact, that Melbourne Cup

day, for you people who wish to plant tomatoes for your consumption, is the day they should go in. But you should recycle your laundry water on those tomatoes, and Mark Carmody agrees with all that.

I would like to commend the many land carers who have made a contribution to maintaining the environmental health of the ACT region. The Stanhope government is committed to continuing support for the community groups and individuals who devote so much time and energy to improving our land and water resources.

I would like to publicly once again congratulate the winners of the 2003 ACT Landcare awards and note that they now become finalists in the national Landcare awards to be held next year.

How sad it is when the media won't pick up instances like this, but they'll put on some of the garbage that you actually see on the news from time to time. It was hoped that there would have been better media coverage of these awards and appropriate media coverage of these awards. It is to their shame that the Fourth Estate didn't pick it up.

Mr Speaker, I would like to tell you and the Assembly the names of the winners of the 2003 ACT Landcare awards. Rosemary Blemings won the national Landcare individual award. Buttles Creek willow removal and revegetation project won the Murray Darling Basin Commission river care award. I found out something the other day—I don't know if other people know this—within the Murray Darling basin, Canberra is the biggest population centre.

Mrs Dunne: Der!

MR HARGREAVES: Mrs Dunne says, "Der!" I would ask you, Mr Speaker, to ask Mrs Dunne at your leisure whether or not she can spell it. I don't think she can spell der, let alone know what it means. I make the observation for Mrs Dunne's edifice—and I can see this is going to be a great day; I look forward to this day, Mr Speaker, it's going to be a great day; and now I'm going to re-organise the speaking list so I can enjoy it.

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Mr Hargreaves just mentioned edifice. I think he actually meant edification, edifice being—

MR SPEAKER: That's not a point of order. Mr Hargreaves direct your comments through the chair. Members of the opposition will cease interjecting.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks, Mr Speaker. I'm not surprised to hear Mr Smyth speak of me and edification in the same breath. Can I just say that one of the interesting facts—and the reason why I'm bringing it forward is for Mrs Dunne's edification or, should I say, with some hope, effigy—no, wrong word, again, Mr Speaker—that, in fact, that particular issue about us being the biggest population centre in the Murray Darling basin ought to be put out there in the community a bit more. People just don't tweak to that. If somebody had asked me that question, I would have said yes, but I didn't have it in my mindset everyday. I didn't know, for example, that we pull out 7 per cent of the water, but we put 3½ per cent of it back. The others don't do that. We should be actually saying that a bit more.

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Mr Speaker, the Cooleman Ridge park care group, the Mount Taylor park care group and the Farrer Ridge park care group came together and won the Alcoa Landcare community group award. It is interesting, of course, that those ridges are almost a series of saddles, and I was pleased to see that the Mount Taylor park care group featured in that. Birdwatch Greening Australia won the Telstra country-wide Landcare research award. The bush friendly nursery scheme won the Landcare Australia local government award.

I was really chuffed, I have to say, Mr Speaker, when Lanyon High School won the Westpac Landcare education award. It's nice to see one of our schools actually compete and win this sort of recognition.

Dr and Mrs Griffin from Uriarra Station won the Rural Press Landcare primary producer award. Southern ACT catchment group won the Sensis Landcare catchment award, and Friends of Grasslands won the bush care nature conservation award. You'd almost expect the Friends of Grasslands to win something because they're just brilliant, in my view.

Mr Speaker, protecting the condition of our land and our water is a serious issue for the whole community. Our recent experience with the January bushfire and the continuing drought highlights the importance of commitment and direct involvement by the community, and I'd like to once again congratulate those winners.

I think one of the other things that struck me about Landcare, Mr Speaker—there are certainly some people that are paid employees of Landcare—was that, essentially, they're volunteers. Essentially, they're like us. What would we do on a Sunday morning or a Saturday morning, after or just before we've done the shopping? Do we go for a walk, do we go and play footy, do we go and watch footy? Why not go and plant a tree? Why not go down to the wetlands and clean up the plastic bags that are floating around. Loads of people come out on Clean Up Australia Day, and I'm encouraged to see loads of people come out for Landcare.

I ask the Assembly to raise the profile of the activities of Landcare. Indeed, if that occurs, then I will have been successful with this motion. As I say, I don't see this as a political footy; I don't see this as a table tennis game. I invite members who feel so inclined to support the work that Landcare does and to support the provision of awards to recognise the people who are leaders in these fields. Many of us do our little bit, but not too many of us are called for leadership roles in these things. You see the quality of our community, Mr Speaker, when you see the sorts of people that have taken out these awards. Mr Speaker, I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MRS DUNNE (11.35): Mr Speaker, I commend Mr Hargreaves for bringing this matter to the notice of the Assembly, as it is very important. I am glad that, as a recent convert to the virtues of Landcare, he is enthusiastic, and I hope that that enthusiasm will increase.

There are a few things I feel that I need to correct, Mr Speaker. Perhaps it was a bit rude of me to say "Der!" across the room, but it does say something about the environmental credentials of the Labor Party that one of its longstanding, elected members had not realised that Canberra is the biggest city inside the Murray-Darling Basin. This is the

reason why the previous government worked so hard to ensure that the ACT had a seat at the table of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission.

Something I said in my maiden speech was that, as a sort of backroom person, one of the things I was most proud of was getting us a seat at the table. I talked about the importance of Canberra in this on a number of occasions at the Shed a Tier conference on the Murray-Darling Basin. Only on Monday evening, when I was talking to a *Canberra Times* journalist about the Murray-Darling initiatives, I made the point about the importance of Canberra's role in the basin because of the fact that we are the largest city situated inside the basin.

Unfortunately, the *Canberra Times* did not end up publishing the whole story, which goes to Mr Hargreaves' point about the media not picking up these important environmental issues. It is a shame that the fault will stay with Mr Hargreaves, who did not bother to pick it up. It is a shame, especially when you see how much work is going on after the bushfires, that he does not pay tribute to the hundreds of hours of volunteer work done in the name of Landcare by ordinary people across the ACT.

I used to be a Landcare volunteer. I am very remiss now because I do not find the time to get out on a Sunday morning to do the work that I used to do. It is a matter of some regret that we are supposedly the leaders in the community but cannot find the time to do what I know my next-door neighbour does on a regular basis. It is not just planting trees; I really have to set that right. It is lots of hard yakka. What the people in our own electorate do for the most part is clean up the mess that is left behind. It is the weeding; it is the taking out of the thistles; it is the dealing with the African love grass and the Chilean needle grass.

There has to be cooperation between government agencies to make Landcare happen, but government does not have the resources to do what land carers do. It would cost millions and millions of dollars, which governments across the country do not have. It is not just planting trees; it is the huge amount of salinity work. When I was an adviser to the Minister for Environment, I spent an awe-inspiring couple of days visiting salinity projects along the Murray-Darling Basin.

But all of that work will come to nothing unless the people who make the policy get the policy right. The hundreds of thousands of hours of hundreds of people across the country, in the 14 years or so that Landcare has been operating, will come to nought unless we get our water policy and our salinity policy right and unless the governments of the Murray Darling Basin come to the table as one, make some really hard decisions, spend some money and forgo a few things. Unless we do this, all the hundreds and thousands of hours of work done by hundreds of people across the south-east region of New South Wales and across Queensland, Victoria and South Australia will come to nothing.

When we are looking at the national Landcare awards, we should be paying tribute to people like the Cooleman Ridge people, who have weeded and taken out thistles for years and years; the Friends of Aranda Bushland; my own Landcare group, the Ginninderra Catchment Group, who were the first in the ACT to put pressure on to have the willows taken out along the creeks. That was done essentially by contractors—but with the support of the Landcare groups all the time.

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That was a daring policy decision. There were a lot of residents who were unhappy and uncertain about what it would mean. They were quite used to having the willows; they looked quite nice and they had their place. But taking out the willows has opened up Ginninderra Creek and made it a place which is accessible, cleaner and with a much higher environmental value than it had five years ago. Those are brave policy decisions that only came about because of the volunteerism of people of the ACT.

There are a few issues that need to be addressed about Landcare. As I have said, governments across this country do not have the money to spend on Landcare. It would not be happening if it were not for volunteers. But there are issues of the support of government: it has to be ongoing, and there has to be a very strong commitment. There has been strong commitment by successive ACT governments for Landcare, but there have also been ongoing problems in relation to insurance.

We must not let problems relating to insurance stop the vital and important work of land carers. As leaders of opinion in the community, we should be reinforcing and affirming the great work that they do and, as Mr Hargreaves said, trying to encourage the media to take an interest in what land carers do because what they do they do for all of us, not just today but for generations to come. Underpinning that need to be the policy grunt and the policy will to make the work that they do have longevity. I commend the motion to the house.

MS DUNDAS (11.42): I rise to add the support of the ACT Democrats to the winners of the ACT Landcare awards for 2003 and for the Landcare program in general. Landcare volunteers put in hard work to protect native vegetation and restore the environmental quality of degraded areas where governments cannot afford to take action because of the scale of the problem they are faced with. There are over 100 Landcare groups in the ACT and region, and thousands of volunteers spend their weekends doing on-the-ground work.

Today we are congratulating the Southern ACT Catchment Group, who won the Sensis Landcare catchment award for their work in the Tuggeranong-Tharwa and Weston-Woden subcatchment plans. Implementation of the plans has already begun, including community education work to help ACT residents see how activities anywhere in a catchment can affect water quality downstream. That is incredibly important in letting residents know the impact they are having on the environment around them and how important it is to monitor that impact and, hopefully, reduce it so that we can have quality of environment in the future.

We wish to extend our congratulations to the Farrer Ridge, Cooleman Ridge and Mount Taylor Parkcare groups on their award for their long-term efforts to eliminate weeds and restore native vegetation to local hills. We congratulate Lanyon High School on winning the Landcare education award. The school students and staff built a hothouse where seedlings are raised for revegetation work. I understand that this is a hothouse that Mr Wood is quite interested in. Raising the native seedlings has developed an understanding of the ecological processes that determine the success or failure of revegetation efforts.

We wish to congratulate not just the finalists and the award winners but all of those who participate in Landcare programs. We owe a debt to all volunteers who participate in Catchment Care, Landcare and Parkcare activities in the ACT or who work with students and the community to promote better awareness of the need for the rehabilitation of our degraded lands. They are active now in rehabilitation work following the fires, seizing the window of opportunity to tackle our ongoing weed problems. Landcare volunteers are also out there addressing the urgent need for bank stabilisation along the waterways where vegetation has been severely affected after the January bushfires.

Whilst the federal government has recognised the immense value of the Landcare movement by providing a small number of paid staff to support the volunteers, through the Natural Heritage Trust, I was disappointed to learn this week that the support of the federal government appears to be wavering, with a lack of commitment to long-term funding for existing paid Landcare positions.

Environment ACT provides support to Landcare groups in the ACT, but it would be difficult for us to take on full responsibility for supporting these groups without our other environment protection work suffering. However, if the federal government does pull the plug on funding, the ACT must step into the breach. It makes no sense to lose the contribution of thousands of volunteer hours to save a small amount of money.

I urge the ACT government, if we are truly in favour of the Landcare program and supporting Landcare workers in the ACT, to talk to its federal colleagues about what their intentions are in terms of Landcare. We cannot let this program be devalued and moved on because the federal government no longer sees it as a priority. Landcare, as we have said today, has an important role to play in making sure our environment is protected and maintained.

I congratulate the winner of the ACT Landcare awards, and I personally thank every volunteer who works to protect and rehabilitate the land and waterways of the ACT. I hope that the ACT government can continue to support the Landcare program into the future.

MS TUCKER (11.46): Landcare had been in the news over the past week, with Lanyon High winning the Westpac Landcare education award for 2003. Also, just yesterday, the National Landcare program was described as facing a crisis as Commonwealth government funding expires.

Landcare was set up in the mid-80s by Joan Kerner and Heather Mitchell and has proved to be a great vehicle for awareness and connection between environmentalists, farmers and community groups. While the Landcare groups cannot in themselves make the big changes necessary in land use in Australia, they are a key part of the changing awareness that is needed if those changes are to occur.

There are more than 4,500 groups in Australia, with one in three farmers being a member and many others involved in those activities. We cannot undervalue the positive links of different sections in our society. Over 100 Landcare groups are active in the ACT in our suburbs, parks and rural areas. The devastating fires have had a positive effect on the energy and commitment of Canberra people in this work, and membership has increased—as, of course, has the workload. This spring is a critical time for regrowth,

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remediation and weed control, and we must be grateful that the Landcare/Parkcare movement has been so strong in the ACT that much of this crucial work can be carried on.

One of the biggest shifts in how Landcare works has occurred over the past six or seven years, with Landcare and similar groups linking up to form catchment groups and the catchment groups themselves feeding into larger natural resource plans, such as the one put together by the Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Board. In other words, we have seen the activities of small community-based groups expand, to be fed into and be part of much bigger and more significant plans and actions, in terms of biodiversity, soil and water quality, and community capacity building.

In the ACT you can see that growth through the Southern ACT and Ginninderra catchment groups. The rural lessees have recently agreed to join together to form the Tharwa Landcare Group. There have now been two meetings of the Molonglo Catchment Group, which covers a large area incorporating an urban water catchment area that runs across the ACT-New South Wales border. This project, perhaps the most substantial in the area of community participation in land and environmental protection in the region, was given effect by a small ACT government grant to the Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra.

We are at another crucial point in the evolution of this movement. The Commonwealth government funding is now in question, particularly for co-ordinators and facilitators. The ACT government, like the states, is loath to pick up all the extra costs. We should remember that the Molonglo group has only come together through the work of a facilitator and that there is only funding now for 2½ days a week and only until the end of this year. That is not enough support for such a large, complex and important project.

I also congratulate Lanyon High School for winning its award, and I use this motion as an opportunity to remind the Assembly that, despite the enormous unpaid community involvement and the growing awareness across Australia, it is possible to make small, collaborative contributions to large-scale solutions. But, without some ongoing and serious support—the facilitation and co-ordination—we may see the Landcare groups mark time or fall back, rather than get to the next stage.

Mrs Dunne did not raise this, but when the Liberal government was in the ACT, there were ongoing issues at that time, too, that were related. There was quite a bit of concern at one point because the grants were going to the groups, and then most of the money was going out to pay Urban Services for heavy machinery. I remember there being quite a bit of debate about whether that was an appropriate use of the Landcare grants.

At this point in time, as I said, we are still seeing a lack of support, certainly from the Commonwealth government. I hope that Mrs Dunne will be writing in the strongest terms to her federal colleagues after her speech supporting Landcare today, which I commend her for, and that she makes representations to the federal government on this issue. I am also aware that the ACT government has responsibilities here and that, as much as possible, it needs to support the groups, particularly through facilitators.

MRS BURKE (11.51): Mr Speaker, I am pleased to join other members in this place in congratulating our Landcare workers for their outstanding work. I commend

Mr Hargreaves' motion today. Without a doubt, these workers provide an excellent service to the community, which we have all had opportunity to enjoy.

Mr Speaker, it is one of those things that are quintessentially Canberra. We certainly saw after the fires great demonstrations of effort made right across the community, not least by Landcare volunteers, and I hope that that spirit remains. After the fires, there were many opportunities to come together as a community, and I take every opportunity, in my shadow portfolio responsibility of community care, to speak about seeing things like this bring people more together.

I certainly do not stand here as an authority on the environment but, the "Der!" factor aside, I know that we have much to be grateful for in the work of Landcare and the many volunteers who are involved in activities such as noxious weed removal and tree planting. Again, I am sure that many of us have seen evidence of this across this city.

The recipients of these awards deserve to be highly encouraged by the recognition of their endeavours. As they continue their efforts to tend the land, it is important that governments at every level support and underpin the work of Landcare. The ACT government must look to how it can independently support the work of about 100 groups—I may stand corrected there—in the ACT.

It is important that the Commonwealth government revisit the issue. We are all aware of salinity issues and the various things that some of us know something about, but I would call on this ACT government to look at independent ways of supporting this activity, which is vital for our future, our ecology and our environment. It is also important that we in this place continue to recognise the achievements, and it is with great pleasure that I stand and support Mr Hargreaves' motion.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (11:53): Landcare is a very important issue, and it is good to see those involved in helping rehabilitate the environment of the ACT get recognition. It is important to understand the sort of work that people do to pick up these awards. Rosemary Blemings, whom Mr Hargreaves mentioned, was named as the 2003 winner of the individual Landcare award for the ACT. I have been sent a summary of all the awards from Steve Welch, in Environment ACT, I suspect. The citation for Rosemary is just fantastic. It reads:

Rosemary Blemings was named as the 2003 winner of the Individual Landcare Award. Rosemary was a member of the North Belconnen Landcare Group and has carried out a continuous program of revegetation of Mt Rogers for some years now. As well as this local commitment, Rosemary is a long time member of the Australian Native Plant Society and has been a driving force behind the Weedbuster display at Floriade and the Weedswap program where people can exchange woody weeds for native plants at the green recycling centre. Like all Landcare Heroes, Rosemary's effort is varied from running and organising meetings, writing letters and articles, telephoning and persuading, networking, research, on-ground work and bird recording, emailing, lobbying, supporting others in their projects, and monitoring tasks. Rosemary regards most of this as a pleasurable activity although at times she questions her sanity. Congratulations Rosemary—a well deserved recognition.

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Most of the list has been read out by other members, but some of the other groups are worth mentioning. The Rural Press primary producer award went to Tony and Heather Griffin at the Uriarra Station. Most of the station disappeared during the bush fires, although all the buildings survived. That work is undone, but no doubt Tony and Heather will get back into it.

The bush care nature conservation award went to the Friends of Grasslands. As Mr Hargreaves has already mentioned, the Westpac Landcare education award went to Lanyon High School for continuing Landcare activities, including propagation and plant work and support for other local schools. That is a part of the network that Mr Hargreaves spoke about, which runs up past Templestowe Crescent and Tom Roberts Crescent.

Mr Hargreaves: Avenue, avenue.

MR SMYTH: Sorry, Templestowe Avenue and Tom Roberts Avenue. He may have to apologise to the *Canberra Times* because there is an article in this morning's paper entitled "Lanyon lessons take a green turn". It is a nice article by Stacey Lucas, the education reporter, about the new hothouse. One of the problems that the school has encountered is that it was unable to get some funding to pick up plants to continue to plant them. They fixed that by purchasing a hothouse.

As part of the education program, they are now growing their own plants. Mr Wood opened it last week and got to unveil a wonderful plaque. The school is now saying that the greenhouse is not just a greenhouse. The article says, "The sunny interior would now be used by environmental studies classes and for a new horticultural class." So it is not just about protecting the environment; it is about instilling in our young ones love for and care and protection of the bush. The principal and the deputy principal program at Lanyon High are to be congratulated for the program and the work that they do in that area.

The other issue that I would like to speak about in this debate is the Alcoa Landcare community group award. It went to the Cooleman Ridge, the Mount Taylor and the Farrer Ridge Parkcare groups for their work over many years in those three reserves. I should note that Cooleman Ridge, Mount Taylor Ridge and Farrer Ridge Parkcare groups basically lost all their work on 18 January. The fires went through and burnt all of those areas. The assessment of how much of the vegetation has survived is still being done, but a fair amount of it has come through, and we hope to see the benefit of that work.

I had an email from Anne Ajions, who is a co-ordinator of the Mount Taylor group, about the award. It reads:

This is the good news I hinted at this week! Cooleman Ridge, Mt Taylor and Farrer Ridge Groups took out the Community Group award for all the work after the fires, and the ongoing program of care for the environment. Wendy Rainbird masterminded the award application, many thanks Wendy! The cast glass-like shield is very appropriate with its "broken edge" design! C'Ridge has first go for member's viewing, then the baton will be passed on! Thank you to everyone in the groups for all the support over the years and particularly the fire recovery.

You can see that it is a broad-reaching thing for three groups to pick up such an award. The three groups have done a fabulous job over the years. I can assure you that planting trees on the side of Mount Taylor has its own special dilemma because you have got to carry all the stuff up there. For those of us who have climbed Mount Taylor for many years, that brings back some fond memories. Pushing up a wheelbarrow, carrying a sack of fertiliser, dragging up water or taking up seedlings has its own special cheer on a Saturday or Sunday morning. Well done to all the groups involved.

The issue of ongoing funding for Landcare has been raised. The community has been emboldened to get out there and do its bit. One practical thing that the community gets out of this is that it can see the results in its own neighbourhood. I agree with others that we have to make sure that funding is secured for these programs, but it is ownership by the community that has effect.

I am not sure how much effect politicians in houses of assembly or parliament saying, "Isn't Landcare a good thing?" has on the ground or the individual. I would hope it has some. The effect of individuals being able to see what they have done and the results of what they have done are far more unifying in the community. So issues have to be addressed at the ACT government and certainly at the federal level.

I hope that all those who have some influence over the future of Landcare, particularly its funding, take it seriously and look at the effect that it has had and the effect that it might have on the future because there is still work to be done. There are people out there who are willing to do that work and, if we give them the tools, they will change the environment that we live in so much for the better. Well done to all who won and well done to all those who support them.

MR HARGREAVES (12.00), in reply: I thank members for their support, and I do not apologise to the *Canberra Times* at all. You will not find that happen in a million months of Sundays.

Mr Pratt: Yeah!

MR HARGREAVES: As long as my backside points to the ground, Mr Pratt, you will not see it happen. One little robin does not a spring make. I congratulate her for popping up one article in the paper, but I condemn the *Canberra Times* for not giving due recognition when the awards were given out. Having one group out of the dozen awardees is giving some prominence. It is great for that group, but it is not great for the whole system. I do not applaud the *Canberra Times* for picking out just one and running with that. I think they should have received more prominence.

As the Leader of the Opposition says, Landcare is a serious issue. It is doing something today to repair something in the past and looking towards a bright future. I think we ought to sometimes stop and think, "Everybody else seems to be doing it; why can't we?" I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Tree preservation in Belconnen

MS DUNDAS (12.01): I move:

That the ACT Government negotiate with the owners of the site at the corner of Nettlefold Street and Coulter Drive a land swap or suitable compensation to ensure the preservation of the magnificent trees on that site.

Mr Speaker, woodlands and grasslands across Australia are among our most endangered of communities. They were very easy communities for pastoralists to move their stock into at the time of European settlement because of their open structure. Most woodland communities were largely cleared in the first 50 years after European settlers arrived in each region. As a result, many of our woodland communities are endangered today.

In the ACT and surrounding regions, a number of woodland and grassland communities are teetering on the brink of extinction, with the yellow box/red gum grassy woodland being the most endangered. Six bird species associated with this depleted woodland type are also listed as endangered. Although most of the ACT is a national park or a nature reserve, less than 1 per cent of remaining endangered woodland is protected across the ACT and surrounding regions, and in rural areas this community is suffering from tree decline because of drought, fire, insects and limited opportunity for regeneration.

Our Minister for Environment has boasted that the ACT is two-thirds bushland, implying that we don't really need to worry about conserving our native vegetation. But this overall figure masks the uneven removal of particular vegetation types. Environment ACT itself acknowledges that only 25 per cent of good-quality remnant woodland remains in the ACT.

The threatened species action plan prepared by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna identifies a need to protect off-reserve remnants of yellow box/red gum woodland with some of the original understorey remains because this community is already so severely depleted. The need for public education of the value of these threatened woodlands has also been identified by the conservator's report. Considering the fragmented nature of the remaining woodland, each patch is significant.

Block 12 of section 2, on the corner of Nettlefold Street and Coulter Drive in Belconnen, is a patch of this endangered yellow box red/gum grassy woodland and supports trees of between 100 and 300 years of age. It is a prominent site that is seen by thousands of Canberrans every day as they travel up Coulter Drive to connect with William Hovell Drive.

I acknowledge that, under the approved development plan for the site, some of the older trees are to be retained. Two red gum trees that are about 200 years old are earmarked for removal, as are some yellow box trees of around 100 years of age. I just want to pause and think about that for a moment. These trees have been there for longer than the ACT has been in existence. They have survived the development that has gone on around them. They have provided a bit of the bush capital in the Belconnen trades area for generations of Canberrans. Yet we are now looking at their removal and destruction.

We also must acknowledge that, as part of the development, erecting a large building and tarring much of the remaining site for access roads and car parks means that this patch of woodland that has survived for so long may not survive into the future. Even if the trees are left standing, the impact of the development on the site will significantly reduce their ability to thrive into the future.

