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OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY  
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## **Wednesday, 30 June 2004**

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

## **Hemp Fibre Industry Facilitation Bill 2004**

**Mrs Burke**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MRS BURKE** (10.34): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

It gives me great pleasure today to table the Hemp Fibre Industry Facilitation Bill 2004 and for this opportunity to speak to the bill. Having spoken extensively to those in the industry, both interstate and here in the ACT, I know this is an exciting opportunity to establish a hemp fibre industry here in the ACT.

The production of hemp as a fibre is not new. It has a plethora of benefits for both our community in general and our education system, through vocational education and training opportunities, and of course it is a key industry driver. I will address these issues shortly. However, allow me, Mr Speaker, to highlight quickly the history of hemp fibre use.

From the times of the Phoenicians to the age of steamships, 90 per cent of all ships sails were made from hemp, as were the rigging, anchor ropes, nets, flags and shrouds. Until about the 1820s in the USA and up to the 20th century elsewhere, hemp provided 80 per cent of the textiles and fabrics for clothes, linens, rugs, drapes, quilts, sheets, towels, nappies et cetera. In fact, as some may know, the first Levis jeans in 1853 were made from hemp fibre, with over 5,000 different textile products being made from hemp fibres since. Hemp is viewed to be softer, warmer, more water absorbent and more durable than cotton. It also has three times the tensile strength of cotton.

Let us look at the environmental issues. There are also a number of environmental benefits of industrial hemp. Hemp is two to three times more productive than cotton and uses half the water as well as half the fertiliser. Hemp also, unlike cotton, requires no pesticides or herbicides. As a result, industrial hemp is cheaper to produce, more productive and is an environmentally friendly alternative for farmers.

From an economic and environmental perspective, hemp fibre has also been shown to be an excellent composite binder within building products like medium density fibreboard, more commonly known as MDF. As a result, industrial hemp fibre has been shown to reduce the use of conventional chemicals like formaldehyde and associated wastes that are used in composite construction and ones that clearly harm the environment—firstly, the land, and then our river systems. I am no expert on this aspect but have taken advice and I am sure others in this place will be able to add something here.

Let me now turn to the economic benefits of cultivating industrial hemp. Industrial hemp, as a raw material, is undergoing a resurgence in Europe with farmers, governments and private sector corporate interests becoming increasingly involved. The Netherlands has led the way with its agricultural research department, which is reinvigorating hemp as an ecologically sound crop with a multitude of industrial applications.

A great deal of research has also been done on industrial hemp in Italy, England and Portugal. For instance, England re-legalised hemp for fibre in 1993 and now joins France, Ukraine, Italy, Spain, Turkey and China as legal suppliers. After speaking to ACT industry and other interested stakeholders, clearly the cultivation of industrial hemp is extremely exciting and has significant support. The nub of the issue is that the cultivation of industrial hemp in the ACT will, without a doubt, employ people and provide an added, unique and much-needed industry.

The spin-offs are vast. Farmers will be provided with an alternative crop choice that, once the industry is established, could provide quite substantial benefits. As I have mentioned already, the environment would certainly be looked after through the cultivation of industrial hemp; the retail sector is also set to reap significant benefits that have already been evidenced overseas; and, of course, industrial hemp provides a number of significant benefits to the tourism industry, manufacturing sector, building industry and the education sector, particularly through vocational education and training.

With regard to vocational education and training, I can tell the Assembly today that there are training based organisations in the ACT that have already developed and tailored training programs in the hope that a bill such as this is passed by the Assembly. The current situation in Australia and worldwide is exciting and as a territory there is no reason that we cannot jump on board.

Currently in Australia, research crops of industrial hemp are allowed and in Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland commercial production is now licensed. Internationally, outside of the countries I have already mentioned, some 26 countries cultivate hemp for commercial production. In fact, religious tradition has it that the Japanese Emperor wears hemp garments.

We need to look, obviously, at the legal concerns. In conclusion, it is important to highlight that this bill in no way condones the use of cannabis as an illicit drug. As members will see, the bill facilitates, through the issuing of licences, the cultivation of industrial hemp with a THC content of no more 0.5 per cent. Evidence shows that to get any sort of “high”—rather more likely to be a huge headache!—from industrial hemp, a person would literally have to smoke a paddock full of it, and we know that that is not possible.

Secondly, for those concerned with illicit drug use as a result of the cultivation of industrial hemp in the ACT, I would suggest that they drive through Tasmania to see hectare after hectare of pure opium poppies. To my knowledge, heroin users have not all moved to Tasmania to steal poppies that could easily be turned into heroin nor have crime enforcement agencies like the police experienced significant concerns as a direct result of Tasmania being one of the largest, if not the largest, pure opium poppy grower

in the world. It is worthy of note that, when I was checking this out, I found that there is a distinct difference between the types of plant. It would be easily recognisable if people were trying to grow the wrong sort of hemp plant just by the look of it.

The ACT is awash with land that could easily be set aside for the cultivation of industrial hemp, particularly as the debate surrounding the regeneration of fire-affected land continues. This bill establishes what I see as an extremely tight but sensible legislative regime for the cultivation of industrial hemp in the ACT and is drafted from analysing similar legislation elsewhere in Australia. There are no surprises in this bill—just commonsense legislative frameworks for a unique and exciting industry. It is an opportunity for Canberra to put itself squarely on the map for something of which we can be proud to be first.

The economic, social education and training spin-offs are immense. I would argue that the spin-offs of industrial hemp cultivation in the ACT could, on a comparative basis, arguably be greater than pine or even perhaps hardwood plantations. We already have companies in the ACT ready to invest and establish training and education programs with regard to industrial hemp. The concerns with illicit drug use are so minimal that they are hardly worth mentioning and, with the debate surrounding the regeneration of fire-affected land, industrial hemp proves an excellent solution.

It is worthy of note that we have moved on and that people are certainly far more educated and intelligent enough to understand the basis of this legislation. With the support of this Assembly in passing this bill, licences could be issued and a much needed unique but exciting industry could easily and quickly be established here in the ACT. The cultivation of industrial hemp in the ACT is exciting. I look forward to debating this bill hopefully before the Assembly retires before the election.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Dundas**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Nature Conservation (Native Vegetation Protection) Amendment Bill 2004**

*Pursuant to standing order 128, Ms Dundas fixed a later hour for the moving of the motion.*

## **Drugs of Dependence (Cannabis for Medical Conditions) Amendment Bill 2004**

**Ms Tucker**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MS TUCKER (10.44):** I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The Drugs of Dependence (Cannabis for Medical Conditions) Amendment Bill 2004 establishes a scheme that permits the medical use of cannabis. I think it has been well established that cannabis can provide relief for a number of conditions, ranging from

appetite-inhibiting nausea experienced by people undergoing chemotherapy to joint pain endured by people with aggressive arthritis. The New South Wales government has announced its intention to legalise the medicinal use of cannabis but, in trying to find the legislative approach, appears to have tied itself up in knots.

The project began with the New South Wales government convening a working party on the issue chaired by Professor Wayne Hall, Executive Director of the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, and included medical academics/clinicians, representatives from the NSW Cancer Council, the AIDS Council of New South Wales, the Law Society of New South Wales, the AMA, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, and government agencies including New South Wales Police and New South Wales Health. The report, released in November 2000, was titled "Use of Cannabis for Medical Purposes". In brief, the working party concluded:

... that crude cannabis cannot be prescribed and is unlikely to ever be prescribed in Australia. There are also substantial obstacles to the medical prescription of cannabinoid substances. At best it will be some years before any cannabinoid drugs are registered for medical use in Australia. Given evidence that patients with some of the conditions indicated are currently using smoked cannabis for therapeutic reasons, the Working Party has recommended a regime for limited compassionate provision of cannabis to patients who may benefit from its use. This is an interim measure until medical cannabinoids become available. It would allow limited medical exemptions to criminal prosecution to patients who have been certified as suffering from a restricted set of medical conditions by an approved medical practitioner who has also counselled them about the risks of smoking cannabis.

That advice is consistent with the scheme as it is managed in Canada, for example. While the onus is on doctors to verify that the applicant has an identified condition or disease and that other treatments are not providing relief from pain or discomfort, the doctor is not required to prescribe the drug. The responsibility for taking on the risk, managing the administration of the drug and indeed controlling its effect, and carrying the responsibility for any adverse health consequences, remains with the applicant. That seems only reasonable.