It is important to protect existing significant trees, but we also have to think about the longer term. These ancient trees were growing on the site before the First Fleet arrived in Australia and, if we think these trees are worth protecting for our generation to enjoy, surely the site should be managed so there are still some magnificent trees there 200 years from now. This site has some healthy regrowth, but that would be lost if the site is redeveloped.

I think that we will have some debate this morning about how we can't just stop and protect every tree that we want to, that there does need to be the recognition that we do have a growing city. I understand that and I support that, but this is a very significant patch in an area that is already developed. There are options being put forward to the government to save these trees. I'm informed the current owners of the site, Coles Myer, do not have any immediate plans to build on the site, because the development they were planning is already currently being well supplied through the Belconnen Town Centre.

If this is the case, then we do have a window of opportunity to talk to Coles Myer about whether or not they are willing to surrender the site to the ACT government, possibly in return for a monetary sum equal to the market value of the site, or they may be willing to do a land swap for the site. Another vacant site is available in the Belconnen Town Centre area. I understand there is a site between Rae Street and Bayles Street which is currently owned by the ACT government and has on it no endangered trees.

With the ACT returning such a strong budget surplus, I'm sure that the money is there to buy back the site. It may cost little or nothing to swap the site for another vacant site similar in size, similar in location, that could meet the demands of the current owners.

The Treasurer has been making quite strong points about the budget surpluses that we have, how they are not necessarily reoccurring budget surpluses into the future, that we only have limited opportunities to look at how we can invest this money. Here's a simple, low-cost investment that could return great things to the ACT community as we continue to work to preserve our bush capital heritage.

What we're talking about today, at the Nettlefold Street site, is a beautiful remnant of an endangered woodland type in a very prominent position, and the government has the opportunity to step in and protect this patch for current and future generations.

There are other sites in the area that are much more suitable for development, and there has been a very strong community campaign to protect these trees, with over 1,500 residents signing petitions calling on the government to preserve the area as public open space. In fact, 200 more signatures were tabled today by Ms Tucker.

I would like to thank the community for working so hard on this campaign that has led me to move this motion today. We have seen different groups and members of the community come together to protect this site, collecting petitions; art works have been

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done highlighting the nature of the trees on this site; and drawing together a really diverse group.

I would like to thank Helen Brewer who has been such a strong leader of this campaign, who has worked incredibly hard and in the process has learnt a lot about planning regulations in the ACT and who has herself faced the problems that can exist when you try to deal with planning issues and the hurdles you have to leap over.

The motion I move today is a simple one that calls on the government to negotiate with the owners for a land swap or compensation. I believe that it is in the government's power to do this. I hope that the Assembly supports this motion and the government takes the time to preserve these trees.

We just can't let another development ruin our bush capital, especially when there are simple alternatives. As one campaigner has said, it is a shame that these valuable trees were sold in the first place and it would be a tragedy if development goes ahead.

MS TUCKER (12.10): The Greens will be supporting this motion. We believe that, where there are suitable sites for property development, these sites be developed prior to sites which have important environmental or social value. It seems fairly clear that there are alternative and suitable sites within the Belconnen area and that this Nettlefold Street block should be left alone.

I acknowledge that the sale of this block for commercial development followed proper process when it was sold, and the Greens support a consistent process for land sale and development. However, I think we should remember that these significant trees are not new; at least one is 300 years old.

The original decision by the Liberal government to sell the site and to not consider the heritage and environmental values was much more offensive than the reluctance of the present government to try to repair the damage, although both really have to be condemned.

I'm very pleased to see the Liberals are now changing their position. I'm assuming they're supporting this motion. I have spoken to Mr Stefaniak at a couple of community events where he told me that he would be supportive of a rethink on this block. So I give credit to him for that flexibility.

Nonetheless, I am concerned about the government's lack of action to preserve these magnificent trees and this bush block in the Belconnen Centre. This block at the corner of Nettlefold Street and Coulter Drive contains a stand of remnant yellow box/red gum trees, some of which are at least 300 years old, as I said. Twelve of these trees are regarded as significant under the tree protection legislation. These trees in this block are not only an important feature of the landscape in Belconnen and for the people who live and use the area but they also provide habitat for native fauna.

Indeed, now that the fires have destroyed so much of the habitat of cockatoo, owls and other birds, trees over 100 years old are very important, and any remnant trees have taken on an added significance after the fires.

I've been convinced that the proposal for a commercial liquor barn on this site does place these trees in grave danger. In particular, my interest is in the lack of really thorough, long-term, hydrological studies. We know the Commissioner for the Environment found that the development control plan prepared before the sale of the block took little account of the value of the trees and questioned whether there was any commitment to protect the trees at any length of time beyond the construction period. As I outlined, I'm not arguing that this liquor barn development not occur; rather that it occur elsewhere.

I have had correspondence from a constituent who has found other sites in the same area that are not sensitive, environmentally or socially, and seem suitable for further development. One such site is section 20, which is bordered by Rae Street, Josephson Street and Bayles Street in Belconnen. This site is only a few blocks from the proposed site, and I think it's worth, at the very least, approaching the developer to see if a land swap could be acceptable. As I understand it, the government has made no effort in this regard.

The saga of the yellow box/red gum stand of trees on Nettlefold Street illustrates the problem we have when there is disharmony between the planning regime and the mechanisms for protecting important trees, wildlife habitat and community amenity.

On the latter: I've been working with the community group who's been trying to save this block for a long time now, and I have to say that I've been very impressed by the strength of feeling that's been exhibited from the broader community. As if often the case, there is a small group of people who continue to campaign with a lot of energy and commitment. But I have seen, from my work with them, the community support.

On a number of occasions I've been at the block itself where the community group has held events, varying from just meetings, a gathering of artists who were celebrating the beauty and magnificence of these old trees, gatherings of community members talking about the impact that this block has on their sense of place in regard to the Belconnen Town Centre in particular.

There's always been a sign up when we've had those gatherings saying, "Please toot if you want to save these trees." I've been at a lot of events over the years where that's been done, and I have been really impressed by how many people toot their horns very loudly when we're there. It's quite overwhelming to stand there with a group and see the response from the community. Of course there are petitions and other mechanisms through which we've been able to seek community support for this block.

I do also want to commend Helen Brewer and her colleagues for the commitment to saving this block. It's been a very creative campaign. I've been really interested in the number of artists who have wanted to lend their weight to the campaign and recently I've felt privileged to open an art exhibition in the Belconnen library which was to celebrate the beauty of nature and the trees and, in particular, to raise some support for the Nettlefold Street block.

I'll just say in conclusion, again, that we support this motion in the hope that the Assembly can meet the challenge that is before us at the moment, which is to preserve our natural heritage and community spaces while allowing development to occur.

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MRS DUNNE (12.16): Mr Speaker, the Canberra Liberals will be supporting this worthwhile motion.

Mr Corbell: Hypocrite.

MRS DUNNE: Can I have that withdrawn, please, Mr Speaker?

Mr Stefaniak: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: that's quite clearly out of order. I think he should withdraw it.

MR SPEAKER: Would you withdraw that?

Mr Corbell: I withdraw it.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Corbell.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Corbell: Blatant hypocrisy.

MRS DUNNE: Can I have that one withdrawn too, please?

MR SPEAKER: What was that one?

MRS DUNNE: Blatant hypocrisy.

MR SPEAKER: I don't know whether he's referring to any particular member, but withdraw that, Mr Corbell.

Mr Corbell: I withdraw it, Mr Speaker.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Speaker, the Liberal opposition will be supporting this worthwhile motion because it goes to the heart of what government in this community is about; it's about listening to the community. This government came in on a platform of planning for people. When it actually comes to the hard yards of listening to the community and taking into account the community's needs, this doesn't mean that every time the community says, "Yes we want X," or "No, we want something else," you have to fold. In this case, Mr Speaker, there is a longstanding and demonstrated desire in the community to have an outcome other than the one that is currently proposed.

This block of land on the corner of Nettlefold Street and Coulter Drive was sold under the previous government. If that is the hypocrisy that Mr Corbell was talking about, he's very wide of the mark. After that block of land was sold, Mr Speaker, there were other assessments of the trees done. The needs of the trees and the value of the trees only became totally to the fore after the block of land had been sold. This is why the Liberal opposition is prepared to support this motion.

If we have done the wrong thing, if we have sold a block of land that shouldn't have been sold because of the value of the trees, we should be prepared, Mr Speaker, to say

that we made a mistake. If that was a mistake, Mr Speaker, we're here today saying that we made a mistake.

There is a solution to this problem, Mr Speaker. The previous speakers, Ms Dundas and Ms Tucker, have demonstrated the age of the trees, the importance of the trees, the significance of the trees, not only as trees themselves but to the Belconnen community. These are issues that we have taken into consideration when we've come to the conclusion to support this motion.

The other thing about this, Mr Speaker, is that there is a solution; there is other land in the area available that would be suitable to build a liquor store on. If this motion succeeds, without constraining the government to look at particular blocks of land, the community has actually pointed out to me, to Mr Stefaniak, to anyone who cared to listen and to those on the other side who don't care to listen, that just across the road, near the bus depot, there is an underutilised car park that could just as suitably be used to build a liquor store on—in fact, more suitably be used—because it has no trees of significance on it; it is already developed; it has tarmac on it already; there aren't any trees there. It is a block that would be big enough to accommodate it.

Yes, we do understand, Mr Speaker, that, by doing this, the government, on behalf of the ACT people, may incur some expenses because the proponent who has bought the land—it has now changed hands; it is owned by Coles Myer—has actually spent some money on making proposals and developing proposals for the site which they bought. They bought it in good faith, Mr Speaker, but sometimes things move on.

What this is about is recognising that yes, things move on; that this is not an irretrievable situation; that there is a solution; that there are vacant blocks of land in Belconnen which are just as suitable for a liquor site. But there are no vacant blocks of land, Mr Speaker, which contain 300 to 400-year-old trees.

We were talking about this in the party room this morning. I suspect I might have misled the party room, because I said that I thought that the oldest of the trees was approaching 400 years and one of the members said, "That means that it was a sapling when Queen Elizabeth I was a slip of a girl." That may not be entirely true; it may in fact be that it was a sapling at the time of the Restoration.

But this means, Mr Speaker, that this tree has been here for longer than any of us here, for longer than white men have been in this country, and the importance of that to the community, to the amenity of the community, to the perceptions of the community, can't be underestimated. What we're actually asking here today, by passing this motion, is for us to take stock; to say that this is possibly not the best site in Belconnen for a liquor store; and if we want to have another liquor store in Belconnen—and I don't want to get into the debate on whether six is enough—let us find a block of land which is more suitable for that, so that the trees can continue to prosper.

This is why the Liberal opposition supports this motion. I would like to echo the words of Ms Dundas and pay tribute to the Belconnen community, to the Belconnen Community Council and, in particular, to Ms Helen Brewer, who has been tireless in this.

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This is the testament of what one or two people can do. One or two people, Mr Speaker, thought that this was a sufficient issue to pursue it; to go down every hollow and find the answers; and bring to our attention where there was disagreement between bureaucrats and officials about the value or not of the trees.

To get a community activity going, to get the 1,500-odd signatures on petitions, to have regular meetings, to keep people informed, to be in our faces, Mr Speaker, that is what the public is there for. This motion today is testament to the hard work of the Belconnen community. I am proud to represent the people of Belconnen because of the work that they have done on this, and I am proud to support this motion.

MR CORBELL (Minister for Health and Minister for Planning) (12:23): Mr Speaker, you only have to marvel at the gross hypocrisy of the Liberal Party's actions on this matter.

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, I think we've already had this discussion. We have asked that that word be withdrawn before.

MR SPEAKER: I was just consulting with the clerk on this issue, and I wondered how it was that we got into the position of ruling out "hypocrisy". I thought I'd better have a look at the dictionary to find out what it means, as described in the dictionary anyway. If a member were to say a former administration or members of a former administration had done one thing in government and another thing outside of government, you might say that hypocrisy was the description they used.

Because the word "hypocrisy" has been ruled out so many times in the past as unparliamentary, I'm not going allow it to be used in relation to individuals standing on their feet here, but I think members are entitled to draw into question the position of former administrations as compared to members of that administration who are now here. But I won't stand for members on their feet being called hypocrites.

MR CORBELL: I'll certainly be conscious of your ruling, Mr Speaker. The gross hypocrisy of the now opposition's approach compared to that which they took when they were in government is just astounding to marvel at.

Here is a process for land release which is being conducted in accordance with all of the requirements that this Assembly puts upon any government; consistent with the land act, consistent with the Territory Plan, consistent with land release policies, consistent with the assessment of significant trees under the tree protection legislation—consistent with all of those things. Even though we've been through all that process and even though they started it, all of a sudden it's not good enough.

And well may Mrs Dunne walk out of the chamber. It would have been a very interesting discussion, I think, in the Liberal Party party room this morning to hear this approach. Who was the minister at the time that agreed to the sale of this land? Gary Humphries was. Who was sitting in the cabinet with him when the cabinet agreed to the land release program that included this parcel of land? Brendan Smyth was and Bill Stefaniak was.

Did they say a single word in defence of this site? They knew it was on the land release program; it was in their cabinet papers. Did they say a single word in defence of this

site? Did Brendan Smyth, Bill Stefaniak and Vicki Dunne, when she was advising Gary Humphries as Treasurer at the time, say, “No, better not do it; this is a very symbolic and important site; better not do it”? No, they did not, Mr Speaker.

There was Vicki Dunne, senior adviser to the Treasurer of the day, the minister responsible, looking at the land release program; and what did she say in defence of that site? She didn't do a single thing, Mr Speaker.

Mrs Dunne: We didn't know about the trees.

MR CORBELL: Bill Stefaniak did not do a single thing. Brendan Smyth did not do a single thing. Now they stand up in this place and profess this almighty sense of feeling about this block of land, Mr Speaker.

Either you have confidence in the processes of the land act, the Territory Plan and the land release program or you do not. Either you have confidence in the Territory Plan process, the land release process, the tree assessment process or you do not. The fact is, Mr Speaker, they did at the time, but they don't now.

Mr Speaker, what's changed? Mrs Dunne puts up some spurious comment: “We didn't know about the trees.” What didn't you know about the trees, Mrs Dunne? Stand up here in this place and tell us what you know about the trees now that you didn't back then; stand up and tell me and tell this chamber what you know about the trees now that you didn't when the site was sold, because I'm about to go through and tell you very clearly what process was used in looking at the trees on this site by your government.

The site was sold on 22 March 2001. It's not as though the Liberal Party wasn't aware that there was an election coming up. They sold the site. It is a commercial site, the land is designated on the Territory Plan as commercial land, Mr Speaker.

The Territory Plan has been in existence for over 10 years. The site has been designated for this purpose for that length of time. In all of that time, didn't it occur to them that the site was eventually going to be released? That was what the commercial land use policy was, Mr Speaker. It's interesting too, Mr Speaker, that the Greens and the Democrats at the time didn't pay attention to that fact either.

Mr Speaker, the site was sold for \$536,000, following a thorough assessment of the trees on the site against the tree protection legislation—the tree protection legislation which had not yet been enacted by this place but which the previous government knew was about to be enacted by this place. The previous government chose to apply legislation that was not yet in effect against this site. That found, quite clearly, Mr Speaker, that there were a total of 21 remnant trees on the site, 11 of which were required to be retained—mandatory retention of over 50 per cent.

Following the lodgement of a DA, the site was again assessed against the tree protection legislation. It didn't just have tree protection legislation run over it once; it had tree protection run over it twice, Mr Speaker. What changed? Following the lodgement, that's what occurred. These trees were considered worthy and suitable for retention, and they were retained.

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The point needs to be made, Mr Speaker, that, regardless of the ownership of the site, those trees will have to be retained—regardless of whether it's privately held or held by the territory. The DA for the block was conditionally approved in May 2002 by the former Commissioner of Land and Planning. After the approval, further discussions were held between the developer, Planning And Land Management which is now ACTPLA, Environment ACT, the Commissioner for the Environment and other interested parties to explore ways of further responding to issues that were relevant. As a result, the plans were further amended, Mr Speaker.

The amended plans result in the removal of only 7 significant trees out of the 21. Six of these were either in decline, with a short life expectancy, or presented an unacceptable risk to public or private safety. Mr Speaker, even if the territory acquired this block of land, we would still have to remove those trees. I think that point needs to be borne in mind by members of this place.

Even if the territory was to reacquire this land, those trees would have to be removed because, in accordance with the law, the assessment is they are unsafe trees. If we are going to permit people to use that space, the trees will have to be removed. That's what is so fundamentally flawed about this proposition. Even if the site is returned to or acquired by the territory, those trees will have to be removed because they are unsafe, Mr Speaker.

The plans, as approved, do provide for the protection of five other significant high-value trees and a number of other trees on the block. The conservator approved an application to remove seven trees and undertake groundwork within the tree protection zone of five others in January this year. This decision was made in light of advice from the independent tree adviser and recommendations of the Commissioner for the Environment.

Mr Speaker, the approach has been an extremely thorough one. Our legislation provides not just for a conservator who makes decisions about tree removal, who themselves are independent—they have statutory independence—but there is an independent adviser to the independent decision maker.

On that basis, it was decided that the trees need to be removed. That's a very open, transparent and reasonable process—an independent adviser to an independent decision maker.

MR SPEAKER: The member's time has expired.

MR CORBELL: I seek an extension of time.

MR SPEAKER: You may seek an extension of time after lunch.

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 12.34 to 2.31 pm.

Questions without notice

School exercise programs

MR STEFANIAK: My question is to Ms Gallagher, the minister for education. Minister, there is a requirement in our school system that each student in years 3 to 10 undertake 150 minutes of physical exercise per week and each student in kindergarten to year 2 undertake 20 to 30 minutes a day. Shelley Rowe, from ACTSPORT questioned your department's commitment to this policy on WIN TV last night, when she said, "That policy is not being effectively implemented."

On 11 October 2000, your colleague Mr Berry, who was then the education spokesman, promised to review schools sport because, according to him, "there had been a lot of adverse feedback regarding increased compulsory sport". Minister, why are you failing to implement the policy effectively, given that childhood obesity is a rapidly growing problem in our society?

MS GALLAGHER: The department of education is implementing compulsory physical education times. It has certainly not been drawn to my attention by anyone that that is not the case. In fact, I have had discussions with officials from the department about it because I share Mr Berry's concerns about compulsory physical education times and whether they are actually achieving what they set out to do. I am not convinced of it.

There is a whole range of things that need to be done to encourage physical health and wellbeing in our children, and the Minister for Health and I are looking at ways to improve support to children in schools to lead healthy lifestyles. What the previous government implemented in terms of compulsory physical education times is still in place in schools. Whilst I am considering having a look at it, it certainly has not been changed since you were minister.

MR STEFANIAK: I have a supplementary question. What contingency plans have you made for when local ovals become unsafe for school sport because of the government cutting maintenance of them dramatically after 1 October?

MS GALLAGHER: There are certainly no problems with children using school ovals at the moment and none in the near future that have been drawn to my attention. As it is now, children are able to access school ovals. I will have further discussions with ministers if further water restrictions mean that our school ovals cannot be used.

There are a variety of places around schools where children take part in physical education, not only on school ovals but also in halls and on playgrounds. Even if we were to restrict use of some school ovals due to the condition they might be in, I cannot see that it would have an impact on a school's ability to provide the compulsory times required. Looking at a bigger picture, I do not see that a more holistic approach to health and wellbeing in schools will be affected by whether or not children can use school ovals.

Aged-care accommodation

MS MacDONALD: Mr Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Minister for Planning, Mr Corbell. Can the minister tell the Assembly what steps the government is taking to address the needs of our ageing community in relation to aged-care accommodation?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms MacDonald for the question. I am very pleased to advise members that meeting the needs of our ageing population and providing additional support and land where appropriate for additional facilities is a high priority of the government, and that is one of the reasons that today I have announced the government has given agreement for the direct sale of land in Garran, block 53 section 8, to Southern Cross Homes for the development of an aged-care facility.

This has been a matter for negotiation since the previous government was in power. They did not facilitate the process but we certainly have. Based on this agreement, Southern Cross Homes is now able to apply for approval for an additional 31 places for aged-care beds in the ACT. In addition, they will be seeking approval to transfer a further 34 beds from the St Vincent de Paul Ozanam House aged-care facility in Campbell to the new facility. These beds were in danger of closing due to the need of St Vincent de Paul to upgrade to meet new Commonwealth standards. If all approvals are given, all of these beds will now be kept in the ACT, and that is a great result for the ACT.

The Southern Cross Homes residential development includes residential care as well as independent living units in a location that gives residents an opportunity to remain living in an area that has been home to them for so long. There will be 18 two-bedroom living units on the site.

Mrs Burke: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I draw your attention to standing order 52—reflecting on a debate.

MR SPEAKER: I did not detect a reflection on the debate this morning. I think he is answering a question from Ms MacDonald.

Mrs Burke: Mr Speaker, he is reflecting on the debate earlier today, which has not yet concluded.

MR SPEAKER: I think the standing order to which you refer is “a member may not reflect upon any vote of the Assembly”. No vote has been taken.

Mrs Dunne: We had two divisions this morning on this subject, Mr Speaker.

MR CORBELL: I am not reflecting on a vote.

MR SPEAKER: No, I withdraw that.

Mr Stefaniak: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Stefaniak, would you just sit down for a minute. You are right. The vote has been taken but I did not detect Mr Corbell reflecting on the vote. He has been asked a question by a member and he is entitled to answer it.

Mr Stefaniak: There is a point of order, though, Mr Speaker. I just draw your attention to standing order 117 (e) (i) which refers to debates that have taken place during a calendar year. We had the debate this morning and, yes, it has concluded. But we have had the debate.

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, on the point of order: the question related specifically to an announcement the government has made today for a specific development in Garran, and it is in that context that I am answering the question. I am certainly not reflecting on the debate because, if anything, in case the Liberals had not noticed, we amended their motion quite significantly, with the support of the majority of the Assembly. So I am not exactly going to reflect on something which the government proposed and was successful in achieving Assembly support for. Further, Mr Speaker, the matter has now been resolved and is no longer on the notice paper.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Stefaniak, if you want the government to be quiet about any of its activities merely as a consequence of it being debated in this place, I think that is a bit of a tall order.

Mr Stefaniak: No, I am not saying that at all, Mr Speaker. It does seem out of order in accordance with 117 (e) (i) because we have had that debate this morning. The minister probably could have given all of that information then.

MR SPEAKER: Well, Mr Corbell, don't refer to the debate this morning.

MR CORBELL: I never did, Mr Speaker, but I am quite happy to abide by the rules.

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, on the point of order: Mr Corbell actually said that there was a specific question about a specific government announcement. Ms MacDonald's question was not about a specific announcement. It was "what are you doing in the planning area?" It was not about the Southern Cross Homes in Garran.

MR SPEAKER: I think "what are you doing?" invites a response from the minister about what he is doing and I do not see a point of order there.

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, the sad thing about all these interruptions is that whilst they complain, we are acting. While they are complaining, we are acting on the issue. We are getting on with giving the approvals for land to make sure that these aged-care facilities can be provided. And all we hear from the Liberal Party is whinging and moaning and complaining, and they never provide anything positive at all.

Where is their policy, Mr Speaker? Where is the Liberal Party's policy on aged-care provision in the ACT? What steps are they proposing to take? They have been in opposition for nearly two years and have we had a single policy on aged-care provision? No, Mr Speaker—none whatsoever.

Mr Cornwell: We don't want them stolen.

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MR CORBELL: But we hear a lot of complaints, especially from grandpa over there, but at the end of the day—

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, on a point of order—

MR CORBELL: I withdraw the comment.

Mrs Dunne: His age isn't—

MR SPEAKER: Order! I don't mind being referred to as a grandparent. Do you, Mr Cornwell?

Mr Cornwell: Mr Speaker, I have been insulted by experts.

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker the government is moving to address these issues in a very appropriate way. The new development is in Garran, as I have said, with 60 high care aged-care beds, and another 18 independent living units.

Mr Cornwell: In principle.

Mrs Burke: In principle.

MR CORBELL: I hear the interjection from the Liberal Party: "Oh, it's only in principle." Well they should go and talk to the person responsible from Southern Cross Homes about how he described the government's in-principle support. You know what he described it as, Mr Speaker? He described it as crucial—crucial to them getting the extra beds they need from the Commonwealth. So I think the Liberals need to go out and talk to some providers on the ground. If they did they would quickly discover how important in-principle support is.

There has been extensive community consultation, including with the Burley Griffin LAPAC, and these processes will continue as we move through the development approval process. But it is a further example of this government's commitment to act, where those opposite simply mouth platitudes or just whinge.

MS MacDONALD: I thank the minister for his informative reply. Minister, is the Southern Cross Homes development the only proposal this government has progressed recently?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms MacDonald for her supplementary question. Yes, I am quite happy to outline to members the other proposals that this government has also progressed. Today's announcement, for Southern Cross Homes at Garran, was ahead of an earlier announcement in which the government gave in-principle support for the direct sale of land for the Little Company of Mary at Calvary in Bruce.

Mrs Dunne: Who did that?

MR CORBELL: Are you saying that you did that?

Mrs Dunne: Yes, it was done under the previous government.

MR CORBELL: The answer is yes. I am pleased to hear that, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Corbell, resume your seat for the moment. Members of the opposition come to order, Mrs Dunne in particular.

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, last month, the ACT government gave in-principle agreement to the direct sale of land in Bruce to the Little Company of Mary for 65 nursing home/hostel funded beds. I heard the interjection from Mrs Dunne in which she claimed, "We had already given in-principle support."

MR SPEAKER: The chair does not hear interjections.

MR CORBELL: Indeed, Mr Speaker. However, Mr Smyth is also on the record as claiming that he gave in-principle support when he was the minister in 2001. He has made this claim throughout the media and apparently claimed that we have deliberately delayed the application. This is rather puzzling, I must say, because Mr Smyth knows, or he should know, that a direct sale of land can only be approved by cabinet. And guess what, Mr Speaker? There is no record of a cabinet decision that approved a direct sale of land to the Little Company of Mary.

Interestingly, further, I found some correspondence. On 12 September 2001, Mr Smyth wrote to the chief executive officer of Calvary Hospital. I just want to read it out for members so that they can see whether or not they think this letter indicates in-principle support for a direct grant of land. It says:

Dear Mr Cusack,

I refer to your application for the direct sale of Blocks 1 and 4 Section 4 Bruce for the development of older persons' accommodation.

I understand that Calvary Hospital is also applying to the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care for funding approval for the High and Low Care places that are proposed to be provided as part of the development of Blocks 1 and 4 Bruce.

I am writing to advise you that the government supports your application to the Commonwealth for funding of the High and Low Care places. The proximity of Calvary Hospital to the proposed site offers the opportunity for a range of benefits in the provision of older persons' accommodation.

The Government has identified this land as suitable for older persons' accommodation and I am pleased to inform you that my Department has been asked to progress your application for the direct sale of land. As you may be aware, before a final decision can be made on your application it will be necessary to undertake a range of studies.

I wish you well with your project. Should you need any assistance...

And so on.

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Mr Speaker, I do not see anything in that letter that suggests that Mr Smyth, or the previous Liberal government, gave in-principle support for the direct sale of land to the Little Company of Mary. I think Mr Smyth was perhaps testing and stretching the truth just a little bit. Unfortunately, that is what we have come to expect from Mr Smyth and those opposite—gilding the lily, claiming they did something when they did not and, if they did not do it, claiming that they were going to do it.

Not good enough! While those opposite whinge and complain, this government acts.

Domestic water consumption

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Environment, Mr Stanhope. Minister, the stated aim, amongst others, of your water resources strategy is to achieve a 12 per cent reduction in per capita use of potable water over the next 10 years, and a 25 per cent reduction by 2023. Minister, given that about 50 per cent of all water used around the house is used indoors, what are you doing to reduce domestic water consumption inside the house?

MR STANHOPE: What we are doing is developing, for the first time ever, a coordinated and comprehensive strategy to deal explicitly and particularly with the issue of water consumption. It is true, as Mrs Dunne says, that the government, through its recently released water policy has set some quite demanding targets in terms of the reduction of the use of potable water in the ACT. They are significant targets, particularly coming on top of the reductions that have been achieved by the ACT community over the last decade. We have set those targets through the issuing of a water policy and the government stands by them.

We are now moving to the second stage of our determination to address issues around water and water use in the ACT through the development of a detailed, coordinated and heavily consulted water strategy. Indeed, I am pleased to be able to advise members that just today a major community summit was held at the Ainslie Football Club at which around about 200 members of the community attended to discuss the very issues around how to achieve the challenging targets that the government has set in relation to the reduction of potable water use and, indeed, how we might best achieve the targets that we have also set in relation to the reuse of grey water—an equally important task, accepting that at the moment we reuse only 6 per cent of water that is treated in the ACT. We have set similarly a target of 20 per cent in relation to that.

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR STANHOPE: These are matters that will be dealt with through the water strategy which we are currently developing.

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, my question related directly to the reduction of potable water. I did not ask about grey water—that is for another day. My specific question was: what is the government doing to reduce domestic water consumption inside the house? I have not had as yet any answer to that question.

MR STANHOPE: I have concluded my answer, Mr Speaker.

MRS DUNNE: The minister has concluded his answer. I will ask a supplementary then. Minister, apart from consultation—as you maintain, rigorous consultation—what measures are you taking to reduce in-house water consumption?

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, at this stage the government has taken a number of steps, certainly in relation to reduction across the board of the use of water. At this stage the Canberra community is participating in water restrictions at level 2. There is a determination by us as a community to reduce overall consumption of water by 25 per cent—

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: on the basis of relevance under standing order 118. Level 2 water restrictions do not relate in any way to inside water use.

MR SPEAKER: I think it goes to the issue of water use. I think it is in order for the Chief Minister to continue with his response.

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is a nonsense to suggest that although the Canberra community is currently participating in a regime of significant water restrictions, Canberra residents are not extending their commitment to that regime to water usage within the house. I know that I am in my household. Every single household that I know of is restricting or reducing the extent to which they use water both inside the house and outside the house. So to suggest “Oh well, it’s stage 2 and stage 2 relates only to outside the house and therefore nobody is extending their cooperation as members of this community to the reduction of water inside the house” is just simply puerile and nonsensical.

At this stage, as we as a community have joined together and battled together to face the issues in relation to what might quite appropriately be regarded as a crisis in relation to water in the ACT, we have pursued a number of initiatives. One of them, of course, is a major education campaign in relation to the value of water and the scarcity of that resource. I do not think at any stage in the history of Canberra has there been such an acute debate and an acute awareness around just how valuable, scarce and rare water as a resource is and its importance to the continuing health of this community. So, in a broad sense, the government has engaged in a major education campaign.

We are engaged in a major consultative campaign. We have imposed level 2 restrictions. We have foreshadowed the prospect of level 3 restrictions, subject to rainfall. We have assessed and pursued a showerhead scheme and we have indicated that it does have some value in the reduction of water. We have issued a water policy and we are developing a water strategy. We have been quite clear in everything we have done in relation to the range of measures that we as a community need and will pursue to ensure sustainability into the future in relation to water within Canberra and the region.

We will develop a water strategy and we have promised to deliver that within the next six weeks. It will go to the extensive detail of the range of measures that we as community will need to commit to to address the major issues facing us as a community and Australia as a nation in relation to the scarcity of water within this community.

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Such is the Liberal Party's desperation and irrelevance as a political party within this community, such is the paucity of their own policy work and development, that the best they can do on the day that the government holds a major community summit on water at which over 200 individuals and organisations have voluntarily attended to discuss this most important issue, is to stand up in this place and say, "Well, what have you done inside the house to date?" This is in the midst of the only genuine effort any government has ever made to address issues around water and water use. You are a policy-free zone, a vacuum.

Two years after the last election and a year to go before the next election, the alternative government has not a single policy on the table.

Mr Stefaniak: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR STANHOPE: Not a single policy on the table after two years, with one year to go. Not a single policy.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister, resume your seat.

Mr Stefaniak: Mr Speaker, standing order 118 (a) provides that answers should be concise and also confined to the subject matter. I do not think the Chief Minister is achieving either of these directions.

MR SPEAKER: I think the Chief Minister has wound up his response.

MR STANHOPE: I have, Mr Speaker. I would just like to conclude with the remark that after two years in opposition the alternative government does not have a single policy on the table. It is a policy-free zone—a disgrace.

Dunlop—construction of school

MS DUNDAS: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, considering the number of young families that are currently residing in Dunlop, are you planning to fund the construction of a preschool and primary school in the Dunlop area?

MS GALLAGHER: At this stage there aren't any plans to build a school in Dunlop—a primary school or preschool—primarily because of the excess capacity that remains in the schools in the surrounding areas, including Charnwood, MacGregor and Holt. The analysis that has been done, in terms of the student population that might be coming out of Dunlop, shows that the capacity can be met within the existing infrastructure that is provided in those surrounding schools.

In fact, certainly in Charnwood's case, it is an extremely small school and would benefit from students coming from Dunlop to that school, to ensure that that school increases its numbers. We all know that, once numbers in schools get very small, they can lose a lot of the add-ons that come from a bit higher population within schools.

Certainly at the moment there aren't any plans, but it is very much because of the capacity that exists in the surrounding suburbs.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary, Ms Dundas?

MS DUNDAS: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Considering the many proposals that are currently on the table for future suburbs, do you think it is necessary for those plans to include looking at the development of new schools; or, if not, looking at greater transport options for allowing kids in Dunlop and possibly the new suburbs to fill in the surrounding schools?

MS GALLAGHER: Yes, certainly, I agree with that. In terms of decisions around new suburbs, certainly into that planning goes decisions about space for schools to be built—community facilities space on which schools can be built. Certainly, if I just look at the situation in Gungahlin, where there isn't a college at the moment, ACTION provides a school service from Gungahlin to Copland College where, again, there is capacity to take students from the Gungahlin area.

Yes, there are a range of things that are being done. If there is a problem in Dunlop, I can certainly look at Dunlop in terms of some support for transport. Certainly the transport issue hasn't been raised with me. I know there are concerns coming from people within Dunlop who would like a school, but I just feel we need to move the debate a bit further when we just can't go building schools in suburbs. I think it is an old way of making decisions about building schools, particularly when we have a problem. This was raised in the Connors inquiry. That was the way decisions were made, and now we are left with schools that have very low numbers.

One way of dealing with that is you provide for the space in the new suburbs, but the decision about whether you build a school on that land will be taken in conjunction, I guess, with competing issues in surrounding suburbs.

Mental health care

MRS BURKE: My question is to the Minister for Health, Mr Corbell. I refer to a report in the *Canberra Times* of 27 August 2003 about your failure to meet the expectations of the people of Canberra in relation to health care. It reads:

Four beds at Canberra Hospital's psychiatric unit have been closed during 2002-03 because the service experienced difficulties recruiting and retaining staff.

This is commonly known as the "CountryLink excuse". Why are you closing beds in the psychiatric unit, given the high level of demand in the community for high-level mental health care?

MR CORBELL: I am glad the Liberal Party thinks it is a laughing matter—because I do not. It is a very serious issue. Staff shortages affect a number of key service delivery areas at ACT Health, and that is not unique to ACT Health. It is occurring in many jurisdictions around the country, particularly in a number of key health care professions. That is why I am working with state and territory health ministers and with the Commonwealth minister to try and address areas of key work force shortage and ensure that sufficient training places are made available in our tertiary institutions through lobbying the Commonwealth minister so that, at the end of the day, we have training

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both through our training institutions and in our hospitals to develop the specialist skills that our health system needs across the country.

MRS BURKE: I have a supplementary question. Thank you, Minister, for that response, but why have you failed to implement a time-out unit or other suitable facility in the ACT, given that there is such a clear need for one in the ACT?

MR CORBELL: I cannot see how that relates to staff shortages, Mr Speaker, but I have to answer the question. Regardless of what sort of building you build, you still need staff. You still need the people to run the facility. That is the key issue that all governments have struggled to address. Unlike my predecessor—before Mr Stanhope—Mr Moore, who opened a facility without staff, we will not be doing that.

Kingston foreshore development—public housing

MS TUCKER: My question is to the minister for housing and is in regard to public housing at Kingston foreshore. Minister, you would recall that you are on the public record as being in support of a proportion of the ACT government's Kingston foreshore development being devoted to public or affordable housing. You may also be interested to know that, in a reply to a letter from me, the Treasurer has conceded that there are many ways of raising funds to pay for public housing if government chooses to make it a priority.

However, it has been reported to me by a constituent that ACT Housing turned down an opportunity to take up an offer of public housing from the Kingston Foreshore Development Authority. Can you confirm whether this is the case and, if so, explain why? If it is not the case, what measures will you take to ensure that public housing is structured into the development from now on?

MR WOOD: We have not, at this stage, acquired any properties at Kingston foreshore. It has proved very difficult, not least because of the prices that are part of the buying-in process. It has been beyond our willingness to pay those prices. I do not know of the particular instance that you referred to but, in general, it is really beyond our pocket and our willingness to pay.

MS TUCKER: I would like an answer to the question about whether ACT Housing did turn down an offer and I would ask you to get back to me on that. My supplementary question is: what is to prevent ACT Housing from increasing stock by accessing the \$40 million in the ACT home loan portfolio, which is managed by Treasury for the commissioner, as identified in the *Public housing asset management strategy 2003-2008*, tabled yesterday?

MR WOOD: I will find that information specifically. If you can give me a name or something to help, that would be useful. As for the home loan portfolio, yes, I have designs on that. It is a useful resource and we have to see how best we can use it. However, even using that, the basic principle still applies: the cost is prohibitive.

Bushfires

MR PRATT: Mr Speaker, my question, through you, is to the minister for emergency services, Mr Wood. Mr Wood, according to a media report yesterday on the New South Wales coronial inquiry into the January 2003 bushfires, incompatible computer services have been blamed for the initial response times to the bushfires. The New South Wales coronial inquiry has heard that a lack of technical coordination between emergency services and agencies caused the problems. It has also been stated that procedures used to record the outbreak of fires were incompatible.

Mr Wood, in relation to the bushfires that hit Canberra in January 2003, was this systemic weakness identified, too, as a factor in Canberra's response to the fires?

MR WOOD: Not that I'm aware of, Mr Speaker. It is a weakness; there's no question about that. We've committed something over \$20 million to a new communications system, and that is a system beyond the CAD systems, which was one of the first decisions I took when I became minister.

We would hope that, as we spend that very large amount of money, we can find a system that is compatible, especially with New South Wales but with any other system. But I am advised that that is not an easy thing to do. There are quite a range of complexities around that.

One of the difficulties is that jurisdictions at different times update their equipment. New South Wales updated theirs two or three years ago; we're in the process of updating ours. Technology has moved ahead. It is not easy to get an exact match. There are so many issues involved. The aim is to have compatibility. We'll tell you perhaps towards the middle of next year some time, as we refine our system, whether we're going to be able to marry into other systems.

But I haven't had reports that the difficulties hampered the firefighting effort. There were circumstances where messages were relayed—no doubt about that—from someone on one phone who then passed it on to somebody else standing next to them perhaps. There were circumstances of that nature. While it wasn't a help, I do not believe it was a hindrance.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Pratt.

MR PRATT: Mr Wood, instead of waiting until mid next year, will you assure this place that we could try to work on sorting these issues out before the approaching bushfire season? Will you work with federal and other jurisdictional counterparts to try to do something about this compatibility problem before the next fire season?

MR WOOD: You've directed my answer from one issue to another. Yes, as a result of last year's fires, a great deal has been done to refine processes to make sure that communications work at their best possible level in view of the differing systems we operate. That is happening or has happened. As we acquire this new system, we will work with everybody and anybody in order, to use your words, to try to achieve that compatibility that is desirable.

Canberra hospitals—bed blockage

MR CORNWELL: This proud grandfather's question, through you, Mr Speaker, is to the Minister for Health. At last week's health summit, the premier of New South Wales, Mr Carr, said that we need to get better value out of the health dollars spent. Mr Carr then cited the example of the John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle, where 30 nursing home-type patients were preventing some 2,200 other people from accessing elective surgery through what is known as "nursing home-type patient bed blockage".

I think we gave you notice of this earlier, Minister, but how many nursing home-type patients are blocking beds in the ACT in both the Canberra Hospital and the Calvary Public Hospital, please?

MR CORBELL: Mr Cornwell is right to identify bed block as a significant issue in the efficiency of all public hospitals, including Canberra's public hospitals. I thank Mr Cornwell for some notice on this particular question. Before I give him the details, I will just make the point that the trial and operation of John Hunter Hospital is a very good initiative, one that the ACT government would wish to follow.

Indeed, my discussions with Senator Patterson recently have very much focused on trying to get Commonwealth support to achieve that, because that is exactly what happened, Mr Cornwell, with John Hunter. It is funded by—if I am correct and I am pretty sure I am—a Commonwealth initiative. It is not an initiative of the state government. Nevertheless, it is a very good program.

The answer to Mr Cornwell's specific question is that, at the Canberra Hospital, there are currently 23 nursing home-type patients and, at Calvary Hospital, nine.

MR CORNWELL: Minister, what are you doing about the bed block that you have just quoted, of 23 and nine patients respectively, which must be denying some elective surgery to Canberrans, when there are currently 200 aged-care beds that have not been commissioned and are available in this territory?

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, I will be making an announcement on this issue shortly.

Mental health care

MR SMYTH: My question is also to the Minister for Health. Mr Corbell, last week there was a conference on health outcomes at Rydges Lakeside. At the conference there was a discussion of the fact that, in most areas of health, incidence of death is used as a performance indicator. For example, in obstetrics and anaesthesia, watch carefully and learn from their relatively tiny number of deaths. Even a small increase is taken very seriously.

The exception to this is the area of mental health, which tends not to collect this information. Minister, in the past 18 months, how many clients of Mental Health ACT have been involved in homicides? How many have been involved in attempted homicides? How many have attempted suicide, and how many have been successful in committing suicide?

MR CORBELL: There may be some difficulties in obtaining some of that information. Not all of it is reportable or reported. I will take the question on notice and provide as much detail as I can to Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: I have a supplementary question. Minister, will the government consider taking this on as an indicator when reporting on mental health issues?

MR CORBELL: I am happy to consider the matter further, Mr Speaker.

Clerical wage increase

MR HARGREAVES: My question is to the Treasurer. During a debate on the third appropriation bill for 2002-2003, the Leader of the Opposition stated:

I'd 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.

Can the Treasurer advise the house and, of course, satisfy Mr Smyth—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, questions shall not refer to debates that have taken place during the calendar year.

MR HARGREAVES: “Refer to”, can I ask, or “reflect upon”?

MR SPEAKER: No, “shall not refer to”. You can re-word the question, or it is out of order.

MR HARGREAVES: I'd like to re-word it then, Mr Speaker, if I may. Can the Treasurer please advise the house about the legality of the payment of the clerical wage increase—

Mr Stefaniak: On a point of order, Mr Speaker—

MR SPEAKER: It doesn't matter, Mr Stefaniak; I'm on to it. You can't ask for a legal opinion.

MR HARGREAVES: Can I rephrase it?

MR SPEAKER: This is your last chance.

MR HARGREAVES: Can the Treasurer advise the house, please, whether it was appropriate that the payments for those wage increases occurred before the appropriation bill was passed?

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I suspect that's an expression of opinion.

MR SPEAKER: I call the Treasurer.

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MR QUINLAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Rather than refer to a previous debate, I'll refer to an article in the *Canberra Times* which has the headline "Quinlan denies unauthorised spending claim". I think, to some extent, that has been an indicator of a trend—an unfortunate trend, I think. Some of the headlines of articles in recent times have probably overstated the import or the salaciousness of the story contained therein.

I think the important point is that the Leader of the Opposition, again—and I will say this again—has made a statement in the public forum which leads the listener, the hearer, to think, "Ah, something wrong." These stories, of course, have a one-day shelf life. If you do correct them, generally it's a day too late, as the moment has passed.

I have noticed of recent times that it's not just once and it's just not accidental. There appears to be a succession of misquotes or quotes out of context, in particular but not exclusively, from the Leader of the Opposition—this being one of them. This was part of a press release that went out, pointing up this particular issue. It was sufficient for Mr Smyth to make an issue of it.

As Barry Smith once said, you don't chide an invertebrate for having no backbone. I don't have a major issue with Mr Smyth because he, apparently, has a standard of "you get away with what you get away with".

Mr Smyth: You're tetchy about this.

MR QUINLAN: Yes, I am, actually, absolutely. The point I wish to make—and I wish to repeat this; I think I made this point last week, the last sitting week of the Assembly—is that I am concerned that occasionally in our local media there isn't some verification process, at least the minimum amount of verification to check the veracity of what's implied in a statement.

As it so happens, Mr Smyth, I think, as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee—I'm not sure—referred this matter to the Auditor-General after the fact, after the press release had gone out of course, after some sort of imputation had been made. This place occasionally, and particularly that side of the house, oozes self-righteousness from time to time; we're fairly dripping with indignation when there is some challenge to their particular integrity.

However, I do believe that it is time that there is an objective analysis and commentary on what seems to be a growing practice. It's a fairly snide practice. Nevertheless, it does, I think, reflect upon individual integrity and, as a result of reflecting on individual integrity, it does reflect on this place as a whole.

Let me assure the house and all of those people that read that article in the *Canberra Times*, assiduously, of course, that the Auditor-General has written back to Mr Smyth—copies have been provided to my department—giving the appropriation bill and its processing the all clear. I rise to inform the house of that, in particular because I doubt very much that Mr Smyth would have the personal integrity to stand and do it himself, even though he has put out the press release.

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: is it appropriate to reflect on the personal integrity of members in that way?

MR SPEAKER: I think you should withdraw that.

MR QUINLAN: Which bit, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: The reflection on Mr Smyth's integrity.

MR QUINLAN: I withdraw the reflection on Mr Smyth's integrity, but I will try to make the point that I wish to make that, really, this place does have and ought to have standards. I am concerned that standards are falling and they are falling at a time, as I said, when we have episodes of this oozing self-righteousness and this dripping indignation that come from the other side of the house and when there seems to be a lowering of standard, particularly in the nature of press releases and in the quoting of individuals in this place.

Mr Speaker, I am very happy to advise the house that Appropriation Bill (No 3) 2002-2003 does have the auditor's all-clear, and I do that in the knowledge that if I didn't advise the house no-one would.

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. I thank the Treasurer for that clear explanation, but just one thing remains. Can the Treasurer please assure the Assembly, and in particular Mr Smyth, that there is a difference between a budget and an appropriation bill?

MR QUINLAN: Yes, I think we are getting there, slowly, over time. During this financial year no doubt there will be need for additional appropriation of some sort or another because not everything in the budget is appropriated immediately. If we can actually get a grasp of the difference between the original budget and the appropriation then we might have a little bit more mature approach to the debate.

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

Tree preservation in Belconnen

Debate resumed.

MR CORBELL (Minister for Health and Minister for Planning) (3.21): Mr Speaker, I seek an extension of time.

(Extension of time granted.)

This motion focuses on the appropriateness of undertaking a land swap for a section of land in Belconnen. In particular, the proposition of those members supporting the motion is that, if the government were to swap the land, the trees on the site would be saved. The point I was making prior to lunch was that, even if the land were to revert to territory ownership, the government would still have to address the question of the future of a number of unsafe trees identified on the site and the government's liability if it did not take appropriate steps to ensure that the site was made safe. That would be, nevertheless, a continuing issue.

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Mr Speaker, the area in question is a commercial area. In planning terms, the aim is to promote commercial activity that will provide goods and services to the community in an efficient and competitive manner. Reducing commercial land, either through acquisition or land swap, does not further this outcome, nor does it assist existing commercial operators. Any increases in the commercial density and potential customer numbers would assist in ensuring the future viability of the area.

This motion fails to recognise the possible serious implications of a land swap or acquisition of the site and does not consider the impact that that may ultimately have on traders in the area. Either a land swap or an outright repurchase of the site would raise many issues that I feel the Assembly must consider before deciding on this motion. In particular, I will address first the issue of a land swap.

There is no equivalent land in the area. There is land that could accommodate the development proposed by the lessee on the current site, but it is not equivalent. An alternative site is likely to have a higher value than the one that is to be acquired by the territory. In order to avoid a windfall gain to the lessee if they are not prepared to pay the difference between the alternative site and the Nettlefold Street site, the territory may have to restrict the level of development that the site could otherwise accommodate to match that on the Nettlefold Street site. This would provide a lesser commercial outcome on land able more effectively to handle a larger development. That would be a poor outcome for the overall commercial development of the area and the best use of the territory's unleased land.