A similar approach was advocated by the Australian Parliamentary Group for Drug Law Reform in its policy paper released last year, which recommended "that Australians with chronic and terminal illnesses be allowed to access cannabis as a form of pain relief in consultation with their family doctor". This group includes parliamentarians and ex-parliamentarians from every state and territory. It was formed in 1993. Michael Moore, here in the ACT, was one of the founding members; ex Chief Minister, now Liberal senator, Gary Humphries is a member and I am one of the two national spokespersons for the group. Other present MLAs who are members of the group are Jon Stanhope, Brendan Smyth, Simon Corbell, Katy Gallagher, Karin MacDonald and Ros Dundas. On that basis, all other things being equal, I would hope that this Assembly would be disposed to support the bill.

Members might be aware that I tabled an exposure draft to this bill earlier in the year. The model, in that instance, was not prescriptive as to the diseases or conditions that warranted medical use of cannabis but required a doctor to prescribe it. Community and medical response to the exposure draft was not strong, but the clear message that came from it was that the medical profession in most instances would be loath to prescribe

a substance of no set concentration without real quality assurance and which, whether effective or not, would have some deleterious health impacts. Consequently this bill does put the responsibility back on the applicant to apply for permission and to carry the risk of medicating with cannabis. This scheme still requires affirmation from a doctor that the applicant has a specified disease or condition, that cannabis is recommended as a potentially effective treatment, that the risks have been weighed and acknowledged and so on.

The scheme creates three categories for approval, ranging from terminal illnesses, through serious and debilitating conditions that are not defined as terminal. Category 3 conditions that may be chronic and debilitating would be defined in regulations and require a medical declaration from two doctors. This scheme also sets up a number of safeguards in regard to criminal offences and in regard to stockpiling the drug. It provides for a licensing scheme to allow an approved person to grow cannabis for medical use or for another designated person to grow it for them. The quantities that can be grown or stored under such a licence are strictly limited.

Finally, in working through this bill, I draw the Assembly's attention to the provision for a review after two years. I think we are all aware that a number of cannabinoid drugs are being developed, but they are not yet freely or cheaply available. The situation may be quite different in a couple of years. In that context, it makes sense to look at the benefits and costs of the scheme, its impact on the lives of applicants and the availability of other, more regulated, forms of the drug.

I would like to flag with members that we are interested in working with them in ensuring that this regime is effective and manageable when the bill is passed. Any constructive discussion and amendments would be welcomed.

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

## **Land (Planning and Environment) (Unit Developments) Amendment Bill 2004**

**Ms Tucker**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MS TUCKER:** (10.51): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present, on behalf of the Greens, the Land (Planning and Environment) (Unit Developments) Amendment Bill 2004. This bill is one step towards mechanisms that ensure we maintain a stock of affordable housing in our community. As the Affordable Housing National Research Consortium said in their 2001 report, *Policy options for stimulating private sector investment in affordable housing across Australia*:

Affordability is a complex issue, yet it can perhaps best be dealt with using a benchmark known as 'housing stress'. A conservative setting of the benchmark, specifically chosen in order not to overstate the problem shows that households in

the lower forty percent income bracket who pay more than 30% of their gross income on housing costs, whether renting or buying, are said to be in 'housing stress'.

This definition of affordable or unaffordable housing is in wide use. It was used, for instance, by the ACT Affordable Housing Taskforce in 2002. This bill would essentially introduce two mechanisms to ensure an increase in the stock of public or affordable housing. First, where the government grants a new lease with the purpose of a major unit development, this bill would establish that the lease may be granted only if a condition is built into the lease requiring 10 per cent of the development, when completed, to be either handed over to the Commissioner for Housing for public housing or to be otherwise used, and continue to be used, for affordable housing. This is requiring the government to do what it ought to do—that is, to use the fact that we have a leasehold system, where nominally there is an element of interest in the common good directing what happens on the ACT's land, to address this crisis in housing.

The second mechanism in the bill would affect the approval of a development application for a major unit development. This is the case where someone already holds a lease and wants to redevelop the area for residential units. Again, this would apply only to major developments, which the bill defines as 20 units or more, or as otherwise defined in regulations. In this situation, the bill would set an additional condition on the approval. The condition would be that the developer either hands over 10 per cent of the development when completed to the Commissioner for Housing for public housing or that that percentage is otherwise used, and continues to be used, for affordable housing—or that the developer pays an affordable housing contribution. The contribution would be determined at a reasonable rate, with reference to several matters set out in the bill. These are the extent of the need for affordable housing in the area; the scale of the development; whether the proposed development is likely to reduce the availability of affordable housing; and any dedication or contribution previously made by the applicant under the section or section 161—granting of leases—in relation to the area.

This condition of approval would not apply if the relevant lease were originally made subject to affordable housing requirements. The choice of contributing either affordable housing or a monetary affordable housing contribution is modelled on the New South Wales developer contribution system—for example, SEPP 70, which is described in the Affordable Housing Taskforce report. I refer members particularly to Background Paper No 3, report to the ACT Affordable Housing Taskforce, titled "The role of land and planning mechanisms in providing affordable housing". These requirements will apply only to applications received after the commencement date of the bill; they will not apply to applications made but not yet approved at that point.

Proposed new clause 245AB would require the territory to apply any affordable housing contribution under 245AA to the purpose of providing affordable housing within a reasonable time after the contribution is made. Also, the Commissioner for Housing must use the units transferred in the exercise of the commissioner's functions in relation to programs and arrangements for providing affordable housing. This task is consistent with sections 8 and 9 of the Housing Assistance Act 1987 where the functions and powers of the commissioner are set out—that is, these new requirements would fit into the powers and functions that the Commissioner for Housing already has. That is how the bill will work.



I will turn now to the need for these kinds of mechanisms. We are all very aware, I am sure, of the increases in the price of housing over the past five years or so in the ACT and around the country. These changes in the market have led to a reduction in the amount of the rental stock available to people on low incomes. We have had the disturbing situation where the increased building of multiunit residences in the central Canberra area has not led to an accompanying increase in affordable housing. After going through an extremely tight vacancy rate—an average of 2.6 per cent—over some time, the market eased a bit to 4.5 per cent but has since tightened again. What easing there has been, however, is not in the lower end of the market. Some observers have pointed out that there is instead a glut in the upper end of the market, in the newer units pitched at higher income tenants. This has put pressure on public housing, already under pressure due to cuts imposed by the previous government, following the economic rationalist trend around the country.

The current government has committed to at least maintaining the stock. But this is not enough, particularly with the current situation and likely direction of the housing and lower income rental market. Repeated failure of government to implement various commitments to require affordable housing or to increase public housing has contributed to this problem. The Kingston foreshore development, from the beginning, was supposed to have a social mix and was supposed to include a proportion of affordable housing. The draft development application included a requirement that at least 10 per cent of the places be affordable for people on low incomes. But these objectives, bandied around as part of the sell job, have not made it through to reality; have not made it through to firm requirements.

One of the responses given was that it was okay because there was already public housing in the rest of Kingston. When the problem of Kingston foreshore not matching the promise came up in 1999, I and Mr Wood, then opposition spokesperson for housing, made a call for 10 per cent of redevelopment housing to be made available to ACT Housing tenants. The *Canberra Times* article of 14 August 1999 claimed that “Ms Tucker’s call was enthusiastically endorsed by the opposition’s spokesman on public housing, Bill Wood”. Mr Wood was then quoted as saying:

It should be at least 10 percent. The percentage of government housing around the ACT should be reflected everywhere, including the Kingston Foreshore.

Unfortunately for our community, and unfortunately for people living on low incomes, this has not happened. We need to do much better than rely on the concept of “student residences” redevelopments, with no requirement for student residents, with no particularly student-friendly inclusions. I will not go on, but without some guarantee, some built-in ongoing requirement for a proportion of these developments to be affordable housing, it seems clear that we will not get it.

Increased stocks of public housing will always be the best buffer against the market. It is the only situation where the rent will remain automatically at a level that matches the tenant’s income. It is stable. It is a place where people can have the opportunity to get some stability into their lives. The problem is that we do not have enough. We have had already quite a few missed opportunities in the central developments. City west is the

next frontier. Because some of city west will involve the granting of new leases, this is the best opportunity to get new public housing properties.

As members are well aware, there are obviously important federal dimensions to this debate as well. The Greens have made several proposals, including allowing negative gearing only for low rental properties for landlords. Also, we have suggested looking at more creative financing schemes for public housing in the ACT, recognising it as a central public good, such as looking, in combination, at alternative ways of investment, green bonds, superannuation and so on. It is obviously a broad issue that can be addressed from several different angles. I am hoping that the bill I am tabling today will at least bring some structure into development in the ACT which will address, to a degree, the crisis in provision of affordable housing.

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

## Leave of absence

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

That leave of absence be granted for today, 30 June 2004, to Mr Wood.

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

That leave of absence be granted for today, 30 June 2004, to Mr Stefaniak.