Should the Nettlefold Street site be swapped for an alternative site, it needs to be remembered that this would further reduce the opportunities for commercial businesses in the area, as any site that may be swapped would not be sold in an open and competitive manner. It would not only deny other commercial interests but also leave the government open to questions of probity in respect of any deal reached.

Acquisition of the site is likely to be expensive. If the lessee requires a price higher than its market value to reflect some cost or perceived special value, to what level above current market value is the territory prepared to go? If the lessee were not to agree to sell the land back to the territory at market price, it would have to be done through compulsory acquisition.

This raises serious issues about the territory's land release program in general. No purchaser would ever be certain that if they purchased land from the territory they would be able to develop it. The prospect of reacquisition could have a major impact on future land prices as purchasers discount for this risk element.

The cost of compulsory acquisition may be extremely high. Compensation would have to be in just terms and it is unknown what a court may determine is just when the territory has only recently sold the site to the lessee with the prospect that it could be developed.

Mr Speaker, the government of the day, the Liberal government of the day, made a decision to sell this site. They did so based on a comprehensive assessment, which has since been repeated on two separate occasions, to determine the best way of managing trees on the site. It is an act of gross inconsistency for the Liberal Party to claim now that

they have had a change of mind. They have not been able to demonstrate what has changed. They have not outlined to this place which factors have changed their mind. They have not given any further evidence.

The government has reassessed the site and believes that this is an appropriate way to move forward with the development of the site. Acquiring it would simply place uncertainty on the marketing of all land in the ACT.

MR SPEAKER: Order! The minister's time has expired.

MR STEFANIAK (3.27): I certainly do recall the land release program Mr Corbell referred to and I also recall that some significant factors came to light after that—indeed, during the term of the current government. It is true that the block in question was sold at public auction during the term of the previous government. It was purchased to enable a discount liquor store to be built.

Subsequent to the sale, the trees on the site underwent a further evaluation and some of them were rated as significant under the tree protection legislation. The design and layout of the proposed building had to be adjusted to maintain the more significant trees on the block. Mr Corbell or someone else in this debate talked about seven trees being earmarked to go. I was shown those trees by some people and five of them were indicated as being so significant that they needed to stay.

I am advised that the design for the driveways and the turning bays on the block still impact on the drip line of the trees and earthworks on the site would cut in below the natural ground level, which would have a very serious impact on the trees drainage. It has also come to my knowledge that the Commissioner for the Environment has expressed concern about the impact on the trees to be preserved and it is highly likely that the significant trees that are being set aside for preservation on the block will be dead within five years.

The community council and other groups in Belconnen—I saw Mr Evans here earlier—have been lobbying for a land swap involving an adjacent underutilised car park. Both areas have the same land use policy. The car park is currently under bitumen and there are no conservation issues with it. There has been a widespread campaign by way of a petition in the community. I think that the car park over the road is block 9. If you look at the territory plan you will see that the block is not of an insignificant size. I drive past that area regularly at a reasonably early hour of the morning to go to the gym there and sometimes I drive past there for other reasons and I do not think that I have seen too many cars parked there. It would seem that the use of that area is not an unreasonable solution to this problem.

There are some significant trees there. One of the trees is about 400 years old. I am advised, and I am no tree expert by any stretch of the imagination, that it has probably another 200 or 300 years left to live. It is pretty old for a tree. It was probably just a little sapling in 1603 when Queen Elizabeth I was on the throne in England. When it was 200 years old the steam engine still had not been introduced. One hundred years ago when it was 300 years old the Wright brothers took their first flight in a powered plane and the Chinese army discontinued to use bows and arrow.

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You could throw around all sorts of trivia in terms of what has happened over the 400 years, but it is a very significant tree for this particular region and that is something we need to take into account. We are not saying that, because there are some significant trees there, the people who want to build there cannot have access to somewhere else to build. The government should look at an obvious site just over the road with the same zoning which could quite conceivably take what is proposed and preserve a very significant tree and several other very significant trees and a not unpleasant corner of Belconnen in the industrial area.

I think that Ms Dundas was correct in bringing such a motion before the Assembly. I think the motion is worthy of serious consideration and support. I do not think it is impossible to effect a win/win situation here for everyone concerned.

MS DUNDAS (3.31), in reply: I thank members of this Assembly for participating in this debate today. It has become quite a heated debate. Protecting our environment does raise a lot of emotional issues for people. There are some points that I would like to pick up on.

It was a shame to see the government attacking the opposition for changing their mind on a decision. Yes, we are looking for certainty and we are looking for probity and accountability, but the ability to say that you have made a mistake and would like to correct it is a very important one, especially in politics. People should not be attacked for seeing wisdom and taking on new information.

I think that it is important to discuss the community concerns about the site that we are discussing. As has been mentioned, there has been a very strong community campaign. The community are feeling disenfranchised—a word that the community themselves have used—about the way the government has dealt with their concerns on this issue. I find it quite disappointing that the government, which said that it was going to be accountable and responsive, has ignored the concerns raised by the community so far.

I hope that this motion will be successful today and show to the government that there are members of this Assembly who are willing to listen to the community, who are willing to act on behalf of the community, and the government should take that on board. What we want is the long-term survival of these trees. The Commissioner for the Environment has said that a land swap may be the only way to ensure the long-term survival of these trees.

We have put forward a positive solution. The minister raised concerns about the high value of any land with which we might be swapping it. Perhaps a small price needs to be paid to protect this remnant woodland, these very significant trees. He has also said that it might reduce opportunities for commercial interests. I have to disagree there. There has been a lot of talk about what is going on in the Belconnen industrial area, the trade centre there, and whether it needs to be redeveloped. Most of the ideas that I have heard have not touched upon this block of land or the blocks around it. They have focused more on more higher density development in the already built-up areas. I understand that urban consolidation is one of the principles of the spatial planning process that we have been looking at, as opposed to just spreading everything out.

I do not believe that a land swap would result in uncertainty, as the government has said. I believe that it would result in a good outcome for the community, who will know that their voice is being heard, and for the environment in terms of protecting this very important part of our ecological system that supports native wildlife, and would allow for greater consideration of further development in the Belconnen area, especially on the blocks of land that have been cited today as possible areas for a land swap.

I thought we had a commitment to protecting our environment and I thought we had a commitment to listening to the community. I hope that that will be evidenced by support by members of this motion today.

Question put:

That **Ms Dundas'** motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9		Noes 8	
Mrs Burke	Mr Pratt	Mr Berry	Mr Quinlan
Mr Cornwell	Mr Smyth	Mr Corbell	Mr Stanhope
Mrs Cross	Mr Stefaniak	Ms Gallagher	Mr Wood
Ms Dundas	Ms Tucker	Mr Hargreaves	
Mrs Dunne		Ms MacDonald	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Motor sport facility—Majura Valley

MR STEFANIAK (3.38): I move:

That this Assembly calls on the ACT Government to build a motor sport facility, including a dragway, in the Majura Valley.

Canberra is blessed with many wonderful sporting facilities. Some of those have come at a cost, but they have provided immense benefit to the people of the territory, immense entertainment for the tens of thousands of spectators who go to various activities, and immense satisfaction for the many people who participate in those sports. We have the reputation of being a very good sporting capital. In fact, governments of all persuasions have trumpeted that and prided themselves on it.

Sadly, one of the major sports does not have terribly good facilities, that is, motor sport. I recall that in the early 1990s there were real fears, mainly as a result of the pretty awful push against Fairbairn Park of some people in the environment department, that motor sport could die in the territory. Luckily, that did not apply. Some improvements were made during the term of the government of which I was a member and a reasonable regime—not perfect, but reasonable—has now been established there. Of course, we all know of the saga of the dragway and the fact that the site near the airport is closed and has been since the end of 1998.

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Motor sport is a very popular activity in Canberra and the rest of Australia. The V8s are no longer with us. Lots of people, regardless of where the races were or anything like that, were very sad to see them go. Indeed, that has had some effect on tourism in the territory, because motor sport has the capacity to bring in many tourists.

In 2001, after the court cases involving the dragway were finished, I commissioned as the then minister a study of what was the best site for a dragway in the Majura Valley and block 52 was identified. An environmental study was done, which was available to the current government, and there was an economic impact study.

That government went to the election in 2001 very much supported by people who wanted a dragway, who very much believed that the new government would build them a dragway. My motion calls on this government to do just that, to build and develop a motor sport facility in the Majura Valley.

It is interesting to go through *Hansard* on this subject. On 30 August 2000, Mr Corbell moved the following motion:

That this Assembly, recognising the significant economic and social benefits drag-racing has brought to the ACT community, urges the ACT Government to enter into negotiations with the Canberra International Dragway to reach agreement for a suitable, permanent venue for drag-racing in the ACT.

Mr Corbell indicated that his motion was not going to reflect on the legal battle. He said:

...it is intended to send a positive signal from this Assembly on the need for a permanent drag-racing venue in the ACT—a venue which is suitable and a venue which provides those enthusiasts with a legitimate outlet for the pursuit of their sport and does so in a way which actually brings a beneficial return to the ACT community, both socially and economically.

The first part of my motion asks the Assembly to recognise the significant economic and social benefits that drag-racing brings to the ACT community. Mr Speaker, there is no doubt that drag-racing does do just that. It has been estimated that each year the ACT drag-racing facility, the Canberra International Dragway, brought in approximately \$1.5 million in visitor revenue to the ACT.

I think he had said earlier \$2 million. I would agree with that. I can recall going there a bit during the time I was minister and that figure was quoted. It was a relatively small-scale affair, but an affair that did not take any government money, that had built itself up. In fact, the only government money it got was \$45,000 all up in two lots, one of \$40,000 and the other of \$5,000, during the term of the previous government. I cannot recall any other government money being spent on it. It ran itself and ran itself well.

Mr Corbell went on to state:

Mr Speaker, I am no revhead—I am sure that most people in the Assembly would recognise that—but I do recognise that it is important to provide in a place such as the ACT venues for people to perform and to experience their sports, the things that interest them, in a safe way. We do not have that at the moment.

That brings me to the second part of my motion, which is about recognising the social benefits that drag-racing brings to the ACT community. The provision of a permanent venue for drag-racing would allow people to pursue their legitimate sporting interests in a way which is safe and which does not have detrimental impacts on other members of the community. At the moment there is no legitimate outlet for drag-racing activity. I am sure that my colleague Mr Rugendyke would attest to the need to have outlets for people to pursue motor sport activities safely and keep them off our streets and away from our residential areas, where that sort of activity is unacceptable.

He went on to say:

The ACT Government really does need to get serious about finding a permanent location. This matter has dragged on for a long time.

I agree with him. Indeed, he was quite right in terms of the social effects and the fact that it would get some people off our streets, an ongoing concern. I recall that only recently about 90 people were drag-racing somewhere in Hume. It is a constant complaint that most of our officers get. That may well not occur if we had a dragway.

Mr Corbell went on to say as his third point:

I think it is incumbent upon the ACT Government at least to consider the option and explore the option in serious negotiation with the Canberra International Dragway on what form of support it is prepared to provide to enable a permanent venue to be established. I understand that a report on an examination of potential sites was put together around five to six years ago and identified a number of sites, particularly one in the Majura Valley, which may have the potential for a permanent drag-racing facility.

I am no expert on the environmental, social and other aspects of those sites and I would expect those issues to be properly examined, but I do think it is important that the ACT government get serious about negotiating with the Canberra International Dragway to find and reach agreement on a suitable permanent venue for drag-racing in the ACT.

I agree. That was said by Mr Corbell in speaking on behalf of the then opposition. What is happening now that he is in government?

Members may or may not know that a study was done in 1996, initially commissioned by Mr Lamont in 1994, into ideal sites for motor sport in the territory and the best site was in the Majura Valley for a full motor sport complex. About six sites were looked at. I have mentioned the 2001 study which I commissioned. Part of the report, an economic part, was sent to me in August of that year and the full report, including the environmental study, which I understand also got the big tick, would have been given to the current government.

The work has been done and a suitable site has been established. I understand that the leases there will expire at the end of 2005. I do not think that it would be an insurmountable problem for the government to go ahead, put its money where its mouth is, and build a motor sport facility, specifically the dragway which thousands of Canberrans voted for in October 2001 and, in doing so, assisted this government to get

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elected. We all remember the sign "I voted for a dragway". That vote was a vote for the Labor Party because the Labor Party was making all the right noises in that regard. I think that those people have a right to feel very badly let down. Unfortunately, that is exactly what has happened since the government came to power.

We started seeing reports earlier this year about the Majura Road dragway being stalled. Finally, Mr Quinlan responded in April of this year to some questions I put on notice in relation to the dragway by indicating that he had advised Mr Develin in a letter to him in April—I have sighted his letter—that government assistance in purchasing a lease would be dependent upon Mr Develin negotiating the transfer of a lease with any existing leaseholders and subject to a business plan that did not rely on government funding for construction or running costs for a new dragway facility. In other words, there might be some assistance in terms of getting the land, but there would be no assistance after that.

I accept that the dragway people would not have had the required funds to build the facility. The 2001 study I will refer to shortly shows, just looking at the dragway part, how effective that could be in terms of jobs, in terms of economic activity and in terms of bringing people to the ACT each year. Combined with a circular track, even a club circuit, which could be built for between \$2 million and \$3 million, that would be stage one, the start, of an excellent general motor sport facility in the Majura Valley.

I am not expecting the government to build the full facility straightaway, but building a dragway and a club circuit of 2½ to 3 kilometres would be an excellent start because the people using the circuit would use the other facilities which would be part and parcel of the cost of building a dragway. The cost of building a dragway is, I think, between \$6 million and \$8 million. The report in 2001 said it would be \$6.2 million, I think, but I am allowing a bit for inflation in saying \$6 million to \$8 million, and the cost of a circuit may be \$2 million to \$3 million.

We are not talking about a lot of money and motor sport in Canberra has never received much assistance from government. Fairbairn Park effectively built itself. It received minimal assistance from government at some stages. During the early 1990s there was none at all. I can recall giving some assistance, but it did not ask for much and it has only received limited assistance. I am talking in terms of \$5,000 to \$10,000 a year. The most Fairbairn Park probably received in one year was about \$30,000 three or four years ago. It has never cost us money. It has never come begging for handouts. I think the track record shows that both the Canberra International Dragway people, who have never asked for recurrent funding, and the other motor sport people would be more than capable of running a facility, if one were to be built in the Majura Valley, at no recurrent cost to government.

In fact, when one considers the number of people who came to town for the V8s and who go to major motor sport events, when one considers the 1,000 or 2,000 people who would turn up at major events at Fairbairn Park, which was basically just about club facilities, and when one considers the several thousand people who would come along when the old dragway was operating, which would have been a much smaller dragway than would be envisaged here, one can see that the economic benefits would be significant. If the old dragway brought in about \$2 million a year, what would having a full one and a proper circuit as well do there?

The economic report of 2001, which the government has, states:

It is well known that motor vehicle racing attracts many interstate and overseas visitors. Most familiar is the attraction of Formula One and 500cc Motor Cycle Grand Prix events and CART events such as the Gold Coast Indy. However, all types of motor sports have their fans and all have the ability to attract spectators from outside the local community. A new Canberra dragway would attract spectators from not only the local region in NSW but from Sydney.

The report went on to say:

The major source of economic impacts are:

The capital/ construction cost for raceway facilities

The capital/construction cost for vehicles

The operating and maintenance costs for the raceway facilities

The operating and maintenance costs for a racing team

Expenditure by interstate visitors.

The direct impact deriving from the above sources has been compiled from discussions with raceway operators and from a variety of published sources including recent studies of drag racing expenditure and of the impact of the drag racing Winter Nationals at Ipswich in Queensland, and of the Perth Motorplex Facility.

The report estimated the cost of construction at \$6 million and took the operating cost of the dragway from data there. Remember, the dragway operated at no cost to government, as with every other motor sport.

The report indicates that the new facility—it is just talking about a dragway—would generate an additional \$6.2 million in gross state product annually and 126 jobs, which is not something to be sneezed at. A major motor sport facility in the Majura Valley could also provide lots of other options as well. The airport might be interested in truck parking there. Mechanical industry infrastructure could be built around it as well. It could be more than simply for racing motor cars and dragway racing. There is a lot of potential in terms of money coming into the territory on an annual basis in building such a facility. Indeed, I think that it would prove to me quite a good investment for the ACT government.

This government disappointed lots of people by seemingly renegeing on what they considered to be a promise to go ahead and build a dragway. It now has the opportunity to change that by accepting this motion and committing to building a dragway and a motor sport complex in the Majura Valley. A lot of work has been done on that. Two major reports have been undertaken. The time for trying to opt out of the commitment has past and I think that it is incumbent upon this Assembly to ensure that this government lives up to the expectations concerning its election and builds a motor sport facility, including a dragway, in the Majura Valley.

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MR QUINLAN (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, and Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming) (3.53): I will move the amendment circulated in my name immediately to allow people to talk to both. I move:

Omit all words after “That this Assembly,” substitute the following:

“notes that the ACT Government is negotiating with the Commonwealth for the purchase of land in the Majura Valley, which if successful, will allow for the development of a motor sport facility and an ACT correctional facility.”

Mr Speaker, it is amazing to see the changes in the ranks of the opposition and their attitudes since finding themselves in opposition, particularly but not exclusively Mr Stefaniak. Without reflecting upon previous votes of this Assembly, Mr Speaker, I think that we have seen a sea change in some of them, including Mr Stefaniak and Mr Cornwell, in what they might do for people in opposition that they did not seem to want to do for people in government.

Mr Stefaniak, in some of his public utterances, is skirting as close as he dares to saying that the Liberal Party would have built a motor sport facility if it had been returned to government in 2001, whereas I do not think that any of the Liberal Party’s platform went anywhere near such a commitment. This is all born again stuff, born out of what I would think is a lack of responsibility to do anything other than to chase cheap bucks, effectively. I find that, frankly, a little irresponsible, but I guess that is parish pump politics.

Mr Stefaniak did touch on the V8 car race and was sad that we have lost it. Let me say that that is probably more reflective of what the previous government might have brought to us than a structure that might be used by local sports people for their own benefit and possibly the benefit of the territory.

Mr Stefaniak referred to the money that he put up for a study particularly focused on block 52. I have to say that right from the word go I considered that to be hush money. That was money paid to protract the process beyond a 2001 election. That was a taxpayer-funded, issue-avoidance scheme. The taxpayers of this territory paid the best part of \$60,000 for the Liberal Party to avoid making any statement of policy in relation to a dragway in particular and probably motor sport in general. I do not think that it confers any credit on the Liberals to keep repeating that they ran this study, which was therefore some sort of indication that they were behind motor sports. On the contrary: as I said, that was a taxpayer-funded, issue-avoidance scheme.

Let me refer to the study itself. I have to say that the study that was produced was referred to Treasury for analysis and, not to put too fine a point on it, the Treasury does have some serious misgivings about the claims, the economic multipliers and the economic effects that are incorporated into that report. I suggest to members, if they have got the time to do it, that they get themselves a copy of the report, skim through it and see what they think, because you do get as you read it an impression that it might just be a rose-coloured glasses view of the impact of a dragway on the ACT, particularly a dragway that at that point in time the proponents were stating would cost, I think, about \$6 million.

We are not talking about an international standard dragway; we are probably talking about what is termed, I think, a provincial dragway. The whole promise for that dragway was huge. I know that the New South Wales government funded a dragway at Eastern Creek and I think that in the order of \$30 million will be going into that dragway. That sort of money is being spent in Brisbane, as I understand. I forget the name of the park where there is a dragway in Brisbane. But to put in an international standard dragway or a dragway that would pull the crowds from hither and thither probably would cost a huge amount of money.

Mr Stefaniak has now upped the ante, as you can in opposition, beyond the commitment of a dragway to one of a full motor sport facility. I do not think that he went as far as talking about having a V8 car track. I hope not, because that would be big money and that would draw you back into dealing with AVESCO. I ask members to reflect upon how AVESCO and the government of the time interacted in relation to the GMC car race. I do not want to cast any aspersions on anybody, but I happened to be at a cocktail party and said that I had just met the guys from AVESCO. Someone said to me, "Did you shake hands?" Having said that I had, I was asked, "Did you count your fingers?"

I think that that is a reflection of the fact that AVESCO are very hard business people. They do drive a hard bargain. If you want to have V8 car races and have the stars of the V8 car races in your backyard, it is going to cost you a lot of money. It did with the GMC race. I think that officially we got up to about \$6 million, but that was not the full cost. There were lots of costs that were absorbed in other budgets but were imposed upon agencies and imposed upon the territory that went beyond that \$6 million, but that was the official amount.

I think we ought to try collectively to get this question in perspective. The government does wish to provide a dragway, or the capacity for a dragway facility. The pressure or the ask of the proponents has varied from time to time. It has varied from wanting a chunk of land and \$6 million to a chunk of land will do. I might add that some of that negotiation preceded the Eastern Creek development in Sydney, which may have a serious effect upon the drawing capacity of the Canberra dragway. Together, they might stimulate even greater activity; who knows? But you would have to take that into account. You would have to think about whether the dragway is going to take off like a drag car, I suppose; is it really going to take off in the area or not?

I think that my amendment puts the question into perspective. Yes, the government seeks to provide land for a dragway. The government recognises that it is not just the chunk of land that is impacted upon by the existence of a dragway. A dragway in full operation, in full flight, would alienate quite an area for most normal activities, for other pursuits, purely because of the traffic and the noise generated. That just happens to be the collateral problem that goes with dragway racing, but we have to recognise that you just do not find a quarter of a mile of dirt, enough room for pits and a stand, and say, "There you go, that's it." It does have to be placed in a most suitable location.

We are trying to find that. Mr Stanhope has advised publicly that the government is negotiating with the Commonwealth for the acquisition of land that the Commonwealth holds in the Majura Valley. We are seeking to build a correctional facility in the Majura Valley. We are also seeking to find land for a dragway. Another degree of difficulty in

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the whole process, another parameter, is the airport—the requirements of the airport and the political clap that accrues to the airport in terms of land and land around the airport.

There are, I would have to say, some issues to be worked through in terms of what might and might not happen within the near vicinity of the airport. It might impinge upon its capacity to grow at a future time and the potential for the airport, a correctional facility, a dragway and the other motor sport facilities to coexist in that area, so it is not a simple situation. I know that it becomes simple in opposition, but it is not a simple situation.

I think that this Assembly overall is mature enough to note that the government needs to be allowed to go through those negotiations and to play the politics that are associated with the airport and its capacity to influence decisions and its actual needs and the needs of Canberra for the growth of the airport, as well as the correctional facility and the dragway.

I remain, I have to say, unconvinced that the existence of a dragway would change markedly the propensity of people to indulge in street drag-racing, unless that facility was open and then policed. With the current environment and the insurance imbroglio that we have been through for the last year and a half or so, if you were the drag club responsible for that area you would not leave the gates open, you would not let people on it, you would not let uncontrolled drag-racing take place. You would not allow, and I certainly would not allow, cars that were not totally modified to meet drag-racing standards onto a dragway.

I know that in the past the story was different, that there was a little bit of “let it rip”, and the police were involved. The police had their own hot car that they used to encourage their members to go out there and race the kids. But I think times have changed a bit. I doubt very much whether I would want to be associated directly with uncontrolled drag-racing taking place at any time that a few people felt like involving themselves in it.

I have, as sports minister, spent quite an amount of my time at various meetings along the motor sport racing facilities in the Fairbairn area and some of them do not need to change their facilities. The go-kart club is a very well organised club. It has a very well advanced facility, a very well respected facility, and the only hitch, as for a number of other areas, is the curfew that applies there, particularly on a wet day which slows down their races a bit.

I just happened to be at a function the other night with Lee Donnelly, who looks after the motorbikes. Having made their arrangements with the Subaru rally people for an upgrade of their course, they are quite happy where they are. (*Extension of time granted.*) If we take out the fact that we are not making a quantum leap towards V8 car racing and we take out those sports which are quite happy now or reasonably serviced now—I doubt that the hill climb would fit immediately into the middle of a sports facility—and we do not anticipate a positive decision on going back to full blown V8 car racing in the territory, we are probably not looking at much more than a drag strip itself and the facilities and accoutrements that go with that as needed to satisfy quite a number of people.

I have had people come to me and say that it is a pity that we cannot have a V8 car race in the ACT; a cab driver did so the other night. However, at the same time, they were all

smart enough to say, “We were blowing a lot of dough on it, though. It was in winter, which was the wrong time. If we got another crack at it, it might be okay.”

Mr Speaker, I think that my amendment to Mr Stefaniak’s motion puts the situation in perspective. I think that it is a reasonable modification of the motion for this Assembly to pass today.

MR PRATT (4.10): I would like to speak to Mr Stefaniak’s motion of support for a motor sport facility, including a dragway, in the ACT. Mr Speaker, as you would know from Mr Stefaniak’s well-presented case, the Liberal Party supports the development in the ACT of a dragway and eventually a motor sports facility encompassing other motor sport activities.

We have not in the past—and would not in the future, by the way—support the building of a dragway or something of that ilk near Macarthur. I stress that now so that the residents of that part of the world know quite clearly that we do support, for the reason that the Brindabella and Tuggeranong Valley areas are not suitable, the building of such a complex in the Majura Valley.

A motor sports facility incorporating a dragway is an important and needed asset for the ACT. However, we do need to recognise that residential amenity is, and always will be, Canberra’s most prized asset. Towards the end of 2001, the then Liberal government commissioned a study into the best possible sites for a dragway, and the study quite clearly indicated that overall, for a whole bunch of reasons including those I have stressed, Majura would be the best site.

The building of a full motor sports facility, including a dragway, in Majura would allow motor sports enthusiasts and the youth of Canberra to come together at a suitable location and enjoy that complex. Developing a facility which included a sports club and even night time drag events for young people would be, I would think, a very positive step to take.

I issued a media release this morning calling on the government to direct more attention to juvenile crime in the ACT following a spate of car thefts in the Belconnen area. I believe that the development of a motor sports facility at Majura may contribute to a reduction in juvenile crime and general, low-level vandalism activities in the ACT. Youths as young as 12 years of age are currently involved in stealing, joy-riding and vandalising vehicles in Canberra, to quote an AFP newsletter of some weeks ago.

Mr Speaker, in my media release, I called on the government to look at ways to ramp up crime prevention programs and said that the community should work together to protect our children. The provision of a motor sports facility for the people of Canberra would provide youths with an alternative to hanging around in the streets and at the local shops and give them a place to spend their time with a range of people who are also interested in motor sports.

As I stated earlier, a motor sports track with club rooms and night events would, in time, provide a social and sporting arena for Friday and Saturday nights and perhaps take our young enthusiasts away from suburban back streets, such as the latest drag strip located somewhere between Kambah and Mount Taylor, where the residents are being driven

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spare. Such a facility would give these youths of Canberra a safe and suitable place to spend their time. It may also mean that the presence of youths in Braddon on Friday and Saturday nights would be reduced, with the facility giving them a place to go to as a group of motor sport enthusiasts.

Not only would the development of a motor sports facility in Majura provide an alternative for youths who may otherwise be out on the streets making trouble and breaking the law, but also it would provide an appropriate place for motor sports enthusiasts to gather instead of on the streets of Braddon. They could go there and show off their cars, as well as enjoy the sporting amenities and perhaps the sort of club life that would eventually—it would take time—be developed as the place was able to gather itself together and take off.

It would be a central place to gather that would be supervised by professional and experienced staff and, I suggest, would be frequently visited and constantly monitored by the police. Mr Speaker, this would encourage police and community interaction and would also ensure that the facility was a safe place for parents to send their children and for the community in general to visit. Police youth programs, such as vehicle care and safe driver training, could be developed around such infrastructure and through an interface such as police programs interacting with a dragway sporting complex.

Mr Speaker, I am not drawing a long bow when I say that the development of a motor sports facility in Majura would benefit Canberra's youth, parents, business, tourism, motor sport enthusiasts and community safety. I would like to take serious issue with the typically arrogant comments made by Mr Quinlan. He attacks the opposition because in some areas members have progressed their positions on policy issues over two years, as if changes of opinion based on meritorious research should be a crime, as if adapting policy positions to reflect changed community or budgetary circumstances and realities should be a crime. Get over it, Ted!

I do not share Mr Quinlan's pessimism either that a motor sports club could not run Friday and Saturday night activities for kids. The driving motive to overcome supervisory and litigation matters is the motive of deterring juvenile crime and doing something to help our kids get together and focus on our kids who are keen about the car culture. An imaginative and serious government could make it work. I would reject Mr Quinlan's pessimism.

Again I say that I support Mr Stefaniak's motion and believe that it would be advantageous to all for the government to honour its promise to Canberra and the motor sports community and develop the site at Majura without delay. I also think that it would be a great initiative and one most beneficial to our youth.

MR CORBELL (Minister for Health and Minister for Planning) (4.17): I join my colleague Mr Quinlan in supporting his amendment, which outlines the positive steps that the government is taking to address this issue. Mr Speaker, there is a new euphemism in use in this place courtesy of Mr Pratt this afternoon, that is, "progressing your position". Others would call it gross inconsistency, Mr Speaker, but let's give Mr Pratt the benefit of the doubt and say that he is progressing his position.

Someone said to me on my way down the stairs that normally when you want to reopen a court case you need fresh evidence, you need something new. In both this debate and the earlier debate we had today, the Liberal Party have failed to provide anything new that demonstrates and justifies a change of position.

Mr Quinlan: Progressing.

MR CORBELL: I'm sorry, a progressing of their position. That is quite typical of the approach we have seen the Liberals adopt in the session today. No, they are not interested in trying to find any real justification for the change in their position; they are just keen to get on and change their position. I do not have a problem with oppositions changing their position when there is a strong basis for doing so, when there is some fresh evidence, when there is something new, but simply to say that they have looked at the facts again and they have not changed, but they have changed their minds is somehow a positive progressing of their position.

The reality is that it is the failure of the previous Liberal government, under their now leader, Mr Smyth, which saw the closure of the dragway facility adjacent to the airport. Since that time, obviously, drag-racing enthusiasts have been denied an opportunity to enjoy their sport in the ACT.

The ACT government have made very clear that we think the contribution we can make is to bring to the table a parcel of land, and that is dependent on the drag-racing fraternity demonstrating their capacity to make good use of that land and to invest in its operation and make it a self-sustaining operation. To that end, Mr Quinlan's amendment outlines the steps we are currently taking to make sure that we are in a position to have land available; in particular, the negotiations which are currently being undertaken between the ACT government and the Commonwealth to acquire land in the Majura Valley for a correctional facility, but also freeing up land potentially for a dragway/motor sport facility.

Mr Speaker, that is the very positive and proactive step the government is taking. I understand that Mr Stefaniak has given a commitment for next year's election that the Liberals will fund a dragway facility. I am very interested to see how the Liberals would find the \$6 million or so that they need to build the facility. I look forward to the budget accountability there. More importantly, I think that Mr Stefaniak needs to work out exactly how he is going to get this land. Unless this government is successful in acquiring land from the Commonwealth, the only other land is held under rural lease.

I am not quite sure whether Mr Stefaniak has looked closely at the processes for acquiring land, but it is highly doubtful that acquiring land for a dragway is acquiring land for a public purpose, which is the provision under the Lands Acquisition Act. You had better make a note of it, Bill; check that one out. That is the only justification on which the territory can acquire land; either that or it has to enter into some sort of private treaty with the leaseholder. Obviously, that would mean acquiring the land for much more than its potential value.

Mr Speaker, those are some of the flaws in the Liberal Party's approach. They have not worked out how they are going to acquire the land and they have not explained to the community how they are going to pay for it, let alone how they are going to pay for

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a multimillion dollar facility. This government's approach is a responsible and supportive one. We have outlined the approach we have adopted to try to acquire land so that we do have the capacity to deliver a dragway facility if the supporting dragway enthusiasts are able to bring the other half of the equation to the table, which is the ongoing financing and operation of the facility. Mr Speaker, to do it in any other way really would not be a responsible use of money.

In the same sitting period we have had Mr Stefaniak say that he thinks that \$6 million at least should be on the table and Mr Pratt insist on a 26½ per cent pay increase for teachers, which would be, I think, a recurrent expenditure of about \$50 million. So I am interested in the Liberal's claim about budget accountability. At the end of the day, who are the financially responsible ones here? Who are the ones who are properly managing the territory's finances?

Mr Speaker, we are looking to the future. We are looking to ways to deliver. We are looking at the way to deliver a proactive approach which can support dragway enthusiasts in a collaborative way. I think that Mr Quinlan's amendment should be supported because his approach is definitely the best approach on this issue.

MRS BURKE (4.23): I am finding this debate really interesting. This has already been raised today by Ms Dundas. I hope people go through their lives reviewing their decisions and are then able to present another position, based on further information.

Mr Corbell says that this decision we have suddenly made is not based upon new information. We are not allowed to change our minds, but they sat here for six years and did what they wanted to do. They blamed us for this, and now they are blaming us for that—it is interesting. I think they are becoming pass masters at avoiding the hard decisions.

They are using an interesting strategy. They promised it in 2001, but have sat on their hands ever since. As has just been alluded to, it could become an election issue again next year. I find it amusing. I think it is encouraging to see that government members are now at least on speaking terms with the Commonwealth and not being childish, as they are in many other areas. That is pleasing to see.

I ask: where is your commitment? Is this another broken promise? The statement—and that is all it is—Mr Quinlan has put forward appears to be a complete cop-out on the motor sport sector. I am no expert when it comes to motor sport, but I am disappointed. Mr Quinlan has made mention of the V8 car race and some of the things around that. It was disheartening that the government saw fit to capitulate on the staging of the V8 car race in Canberra.

We know that jurisdictions hosting V8s do well. There is obviously huge support and a big groundswell for motor sport in Australia. It could be managed and promoted well. Mr Quinlan himself said he had been told it is a pity that the event was in winter. I have a little saying: it is better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all. One can say that the former government at least tried to get the economy revved up. I make no apology for the pun.

This government just saw it like a damp squid. It did not think outside the box, to try to change the time or negotiate with the jurisdictions involved. It is a sad thing that they could not pick that one up. Anyway, that has gone and we must move on. It had the potential, over time, to be economically viable and I saw their decision as premature.

As Mr Stefaniak has just said, many of our sporting facilities come at a cost—so does obesity, for that matter. When choosing, I think we need to look carefully at what sporting facilities we have—how sport gets people out and about, instead of sitting on their backsides watching TV. I am guilty of that as much as anybody else. We must think of opportunities to get people out of their homes and bring them together in the community.

On the matter of the dragway, it is a disappointment that the government—please excuse this pun—has stalled on the issue for so long. Why has it taken them so long, when they were rampantly promising it in 2001? The issue is that, as I recall, there was a strong commitment by the government when they were going to the election in 2001.

Mr Quinlan: No, there was not!

MRS BURKE: You led people up the garden path, Mr Quinlan.

Mr Quinlan: Mr Speaker, I wish to raise a point of order. “Led people up the garden path,” is that in our lexicon? The point here is that Mrs Burke is telling this house that we made a commitment, when we did not.

MR SPEAKER: I do not think that is a point of order.

MRS BURKE: The issue is that people in the community believed, at that time, that the then Labor opposition was going into an election making some loud noises that they were going to back them all the way and build a dragway.

Mr Quinlan: That is not true.

MRS BURKE: Then you are casting aspersions on the community, Mr Quinlan—be careful.

Mr Quinlan: It is not true.

MRS BURKE: You said you were going to do more than just look at the possibility of a dragway.

Mr Quinlan: You do not know what we said, do you?

MRS BURKE: I do know what was said. I am thinking about you, Mr Quinlan, as you sit there. It is interesting to listen to you and watch you—your body language is fascinating. I think you did betray the trust of people out there. I saw bumper stickers saying you were supporting it and that the dragway was going to be there. Why were people talking about it, if that was not the case? That is another issue we need to look at. Mr Stefaniak has already articulated well the government’s position when they were in opposition, which is most interesting. It was like, now we do, and now we do not.

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Mr Quinlan talked of his doubts as to whether the facility would prevent our streets from being unofficial drag strips. None of us knows the potential for encouraging young people to channel their energies and efforts, do we? Nobody has done a study. That is something you could have done while you were in government. You could have done a study. You could have questioned the young people around there. You could have talked to the Chief Police Officer or to the young people in Braddon. The government needs to think outside the square, but it all gets a bit difficult.

What about the potential for the facility to provide vocational training in the area of motor trades—a multi-facility? There you go; I will let you have that idea. I will give you another idea, although we have already given you many good ideas. I am sure there needs to be a facility which can be used by many enthusiasts. I understand many will have concerns regarding environmental issues. No doubt Ms Tucker, as an expert in that area, will bring out some of the issues she has, but I do not know.

I also understand that the report done some time ago addressed, comprehensively, issues in relation to emissions and noise. I am sure a thorough study was done and that there is no reason why this facility cannot go ahead. We can always find reasons not to do something. What we need is for this government to stand by its pre-election suggestion, shall we say, to the community, and deliver.

This dragway will be an excellent facility for the city. Like Mr Corbell, I may not be a revhead, but when it comes to allowing other people, who are many in number, to pursue a sport which draws large numbers—and supporters—from outside the ACT, we should be going for this and looking at it strongly.

We need to be encouraging and boosting our economy. A strong economy means more money, more jobs, et cetera. It has a good spin-on effect. Mr Stefaniak has already mentioned a \$6.2 million GSP increase and many jobs. I am sure they are not figures which have been plucked out of the air. Do you think they have been plucked out of the air, Mr Quinlan?

Mr Quinlan: They are not very good figures.

MRS BURKE: Is that right? I congratulate my colleague Mr Stefaniak for calling on this government to honour its pre-election commitment, promise or suggestion. I fully support this motion and his endeavours to continue to exert pressure on the government to deliver to the people of Canberra.

MS TUCKER (4.31): The Greens will not be supporting this motion. Firstly, I have concerns about the environmental impacts of such activities in the Majura Valley, which has ecologically sensitive areas. Secondly, I have continuing concerns about the government heavily subsidising motor sport activities in Canberra. I realise that this matter has been discussed in the Assembly for several years. I realise also that the Canberra International Dragway has faced, and still faces, a great deal of uncertainty.

I went to the meeting called by the Tuggeranong Community Council, where the proposal to put a motor sport facility at Macarthur was discussed. There were a lot of people there supporting motor sport. I spoke with a couple of them. They certainly did

not like the Greens' position but said that at least we were consistent, and that neither Labor nor Liberal had covered themselves in glory on this one.

That is definitely the case, and I felt some sympathy for them, in the way they have been messed around over the years. We appreciate that some people like motor sport, and we do not say there should not be such a facility at all. However, we are concerned to see that the noise from such a facility does not affect residents. It should not impact on the environment, and nor should it require large amounts of public money.

We have concerns about the vague reference to the location of the motor sport facility in Mr Stefaniak's motion. Areas in the Majura Valley contain significant regions of natural temperate grassland. These areas are declared an endangered ecological community under the ACT's Nature Conservation Act 1980. This habitat is home for two threatened grassland fauna—the golden sun moth and the eastern lined earless dragon—which are also listed under the Nature Conservation Act.

The golden sun moth is currently listed as of the highest conservation value, while the Majura Valley is a critical site for the earless dragon. It is critical that we act to preserve this area and maintain the corridors of endangered grasslands. This motion does not mention a specific site within the Majura Valley, and I am concerned that these sites will become more threatened if this motion is passed. It is also not just about the direct area to be used for a motor sport facility—it is the impact of that on the surrounding areas.

The Greens are also concerned about the government fully subsidising the building of a motor sport facility. Supporters of the dragway in Canberra have claimed that a motor sport facility will significantly contribute to Canberra's economy. Perhaps, then, there is scope for the motor sport facility to be financially self-supporting and for the provision of funding to construct the facility.

The issue of support for motor sport in Canberra is not new. We are all aware of the financial drain of the V8 car race on the territory's budget of in excess of \$20 million over a number of years. I recall asking for details of the costs—across all agencies. Mr Quinlan mentioned that the costs were greater than those which appear on paper. I also asked for much more detailed justification for the claims by the proponents and the government of the day, in light of the proclaimed benefits that would come to the ACT.

Mrs Burke mentioned plucking figures out of the air. That is pretty well what the Auditor-General demonstrated had been done by the previous government through the V8 car race. The questions I was asking were certainly justified by the Auditor-General's report.

I make the point that, if we are going to be spending millions of dollars on a motor sport facility, I am very concerned about the priorities of the Liberals. Every day for the last two sitting weeks, and many sitting days before, we have been calling for extra money from this government for essential community services for people who have no choice about their life situation. I am talking about people who have a disability.

Just last week, I was asking about therapy services and reminding members, that we have two occupational therapists across the whole of the ACT—that we have an inadequate supply of therapists for children with a disability. This is supported by numerous reports.

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I asked a question about foster carers not being able to get even the normal increase in CPI for the work they do. I have asked questions about mental health and today I asked about affordable housing.

I believe you have to take some responsibility when calling for public funds to be used for particular services or activities. From the Greens' perspective, I will be calling on governments to put more money into essential social services. However, I could not, in good conscience, at the same time demand millions of dollars for a motor sport facility. I do not think that would be responsible.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (4.37): I have a few matters to clarify. I note that Mr Quinlan interjected on Mrs Burke about whether or not a commitment was made in the lead-up to the 2001 election. If that was not the case, there are many people out there who certainly think it was—who obviously got whatever the government was saying to them wrong—because a large number of people believed the commitment was made. I will go back to the sources who told me that, to find out what was said to them.

I notice Mr Corbell regresses to the old retort: “Well, you shut it down.” I am reminded that Mr Corbell said words to the effect of—I do not have the quote with me—“If I were the planning minister, I would give them a lease.”

I remember that, when government changed, and we asked Mr Corbell last year when he was going to give them a lease, he backed away from it at a rate of knots that you would not believe. He knows that, having been through the government solicitor and then through the Federal and Supreme Courts, the government of the time was not able to give a commitment to something over which we had no control. The cheap politics of Mr Corbell over the dragway in the lead-up to the election disappeared as soon as he became a minister, because he knew—right from the start—it was impossible for the government to grant a lease on land over which it had no control.

That brings us to the meeting in Tuggeranong some months ago, where the government announced that it was against a dragway site in Macarthur. Mr Hargreaves, on behalf of the government, announced to the 497 Tuggeranong residents who were in the room at the time that the government was negotiating with the leaseholders over the blocks in question.

The blocks—Mr Stefaniak was there—named were 51 and 52 of Majura. At the August meeting of the Tuggeranong Community Council, I asked whether Mr Hargreaves could clarify what he was talking about. Everybody at the meeting in August—those who had been at the meeting in July—had heard Mr Hargreaves say that the government was negotiating to buy those blocks. Those residents also want to know what the government was talking about. If you ring the current lessees of blocks 51 or 52 Majura—I took it a little further afield—and even with block 611, nothing had been heard from the government. There were no negotiations for the purchase of the blocks.

Mr Hargreaves has wandered in. Perhaps he will get up and tell us what blocks the government was negotiating for. What he clearly told that meeting, and what everybody clearly heard, was that they were negotiating for those blocks. We now know that they were not, because we rang them to find out if they were.

The gentleman who is the lessee on 611 said that they had contacted him about a prison but never about a dragway—and the lessees of 51 and 52 had no idea. I think what we have is a government that is shambling from position to position on this, because they clearly have no commitment to the dragway at all.

We have always been interested in motor sport and the benefits it provides to the community. That can be seen through our support for the Rally of Canberra and the V8 car races—and we were always very interested in the dragway as well. However, just because you are interested does not mean you can break the law and issue a lease on something over which you have no control. In that way, the government had to be responsible to the law.

In another way, Mr Stefaniak assisted them by giving them cash to do the economic study to prove their point—to see whether it was something that should be done. At the same time, the previous government, I think starting in 1994 under the Follett/Lamont Labor government—and it was handed to the Carnell government in 1996—went looking for sites for a complete motor sports facility in the ACT. The sites picked were in the Majura Valley. So there has always been that commitment from this side of the chamber.

We heartily believe that, from a tourism point of view, there is value there. We believe, from a road safety point of view, in teaching kids to drive properly and not do burnouts in the suburbs. We believe that doing it in a controlled environment has value. We believe motor sport is one of the growing industries in Australia, because of the interest in the car in this nation—and we certainly believe Canberra has a role to play in that.

The opposition puts this motion forward because we believe it is time to get the Assembly to say, “Yes, we all agree it is time for a motor sport complex. Let’s stop arguing about it—let’s get on with it.”

MR HARGREAVES (4.41): Mr Speaker, when you get an invitation from such an illustrious person as the Leader of the Opposition to dine frequently on the carcass of a jackal, we cannot all turn it down.

Mr Smyth: You are titchy.

MR HARGREAVES: You bet your sweet life I am titchy, Mr Smyth! I must respond to some of the efforts of the pseudologist across the chamber. Mr Smyth does not mind going into print, telling people that I have told porkies about what happened at Majura.

Mr Smyth: No. I asked for clarification. You are fessing up!

MR HARGREAVES: He does not mind doing that. Let me ignore, for the moment, the innate ramblings of idiots and tell you, Mr Speaker, exactly what is the case.

Mr Pratt: Through the Chair, Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much for your contribution, Mr Pratt. We need take no further notice of you—your contribution is sod-all.

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We are talking about discussions with people who might own or lease land in the Majura area. I do not know how many crowds of 700 people you have addressed, but I have only ever done it once. The area I thought of, whilst addressing that crowd, was everything on the left-hand side of Pialligo Avenue, as you head from Civic to Queanbeyan. I have indicated that on a number of occasions—almost ad nauseam. Mr Smyth—the serial hair-splitter that he is—will say, “Well, one bit is Majura and the other bit is Pialligo.”

Mr Smyth: That is not what the meeting heard.

MR HARGREAVES: You win, Mr Smyth! It is not Easter, but get your hammer, nails and wood and do me over a bit, on the map and name.

Mr Smyth: So the *Chronicle* got it wrong, too?

MR HARGREAVES: The *Chronicle* is absolutely incorrect. You perpetrated that porky in it yourself, and you stand condemned for that.

Mr Smyth: He has the tape—he said he has the tape.

MR HARGREAVES: Give it a break!

MR SPEAKER: Members of the opposition will come to order.

MR HARGREAVES: What I said was that there were conversations going on with people out there who own land, or are leasing land—that is true. Mr Smyth goes out and selectively talks to a couple of leaseholders. He asks, “Did they chat to you?”—and they say, “No.” That is probably true, too.

What I would like to know, Mr Smyth, is who else did you speak to out there? For example, did you speak to the leaseholder at the airport about the drag strip that you personally, through your inaction, killed off? It was you personally, because you did nothing.

In fact, the only person the dragway people have any time for, in my understanding, is Mr Stefaniak, who unfortunately got rolled in cabinet—by whom, Mr Smyth? By you! It was by you—because you did nothing. You stood by and watched Rome burn! You stood by and let it happen. You could have given them a five-year lease, but you did not do it. You just plain did not do it—and you do not have the guts to tell the people of the ACT you did not do it!

Mr Smyth: Talk to the Supreme Court and the Federal Court.

MR HARGREAVES: Have you spoken to the other leaseholders, for example, in what I now know to be Pialligo on the Queanbeyan side of the airport? Have you spoken to that illustrious landlord, Wilson Tuckey—or to Senator Abetz—or whichever monster on the hill is responsible for that? Have you spoken to them? You are too gutless to stand up in this place and say you are backing the people out there to stop the dragway from being built. You are gutless, sometimes, Mr Smyth. You will not get out there and tell the truth. You figure, “I will build up a straw man—I will crucify John Hargreaves—and that will

keep the spotlight off me.” Mr Smyth, you are like a rabbit in the headlights. One of these days, a drag car is going to come along and kill you out.

Mr Smyth: Not under your government!

MR HARGREAVES: You are a pseudologist, Mr Smyth.

Mr Smyth: A what?

MR HARGREAVES: You are a pseudologist. Go and get the dictionary.

Mr Smyth: Go on—spell it.

MR HARGREAVES: I do not need to spell it—I can pronounce it. I can pronounce it, but you cannot. You don’t even know it!

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, direct your comments through the chair. Members of the opposition will come to order!