## Employment growth expectations

**MR HARGREAVES** (11.01): I move:

That this Assembly welcomes the release of the latest *Hudson Report* on Employment Expectations which shows that the ACT leads the nation in employment growth expectations.

I am pleased to note that yesterday's release of the *Hudson Report* on employment expectations shows that ACT employers are the most optimistic in the country with respect to hiring over the next three months. Almost half of the ACT businesses surveyed plan to increase staff numbers over the September quarter 2004 while only 4.4 per cent expect to reduce numbers. The ACT net effect of 43.2 per cent is by far the highest among the states and territories and is 14.8 percentage points above the national average of 28.4 per cent. The September quarter result is also an impressive 12.3 percentage points above the June quarter estimate.

The Treasurer noted in his budget speech that employment opportunities are forecast to remain strong in the territory and the results of the *Hudson Report* lend weight to that view. Of the ACT industries surveyed, Professional Services recorded the most optimistic outlook, with a net effect of 51.8 per cent, up 8.7 percentage points on the previous survey. The government sector also recorded a very optimistic net effect of 43.5 per cent, up 19.2 percentage points on the June quarter result. This outcome for the government sector is particularly pleasing and should go some way to alleviating the uncertainty in the business community that is often associated with territory and federal

elections. With respect to business size, small businesses recorded a healthy net effect of 33.8 per cent, down marginally on the previous survey. Both medium sized and large businesses recorded strong results, up 15.4 and 15.2 percentage points respectively. The net effect for all three business sizes was substantially higher than at the same time last year.

The optimistic outlook of the *Hudson Report* is supported by the most recent results of the ANZ job ads series, which is currently running at close to record levels. As a leading indicator of employment, strong growth in ANZ job ads is indicative of high levels of business confidence and labour market strength. Trend ANZ job ads have been at historically high levels in 2004, with the number of job ads in the ACT for February reaching a series record. Trend ANZ job ads grew 9.6 per cent for the year ending May 2004, compared to national growth of 1.6 per cent for the same period. The strong growth in trend ANZ job ads suggests an optimistic outlook for ACT employment.

ACT Treasury maintains its own account of job advertisements by industry, which corresponds with movements in the ANZ job ads series. The ACT Treasury series show that there has been strong growth in job ads over the past year in the administration/clerical sector, the services sector and the retail sector. All labour market indicators point to a very healthy ACT labour market and to strong levels of recruitment demand among employers. Trend employment in the ACT has reflected the strong growth in ANZ job ads, albeit to a lesser extent, with trend employment rising for the nine months to April 2004 and remaining steady in May. The trend number of unemployed in May 2004 was at its equal lowest level since November 1986. The trend unemployment rate of 3.6 per cent in May is the lowest on record and is 2.0 percentage points below the national unemployment rate of 5.6 per cent. The trend participation rate is at a 14-month high at 71.9 per cent and is 8.2 percentage points above the national participation rate of 63.7 per cent.

While the *Hudson Report* and the ANZ job ads series highlight the growing demand within the ACT labour market, there are indications that employers are having difficulties filling some vacancies being advertised. This is highlighted by the difference between the level of growth in ANZ job ads and overall growth in employment. With a buoyant labour market nationally and anecdotal evidence of skill shortages emerging across the country, ACT employers may continue to find it difficult to source labour locally or to attract skilled candidates from interstate. Opportunities for ACT workers, indeed for workers throughout the region, have never been so good. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (11.07): I welcome the motion today from Mr Hargreaves because it is an important issue, but I think it is rather pathetic that we have a motion on the ACT economy that basically deals with only one parameter—employment expectation and expectations from industry. One would normally expect such a motion to cover broader consideration of the outlook of which employment expectations would be just one component. I am reminded of that old saying “One cuckoo does not make a summer” and I guess, in this case, neither does it make a political party.

Equally, the figures have to be taken in context. One quarter’s results do not make a boom—quite the contrary. It is extremely dangerous to base an argument on the results

from a single quarter. The Sensis and Chamber of Commerce reports over the last two quarters have reported rapid declines in confidence and expectation with a flat outlook rather than anything else. Any economist worth their salt knows that many results for a single quarter often need to be revised, sometimes quite substantially as later data becomes available. Even the biggest and the best—in this case the Bureau of Statistics, one of the most eminent statistical organisations in the world—revises statistics on a regular basis as the fuller data becomes available and is reviewed.

It is silly of the government to base a view of the ACT economy, and indeed employment in the ACT, on a single report from a human relations company. The latest unemployment stats show the unemployment rate for 15- to 19-year-olds is 18.8 per cent in the ACT. We need to be careful with that figure. There is a little caveat at the bottom of the page that says, “The estimate is subject to sampling variability which is too high for most practical purposes”. You have to keep that in mind with youth unemployment because there is a question of whether they should be attending full-time education, if they are not. If they are attending full-time education—we all know that argument.

Let us look at Hudson. Hudson’s are recruitment and human resource consultants, known in the trade as search consultants. Their expertise is not in economic analysis; it is limited to working with employers to attract, select, engage, develop and retain the people they need to succeed—and they are good at it. They are one of those firms that have a long history. They have had several name changes recently. What they do best is recruit. The *Hudson Report* looks at employment and HR trends. But there is a lot more to the ACT economy than what Hudson’s essentially narrow take is based on—the outlook of their clients. Hudson should be seen in the light of, say, the Sensis business index, a much more broadly based measure and one often quoted by the Treasurer, who is an economist and who obviously, therefore, knows much more about these things than Mr Hargreaves. What does Sensis say? A report in the *Canberra Times* of Tuesday, 25 May, states:

Business confidence in the ACT has fallen below the national average, a new survey has revealed.

The May 2004 Sensis Business Index—Small and Medium Enterprises (SME)—found business confidence in the ACT had fallen for the second consecutive quarter.

Sensis chief economist Steven Shepherd said confidence ... was ... 6 per cent below the national average. “This means business confidence in the ACT has declined 23 percentage points in just six months.” Mr Shepherd said.

That would be the six months following the release of the white paper. That is an interesting commentary on the white paper and this government’s economic performance. Another paragraph reads:

Sensis reported SME support for the policies of the ACT and NSW Governments had experienced the largest fall across the nation for the quarter. With a decline of 18 per cent, approval for the ACT Government was now at 12 per cent.

That matches some of what the Chamber of Commerce said the other day. It said that for over six years we have had conditions that are positive, but for the past two quarters we have had a situation where confidence is flat—the same two quarters since the release of

the white paper. We need to be careful when we selectively read the entrails of reports produced by firms that have specialist interest in very limited fields.

As you can see, you can have a different reading from both Sensis and the Chamber of Commerce. The employment expectation from the Chamber of Commerce is a net minus 4. Employment levels are down from the June expectation of 52 per cent to a September expectation of 48 per cent. There is a decline on the figures done by a local survey and that really contradicts what the *Hudson Report* is saying. In contrast again to the *Hudson Report*, the chamber survey is based on a wide range of economic parameters. The chamber survey found overall that there were some signs of slowdown in growth in the September quarter.

We can sit here and pat ourselves on the back for having found a report that says that we are doing a good job, but the question is: what do we do with that report? Do we take the foot off the pedal? Do we sit back and say things are okay? I do not think things are okay. Mr Hargreaves attended the Tuggeranong Business Forum the other day. All the candidates spoke about the need to increase employment in the Tuggeranong Valley. Mr Hargreaves himself expressed some concerns that the Canberra plan was not doing anything for Tuggeranong, that it was not working for the people of Tuggeranong—and he is right.

**Mr Hargreaves:** That is not what I said, Brendan. Get it right.

**MR SMYTH:** You can correct it.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Go back and get it right or I will have you in a censure motion.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, Mr Hargreaves!

**Mr Hargreaves:** Get the quote.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! You can come back to it.

**MR SMYTH:** I will get the proper quote.

**MR SPEAKER:** Direct your comments through the chair.

**MR SMYTH:** The quote said words to the effect, “If you expect me to tell you that the Canberra plan is working for Tuggeranong—well, I can’t cause it ain’t.” But I will get the quote. The *Canberra Times* quote was fairly accurate as to what was said.

There are still concerns about jobs growth in areas such as Tuggeranong, Belconnen and Gungahlin. It is all well and good to have a survey that says, “This is the expectation”, but how are we going to deliver it? The real question becomes: what are we doing about making sure that there is long-term employment into the future? The government’s answer seems to be, “We have got a white paper.” The commentary on the white paper from both Sensis and the Chamber of Commerce seems to be that since the release of the white paper we have seen two quarters where confidence in the government is either flat or has fallen significantly.