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker, I reject all the things Mr Smyth has had to say about me. This government has been talking to people in the Majura Valley/Pialligo area in good faith. We have been doing that despite the opposition from this lot over here—despite the obstacles put in our way by people over here. We will get the dragway for these people, in some form or another, at some time or another, despite what they are doing.

MS DUNDAS (4.46): I will speak on both the amendment and the substantive, to get it all out of the way at once. This has become another heated debate in this place. Nevertheless, there seem to be a number of things upon which the majority of the Assembly agrees—support for a motor sport facility of some kind, and that it should be in the Majura Valley—or that the Majura Valley is the best place for that, as it is out of the urban area.

How we word this Assembly’s support for that understanding is where we hit the complications. Should the government fund such a facility—pay for it to be built and have it as part of the ongoing budget process, so it is continually supported through government funding, or should it be privately owned and just supported by the government, in essence, in allowing the thing to be put there? To me, these seem to be the main debates we are having here. There is debate on the pros and cons of a motor sport facility, but most of it seems to be on how a motor sport facility is supported.

This has been the subject of great community debate, especially since the old Tralee speedway closed. I have not received a satisfactory answer about why the old dragway was closed, and why it has yet to pick up again. It was a great facility. I went there only a couple of times but, each time I went, I had an enjoyable time. It is important to note that Canberra has a large population of motor sport enthusiasts, yet Canberra continues to be Australia’s largest city without a motor sport facility of this type.

We have briefly discussed what happened at the Tuggeranong Community Council meeting—attended by about 400 people just a few weeks ago. I understand a large group

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of vocal supporters of the motor sport facility left the meeting concerned that the government had still not committed to building the facility.

I understand—and Mr Quinlan’s amendment points to this fact—that the government is in the process of trying to acquire land in the Majura Valley for a correctional facility and a motor sport facility. I think that putting a motor sport facility next to the other largest noise generator in the ACT—the airport—is a sensible way to go.

I understand Ms Tucker’s comments about needing to support corridors of ecological value across the ACT. That is important, and I hope it will be considered as we look at building a facility. There are concerns about motor sport not being an environmentally friendly form of entertainment, as it produces greenhouse gases and promotes the private car. Nevertheless, we need to consider the positive social impacts of a motor sport facility. It has the possibility of being a tourist attraction—something that I know this government has been keen to focus on recently.

I believe this will also address a number of concerns raised over the last few years about the problems we have been having, especially around the streets of Braddon, with cars practising burnouts up and down the drag strips, whilst a safe facility has not been provided for the people who wish to undertake motor sport to do so.

In the ACT, there are ovals, equestrian facilities, gymnasiums, halls, swimming pools and even a shooting range, to allow people with diverse sporting interests to undertake these sports. The Democrats are quite clear in their support for the establishment of a motor sport facility outside the urban area, to encourage and support people who want to participate in the sport to do so in a safe way—so they are not doing so illegally on the streets of Braddon at night.

As with anything, I believe it is best to have it in a way that can be supported and promoted, as opposed to a way that pushes the sport underground and makes it illegal. This is a legitimate sport, as are a whole range of things in which people in the ACT participate. Unfortunately, it has been on the backburner for far too long.

In essence, I would be supportive of Mr Stefaniak’s motion, but we have before us an amendment from Mr Quinlan. That wants us to note that the ACT government is negotiating with the Commonwealth for the purchase of land which, if successful, will allow for the development of a motor sport facility and an ACT correctional facility. That is where our major contention is today—whether or not the government should be putting money forward to build a facility on land it does not currently have.

I am hopeful that the negotiations for the ACT government to purchase the land in the Majura Valley go well, and that the federal government recognises that the ACT should have first dibs on land within the border which the federal government owns. As I have already said, I believe the Majura Valley is one of the best places for the development of a motor sport facility.

I think the problem with Mr Stefaniak’s motion—which Mr Quinlan’s amendment seeks to address—is that we cannot call for the building of a motor sport facility in the Majura Valley because, at the moment, we do not have control over a lot of the Majura Valley.

We cannot just plonk a sporting facility on top of something we do not have control over or own.

I will be supporting the Treasurer's amendment—and I hope we get the land. Today, I have been discussing with people the government's commitment or otherwise and the ongoing debate about the government's commitment to a motor sport facility. I understand, from what government members have said today in this debate, that the government is committed to a motor sport facility, although we are yet to see the level of commitment.

I see this motion as a first step to the reopening of a motor sport facility in the ACT. It is one I am happy to support and promote. Hopefully, with this as a first step on the books, we can move forward—after the successful completion of the negotiations for the land in Majura Valley—to push for support for the motor sport facility in next year's budget.

MR CORNWELL (4.54): I listened with interest to Ms Dundas' considered comments. I am sorry she reached the conclusion she did, but her comments were considered and sensible, which is more than I can say of those of others. You could almost add Mr Quinlan's amendment to the motion of my colleague Mr Stefaniak—they would probably complement each other.

The truth of the matter is that the question of the dragway has been around for a long time. Despite the amendment put forward by Mr Quinlan, I am not convinced that this will necessarily come to fruition in the near future. Far be it from me to reflect upon earlier debates, but the government's track record leaves a great deal to be desired in a number of areas. In fact, I was looking anxiously for the words "in principle" in Mr Quinlan's motion. Fortunately, I did not find them—nevertheless, I am concerned.

There is no doubt that there is considerable demand for a dragway for motor sport facilities in this city. That is not surprising, when you consider that we have, substantially, a young population. Many in that young, at least male population—although we cannot leave out the females—are interested in motor cars and in driving. If they do not have the opportunity to practise their skills or enjoy their driving under controlled conditions, I suggest—and the evidence speaks for itself—they will attempt to do it under uncontrolled conditions in the streets, parks and ovals of our city.

Mrs Dunne: Like Amaroo.

MR CORNWELL: Like Amaroo. You must weigh up this type of vandalism with the need to provide some sort of facility.

We have had, and are still experiencing a few problems with skateboarders. One of the ways out of the skateboard problem was to build skateboard parks. I think the analogy is reasonable. It is not as if we are dealing with a small number of people, where motor sport is concerned. We may not have too many skateboarders around, but I believe the number of motor sport followers would be far in excess of practising skateboarders. So, unquestionably, there is popularity. One of the problems with a motor sport facility is that it needs to be out of the way, because of the noise, so it seems that the choice of the Majura Valley is a good one.

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Ms Tucker raised the question of the environment, and the expenditure entailed in a dragway. I fear that this city would remain in a 2003 time warp for the rest of its days if we listened every time to the question of the environment. We need to recognise that the world and the people who live in it are entitled to some sort of recognition—aside from waving grassland, funny insects and suchlike. We are entitled—and the people who pay taxes in this territory are entitled—to some sort of recognition.

The other interesting point is that, if the environment in the Majura Valley is under threat by this dragway, then I presume the environment is also under threat from the correctional facility.

Mr Stefaniak: And from the airport.

MR CORNWELL: Mr Stefaniak adds another piece, which I will come to. Presumably, the environment is under threat from the correctional facility—and then there is the possible extension of the airport—to bring it up to an international standard.

All these things present challenges, such as the environment versus the social cost, when it comes down to a correctional facility. How do we weigh up those two? It is not an easy choice. I suggest the choice will not result in both the environment of the Majura Valley and the social benefits of a correctional facility for the ACT necessarily coming out on the same side of the environmental and social justice ledgers. Therefore, it seems to me that we must look at it from a more commonsense point of view.

May I remind those who talk about the environment that police driver training is run out there and I understand there is also an army rifle range in the area. I know of at least four rural properties which exist there. I do not think they are too worried about waving grasslands—except for their cattle or sheep.

We have to put this into perspective. The fact remains that there is a demand for motor sport—and there is land out there. There is clearly an opportunity to place the facility out there, along with other facilities this city needs. I suggest, therefore, that we should get on and address this matter, leaving aside the considerations raised as to whether we should proceed at all.

Let me conclude by addressing the question of cost. Governments always find it difficult to balance the outlays. The fact is that they have to do it, because governments represent a majority of people—that is why they are the government—and each of those people have different requirements and wants.

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 CORNWELL: Governments, by virtue of the fact that they are the government, obviously represent the majority of people. That majority has certain requirements—they have certain wants and needs, but they are all different. It is therefore up to governments to balance these things and allocate funds as they see fit.

It seems to me that, in view of the immense interest in and support for a dragway here in the ACT, this government—and any other government, for that matter—would be well advised to follow the views of a substantial number of ACT citizens and, possibly, a substantial number of its own voters.

MRS DUNNE (5.03): I rise to speak in support of Mr Stefaniak's motion—that the Assembly calls on the ACT government to build a motor sport facility, including a dragway, in the Majura Valley—and against the amendment proposed by Mr Quinlan.

As Mr Cornwell said, Mr Quinlan's amendment would be fine, if it did not omit words with a view to substituting others, but was an addendum to the motion. It is worthy of note that there are negotiations going on. It is also worthy of note that there has been something of a sea change in the attitude of this government since the issue was raised by me in a question without notice in April last year. At that time, it was definitely: "No. We are not going to do anything to help the motor sport people."

There has been some sea change, but what we see today is no commitment from this government. It is all very well to note that they are negotiating to buy land, but that does not boil down to any sort of commitment. Mr Stefaniak's motion requires this Assembly to commit to the motor sport community.

I could be selfish and say that I could not stand here today and not support this motion. If I did, my mechanic would never service my car again! I do not know how many times, when I take the car to be serviced, I hear, "What are you going to do about motor sport? What is this useless government going to do about a motor sport facility for people like us?"

These are ordinary, everyday, working men and women who have an interest in cars, as Mr Pratt has pointed out, and also in motorcycles. My mechanic happens to race veteran motorcycles. These people are law-abiding citizens. They want a facility where they can enjoy their chosen recreational pastime without having to travel interstate.

Ms Dundas made the important point that governments provide a whole range of recreational facilities for people in and outside the urban area. Outside the urban area we already have a range. We have horse trails, equestrian trails, walking paths, bicycle paths, shooting ranges, mountain biking and paintballing. All these things are available to us—all these things are about people's chosen pastimes—but, when it come to motor sport, it is: "Oh no! We can't possibly do that!"

What we are asking here today is for this Assembly to pledge to commit to the motor sport community of the ACT. We can then make our way forward so that, in the end, there will be a motor sport facility which will meet the needs of the people of the ACT and, as Ms Dundas has pointed out, will meet a whole lot of other needs.

In talking about sustainability of a project, if Ms Tucker is concerned about the environmental impacts, I would welcome consideration of an amendment to look at whether this is sustainable. In looking at whether this is sustainable, we have to look at all three parameters—the economic, social and environmental sustainability of an issue.

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Certainly, in some ways, motor sport is not the most environmentally friendly activity. Balanced against that is the economic impact it could have on the community, by its being a tourist attraction—and the whole bringing together of the social fabric of the ACT community. Many people benefit from and enjoy motor sport, but, at the moment, they have to travel interstate to find an outlet for that enjoyment.

Look at what Summernats does in the ACT. There are many people who do not like Summernats but, for the purpose of providing an enjoyable outlet which is an economic boon for this territory, it is a great venture. It might be that, if we had a super motor sport facility, a place like Summernats could find a more appropriate home. Their franchisee, the Dickson McDonalds, may not be happy about that, because Summernats is good—and a number of people at the Dickson shops may not be happy. Nevertheless, it might, in the long run, be a better place for Summernats.

What we have in this debate today is some not-quite-together thinking. I commend Ms Dundas for her considered views but, like Mr Cornwell, I find it unfortunate that she has come to the conclusion she has. I think that, if you go through the motions of looking at what Ms Dundas said, the logical conclusion is that she should support this motion.

To support the amendment really guts the motion. It takes away most of the import of the motion and does not commit this Assembly to doing anything in favour of motor sport.

We have had Mr Corbell, in his usual way, coming in here for the second or third time today, calling this opposition a pack of hypocrites because we—in the words of Mr Pratt—have adopted our policy position in the light of information received. It seems that we have one of those regular verbs you find in politics which is: “I adapt my policy position—you are a hypocrite.” It depends on what side of the fence you are sitting on.

I am proud that the Liberal Party is able to be flexible—that it is able to adapt, and is able to listen—unlike this government over here, which spends its time opposing, or saying, “We can’t support that because you’re the opposition, and you’re not allowed to have any ideas. You’re not allowed to question, and you’re not allowed to scrutinise. You’re supposed to sit back and say that it is all wonderful—because we’re the government and we’re here to look after you.”

It is not like that, Mr Speaker. We are here to represent, and we are here to scrutinise. I believe that, in putting forward this motion and voting in support of it, we are representing a large number of the people of the ACT who want this facility.

MR STEFANIAK (5.10): I believe I am speaking to the amendment and also closing the debate. Unless I hear otherwise, I will do that. Regarding the amendment, I believe that several speakers on my side of the house are quite right. It effectively totally guts the motion. If it were added after my motion, it would be informing us what is occurring, and that would not be too bad. As it is, it totally guts the motion. It just asks the Assembly to note that the ACT government is negotiating with the Commonwealth for the purchase of land in the Majura Valley which, if successful, will allow for the development of a motor sport facility and an ACT correctional facility. Thank you for that information. I am sure the Assembly has noted that—and that, I think, is all we need do.

To support the motion does not advance us anywhere—it does not involve any commitment from the government. It does not have the government saying, “Yes, all right. We will build this motor sport facility. We will honour the commitment we made to the dragway people in 2001.”

If they said that, I would be happy, but they are not saying that at all. They are asking us to note this. Yes, I think we should note it—but there is no need for it to be moved as an amendment. The opposition will be opposing the amendment, and I encourage the crossbenchers to do so, too. Then let everyone vote—put their money where their mouths are, as it were—in respect of the substantive motion.

Ms Tucker has a consistent position on this. I do not agree with her—I never have. She has always been consistent, and she has probably found me always fairly consistent, about motor sport since she has been in this Assembly. I respect her position, even though I totally oppose it. I do not agree with it, but it does not surprise me.

Ms Dundas, I know there is strong support for motor sport. Nevertheless, by accepting this amendment, you are not showing that effectively; you should vote against this amendment. I think you misunderstand one thing—that the government has to be able to get the land before it can provide money to build a facility. That goes without saying. You cannot build it in thin air. That is implied.

Don’t use that as an excuse to vote for Mr Quinlan’s amendment because, quite clearly, implicit in my motion, if we are calling on the government to do something, they must have the land to put it on. A block has been identified—and, by the way, the lease expires at the end of 2005. So there are a number of things the government can do.

What we want today is to get a commitment from this government or, failing that, to get the majority of this Assembly to accept that the government should build a motor sport facility in the Majura Valley—that being the best possible site—and obviously it has to get a block of land.

Mr Quinlan’s amendment is interesting, but it is information only. It puts off a proper commitment to the motor sport facility. That was a commitment this government made—a commitment on which numerous people voted for them and a commitment they are now seeking to weasel out of. All they will do, it seems, is commit to finding a block and maybe buying it, but nothing more—although, in listening to Mr Hargreaves, he said, “We will get the dragway in some form or another.”

Mr Corbell said something about working with the dragway people for ongoing financing of the facility. Does that mean he is going to build the facility? If the Labor Party, or two members of it, want to say, “Yes, we will build the facility,” why not vote for my motion? That gives a full commitment to: yes, we will build the facility. If you oppose that and vote for these weasel words in the amendment, it is fobbing off that necessary commitment.

In closing, I want to address a few other points members raised during the debate. Mr Quinlan talks about the opposition changes on all this. Actually, I believe the opposition has been fairly consistent on motor sport, all the way through—I certainly have been, as even Mr Hargreaves acknowledges.

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I hark back to the early 1990s. If the then Follett Labor government had been re-elected, we would not have even seen Fairbairn Park. There were noise complaints from only one or two selfish individuals on the Ridgeway. That would have completely destroyed motor sport at Fairbairn Park.

I can remember, in 1994, tabling a document from the then head of environment saying that we might as well support one group because we are not going to get too much out of this, or something like that—we might as well make one lot happy. That was a handful of people on the Ridgeway. Had that gone ahead—had the government not changed—there would be no motor sport at Fairbairn Park because of repressive, unrealistic noise restrictions. Thank God we got a different government!

Our motor sport idea policy in 1995 probably helped us. It probably helped us also in 1998, when we ended up with a much more reasonable noise regime. It was not perfect, I must say now, with regard to Fairbairn Park. I give the government some credit there. From 1998 onwards, the government learnt a lot more about the need to support motor sport.

The fact is that there were many voters in the territory who were very keen on motor sport and this government has milked it for all it is worth—certainly in opposition. At least now—Mr Quinlan is right—there are some excellent facilities at Fairbairn Park, so we are about 70 per cent of the way there.

Mr Quinlan, I note that noise credits were not restricted further. There were some things like half-credits, but we are only about 70 per cent of the way there. I would urge you not to pander to one or two people on the Ridgeway, if your government is doing that—and there are further improvements that can be made there.

We talk about our support, when we were in government, for motor sport. We took a policy to the electorate to increase the noise credits for Fairbairn Park. That has not happened, but at least the levels have not been decreased. In talking about that, there is a \$60,000 pledge to resurface the hill climb track. I have spoken in this place about that before. I note that this government did not continue with that, and that it simply dropped off the program. Hence, do not talk to me about who is supporting motor sport and who is not.

Then we have this amazing thing that happened on the original dragway site in 1998. There was little Mr Smyth or anyone in this government could do. I looked at the lease, and it was one of the most convoluted things I have ever seen.

There were some cases brought by the dragway people against the Commonwealth and the ACT government. I wish they had succeeded—I was barracking for them to succeed. I did not care less that it was against my own government or the Commonwealth. Unfortunately, in both the Supreme Court and the Federal Court, they were not successful.

Quite clearly, in respect of the airport, the Commonwealth had its way there and the site was closed, despite—I might say to Mr Corbell and Mr Quinlan—some significant lobbying on my behalf in January 1999 to the relevant federal authorities in relation to

that, which I note Mr Quinlan tried to do last year—to get that site reactivated for a 10-year lease. That is something we were both trying to do—in my case in 1999, and in his case in 2002—all to no avail.

Consequently, the carnival has moved on and we do not have a dragway. We have a government which made commitments in the last election to the people involved in the dragway. Certain members—you, Mr Speaker, and Mr Corbell—were quite vocal in relation to it, no doubt with heartfelt sympathy and goodwill towards the dragway, in wishing to see it occur, but it all changed once you became the government.

The only commitment you have given to date is to maybe help them in trying to find land. There has been no commitment to the building of the facility. They do not want a monetary commitment to run it—they have said that; that is simply not part of the equation—they just want a commitment to build it. That commitment has been reneged on and is not forthcoming.

My motion calls on this government to honour its promise. We are not the government, and we will come up with an election policy which will address this in great detail. In that, I will certainly be pushing for a dragway—and indeed for extra motor sport facilities. The fact is that we are not the government—you are. You made commitments which people voted on in the last election and they feel let down because nothing has happened.

I think my colleagues Mr Cornwell and Mrs Dunne are correct in saying that there are a significant number of people in this community who support motor sport and want to see a dragway facility and a motor sport complex.

You are correct, Mr Quinlan. There are several great tracks at Fairbairn Park, and there is no reason why they should be moved. There is a lot of potential for motor sport and the ancillary facilities and organisations which support it. Great potential can come from developing the Majura Valley. All it requires is commitment from government.

I close by urging members to support my motion in voting against Mr Quinlan's amendment. Mr Quinlan's amendment merely puts it off—fobs it off. It tells us the current state of play and nothing more. We want more than that. We want a commitment now from this government. It is something you are not going to weasel out of.

Question put:

That **Mr Quinlan's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 11

Mr Berry	Ms MacDonald
Mr Corbell	Mr Quinlan
Mrs Cross	Mr Stanhope
Ms Dundas	Ms Tucker
Ms Gallagher	Mr Wood
Mr Hargreaves	

Noes 6

Mrs Burke
Mr Cornwell
Mrs Dunne
Mr Pratt
Mr Smyth
Mr Stefaniak

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Personal explanation

MR PRATT: Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation under standing order 46. I claim to have been misrepresented by Mr Corbell in the debate just concluded.

MR SPEAKER: Please proceed.

MR PRATT: Mr Corbell claimed that I had called for a 26.5 per cent pay rise for teachers, and he was very specific about that. I said no such thing. He misrepresented what I said. Mr Speaker, my personal explanation is that in supporting the teachers case I said to the media that the government had to strive to achieve parity with other jurisdictions. I also said that I did not know whether the government could match New South Wales, but it had to try. In his haste to misrepresent, Mr Corbell has tripped up again. Thank God—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Pratt, stick to the personal explanation, please.

MR PRATT: Okay, Mr Speaker. He has misrepresented what I said and that, again, reflects on his inability to be careful about the detail of what he is talking about.

MR SPEAKER: It is not about Mr Corbell; it is about you, Mr Pratt.

Alcohol and other drugs task force—availability of consultant's report

MS TUCKER (5.26): I move:

That this Assembly calls on the Government to ensure that, by the end of this week, the consultant's report to the ACT Alcohol and Other Drugs Taskforce on the ACT Alcohol and Other Drugs Taskforce Consultation is made available to everyone who participated, in line with one of the basic principles of public consultation: that the results of consultation need to be available to all participants.

Members may recall how the alcohol and other drugs task force was set up. A public meeting was held in the Assembly about a year ago—I cannot remember exactly—at the

request of various community groups which were concerned about substance abuse in the ACT and I was asked to chair that meeting. The theme of that meeting was that substance abuse affects all sections of our society.

Out of that meeting came a call for the setting up of a drugs task force. The idea was that it would be modelled on the poverty task force of the previous government, which had community ownership and had worked very well. As it turned out, the current Labor government did not want to have the task force based on that model and appointed a task force itself and basically ran it in that way. As far as I am aware from the feedback I have had, the process has been reasonable to this point in time, although I am not sure that it will be of the calibre of the poverty task force process. However, there has been a reasonable process up to this time. I have raised this motion because I am concerned about what is happening.

I understand that, basically, the minister is supportive of what I am doing today, except that he will seek to amend my motion to remove the timeframe. I do not have a problem with that. I know that it is a bit difficult for some people to debate this motion because the report in question is not available to MLAs, but I do not think that that should matter because it is more about the process than the content of the report itself.

The document is a product of the consultant engaged on behalf of the Minister for Health by the ACT alcohol and other drugs task force. The consultation process has been a major piece of work, the biggest piece of work for the task force. Around 3,000 people were surveyed. The process of developing and doing the survey took around 12 months and involved the members of the task force going out into their particular communities to survey opinions on the effectiveness of the alcohol and other drug services available and improvements that should be made. The task force had agreed on particular communities and groups of interest within the wider Canberra society and targeted those groups.

The consultation was designed to be good-quality feedback on the services and to feed into the new drug and alcohol strategy. It was obviously a large body of work as a lot of energy and effort went into gathering the information. Also, in this kind of constituent survey there is a level of trust on behalf of people surveyed that their voices will be heard. In cases where a member of the task force has passed on the survey and worked with the community, there is also an issue of credibility for them as individuals if the process is not good.

We know from people on the task force that there was disagreement about whether to release the report when it was produced and that the resistance to releasing the report was largely based on the fact that there were criticisms of certain services in that report. I have to make the point again that we cannot afford to allow cultures to become that defensive. We need to have a focus on service improvement which sees complaints as information. That is something that comes up again and again in this place in debate. It is not just about the public sector; it is also about non-government providers and community providers. I think there is really quite a lot of work to be done.

In lots of ways, I do not blame service providers for this culture. I think that in a way there has never been a proper structure on which to base complaints that do work with a service improvement focus. This government, to its credit, is doing work on that as I speak. It has employed a consultancy to review most of the complaints mechanisms and

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bodies in the ACT, and I applaud the government for that. Hopefully, it will lead to some clear recommendations regarding how to change cultures so that complaints are received as information rather than something to be fended off and, if possible, suppressed.

We need to remember with regard to this body of work and this consultation that it has been working with people who, quite often, are disadvantaged and vulnerable, who are in need of improved services and who are cynical about government processes. There have been many inquiries over the last eight years I have been here in which we have been consulting with the same groups of people about how we can improve services and there is already a degree of cynicism and review fatigue, if you like.

It is particularly important that this process continues to be good. If there are problems with the services available, they need to be fixed. We need to look at what comes out of this report. It needs to be open so that everyone who has participated in the process feels that they have access to what came out of that consultation. That is recognised as fundamental to good consultation.