It is interesting, in particular in the Sensis report, that the actual policies of the ACT government have been rated as one of the lowest in the country. The government's approval rating has fallen from 18 per cent to 12 per cent—and that is an indictment. People do not believe that this government has a plan for the future or has any intention of delivering a plan for the future. There are geographic pockets that need to be addressed, both in age group and socioeconomic areas, that are not being met by this government. We had a debate last night on the budget. I said then and I will say it again that this budget and the budgets of the last three years have squandered a tremendous opportunity to take—

**MR SPEAKER:** You are reflecting on a vote.

**MR SMYTH:** No. I am dragging out the comments that I made last night that were not reflecting on a vote. I am not reflecting on a vote at all. We have accepted and passed the budget. I believe that, with the large surpluses we have had in the last couple of years, we have squandered the opportunity to drought-proof the ACT economy. It is not enough to say, "We have a report that says we are doing okay. We have a plan that we think will do something". You have to look at what you are delivering.

The opposition will support the motion welcoming the release of the latest *Hudson Report*. If the best the government can do is have a motion that welcomes the release of the *Hudson Report*, we will welcome its release. The real question is: what will the government do in the future to reduce unemployment levels, particularly among persons aged 15 to 19 years? What will the government do to improve employment for older Canberrans? Men over the age of 40 often have difficulty getting jobs. They are seen to be at the end of their useful life. We are increasingly asking older Canberrans to stay in the work force. Where are the strategies to make that occur? There will be an amendment moved to the motion and I will save the rest of my comments for that.

**MS TUCKER (11.16):** I thank Mr Hargreaves for raising the issue of employment in Canberra. I have a similar response to Mr Smyth in that I do not have a problem with welcoming the *Hudson Report* on employment expectations. Looking at the *Hudson Report*, the point has to be made that this is about projection. Positive projections are largely driven by the federal election and associated employment. I do not think it is something the ACT government can claim credit for particularly. The boom seems to be in the short-term consumption areas such as IT and telecommunications where highly skilled workers, often brought from interstate, do the work at an executive level. Skilled knowledge workers are at a premium.

I welcome the report, even though I am not quite sure that a particularly consistent performance has been projected at this point. As I said, with the influence of the federal election, I always raise a question about the nature of employment and who will be benefiting from it. I remind members of some comments that ACTCOSS made a year ago but which still stand. It said:

Labour mobility data tell us that Australia has a very mobile work force. It has often been argued that Canberra, with a high education attainment level, has a particularly mobile labour force which will move to where the jobs are if they become unemployed ... It is ACTCOSS' submission that this mobility makes the unemployment figures less robust. It would appear on anecdotal evidence that unemployed, skilled Canberrans move out of the area if they are unemployed,

leaving a core of low-skilled unemployed who have particular problems that will not be resolved by providing incentives to high-end employers in the IT industries.

ACTCOSS' hypothesis is that the ACT's unemployed are more likely to be long-term unemployed, as those with desirable work force skills are more likely to move interstate to gain employment. Those left are more likely to suffer some form of workplace disadvantage and need more intensive assistance to find work. My foreshadowed amendment "expresses concern at the lack of a comprehensive and targeted employment strategy which addresses long-term unemployment, under-employment and the needs of groups in our community who are particularly disadvantaged in the labour market." This includes people with disabilities, early school leavers, migrants, indigenous people, refugees and older people as well—as Mr Smyth said—particularly those over the age of 50.

I was interested that government initiatives to address employment issues for that group were not included in the *Future Directions for Disability ACT* report. Although the social plan made a general pledge to reduce the number of long-term unemployed by 2013, we need a more detailed and tangible employment policy to support this aim. Another aspect of this discussion is the question of where employment is at physically. Mr Smyth said that there has been concern raised about employment in Tuggeranong, as there has been in Gungahlin. That should also be part of any strategy.

Also related to the question of how we are supporting people who are disadvantaged in the labour market is support for CIT. Obviously CIT is a very important vehicle for less skilled people to improve their employment prospects. I think that should be brought into any strategy as well. The question of underemployment also is always important to address. We know that underemployment can be a very significant factor in poverty in Australia and that employment figures often gloss over this fact.

Once again, there should also be a gender audit and analysis in any credible employment strategy because the issues for men and women are different. When an analysis has been done, it has been found that women are particularly disadvantaged by the casualisation of the work force. I was involved in a workshop on women's issues recently in the Assembly—Ros Dundas was there; she sponsored it—and was working with the United Nations group for women's development. It was a good and interesting opportunity to just sit at a table with a group of women workshopping what the issues are for women. Employment was a major factor that came up as a strong concern in all the groups in which I participated—and that includes questions of casualisation and part-time work.

As I said, the table on page 5 of this report we are welcoming shows where the expectations are strong. The strong areas are telecommunications, professional services, construction, property engineering, IT and retail. If we are looking at government social investment where ACT people require services, we find the areas of health, education, tourism, hospitality, transport and manufacturing are at the bottom. That presents us with a picture that we can pick up and work with in any strategic approach to employment in the ACT. As members we would all be well aware of the difficulties that certain groups in our community have in accessing employment. We hear those stories from the individuals concerned—whether it is the highly skilled people that come to our community as refugees, for example, who are basically trapped in poverty and unemployment just because there is no real capacity building there, whether it is talking

to people in the indigenous community or whether it is looking at early school leavers. I did an Assembly inquiry which looked into school leavers. It is well understood that employment prospects are not high at all for people who leave school early. We know that if we work with those groups we have the opportunity to make a big difference in the long run for those individuals and for the community as a whole, which saves taxpayers money because of reducing the need for support payments.

I conclude with the underemployment question, which is often connected with overemployment. This is an issue because, if you seriously tackle overemployment, you can see the problem for the establishment and development of a number of jobs. That has certainly been proven in countries where this question has been seriously tackled. The relationship between underemployment and poverty has to be stressed as a major concern in our community. I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Add "but expresses concern at the lack of a comprehensive and targeted employment strategy which addresses long-term unemployment, under-employment and the needs of groups in our community who are particularly disadvantaged in the labour market."

**MS DUNDAS (11.25):** I will talk to both the substantive motion and to the amendment moved by Ms Tucker. Higher employment growth expectations are of course good news because that means more jobs for the ACT, and we have seen a steady fall in unemployment rates in the territory. However, a closer look at the figures put forward in the *Hudson Report* on employment expectations reveals our continuing vulnerability to federal government policy.

Expected employment growth is heavily concentrated in the government and IT sectors. Growth in the IT sector itself is largely dependent on the federal government. If the Howard government decides that there are more votes in moving government jobs elsewhere, our unemployment rate could rapidly soar. As a result not only do we lose core jobs in the public sector but also all the people who are providing IT support and additional resources find themselves without work.

We need a more diverse industry base in the territory so that we are not so vulnerable to federal government policy. The ACT government needs to look beyond our borders to help local businesses reach their potential. It would be very useful if BusinessACT helped and supported local businesses to form consortiums to bid for interstate contracts that are too large or complex for any single Canberra business to take on alone.

The government has failed to develop a scheme to help start-up businesses develop prospectus documents to attract venture capital funding. Instead of exploring the creation of skill building for businesses, the government has taken the lazy option of just throwing money at business start-ups through a venture capital fund in the hope that it will pay off.

It appears that the government has not even made a serious effort to help local businesses tender for ACT government contracts. To increase work to small businesses in the territory, the government plans to introduce a pre-tender process to inform local businesses about major upcoming ACT government contracts. That is laudable, but the process will not guarantee that government contracts are of a size that local businesses



can tender for and manage, and it will not result in ongoing monitoring of local employment outcomes.

New jobs in the ACT should mean lower unemployment. However, these new jobs do not appear to be providing work for the long-term unemployed. They are still as marginalised as ever. The white-collar white paper that the government put out was still focused on the high knowledge end of the ACT business sector. We are not targeting jobs to support those who have never been through university, who did not have the best outcomes when they left school at either year 10 or year 12. A lot more work needs to be done in those areas.

Entrenched youth unemployment is a problem that is not being addressed by growth in IT and government jobs. The ACT still has a high rate of youth unemployment, despite the figures put forward in the *Hudson Report*. Between December 2002 and December 2003, the number of young people in the ACT seeking full-time work doubled. In percentage terms, youth unemployment went from just over 11 per cent to 22 per cent.

Reports have shown that the number of ACT kids classified as at risk has doubled between 1999 and 2001. This means that 17 per cent of our young people living in the ACT today will fail to ever reach full-time work or study—they will never have a full-time job; they will never complete university. Where are the programs to help these people? Vocational programs are crucial for helping these kids at risk, but the cost of courses excludes many. Not all kids excel at academic study and vocational education suits many of them much better. The cost of school based vocational education courses is still too high for many children from low-income families, so in the end they drop out of school and end up in an ongoing cycle of unemployment.

We will see if the new budget initiatives will support the majority of these young people. They are targeted programs to support the most at risk or the most in need young people, but there are still many more out there. Seventeen per cent of young people in the ACT need broader support. We need that focus, that recognition, from the government that not everybody is going to go to university, that not everybody is going to be capable of a high-skilled job. We need to support diverse industries.

Youth unemployment can adversely affect health, happiness and future job prospects for a lifetime. We must ensure that school based vocational education is within the financial reach of all students or youth unemployment will just continue to rise and that will have a long-term impact on our economy. The employment of people with a disability is also another issue that needs to be addressed. The government's disability access strategic plan had only two lines on employment for people with disabilities. In my submission to that plan, I noted that the government needs to do more in this area—to set targets for each of its departments and to support bringing people with disabilities back into the government sector so that they are able to contribute to the community.

I hope the action plans that sit under the strategic plan include greater targets for support and that that turns into a reality. I will be supporting Ms Tucker's amendment because I am concerned that there is a lack of planning, a lack of comprehensive and targeted employment strategy to help the long-term unemployed and underemployed. As we have mentioned, other groups—young people and those with a disability—are still left out of the labour market. The *Hudson Report* does not show a positive outcome for them. Rosy

short-term employment predictions do not touch broader structural issues. We need to tackle these hard issues head on; otherwise the most encouraging business confidence figures are not of any use to us in promoting a happy and inclusive society if so many people continue to be left out.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (11.31): I will speak initially to the amendment, Mr Speaker. Some comment has been made about what we might do to skill up some people or provide for a transition. I recognise the positive sentiment in that. I have to point out that this government has provided additional funds for vocational education and training in the budget just passed effectively answering that.

The way that this motion probably will be amended is just a commentary on minority government. It is what happens when you have a minority government. Whatever you do, no matter how good it is, it ain't enough; it ain't soon enough and it doesn't reach enough people. Whatever. I think that reasonable people will accept that that is the situation and there is not much point railing against it.

But I would like to think, having brought down the economic white paper, that, whenever the Assembly does have the opportunity to debate motions like this one, those that will carp, despite the best figures in the nation, will be a little bit more constructive about how to get to the end game where we actually provide the opportunity for those people that we skill up or give greater training, counselling, advice or whatever.

Unfortunately, there is a regular deficiency in debate here as to what to do. I have already spoken about the nonsense, and I am quite firm about that at this stage, that I have heard come forward from the opposition about what they would do for the economy under the so-called creative Canberra policy—I think that phrase belongs to the Arts Council, but nevertheless—and about the absolute paucity of support for it or any real structure behind it. At least an election ago, this government went to the electorate with a proposal for a knowledge bank, a knowledge-based economy, and a commitment to produce a white paper, and it has done all of those things and more.

I appreciate Mr Smyth's contribution to this debate, because I think he hit, accidentally, on the nub of the problem when he talked about the *Hudson Report* and its statistical analysis versus the surveys that have been done on more qualitative studies that might depend on exactly how the questions are asked. I have no doubt as to the general trend in those qualitative analyses that have been done, because I think there is very good reason for that.

Some of those studies ask, "Do you support the policies of the government?" It is not the natural habitat of businesses to be dealing with a Labor government. They would much prefer to be dealing with a conservative government that has traditionally lent more towards assisting business than maybe Labor has done.

Given that this government has brought into this place a number of provisions designed to enhance the safety of workers within industry, I would expect business to rail against that. I would expect it to mount a campaign. I would expect that campaign to have an impact in any qualitative surveys. Business in the ACT has one or two quite articulate

advocates. If a government wishes to place any restriction on business, any taxation on business or bring about any improvement in working conditions, business is not likely to like that. That is born of self-interest, if nothing else.

It might be possible for those of us in the place that can consider more than one concept at a given time to embrace a position in which this government is unashamedly prepared to bring into legislation conditions that improve the health and safety of workers. That does not preclude us in any way from helping business to grow and the economy to strengthen. We had a whole debate in the last week or two about business migrating to New South Wales because of union access. The fact is that that provision already applies in New South Wales, but we had a whole railing against that particular provision. Of course we had that.

As I said, business has articulate advocates. With ready access to the media, why wouldn't they try to minimise the impact of any restriction on what they do? But when it comes to the statistical stuff and it is not a case of opinion and it is not a case of maybe realising when you are being surveyed that what you say will have an impact within the public forum, but what you are actually doing when you are really out there doing your business, you find that we have record employment, that we have record job advertisements and that we observe the strongest intention to employ.

Those things are objective measures and they are far more objective than the qualitative surveys which ask, "Do you like government policy?" You can go out into the street and ask the people how many of them like government policy, but do not come in here and say that we have to let the particular opinion on that be the sole arbiter of decisions that we might take in here. That really would be reducing the position to a nonsense. As I said, I thank Mr Smyth for bringing that topic into the discussion.

This government has worked with business in the ACT and business in the ACT has happily worked with this government. It will still go out and criticise and it will still campaign. At least we have reached the stage in our relationship with the major business representation body, the business council, that it will ring us up first and say, "Sorry, but we are going to have to go out and give you a smack on this one as we don't like it." That would be fair enough if we did not expect them to like it, but we would have hoped that they would have done enough homework to realise that you cannot talk about businesses marching off to New South Wales. They have to march as far as Queensland to avoid union access and if they do they might find that they will only have temporary respite anyway.

This government has committed to and produced an economic white paper and it does have a plan for the territory. (*Extension of time granted.*) I know that the anal retentives amongst us would like to have more targets and that those that live by the slogan of keeping the bastards honest and not much else really do need all those figures and depend on those figures for their lifeblood, otherwise, as I said earlier in the piece, they might just have to make some positive contributions and suggestions.

We are open today to suggestions on how to grow business of any sort in the ACT, to strengthen the economy, to make that economy capable of absorbing those people who are not employed, who are underemployed or unskilled or are in the grey zone, as some of us are. We would be very happy to receive those suggestions in a positive way. I give

you my commitment that, if they are sensible, we will implement them. We have built structures within business. We have built the knowledge bank. We have used the knowledge bank. We have built the Canberra partnership.

We are establishing business relationships worldwide: London, Wales, San Diego, Chicago, Washington, Los Angeles, Ottawa, Beijing, Hangzhou, and Cambridge. We are building those relationships. We have not just gone to those places for a junket and a visit. I have signed memorandums of understanding with a number of those zones. Today, I received a newsletter from the Los Angeles Regional Technology Alliance, a very large organisation, which builds business in Los Angeles. One of the major features of the newsletter was an article about the relationship that the alliance has built with Canberra and an agreement that its CEO, Rohit Shukla, signed with us when he appeared at Focus on Business 2004 in Canberra.

A number of the major speakers at Focus on Business visited Australia and contributed to Focus on Business because I had met them overseas last year and invited them to come and participate. They did so willingly and they have seen the prospects for the ACT economy. They have been very positive. These people deal in sorting out businesses with a chance and a future and those that have not and they have seen exciting prospects for the ACT and are very happy to work with us. More will be seen of the territory working with those organisations to benefit from their experience.

We have invested in commercialisation funds. We are establishing a small business commissioner. We have invested in the National Information Communication Technology Australia—NICTA—centre of excellence. We are investing additional funds in the development of tourism and it is not about throwing money at events in tourism. Members will have observed that over the last couple of years we have developed a strategic approach. I think that it was even recognised in this place yesterday that the major attractions seem to be working better with the ACT government.

That did not happen by accident. It happened because I pushed for it. It is something that should have been done before, but the approach was never strategic. It was usually photo opportunity stuff and not a strategic approach—big bangs, but no substance, no underpinning. We have a far better approach to the development of tourism and the results are showing up. Mr Smyth, despite trying to put a bit of spin on those numbers last evening, had to concede that they were better than they had been. Beyond the World Cup and beyond the Masters Games, the numbers have improved. They have improved because the work has been done—not just having money thrown at it, but the thinking that has gone into it.

The government intends to work to build the economy. We intend to work with business. We anticipate that business will criticise us from time to time. Business will lobby in the public forum to minimise the cost to business, to minimise the imposition that government might make on it and to minimise occupational health and safety restrictions placed upon it. If the advocates for business did not do that, they would not be doing their jobs.

But our job is not to come in here and immediately embrace everything that is said by the business sector and say that it must be right. Our job is to be a bit more discerning. Our job is to be able to consider, as I said earlier, more than one concept at a given time and

to consider the concept of growing business and building the economy and at the same time making sure that we actually improve the lot of the employee. We are here, certainly, to improve the lot of business, the employer, but we are also here to improve the lot of the employee.