I refer members to the previous government's consultation protocol, which was a good document. I think that basically this government has accepted its principles. The document makes the point on page 11 that commitment is needed by all parties to complete the consultation before any announcement or decision is made, as this ensures credibility of the consultation process, and that the results of consultation need to be made available to all participants.

The document goes into much more detail about the importance of feedback, the loop, being there and the process being transparent. In fact, the first inquiry I chaired in this place, in 1995, looked at community consultation and a lot of the recommendations of that committee translated into this consultation protocol. I think that it is a good document and I do not think that people are challenging the principles outlined in it.

For that reason, I think it is important that the report produced by the consultant is made available to the people who were participating. In a way, it is unfortunate that the situation has reached this level. If the task force had said originally that it would be made available to anyone who wanted to see it, there would not have been any drama, but, as it turned out, a decision was taken by the task force and then by the government not to release it and now it has been sent back to the task force to make the decision. During that process, a number of people—consumers and task force members—became very upset, which is why I put this motion today. I am pleased to know that the government will be supporting it.

MS DUNDAS (5.34): I strongly support this motion as moved by Ms Tucker today. In July 2002, when the composition of the ACT alcohol and other drugs task force was announced, I did praise its composition. I believed that the people appointed were broadly representative of the community services sector and promised to bring substantial expertise and credibility to the task of preparing the ACT alcohol and other drugs strategy.

Whereas in other Australian states drugs task forces have been stacked with people representing a zero tolerance position, the ACT task force represented a broad range of views and approaches to reducing problem drinking and drug use. That made me very

optimistic about the outcomes of the process. With 44 per cent of ACT males over the age of 14 consuming alcohol at risky levels and 34.6 per cent of ACT females aged over 14 also engaging in risky drinking, it is clear that there is a significant problem to be addressed if we are to have a truly healthy population.

We also have a high rate of illicit drug use. A 2001 survey by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that 18.1 per cent of our population aged 14 and over had taken illicit drugs in the last year. The ACT rate was higher than the rates for New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania and South Australia. Of course, only a proportion of those drug users would be using drugs at a risky level or in a risky way.

Figures for risky drug use are not readily available, but we do know that risky drug use presents some serious challenges. Australia wide, one in three deaths of young people aged between 15 and 34 are drug related. Of those, 60 per cent are related to alcohol, 23 per cent to opiates, 7 per cent to tobacco and 10 per cent to other drugs. Figures for the ACT are likely to mirror those figures, although slightly lower for tobacco deaths due to our lower rates of smoking.

Concerns have been raised about the report which was prepared by the consultant to inform the task force and which summarises consultations with drug users and other stakeholders not being released to all the people who contributed to the strategy. Ms Tucker has raised this motion today because of these concerns. The allegation does make me quite concerned that the government could be exercising too much control over the content of the report, which may in the end compromise the effectiveness of the report.

If the community does not have access to the raw data fed into the strategy development process, it will be impossible to assess the likely effectiveness of the strategy. The government may be reluctant to endorse the release of the report if it is highly critical, but the very fact that the development of a strategy was deemed necessary is an indication that the government recognised that there was serious room for improvement to the current approach to drug use. Any shortcomings in existing education or treatment programs identified in the report would be seen by most as a positive step towards improving our response to problem alcohol and drug use. We must first identify the problem before we can fix it.

The only reason I have heard so far from the government for withholding the report is that the report is difficult to understand because it is in a rough form. I am not very convinced by this argument. I suggest that the assessment of whether it is understandable or not could be left to the people reading the report. That could encourage further debate and greater understanding of the figures presented.

I have no difficulty with the final strategy summarising and clarifying the consultant's report, but there is no good reason to deny the consulted parties access to the report, which has been prepared at taxpayers' expense for the benefit of the community. I hope that support for this motion today will encourage the government to promptly release the consultant's report so that there is greater awareness of the issues and greater debate can be brought about on how to address the problems that have been highlighted.

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MR CORBELL (Minister for Health and Minister for Planning) (5.38): The government will be supporting Ms Tucker's motion today with an amendment. I will move that amendment now. I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit the words "by the end of this week".

The amendment simply acknowledges that the report was commissioned by the alcohol and drug task force, not by the government. The report has not been presented to the government. I became familiar with the report only as of this morning when I was made aware that Ms Tucker would be moving this motion and I asked to see a copy of it so that I could understand what she was talking about.

I am quite happy to allow the task force to arrange to release this report. I will be indicating to the task force that this report should be released. I was just concerned to ensure that the Assembly did not put a community task force in the position where it was being told what to do. I think that it is reasonable that the report be released and I will be indicating to the task force that I believe that it should be released. I think that the task force itself will be happy to agree to that course of action but, given that the task force may not be able to consider this motion of the Assembly until after the end of this week, I am seeking to omit the timeframe requirement.

I think that the process to date has been very positive for the alcohol and other drugs task force. The series of community consultations that were held only last week, one with indigenous Canberrans and one with non-indigenous Canberrans, was very positive. I think that, for the first time, we will have a very strong collaborative and community-based drug strategy coming out of the work of this task force and the work that has informed the task force's deliberations.

The government will be supporting the proposition on the basis of support for my amendment.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (5.40): The opposition is pleased that Mr Corbell has agreed with the motion as put forward by Ms Tucker. It is important that community groups and individuals which respond to the call of either the government or a community task force for information do get the feedback and see the results of their work. I thank Ms Tucker for bringing forward the motion and thank the minister for ensuring that the community will get to see in this case the fruits of their labour.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Availability of Canberra's public hospital waiting list figures

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (5.41): I move:

That the Government acknowledge the importance of openness and accountability and their election commitment to this end and that this Assembly calls on the Government to:

- (1) make available to Members on the 21st of each month, and table the next sitting day, the waiting list figures for the previous month for elective surgery in Canberra's public hospitals;
- (2) include information on the waiting lists and waiting times broken down by speciality;
- (3) ensure that the waiting lists and times published on the Health Department website are updated on the 21st of each month; and
- (4) ensure that waiting list reports contain at least as much information as was contained in the previous Liberal government's reports.

I am moving this motion today because there has been a disturbing trend since this government came to office for information on waiting lists and waiting times to be withheld from the public. Even more disturbing is the way in which this information, when it is eventually made available, is dumbed down by the government. The situation has reached the stage where the minister's media releases on the subject are no longer gilding the lily; they are way past that stage.

The minister's last media release on the subject—7 August 2003—said that those most urgently in need of elective surgery at Canberra's public hospitals continue to get excellent service, with 96 per cent of the category 1 patients being seen in the target timeframe. That is completely unacceptable. The only acceptable target is 100 per cent.

The minister tried to laugh it off by saying that the Liberals are attacking the service provided by the staff. That is not true; the service provided by the staff is excellent. What is not being provided is access for 100 per cent of the category 1 patients. That is the only acceptable target.

I remind the minister that category 1 elective surgery is to treat potentially life threatening conditions, for example, brain and aortic aneurysms. Brain aneurysms, and aortic aneurysms even more so, are potentially life threatening. They are not emergencies yet, but the potential for them to become emergencies if an aneurysm bursts is very real.

For the minister to blithely dismiss the issue of overdue category 1 patients is very dangerous. It is also potentially very expensive. I understand that the cost of repairing a brain aneurysm is around \$20,000. To repair a burst brain aneurysm, providing the patient survives long enough to make it to hospital, the cost is closer to \$50,000, due to the need for extensive intensive care and rehabilitation.

The latest quarterly report on health shows that only 91 per cent of category 1 patients were treated on time, 4 per cent lower than the department's target and 9 per cent lower than the only acceptable target, which must be 100 per cent. I do not know whether the overdue category 1 cases are about aneurysms, heart valve replacements, gall bladder removals or whatever. A year ago, I would have been able to tell you, but not today. The reason is simple: the minister no longer provides that level of information on the individual specialties in elective surgery.

I cannot and, more importantly, the public and those on the waiting lists themselves cannot find out what is the waiting time for each specialty is. Indeed, if one were to go to the ACT health department's website, one would easily be forgiven for thinking that the

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waiting time at Calvary is now 23 days for category 1 surgery, 123 days for category 2 and 248 days for category 3.

One would be wrong on two counts. First, they are average waiting times, not the actual waiting times per patient. Category 2 patients awaiting orthopaedic surgery would be looking at a wait of closer to a year, even as long as 2½ years, as we have heard recently, depending on their surgeon. Secondly, those poor souls who believed the government's promise to better and more openly manage waiting times would be mistaken because the waiting lists and times on the website as of 10.21 this morning—I have not checked since that time—are for February. I have a screen dump there for those that would like to see it.

The website still has the figures for February. It is six months out of date. I have raised the issue of the outdated website, both in this place and in the media. Just last week the minister said that he understood that the website was being updated, yet here we are today talking about a website that is ridiculously out of date. That is a sign of the contempt with which this government holds the people of Canberra. That is a sign that Mr Corbell's pledge that waiting lists would be his top priority was worthless.

Since Mr Corbell became minister, the amount of information about waiting lists and times has been dramatically reduced. During the estimates process, Mr Corbell had the hide to claim that the new elective surgery data sets would be more informative. The *Hansard* report of that reads:

...I've taken the decision that we need to improve the format, to improve the accountability. We're not proposing to remove any information from the bulletin which is already in the bulletin or in the waiting list figures, but I have asked the department to improve the accountability so that people can see what is going on in relation to elective surgery waiting lists. I've asked for the development of a new format.

The minister soon had to backtrack on that claim. He was forced to write to me on 17 June 2003 to clarify the matter. Remember that he said that there would not be less information. His letter reads:

Dear Brendan

In the Select Committee on Estimates Hearing on 22 May 2003, during discussion on the publication of elective surgery waiting list information I indicated, "we were not proposing to remove any information from the bulletin which is already in the bulletin or in the waiting lists figures..."

This information was incorrect and I would like to make the following correction. The information reported in the new publication *Access to Elective Surgery* will not report all information previously reported in the Hospital Information Bulletins. It will present some of the information previously published but this will be in a different format. Changes and additions to the information published in this report may change from time to time as required.

Yours sincerely

Simon Corbell MLA

I seek leave to table the letter, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Leave granted.

MR SMYTH: I present the following paper:

Hospital Waiting Lists—Copy of letter from Minister for Health to Mr Smyth, dated 17 June 2003.

We were already starting from a low base with the new you-beaut waiting lists and now Mr Corbell is going to move an amendment, noting in the fourth dot point that the waiting list information prepared by the Stanhope government provides more information. That is a question the minister will have to answer before we finish the debate on this motion.

The latest instalment of the denial of public information has been the minister's reluctance to release the already gutted data sets in a timely manner. The waiting lists for June were not released until 7 August, over two weeks after the conventional due date of 21 July. I suspect that they were released only after sustained pressure from me.

However, the minister claimed in this place just last week in question time that he released figures every month. Mr Corbell said:

Is he seriously claiming that I do not release the figures for waiting lists every month? Is that what Mr Smyth is claiming? If he is claiming that, then he is simply wrong, because the figures are released every month. I challenge any member of this place to point out to me where they have not been released on a monthly basis, because they are released on a monthly basis. Every consecutive month there is a new waiting list released.

I accept Mr Corbell's challenge. I can say to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that there were no figures released in the month of July. The figures for June were not released by Mr Corbell until 7 August and the figures for May were released on 27 June. If we were to use the ACT Health website as a guide, we would find that it does not show any figures released since February.

The minister's comments last week were disingenuous. I am not sure whether they constitute a misleading of the house, but the comments were simply inaccurate. I hope that the minister will correct the record when he speaks to this motion. I am happy, though, to speculate as to why the minister is reluctant to release this information. Quite simply, it shows that there is a big problem in our health system. Mr Deputy Speaker, if you were to do a graph of the waiting list figures, you would see that the trend line is moving up and up. I have a copy of such a graph here, but, of course, it cannot be incorporated in *Hansard*. The trend line shows a low in August/September, just before the election, of about 3,500 or 3,600, but we are now up to well over the 4,200 mark.

Last week in question time, the minister tried to deflect this argument by quoting the words of the only health minister to have successfully tackled both waiting lists and waiting times, Mr Moore. Mr Corbell said:

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I would like to read a quote to you which I think puts the issue in some perspective.

Then he quoted Mr Moore as follows:

Many people wrongly judge the performance of the public hospital system simply on its ability to deal with elective surgery as reflected by the emphasis on elective surgery waiting times. In reality the real measure of the success of a public hospital is its ability to deal with emergencies; those patients where treatment is urgent and important. On that measure the ACT has a high performing health and hospital system.

Mr Corbell said:

I couldn't agree more.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I point out, even though it is a little off the topic, that the emergency department performance that Mr Corbell uses as his defence is also lacking. According to his last quarterly report, four of the five categories did not meet their performance targets, including category 1, the most serious of all categories, which undershot its target by one per cent. One per cent might not sound like much, but in this category it is quite literally a matter of life and death and anything less than a 100 per cent result is bordering on ministerial negligence.

Not only is elective surgery in trouble, but also the minister's last bastion, the emergency department, is significantly underperforming. Not only are waiting lists unacceptably long, but also the waiting times are unacceptable. If we have a health system where category 1 patients are overdue on a regular basis, we have a serious problem, and that is happening regularly. In the 2002-03 financial year, there were overdue category 1 patients in eight of the 12 months that year. That is not a seasonal anomaly; it is a regular pattern. It is a pattern that cannot be allowed to continue.

We all know how the waiting lists have risen and risen and risen since the government came to office. For the benefit of my colleague Mrs Burke, who, as a new arrival, has not witnessed the whole sorry saga, I will go over it again. The last report delivered to this place by the previous Liberal government had the waiting list figures at 3,565 in August 2001. By April 2002, just a few months after Labor took office, they were at 3,814. By July 2002, they were at 3,921. By October, they were at 4,057. The year finished on 3,854. To celebrate the new minister, there was a huge jump for January to 4,145 and another huge jump to 4,330 at the end of April. Thanks to a \$500,000 injection of funds, the waiting lists at the end of June were at 4,274.

The minister trumpets the fact that he has increased funding by \$2 million. Bully for you, Mr Corbell! The sad fact is that the extra money will barely make up for the cut in funding Calvary received last financial year, a cut that was somehow the previous government's fault, even though the Chief Minister, in taking the decision as the former Health Minister, said that he knew that there would be pain. That was also about \$1.5 million short of what Calvary needed to operate at the level it did under the Liberal government. Indeed, there will still be elective surgery closures at Calvary this year for between four and eight weeks.

The point of all of this is that the government, on page one of its election health sheet, said that the waiting lists for elective surgery were unacceptably long. Page 10 of their full policy says that they will ensure better and more open management of the waiting lists. When those election policies were released, the waiting lists were at 3,565. The waiting lists are now at 4,274. If they were unacceptably long at 3,565, what are they now when they stand at 4,274?

The government stated in its health action plan that the management of waiting lists for elective surgery will be improved through the provision of more comprehensive information about waiting lists for elective surgery through telephone, internet and written material. As I have pointed out, the website is a dead loss, out of date and misleading, and, as Mr Corbell has conceded, the monthly data sets contain less information, not more.

The waiting list figures for July are now due; in fact, they are overdue. They would normally have been delivered on 21 August or thereabouts. I was fully expecting a dorothy dixer on the subject, but that has not happened and it is probably a bit much to hope that Mr Corbell will inform this debate with the latest figures, which, I am sure, he has. That is the point of this motion: the need for accurate and up-to-date information on waiting lists to be made available in a timely manner.

Paragraph (1) of the motion asks the government make available to members on the 21st of each month the waiting list figures for the previous month. It also asked the government to table the figures on the next sitting day, as the previous government did. That would not be particularly onerous. It certainly would be in keeping with the government's health action plan and the Liberal government managed to do it.

I remind members that the Legislative Assembly library is not a public library. We cannot accept that providing the library with these figures is making them public. (*Extension of time granted.*) By providing the figures to members and tabling them in the Assembly, we can ensure that the public is well informed on the subject, particularly when the website is six months out of date. Obviously, if the health system is in as much trouble as I think it is, the government will not support this part of the motion. The last thing Labor would like to have is a well-informed public.

The purpose of paragraph (2) of the motion, which calls on the government to include information on the waiting lists and waiting times broken down by speciality, is to give the public a more accurate picture of the waiting times. One of the reasons that the old report was approximately 25 pages and the new report is a mere five pages is that we no longer get this breakdown by speciality.

As I said earlier, the waiting times published are an average. The waiting times for orthopaedics, and I suspect many other specialities, is somewhat longer than the published average. The request for the provision of this extra information is not a big ask. The information is already gathered by the hospital and it is used to form part of the old waiting list data sets. It would be the work of a moment to include it in the new version of the data sets.

Paragraph (3) of the motion calls on the government to ensure that the waiting lists and times published on the health department website are updated on the 21st of each month.

That, hopefully, would end the farce that is the current website and—shock, horror!—provide a useful service to the public. Paragraph (4) seeks to ensure that the waiting list reports contain at least as much information as was contained in the previous Liberal government's reports.

None of this is new, apart perhaps from the website. It is all doable and an honest and accountable government can and has been able to provide the people of Canberra with accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date data sets on elective surgery waiting lists and times. This motion is about accountability. It is about openness. It is about honesty and transparency. At the risk of its sounding like a cliché, the public has a right to know what is happening in its health system. The public has a right to accurate and up-to-date information on elective surgery waiting lists and waiting times.

The creative spin doctoring of the minister is not what the public wants. The public expects the full story on our hospitals, not the hopeless propaganda from the minister's office. If this motion is passed, it will ensure that the public gets what it is entitled to in regard to information on the waiting lists and times. I urge all members who believe in the public's right to information to support this motion.

MRS CROSS (6.00): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to support Mr Smyth's motion. I understand there have been two motions in the notice paper today that were unnecessary: one moved by Ms Tucker and one by Mr Smyth. I frankly do not understand why we had to waste Assembly time to move motions that—

Mr Corbell: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: Mrs Cross is reflecting on the business and the vote of the Assembly and is suggesting that we wasted time on motions, which is disorderly.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: I uphold the point of order. Do not mention the previous voting or the previous matter, Mrs Cross.

MRS CROSS: I know. It ruffles feathers, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am amazed that we need a motion such as this one that Mr Smyth has put forward, given that this government constantly tells the people of the ACT how well it consults with them and how it has made all the processes transparent. So much for transparency!

I find this motion interesting from another point of view. I remember being a visitor to this place during the previous Assembly. Then there was a different government: the opposition of those days is, of course, the government today. What I noticed was that the then Minister for Health would talk about waiting times, and the opposition would rant and rave about waiting lists.

It was an interesting observation for someone who did not know a lot about this place at the time, but I remember it very clearly because of the behaviour of the fellows in the chamber on that side. Now the same people are converted to the waiting times argument. How things change when you change sides in this room! The gross hypocrisy of the then opposition and the now government on this issue is very interesting.

The information called for by this motion is information that the government claims it has already made available to the community. I suggest it gets down and does it.

I suggest the government really learns about transparency, does what it talks about and, even more importantly, does what it claimed it would do during the election campaign. I find it unnecessary, but I will support Mr Smyth's motion and I commend him for it.

MR CORBELL (Minister for Health and Minister for Planning) (6.02): This government not only acknowledges the importance of openness and accountability; it practises it. In May this year, the government published the first monthly report on access to elective surgery in the ACT. The report is provided to the Assembly library as soon as it is completed.

Prior to this report, anyone who wanted to get a handle on issues relating to elective surgery waiting lists had to wade through a lot of data in individual hospital bulletins and try to compile a total ACT position. Now members, and the people of the ACT, have access to ACT-wide information in a single publication. Even though the report is available to members in the library as soon as it is available, I am happy to table it at the first possible opportunity, as soon as it is available.

Mrs Cross: When?

MR CORBELL: At the first possible opportunity. Let me quickly go through what the report shows: the total number of people on the ACT public hospitals waiting lists; the number added to the list each month; the number who receive surgery each month; the percentage of people who have been waiting for longer than the standard time for their surgery, by clinical urgency category; and the mean and median waiting times for surgery by category.

That is quite a credible and reasonable list of information. Most importantly, the report provides a clear indication of performance and trends over time. This greatly assists the community to assess the performance of the ACT health system in meeting their elective surgery needs.

I would now like to turn to Mr Smyth's concerns. Firstly, as I have already indicated, the government releases the elective surgery waiting list information as soon as it is available. We want to make sure the community has all the information it needs to assess the performance of the ACT health system. For this assessment to be effective, we have to be sure that the information is accurate.

This need for accuracy can impact on the capacity to provide the data on a set date every month. Unlike the previous government, this government audits the data to make sure that it is accurate and there is no duplication of information. On occasions, this will mean a delay of a couple of days in releasing the data, but I am sure the Assembly will agree that it is preferable to release accurate and complete data.

It is interesting that Mr Smyth is asking me to do something that he and his party could not deliver when they were in government. Under the previous Liberal government, waiting list information was published in hospital bulletins and placed in the Assembly library when available. There was no agreement—and there was no practice—that it was always released on the same date of the month, yet Mr Smyth comes into this place and says, "We did not do it, but you must." Gross inconsistency would be the way to describe that approach.

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The bulletins were tabled at the next available sitting date by the previous government. An important distinction to make about the government's new monthly report is that audit and validation exercises are now undertaken. The government puts the raw data that used to be tabled by the previous government through data checks to make sure that the information we publish is accurate and reliable.

Unlike those opposite, who delivered unchecked or inaccurate data, sometimes duplicating or double counting people, we are putting in place data that is accurate and audited. Even with this added quality-control exercise, we are still able for most months to get our waiting list data published in a timely fashion.

In response to Mr Smyth's second concern, I can advise him that information about waiting times for all specialities and some procedures will be reported quarterly on the ACT Health waiting list webpage. This information will include activity data and the waiting time for people at the 50th and 90th percentiles. These are the waiting times in which 50 per cent and 90 per cent of all people waiting receive their surgery.

These are the performance indicators that are used nationally. They are the national reporting indicators; they give the best indication of possible waiting times in specialities and for individual procedures. We are following the nationally accepted and consistent reporting patterns for the 50th and 90th percentiles.

The figures will be reported quarterly rather than monthly, due to the very small size of the ACT hospital system. In a small system, with only two public hospitals conducting public elective surgery, it is quite likely that in some of these smaller, unique specialities it will be possible with a monthly report to identify not only potential patients but also surgeons. Is that appropriate? In the government's view it is not. There are significant privacy issues when reporting small figures. Monthly numbers would be too small and too volatile for accurate analysis and comparison.

In response to Mr Smyth's third concern, I recently reviewed the elective surgery information on the ACT Health website and found that a lot more information should be published electronically. I have directed ACT Health to amend the website to include all the information in the monthly waiting list report, as well as the information I mentioned previously relating to specialities and specific procedures. The amended website will be active from early September 2003 and will be updated each month as soon as accurate and validated data is available.

Mr Smyth wants the government's report to show at least as much information as the reports produced by the previous Liberal government. I can say now that our reports show more. Perhaps he would like us to go back to their way of reporting, but to do this we would have to take some information out of our report. We would have to take out the information showing the number of people who were admitted to surgery over time—because they never reported it.

We would have to make members and the people of the ACT wade through 48 monthly reports to get a handle on trends in the number of people on the waiting list and how many people were added to the list over the two years. We would effectively remove the

capacity of the people of the ACT to easily see how the ACT health system is responding to the demand for elective surgery.

In conclusion, the proposition of Mr Smyth is that we take out information, since we report on more than the previous government reported on. We report in a way that is more accurate—because we validate the data—in a way that protects people’s privacy and in a way that ensures that people are able to get an easy grasp of their waiting times. We measure that in a way that is consistent with the national reporting measures.

For those reasons I propose to move an amendment to Mr Smyth’s motion. I move the following amendment:

Omit all words after “That” and insert

This Assembly:

- 1) notes that the previous Liberal Government did not publish hospital waiting list information on a set date;
- 2) notes the provision of information by speciality monthly could lead to identification of specific patients and/or specialists given the small size of the ACT system and that reporting in this manner does not assist the analysis of performance of the health system;
- 3) notes that the ACT Health web site will be amended to include all information in the monthly waiting list report as well as quarterly waiting times for all specialities. The web site will be active from September 2003;
- 4) notes that the waiting list information prepared by the Stanhope government provide more information and are more accurate than previous reporting due to the auditing practice introduced by this Government;
- 5) calls on the government to table, the waiting list figures for the previous month for elective surgery in Canberra’s public hospitals on the next Assembly sitting day.