**MR HARGREAVES (11.47):** Mr Speaker, I will be speaking just to the amendment, not closing the debate. Members need to have a close read of the amendment moved by Ms Tucker because it is not as comprehensive as the first half a dozen words might give the impression of its being. The amendment talks about having a comprehensive and targeted employment strategy that addresses the long-term unemployment, underemployment and needs of those groups in our community that are particularly disadvantaged in the labour market.

I cannot support the amendment because I do not think that it is right. We have had successive governments quite specifically address this issue. I do not think that it is fair to say that any one government can claim to have done the best thing for all of those things. Incrementally, we get better at it. For example, the former government and this government have quite significantly and deliberately supported institutions such as Koomarri, which has an element that specifically goes about trying to find long-term employment for those people who are physically and intellectually incapable of doing so by themselves.

That is something that this government has supported and the previous government, of which Mr Smyth was a minister, supported. It has been part of the commitment of both governments to try to level the playing field for those people. That is just one example. If Ms Tucker is saying that we need to have a comprehensive and targeted employment strategy for all of the bites of difficulty within the employment regime, I suggest that she is being a little bit unreasonable.

We cannot isolate one particular part of the employment regime. We need to consider the global picture. We need to consider the partnerships between business and Labor. We need to consider the incentives that businesses are putting forward. This government has put in place incentives to try to get small and even smaller businesses moving and being able to provide employment opportunities.

The major reason for bringing forward this motion highlighting the *Hudson Report* figures was to show what the environment is like. What is the environment like for getting a job here in Canberra? What are the opportunities like for our kids? One of the big things that I picked out of this report was the fact that employers are having difficulty finding jobs for people. I suggest that they are having difficulty finding jobs for people a little bit more so than places in other parts of the country.

I do not think that it is appropriate to water down that point by suggesting that there is a lack of a comprehensive and targeted employment strategy, because that is not true. The economic white paper talks about employment opportunities. It talks about employment opportunities for older people. A lot of our discrimination legislation is all about making sure that those people have an equal opportunity. The Human Rights Act that the government has brought in is all about doing these things.

I do not think you can take the rest of the issues that this government and governments before it have done in isolation. Also, I do not think that this amendment should be supported because, whilst our position is that you have an employment strategy covering all spectrums of the community that are looking for work for a variety of reasons, we are not seeing anybody putting up anything in its place. The opposition and the government fight a bit about philosophy, but not all that much. Generally speaking, we fight about the detail, about whether a particular initiative is a good one or a bad one, whether their initiative is better than ours.

We argue the toss about these things because at this point in time we are in government and can do something about that and members of the opposition were in government and at some time in the future probably will be in government and will then have an opportunity to put their specific strategies in place. The crossbench, on the other hand, will never be in that position, but one of its members wishes to express concern at the lack of a comprehensive and targeted employment strategy. In response to that, I say, "Put yours on the table, then, and match them up against each other. If you can't, then it is a case of all care and no responsibility, and I do not accept that."

What we are trying to do by this motion is to say that there is something that Canberra can be proud of. Government, business and the community are pulling together and we have had the best results. In fact, we have the best trend unemployment rate on record at 3.6 per cent. We have the lowest level of unemployment since November 1986. Mr Speaker, you will notice that the wording in the motion does not give congratulations to this government. It does not say that this government can take the credit for that. That is not said in the motion. The motion is about the fact that this is a good bit of news for the people of the ACT, that we have an optimistic outlook and ought to be celebrating it. That is the object of the motion.

I urge members not to support the amendment. Ms Tucker's concerns are such that she wants to water down a piece of good news and say that there is a part of the community that is not being looked after but if she looks through a whole stack of issues, such as the budget papers, the economic white paper and the contracts that the government has with employment groups, Koomarri and some of the other community groups she will not find that there is a lack of action in this area. She will not find that at all. Ms Tucker might like to table her comprehensive and targeted employment strategy for disadvantaged groups and give both the opposition and the government a chance to do an audit on that strategy.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (11.55): Mr Speaker, there are important issues in what the Treasurer has said the government is doing for business. That is fine, but the whole point of the amendment is about what the government is doing to address unemployment. That is where the Treasurer's argument falls down.

Members of the northern electorate may have received a letter from Maribyrnong Primary Parents and Citizens Association about the 2004-05 ACT budget and the government's failure to follow up on the education equity component of the ACT social plan. I want to read small portions of it to the Assembly, if I may. It says:

It is a major concern that the major priorities to improve education equity identified in the Government's Social Plan have been ignored in the Budget. The Social Plan

sets the goals of improving equity in education by improving completion rates to Year 12 and increasing literacy and numeracy achievement of students “at risk”. None of the new Budget programs directly address these goals.

There are many students in government schools who have not reached crisis point, but are at the risk of not achieving adequate school outcomes to sustain them in adult life and further learning.

The major area of learning needed in the government school system is in high school. Over 10 per cent of Year 9 students are not achieving adequate literacy standards. There is a large disparity in outcomes between the highest and lowest performing students. About 50 per cent of high school students do not like being at school. Some 20-30 per cent of students drop out of school before completing Year 12.

The letter finishes in this way:

It is very disappointing that, after three years, the Government has failed to act in any significant manner.

Mr Speaker, at least 46½ per cent of the students in high schools are no longer in government schools; they have gone to the non-government sector. I heard it said the other day that something like 2,000 to 3,000 students do not finish year 12. You have to say in that regard that there is a problem out there. It is the sort of problem that Ms Tucker is bringing to our attention in her amendment. That is why we do need strategies that address long-term unemployment, underemployment and the needs of groups in our community that are particularly disadvantaged in the labour market.

Mr Hargreaves made the point that this government has programs and previous governments have had programs. That is a true statement, but you have to keep reassessing those programs and remodifying them to make sure that they are meeting current needs. We know that a large number of students are not finishing year 12. Where are they going? What is happening with the kids at risk?

There is an acknowledgement that these problems exist in the fact that the government is implementing a program for putting youth workers into every high school. Why is the government doing that? It is because there are a growing number of kids at risk and often one of the downsides of being a kid at risk and leaving school early is the inability to get a job, to hold a job and to have a long-term job. So there is a need there. I do not think anybody doubts that. If they do, obviously they are not talking to people out in the street.

Mr Hargreaves mentioned vocational education. Vocational education is very important. I think Ms Dundas mentioned it as well. There used to be an attitude that you had to go to university. I think we would all remember the push by the Keating government to the effect that there was some sort of need for every one of us to go to university. If you look at the marketplace, you will find that there is a huge lack of tradespeople. Being a plumber is a licence to print money these days. There is a shortage of them and a shortage of bricklayers. There is a shortage of finishers—the tilers, the plasterers and the carpenters who come in and finish a construction project, for instance. If we can link up with those kids who have difficulty with school, perhaps the stream they will really want to go into is vocational education. Mrs Burke has spoken long and hard in this place

about the need to improve the profile, the accessibility and the desire to get kids into vocational education.

Mr Hargreaves also spoke about support for Koomarri as a way of addressing the needs of those who are disabled in some way. That is true, but it is just one initiative that happened a couple of years ago. What have we done since then? What are we going to do into the future? Koomarri is not the only organisation and should not be the only organisation that looks after those with a disability. There are many other organisations and they need support as well. I suspect that there are many more people with a disability who are failing to access the employment market simply because the means for them to do so are not there. Of course, we can put those means there if we know how to address the problems, but to do that you have to have a comprehensive employment strategy.

We ran a very successful program which started as Youth 500. It was so successful that it became Youth 1000. I think it got to about Youth 1250 in the end. It was targeted quite specifically at youth unemployment—the 18.8 per cent of young Canberrans who currently do not have a job. We had a specific program. It had specific timeframes and it certainly had targets against it, which is exactly what Ms Tucker highlights in her amendment. She calls upon the government to do that, and she is right in doing so. It is the sort of activity that you need—targeted, focused and with a specific outcome that we can measure so that we know when we meet our target point. I think that that is the sort of thing we ought to be doing.

Why aren't we talking about not having any student leave school and go on the dole? I am sure that many of you heard Bill Lawson speaking a couple of weeks ago about the no dole program that the Beacon Foundation started in Launceston in about 1994. For those that do not know of it, the Beacon Foundation went into what was considered to be the worst high school in Launceston, where 40 or 50 of the kids would leave school and go on the dole just to be like dad and like granddad, and attacked institutional second and third generation unemployment in a town that had not done particularly well in the last couple of decades.

The foundation was able to achieve a drop in the rate that kids went on to the dole from, I think, 34 per cent to 14 per cent in the first year. After that they had a year in which only 2 per cent of the students left school and went onto the dole. They then had four years in which none of the students left school and went on to the dole. Why aren't we a no-dole jurisdiction? Why don't we have a program like that? I understand that the Chief Minister is aware of this program and had briefings from the Beacon Foundation as well some time ago. Why aren't we looking at that as a program?

I offer bipartisan support to the government: if the government wants to work with us, we will work with it to make the ACT a no dole jurisdiction for students leaving high school. The no dole project of the Beacon Foundation is aimed at students who are at risk of falling out at the high school level; it is not just about the students that make it to year 12. There is a handout to the government: if you want to work collectively on this, we will do so. I say that to the crossbenchers as well; the 17 of us should stand up in support of it.

Part of the project involves getting the community to commit to supporting these kids and everybody puts their signature on a big document. Perhaps the first 17 signatures on



such a document should be those of the 17 MLAs saying, "As a community, with complete bipartisan support, we will work together to make the ACT the first no dole jurisdiction in the country." If any jurisdiction can do it, we can by having students, parents, community, business and government all working together. I suspect that that is the sort of program that Ms Tucker is looking for in her amendment, because it addresses the needs of every student who is at risk of leaving school early, dropping out and not finding a job.

It is easy to speak about the bits that the government has done for business and to say that some of the surveys do not compliment the government on what it has done and business does not like what it has done, but the amendment is not about business in particular. The amendment is about finding jobs for people at risk, particularly those who are disadvantaged in the labour market. The opposition will be supporting the amendment. We think that it is necessary. We believe that it is something that the government should have done by now. I finish on the positive note that if we as an Assembly get together and if we as a jurisdiction, through the leadership that can only be offered by this place, want to work together on making the ACT the first no dole jurisdiction in this country, I will be quite happy to work with the government in a totally bipartisan way to achieve that.

**MS TUCKER:** I seek leave to make further comments.

Leave granted.

**MS TUCKER:** I will be brief. I want to respond to the concerns of Mr Hargreaves and Mr Quinlan about my amendment. As Mr Smyth said, significant work has been done through the committee system here on, in particular, the failure of students at risk to complete their education. Obviously, prevention is very desirable in this area to ensure that children manage to finish year 12. As I mentioned, the CIT is very important in that regard.

Mr Hargreaves seemed to be focusing on physically and intellectually incapable people. I am quoting what he said; I wrote that down. I think that he is failing to acknowledge social disadvantage in the labour market. The situation is far more complex than just being about physically and intellectually incapable people. I am not speaking just about those groups. I think that an understanding of the labour market would lead you to recognise that it is not just about physical and intellectual disability; it is about social disadvantage.

That can be through poor education, being a migrant, being older, being Aboriginal or being a child of someone who is unemployed. The cycle of unemployment and disadvantage is clearly understood in the analyses that are presented to decision makers. That is a really simplistic response to make to what I am asking for here. I want to make it quite clear that my understanding is much broader than the one that Mr Hargreaves has mentioned.

Mr Hargreaves advanced a put up or shut up argument, as did Mr Quinlan. I find that a bit extraordinary. We are asked to keep the government accountable and to make comments as a parliament about what the government is doing and to say that we do not have the right to do that unless we have the full plan is quite inappropriate and is to fail

to recognise the role of the parliament in keeping the executive accountable and in assisting the executive to deliver better policy. I would be quite happy to go on at length about some of the suggestions that I have made over the years, but I think that this is probably not the time to do it.

I will make just a couple of comments. I did not quite hear what Mr Quinlan was saying, as he was speaking softly, but I think he was saying that people need to understand that there will be employment opportunities if the government is providing incentives and the upper end of the market is being stimulated as there will be a trickle down effect. That is true to a point and the Greens do not have any problem with stimulating the business community and doing the things that the government is doing in that area.

I do not want to be misunderstood; I am not just being critical of the government. I am pointing out what I see to be a deficit in their approach. I support how they are working with the business community, but I am pointing out that there are lots of people in the community that will not benefit, that the trickle down effect will not happen automatically because of the disadvantage that people are starting off with and that they need to be assisted to overcome that disadvantage so that they can compete more equally in the labour market. That is about really understanding the barriers.

Mr Quinlan said, "Tell us how to do it." Mr Quinlan, you need to be doing work in the community and talking to the community services sector for a start. That would be a very good source of information for you about the issues. Go and talk to the Migrant Resource Centre, go and talk to ACTCOSS, go and talk to people from the Youth Coalition. The expertise exists in our community. I know what they are saying. You should know what they are saying. If you do not, you can find out. It is not that difficult to ask people on the ground what the barriers are and then design an employment strategy that actually deals with those barriers.

As to suggestions, I have to say that in some ways I have seen some inconsistencies coming from the government in their support for the knowledge industry in the ACT. I was really surprised and concerned that there was little public response from the government to how the proposed new CRC at the ANU was cut by the federal government and the general approach to CRCs. I think that it is fundamental to employment and the competitive and comparative advantage we can have in the ACT to have the benefit of the educational institutions that we have here.

Another point that has been made often by me in speeches here is about understanding the employment value of the community sector. I know that the government acknowledges that environmental technology and the environment industry are a source of employment. But, for example, when I put up a proposal about having a particular target for the solarisation of houses in the ACT by 2005, the response from the government was, "We can't do that. We would not have enough people to do it." That would be an opportunity to provide intensive training for unskilled workers to achieve this result, which would bring about benefits for the environment as well as the social benefits of the training. We need to be thinking here a bit more laterally. Mr Hargreaves said, "Don't worry about that; it's dealt with in the white paper."

**Mr Hargreaves:** I didn't say that.

**MS TUCKER:** I am sorry, I have misrepresented him. He says that he did not say that. He referred to the white paper as addressing some of the issues. He would agree that he said that. I would point out that one of the key recommendations of the summary document from ACTCOSS on the white paper was that no further action be taken on economic and industry policy development until such development can be informed by the other elements of the Canberra plan, the spatial plan and the social plan and that the economic white paper should include a thorough multidisciplinary analysis of the relationship between economic, social and environmental factors in the overall development of the ACT and that this analysis should be used as the basis for developing economic and industry policy. There are a number of comments in this response document about focusing on the top end, which is really the point of my amendment to Mr Hargreaves's motion today.

Amendment agreed to.

**MR HARGREAVES (12.13):** In closing the debate, I thank members for their contributions. It is always welcome to have such input from such gigantic minds. Mr Speaker, there is a coincidence with the figures shown in the *Hudson Report*. The figures are the most optimistic for some time, as I have mentioned: the lowest level of unemployment since November 1986 and a trend unemployment rate of 3.6 per cent, the lowest on record. There is a coincidence there with the business incentives issues that this government has been pushing and promoting, the partnerships.

There is a coincidence between the emergence of the economic white paper promising partnerships between the community and business and promising further growth and the figures released in the *Hudson Report*. I do not think that there is any doubt about the coincidence between the activities of this government in promoting employment since it has been in office, just under three years, and the emergence of these figures. In contrast, the best the Liberals could do was CanDeliver, which did not deliver. I am not going to speak any longer. I think the motion, as amended so eloquently by Ms Tucker, deserves to be passed.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## **Nature Conservation (Native Vegetation Protection) Amendment Bill 2004**

**Ms Dundas**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MS DUNDAS (12.15):** I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Mr Speaker, since European settlement in Australia, people have been steadily clearing native bush to make way for agriculture, housing and infrastructure. Most states now have a ban on native vegetation clearance, but for some unknown reason the ACT lags behind. If we keep clearing native vegetation at our current rates, we will lose our name as the bush capital.

The bill that I have presented today commits the ACT to turning around its deplorable record on land clearing by making sure that it does not lose any more habitat for native species over the longer term. This bill introduces a general prohibition on the clearing of native vegetation unless there is a commitment to replanting or rehabilitating an alternative area. The bill mirrors law already in practice in Victoria, where the Bracks government has made a commitment to there being no net loss of native vegetation.

This bill does not outlaw the clearing of native vegetation, but before landholders can undertake clearing they must undertake to revegetate another area or promise to rehabilitate the degraded area of native vegetation so that that habitat is restored. These undertakings will be recorded in a vegetation management plan that must be approved by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna to have effect. The approval must be publicly notified and, in itself, is a notifiable instrument. If the landholders fail to replant or rehabilitate an area of equal value, they can be fined. They will have to repay the cost of doing the work that was failed to be done. So there is a commitment there to have landholders take their responsibility seriously.