This is the approach of a considered, accountable and responsive government that is addressing this complex issue in a serious and reasonable way. Mr Smyth proposes to go back to a very poor way of reporting data, which was less accurate, less comprehensive and less accountable.

MS TUCKER: (6.12) This debate is about the provision of information to the Assembly and to the public. When Mr Smyth first put the motion on the notice paper in May last year, the response from the then minister’s office was that the information was available in the library and that in any case the government would be developing an improved type of bulletin combining data from both Calvary Public Hospital and the Canberra Hospital.

At that time I was not convinced by the government and planned to support the motion. In the intervening months, my office inquired of Mr Smyth’s whether he might be bringing the motion back on for debate. I am pleased to have this issue finally here. The motion today expands on the original requests for the reports to be tabled. That is because in the meantime the government introduced the new format, and this format has resulted in less information being made available.

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From March 2003 the patient information bulletins produced by each hospital ceased to include tables reporting on surgical waiting lists. The surgical waiting list reports previously included patient numbers waiting at the start of the month; patients added to the list by being reclassified, or added for the first time; patients removed from the list because of admission, or for other reasons; and patients waiting at the end of the month.

There are also figures on the extent to which the throughput meets the target, the number of patients overdue for surgery and the percentage overdue. All of these statistics are broken down by surgery speciality and by urgency category. Then there are statistics on the average length of wait by urgency category and by surgery speciality and the average waiting time of overdue patients.

With the government's amendments we are being asked to support that the Assembly notes that the previous Liberal government did not publish hospital waiting list information on a set date. This responds to Mr Smyth's motion's call for the figures to be published both in the Assembly and on the web by the 21st of each month.

I cannot support this part of the government amendment; it would be misleading. The previous government did not have a set date, but there was no set requirement for the stats to be published. Nonetheless, the health minister did table the monthly information bulletins regularly. In 1999, for example, the index to papers presented shows that the bulletins were tabled for every month but August and at frequent intervals.

I do not know what practical limitations there are on the 21st of the month timeline set by Mr Smyth's motion, but I understand by Mr Corbell's amendment that there may be some difficulties. My amendment means that, rather than calling for the information to be circulated on a particular date, we are calling for it to be provided as soon as practicable. Of course, that is within a month because it requires monthly reporting.

My amendment also adds to the information we are asking to be tabled. The previous government tabled the entire information bulletin patient activity report, of which the waiting list data were a part. The bulletin as a whole includes data on admission by month, occupied bed days by month, hospital acute in-patients average length of stay and non in-patient occasions of service. The argument for having the waiting list numbers tables holds also for this broader package of information. Waiting lists do, of course, lend themselves to headlines, but the other information informs our picture of what is happening with the hospitals.

Mr Corbell contends in his amendment that the monthly provision of information by speciality could lead to the identification of specific patients. However, in one of the government's own reports on waiting lists for June 2003 there is an explanation of the situations for four particular patients. While their names do not appear, this description of the circumstances is much more personal than the statistics, even when the statistics are small. Under the heading "Long waits by category", it reads:

There are five category-1 long wait patients this month from TCH. Three of these patients required major joint surgery and one patient had to be cancelled due to doctor unavailability. All these patients have been booked for surgery in July 2003.

As to the concern that particular specialists performances will become apparent, if there is some problem that prevents a particular specialist performing as much surgery as they had intended, I would have thought it would be useful to be able to identify that.

The patient information bulletins are put together by the hospitals—in the case of Calvary, by their clinical performance and evaluation unit and, in the case of TCH, by the information analyst in the management and information support unit. Their original purpose is to inform hospital management—and so lead to improvements in the service—if the data show that, where there are problematic reductions in surgery, there is also a problem with the bandaging budget, so the bandage budget needs to be increased, or that there are staff shortages. We all know the kinds of things that reduce the ability of the hospital to deal with the needs of the community.

The information is already put together and is already classified for external release. The issue here is whether it is tabled or put into the Assembly library. Tabling means that members' attention is drawn to the available information and that the bulletins are available immediately, without the need to go and photocopy from a book in the library. This is a practical consideration. We all know the difference between having on our shelves a set of data, comparable over the year or the last few years, versus going up to the library to copy, which takes time many of us do not have.

Mr Corbell also asks us to note that the ACT Health website will be amended to include all information in the monthly waiting list report, as well as quarterly waiting times for all specialities. That is good news. I am happy to note this in the debate but would prefer to formally note in the motion the Assembly's desire for this information to be tabled.

Point 4 notes that the waiting list information prepared by the Stanhope government provides more information and is more accurate. I have heard Mr Corbell argue for this, but I still cannot really support that. If the auditing practice has improved the validity of the statistics, that is a very good thing and the government should be congratulated.

The government's new form of waiting list report includes a bit more descriptive analysis and some additional comments on what the government has recently done. For example, in the report on the June 2003 waiting lists, it is noted that the government provided an additional \$500,000 to Calvary Hospital for major joint surgery. That connects to the individual cases of long waits described. That is useful and could easily be an addition to the patient activity report and/or the waiting list data requested in Mr Smyth's motion.

The presentation of the data in a time-series graph does show the monthly fluctuations and is useful additional analysis. But this is an amalgamated report, which does not show the average waiting time for each speciality, nor the average length of wait for people whose surgery is not scheduled within the recommended time for their urgency category. So it is not an appropriate replacement.

The government's suggestion is that the reports be tabled on the next sitting day. That sounds like a fine timeframe for tabling but refers only to waiting lists, not to the patient information bulletins. I believe that the original motion, with my amendment, will achieve this same outcome. I thank Mr Smyth for bringing this matter back to the

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Assembly. Information is a necessary part of democracy. I will move my amendment after Mr Corbell's has been dealt with.

MS DUNDAS (6.20): I will be supporting the motion as put forward by Mr Smyth today, but I also support Ms Tucker's foreshadowed amendment. It appears that the provision of information to this Assembly by the ministers has not been up to what we appreciate to be standard.

We can have the debate about whether or not this was happening two years ago under the former government. But the point is that this Assembly would like the information and sees it as necessary for not only keeping the government to account but also making the decisions about whether or not expenditure is going in the right way and what issues we need to be focusing on. In the area of health care this is particularly important, as we are talking about things that are fundamental to every citizen here in the ACT.

The information we are asking to be presented is already collected under contractual arrangements with the ACT hospitals. We have static reports that come out, but many in this Assembly agree that we are not getting enough detail or we are being presented information in badly scaled graphs that hide the detail of what is going on.

There has already been some discussion tonight about the need to differentiate the waiting times from waiting lists. We can see that there are any number of people sitting on a waiting list and that those numbers fluctuate, but that does not indicate that one person—

Mr Corbell: We've published the waiting times. You don't know what you're talking about.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Ms Dundas has the floor.

Mr Corbell: Just check the god-damned data. We've published the waiting—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Ms Dundas has the floor, thank you.

MS DUNDAS: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will continue with what it is I am saying about the information being available in a package where everybody can access it at once without having to file through reams of paper and lists that are hidden. We have had this discussion before—

Mr Wood: You're simplifying it. You're playing the innocent with everybody.

Mrs Cross: I think you're ruffling some feathers, Ros.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, please, members!

MS DUNDAS: This discussion has been ongoing, with lots of different points being made about when the information is available, where it is available, whether or not members can access it, whether or not the community can access it and whether or not it is providing us with accurate and relevant information.

Accountability is about providing accurate figures that are accessible, not hidden within changeable graphs and statistics. Accountability is about saying you are going to do something and delivering it.

My understanding is that we are still waiting for the government's access to elective surgery reports to deliver on the promises made by the minister when they announced that the people of the ACT would be able to get updated information on elective surgery waiting lists. It is a commendable trait, but it appears that this information is not being delivered in the way that people expect, and that is possibly the crux of the question.

The minister would like us to note that the website will be active from September 2003 and will include information on the waiting list reports, as well as a report on the waiting times. When we had discussions about this earlier this year and last year, we were always being assured that the website would be updated soon. Maybe we need to have questions about waiting times for website updates.

The minister is getting quite wound up about this debate—

Mr Corbell: You don't know what you're talking about!

MS DUNDAS: He is getting quite wound up about this debate because he is feeling pressure about the accountability of hospital information that the Assembly is calling for. I support what Mr Smyth is getting at today, and I am also supportive of the amendments Ms Tucker has foreshadowed to include patient activity data and having the information that we require as soon as practicable.

I expect we should not always be waiting for the Assembly to sit to get information. There are months when we go without sitting and having that information as soon as practicable provides members of this Assembly with the information they are looking for to be able to make decisions on how budgets are worked out and how future directions are handled.

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (6.25): The amendment of Mr Corbell is interesting; we will go through the points one by one. Point 1 is simply irrelevant. It says that the previous Liberal government did not publish hospital waiting lists on a set date. They were generally available on or about the 21st of the month—three months after the information became available.

Mr Corbell: So, you're imposing a higher standard on us than you imposed on yourself?

MR SMYTH: What's wrong with urging you to have a higher standard? We are very twitchy tonight, Mr Corbell.

MR SPEAKER: Order, members! Direct your comments through the chair, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Mr Speaker, I would love to address my comments through the chair, as you would know.

MR SPEAKER: You have not shown much of a passion for it yet.

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MR SMYTH: Mr Speaker, I bring them to task all the time for not referring to you and addressing your position. The reason the 21st is there is simply that it is the date at which the library itself starts to look for this information. If you go back and check last year's accession of the information, under the Labor government, January's figures were available in the library on 18 February; February's figures were available in the library on 19 March; March's figures were available on 23 April; April's slipped a bit—they were available by 30 May; June's figures were available by 29 July; July's figures were available on 19 August; August's figures were available by 23 September; and October's figures were available by 22 November.

It is a practice that has occurred and in most cases has been met. You have to understand that the data gets to the library and then its accession before it gets onto the shelf. I am not sure what the processing times are upstairs, but it is achievable and this government did it for the majority of last year. To say that the 21st is a figure that has been drawn out of a hat is not correct; it is the figure that most of us have worked to for some time.

Point 2 is plainly ridiculous. The defence is that it might identify somebody. Ms Tucker has stolen my thunder by saying that the new report is even more detailed in terms of being able to identify an individual patient. It is just ridiculous. Patient activity data sets contained this information for years, absolute years. This part of the amendment is designed to allow the government to peddle the fiction that the waiting times it publishes are somehow based on reality.

I get letters every week telling me that there are very few people who are waiting 136 days for category 2 surgery. It is a deceitful attempt to hide the truth about the specialists and the speciality operations that are required. Who knows? Perhaps we will discover that the CountryLink excuse does not apply just to radio oncology but also to orthopaedics; to ear, nose and throat; to ophthalmology; and to neurosurgery. If we get that excuse too often, the government might worry that people will no longer believe it.

Point 3 says that information will be amended to include all the information on the ACT Health website. That is laudable, except for one insy winsy little point. Why on earth has the website been inoperable since February and, now that we have brought that to the attention of the minister, why is it going to take until September to fix it? I remind members that the government's own health action plan said that information would be available on the website.

Point 4 notes that the waiting list information prepared by the Stanhope government provides more information and is more accurate than the previous reports, due to auditing practices introduced by the government. The previous government did audit the lists and remove double counting—so there is no additional auditing. They might be doing a different sort of auditing now, but auditing was done on the previous list to ensure accuracy. You cannot say it will take more time because there is auditing, since auditing was done last time.

Mrs Cross: Did you keep the webpage updated?

MR SMYTH: I am not sure we had a webpage. It is quite clear that this part of the motion is just plain wrong. We got the contradiction from Mr Corbell himself. He sends me a letter saying, "The information that I gave you was incorrect. We are not proposing

to remove any information from the bulletin. This information was incorrect, and I would like to make the following correction.” Those are Mr Corbell’s words.

The information reported in the new publication, *ACT public hospitals: access to elective surgery*, will not report all information previously reported in the hospital information bulletins. Either he is delusional—blithely saying, “But there’s more information,” when his own letter on 17 June this year, following the estimates, said it has less information—or he needs to come back and tell people what the truth is here.

Point 5 “calls on the government to table the waiting list figures for the previous month ... on the next Assembly sitting day”. It is a reasonable part of the amendments, perhaps the only reasonable part. However, we do have the problem of what happens during a winter recess, which might go for eight or nine weeks. From the December closure of the Assembly through to late February/early March, this data might not be available for almost three months. That is unacceptable as well.

The other point Mr Corbell made is that the government already releases the information when it is available. His record does not back that up. It did not happen during the estimates, when he had it; he refused to give it to the Estimates Committee and, through them, the community. As a consequence of that, there is a committee of contempt looking into that particular statement.

If you talk to the library—we talk to the library; we go up seeking this information—they say to come back on about the 21st, which is when they expect it. They have told my office on a number of occasions that it is in the minister’s office and they are waiting for it. They have actually rung the minister’s office to find out where the information is. So, I am sorry, Mr Corbell. You say the government releases it when it is available. But it is actually as you said in the Estimates Committee: you will release it when you are good and ready; the government does not have to do it when the people call for it; the government will do what it wants. That is incorrect as well.

I thank Ms Tucker for her amendments. I find amendment 2 to point 2, insert “Information Bulletins—Patient Activity Data”, acceptable. I would prefer to leave the 21st of each month. It is three weeks after the closure of the previous months. It is three weeks in which the data can be collated—it has already been gathered—and presented. I think it gives people some certainty. If they want, they can change the 21st to the 25th or the 28th, but I do not think we can let this minister go. This minister has already told us things tonight that are not borne out by the facts.

He says he releases the figures when they are available. I can give you two occasions when that did not happen. He says that they are released every month, but no figures were released in July. If we let him off the hook on this occasion, we will be back here shortly tying him down a little bit more. The minister seems to like the thought that if you say something often enough people will believe it. It is not true in this case.

I would ask Ms Tucker to reconsider keeping the 21st. It is achievable. It was achieved consistently by this government through most of last year. If she wants to make it the 25th or 28th, that would also be acceptable, but we do need to tie this minister down to a set date. Otherwise we run the risk of having to come back to do this again.

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I will go back through the dates to make the point. Data for January 2002 was available to the library on 18 February, data for February 2002 on 19 March and data for March 2002 on 23 April. So it is possible to have it ready for people to see.

I ask members of the Assembly to reject Mr Corbell's amendment, and I would ask Ms Tucker to reconsider the date in her amendment, changing it from the 21st to a later date, should she wish to. However, it has to be within 28 days of the end of the previous month.

Question put:

That **Mr Corbell's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7		Noes 8	
Mr Berry	Ms MacDonald	Mrs Burke	Mrs Dunne
Mr Corbell	Mr Quinlan	Mr Cornwell	Mr Smyth
Ms Gallagher	Mr Wood	Mrs Cross	Mr Stefaniak
Mr Hargreaves		Ms Dundas	Ms Tucker

Question so resolved in the negative.

Amendment negatived.

MS TUCKER (6.38): I seek leave to move the following amendments to Mr Smyth's motion together.

Leave granted.

MS TUCKER: I move the following amendments:

- (1) paragraph (1), omit the words 'on the 21st of each month, and table the next sitting day', and insert in their place:
"and table in the Assembly as soon as practicable after they are prepared
- (2) paragraph (1), insert after the word 'the' and before the words 'waiting list figures':
"Information Bulletins – Patient Activity Data' and the"
- (3) paragraph (3), omit the words 'on the 21st of each month', and insert in their place:
"as soon as practicable after they are produced".

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (6.39): We can certainly accept the amendments. I would prefer that there was a set date. If the amendment gets up, we will monitor what happens. If we find they take an extraordinarily long amount of time to get this information to members and/or to table it, we will be back to put a specific date in another motion.

MRS CROSS (6.39): I will also be supporting Ms Tucker's amendment. Like Mr Smyth, I would have preferred to see the date but, given that Ms Tucker has included each month in her amendment, we will wait and see how it goes. At this stage, I will be supporting it.

Amendments agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Australian health care agreement

MR SMYTH (Leader of the Opposition) (6.40): I bring to the attention of the house the fact that Mr Corbell has broken ranks with his Labor colleagues and signed up to the Australian health care agreement today. We congratulate him on getting that extra \$58 million worth of hospital funding for the people of the ACT. We think that is a fabulous outcome, given the rhetoric that Mr Corbell has put up in the past couple of months.

I am pleased that he has taken our advice that he should go and talk to the minister, instead of yelling at her, because he might negotiate a better package. Mr Corbell, to his credit, has managed to get a few extra goodies for the people of the ACT. I congratulate him on that and also thank the federal government for making available funding to boost after-hours access to GPs.

We thank the federal government for agreeing to 50 transitional aged-care beds, worth \$1.8 million, and for putting up \$5.5 million worth of capital funding for the ACT's new sub and non-acute facility. We congratulate the federal government for now declaring the ACT a district of work force shortage for GP services. We thank the federal government for extending the Commonwealth's outer metropolitan GP incentive scheme to Belconnen, Gungahlin, Weston Creek and Tuggeranong.

It is pleasing that the minister finally took the advice that was given to him: if you negotiate instead of yelling at people, you get a whole lot further. Well done, Mr Corbell, and well done particularly to the federal government for making a significant additional funding commitment to the people of the ACT.

Ms Narelle Hargreaves

MS GALLAGHER (Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, Minister for Women and Minister for Industrial Relations) (6.42): I rise tonight to speak about one of the ACT's longest serving public servants, Ms Narelle Hargreaves. Ms Hargreaves worked as a teacher, principal and senior officer in education for the past 41 years, the overwhelming majority of that in the ACT as a teacher and educational leader.

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Narelle worked as a teacher and principal at Red Hill, Turner, Narrabundah, Florey and Miles Franklin primary schools. She was also instrumental in developing a number of very successful Canberra schools, such as Miles Franklin, Florey and the Gold Creek joint facility. She fostered the instrumental music program in many ACT schools and has watched plenty of young talented students benefit from this program.

In 1993 Narelle was appointed Director (Schools). Her experience, dedication and warmth have made her a much-loved and respected educational leader. Narelle has also been heavily involved with the development and promotion of the international student program.

I was lucky enough to attend Narelle's farewell and retirement drinks last Friday, where several hundred people crammed into Ainslie School to pay their respects to an incredible woman. Speakers paying tribute included principals from primary schools, high schools and colleges and the Director of the School of Music. There was also an address from the Chief Executive of Education, Youth and Family Services, Fran Hinton. Speakers all spoke of a woman with tireless energy—she only had four days off in 41 years—with enormous commitment to public education.

Narelle Hargreaves' contribution to ACT education will remain with us always. She was a leader, a mentor and a friend to many. At the end of the day, she was a great teacher and a person who never lost sight of the fact that it was all about the children. On behalf of the ACT government, I acknowledge Ms Hargreaves' contribution to ACT education and to the countless individual students and her colleagues. I wish her and her husband all the best in her retirement.

Death of Mr Vince Kalokerinos

MRS CROSS (6.44): I rise to pay tribute to Mr Vince Kalokerinos. I know Mr Smyth paid tribute to him last night, but I attended his funeral today. Mr Kalokerinos was not only a husband and father, and a friend to many thousands of people in the ACT, but a good Canberra citizen, of Greek origin, who ran a very successful business.

It was a big shock to me when I learned of his death yesterday. The passing of someone is always very sad, particularly when it is someone as special as Vince. He was extremely loved by members of not only the Greek community but also the broader community, for his generosity, kindness, tact and intellect—but mostly for his big heart.

My husband and I came to Canberra 10 years ago, and we met Vince shortly after we arrived. One of the things that struck David about Vince was his great command and understanding of literature. Most people assume that people who run businesses, especially fish and chip shops—or “mixed businesses”, as they used to call them—are not very well-read people. They think they go into those businesses because they either come from a labour background or they are uneducated. Indeed, that was not the case.

Vince was not only very well read; he also made an impression on many people in this community— from labourers to scholars to people in all professions. He produced three fine children: a daughter and two sons, one of whom became a lawyer. I see him doing great things in the public arena one day.

What touched me most about the funeral today was that the church was overflowing—there were people standing outside the Greek Orthodox Church in Kingston—and that people from all sides of politics, all walks of life and every socio-economic background were represented there. There must have been close to 800 people. The love, warmth, sadness and joy we felt in the wonderful memories of Vince marked today's funeral in a very special way. We are going to miss him very much. He was an inspiration to someone like me, an Australian of Greek origin who always looked up to Vince for his integrity and dedication.

I pay tribute to him once again and wish his family well.

Ms Narelle Hargreaves

MRS BURKE (6.47): I would like to add my congratulatory note to the minister's on Narelle Hargreaves. I met Narelle a few years ago in my first involvement with school-to-industry stuff and across the education sector, and I have to say she was the most dynamic and enthusiastic person I met. It was so rewarding and warming to see somebody of an equal level of energy, and it really helped me along in that early time. She was definitely a dedicated leader. Her face and the way that she was with people were an enormous encouragement to all who worked with her.

She is a very warm person and strong, determined and forthright in the way she led her people. That is a really good quality in leadership, which I aspire to. I was blessed to have met somebody who was so encouraging to me in my endeavours. I wish her and her family every success and happiness in her well deserved retirement.

Ms Narelle Hargreaves **Bill of rights**

MR STEFANIAK (6.48): I heard a couple of weeks ago that Narelle Hargreaves would be retiring. I am only sorry no-one told me exactly when the farewell drinks were on, but I will catch up with her. As the minister said, she has done wonders for the ACT education system. When I became minister, she was Director, Schools Operations Northside. There was a move to move her somewhere else, but she did not want to be moved somewhere else. I was certainly happy to go in and bat for her there because she was terribly effective in the job that she did.

Over the nearly seven years I was minister, I never failed to marvel at the magnificent job that Narelle Hargreaves did for our education system. She had a certain style about her; she was quite unflappable. As an executive director, she would go out there and handle the most incredible problems at a school level. If there were parents who were really upset about something happening in the school, Narelle would sit them down and patiently go through it.

She would show great understanding and compassion—and strength when she needed to; she knew what she wanted—and was always able to listen. It was amazing how many difficult situations Narelle Hargreaves was able to resolve simply through her experience, dedication, force of character and the warmth that she displayed to everyone.

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When we went out to a number of school functions, especially where ex-students were involved, it never failed to amaze me how many people would come up to Narelle because they had been her students. In some instances, they had been junior teachers who had taught with her when she was principal of a school.

The regard in which Narelle Hargreaves is held is truly remarkable. I was very saddened—but not surprised; we all get to the age where we have to retire—to hear that the era of Narelle Hargreaves in our school system was coming to an end. She has been a wonderful example for public education in the ACT, a magnificent teacher, a magnificent administrator and a decent friend to education generally. She will be sorely missed.

I wish her and her family all the best in their retirement, and I also look forward to catching up with her now that she has retired. She leaves incredibly big boots to fill, and I do not think anyone could do quite the same job as Narelle Hargreaves.

I have another, not quite so pleasant, point, Mr Speaker. In response to a supplementary question I put yesterday on a bill of rights, the Chief Minister talked about Liberals, conservatives and rednecks against the bill and then rattled off a group of people, including criminals, who would benefit from the bill and whose rights need to be respected. Everyone has rights in this country. Everyone has rights and responsibilities. It is churlish to lump together people who oppose his legislation as Liberals, conservatives and rednecks. There are a lot of people who are none of those three.

I dread to think, too, that he wants criminals to get more rights. I recently heard some very sad stories emanating from victims in our courts. I have written to the Chief Minister about some of the victims, who are very concerned that the courts are so criminal centric, who feel that victims have no rights and who wonder what on earth they are doing there. I cannot conceive of what other rights criminals need; if anything, it is the victims and society whose rights need to be further enhanced. The Chief Minister went off on a real tangent in answer to this supplementary, and I do not think that advanced the argument he is trying to push one jot.

Ms Narelle Hargreaves

MR PRATT (6.59): I want to add my best wishes to the excellent speech given by the minister on the parting member of the department of education. I have nothing much to add because everything which has been said has covered all aspects. I was impressed to hear the minister say that Narelle had only taken four days off. That is incredible. I wish her and her family all the best.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.53 pm.