The bill also binds the ACT government, so it will have to think carefully about planning decisions that involve the clearing of remnant vegetation. I propose that the law be triggered at the point that ACTPLA seeks to divide a block into portions that fall below a threshold of 0.2 hectares, where the boundary of the subdivision runs through an area of native vegetation that is 0.2 hectares or larger.

If the government chooses to release for development land that is larger than 0.2 hectares, the developer would become responsible for getting a vegetation management plan approved. I hope that this legislation will make both government and developers decide that it is simpler to develop areas that have already been cleared and, if that is not possible, to see the benefit of regenerating or rehabilitating other parts of the ACT so that the ACT returns to being the bush capital.

I have put exemptions in this bill for clearing in the interests of public safety, including activities under the Emergencies Act, such as the construction of fire breaks and fire trails. There are also exemptions for works under the Utilities Act and exemptions to allow rural leaseholders to continue routine agricultural management activities, so this bill should not provide a threat to existing sustainable agricultural practices.

This bill is designed to protect patches of vegetation supporting species native to the ACT, but we recognise that it is harder to support patches dominated by species that are native to Australia but not to the ACT. Under this bill, approval to clear native vegetation will be granted only if the conservator has approved a vegetation management plan that sets out the scope of the intended clearing and the undertakings to revegetate or rehabilitate other areas, including undertaking ongoing care of the revegetated or rehabilitated lands. A vegetation management plan can run for up to 30 years and will bind subsequent owners of the land for as long as it operates.

This bill complements the tree protection regime applying to urban areas and it applies to urban areas, but only to patches of native vegetation, not individual trees, as does the tree protection regime. It does not apply to vegetation in conservation reserves. The recent

Environment Legislation Amendment Act 2004 introduced a regime to govern land clearing in reserves.

I will be undertaking further consultation on this bill in coming weeks, but I look forward to the Assembly debate on this bill in August. With this bill, the Democrats propose a goal of no net loss of vegetation in the territory. The goal is being implemented through new obligations placed on people who wish to clear native vegetation to revegetate another cleared area or rehabilitate a currently degraded area of native vegetation. The goal is that over the longer term the area of native habitat in the ACT will not be reduced as a result of the approved clearing and the ACT will remain the bush capital. I commend this bill to the Assembly.

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

**Sitting suspended from 12.21 to 2.30 pm.**

## **Ministerial arrangements**

**MR STANHOPE** (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Environment and Minister for Community Affairs): Mr Speaker, for the information of members I indicate that my colleague Mr Wood, the Minister for Urban Services and the Acting Minister for Health, is on ministerial duty elsewhere today. I am happy to take questions that might otherwise have been directed to Mr Wood in relation to his portfolio and portfolio responsibilities.

## **Questions without notice Canberra plan**

**MR SMYTH:** My question is directed to the Chief Minister. I refer to comments by Mr Hargreaves to Business Tuggeranong about the Canberra plan and its impact on employment growth in Tuggeranong as cited in the *Southside Chronicle* of 15 June 2004. Mr Hargreaves said:

I'm not going to say that the Canberra plan is doing wonderful things for Tuggeranong, because it doesn't.

Is Mr Hargreaves right in saying the Canberra plan has failed Tuggeranong?

**MR STANHOPE:** I thank Mr Smyth for the question. It gives me an opportunity to inform members here of the significance of the Canberra plan to all Canberrans, including, of course, the residents of Tuggeranong.

Mr Hargreaves did make the comments about the Canberra plan that the media has suggested. Mr Hargreaves is, as we all know, a vigorous and certainly active—perhaps the most active—representative of the people of Tuggeranong in the Assembly. I do not think anybody would gainsay that, including of course other members for Brindabella in the Assembly. They would understand that it is recognised within the community that Mr Hargreaves is the most active, the most interested, the most connected and the most vigorous representative, and the people of Tuggeranong are happy to have him. He is a very active and vigorous advocate of the interests of the people of Tuggeranong.

One of the issues that Mr Hargreaves has championed is the need for an expansion of the economic base of Tuggeranong and the Tuggeranong Valley. Mr Hargreaves has vigorously pursued the need for more employment opportunities in Tuggeranong for the people of Tuggeranong.

It is an issue of interest to all members of this place in terms of their respective electorates: the need for employment to be based around the town centres of the respective regions of Canberra. Mr Hargreaves has vigorously pursued this issue in the time that he has been a member of the Assembly. I am sure that he will continue to push—as any dedicated member of the Assembly should—the specific directives of those people whom he, as a member of the Assembly, directly represents. I commend him for that. I commend Mr Hargreaves for his energy, enthusiasm and commitment to his electors.

In that context, Mr Hargreaves has raised questions with me, the Treasurer and the Minister for Planning around opportunities for enhancing the economy and the employment base of Tuggeranong. He has some issues in relation to the extent to which planning—the spatial plan in particular—may not produce the opportunities in the Tuggeranong town square to the degree that he, as a dedicated, and perhaps parochial, member for Tuggeranong—I do not blame him for that—might hope for. And I accept that. I am sure it is good.

**Mr Smyth:** Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The question was not whether Mr Hargreaves is a good or parochial or the best member for Tuggeranong; the question is: is Mr Hargreaves right in saying that the Canberra plan has failed Tuggeranong?

**MR SPEAKER:** Come to the point of the question, Chief Minister.

**MR STANHOPE:** Thank you Mr Speaker; I will. I conclude my comments. The people of Tuggeranong recognise and respect the fact that, in Mr Hargreaves, they have a member who is dedicated to them, who listens to them.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! Come to the point of the question, please, Chief Minister.

**MR STANHOPE:** Thank you Mr Speaker; I will. They draw a real and obvious comparison with the flim-flam that they get from the Leader of the Opposition. The Canberra plan is a plan for all of Canberra, just as this is a government for all the people of Canberra. Mr Hargreaves acknowledges that and he knows it. He is committed to the Canberra plan. He is committed to all those aspects of the social plan, which is part of the Canberra plan. This is a real commitment by this government to all the people of Canberra, including the disadvantaged, those on the edge, those who battle, and those who need the assistance of a caring and inclusive community.

It is the sort of community to which this government is dedicated to delivering; it is what this government is all about. It is a government for everybody in this town. We are delivering that through the Canberra plan. Mr Hargreaves, as a dedicated representative of the people of Tuggeranong, is as committed to that as all of us.

**MR SPEAKER:** The member's time has expired. Mr Smyth, do you have a supplementary question?

**MR SMYTH:** Yes, I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. Chief Minister, why does the Canberra plan not do wonderful things for Tuggeranong?

**MR STANHOPE:** The Canberra plan is a very good plan. The Canberra plan is the first plan delivered by a government since self-government that looks to the future of the ACT. The Canberra plan is the first time any government since self-government has asked the hard questions about the future of this town. It has developed, through the spatial plan, the first serious attempt at planning the future of the city—looking at what it is that we need to do to develop and generate a truly sustainable future for us and future generations. A sustainable plan will deliver that.

The social plan has been embraced by every community sector organisation that I deal with in the community. The social plan has been embraced by everybody in this community that is concerned about delivering services and enhancing the delivery of services to those people within this community who battle; who are on the edge; who live with poverty; and who struggle with dysfunctional family, drug abuse or homelessness.

There is not a single, dedicated community organisation in the ACT that will not or does not accept that the social plan is a very good step forward in relation to our commitment to the delivery of services to people in this community who have difficulty participating in what the community has to offer.

**Mr Smyth:** Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The supplementary question was: why is the Canberra plan not doing wonderful things for Tuggeranong? Perhaps the minister could come to the point of the question.

**MR SPEAKER:** The Chief Minister was singing the praises of the Canberra plan. He is entitled to sing the praises of the Canberra plan if you ask him a question about it.

### **Teachers enterprise agreement**

**MR HARGREAVES:** Mr Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Minister for Industrial Relations. Can the minister please outline to the Assembly the benefits ACT public sector employees and teachers will receive, outside pay increases, as a result of the successful enterprise bargaining negotiations?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I thank Mr Hargreaves for the question. The issue of resolving enterprise bargaining agreements in the public sector, of course, very important. I am pleased to say that, both in the clerical area and in the teaching area, the government has reached in principle agreement with the unions we negotiate with for their enterprise agreement. These agreements deliver not only substantial wage increases but also substantial improvements in conditions.

It has been the view of this government since coming to office that we should bargain collectively with our employees and that we needed to address the shortfall in wages the previous government provided to the public sector. We came to government with

a public sector that was moving towards the rear of pay scales. Having to deliver immediate relief to those public servants provided enormous pressure. We were seeing difficulties in retaining staff, difficulties in recruiting staff and a drift to the Commonwealth, where we compete for considerable numbers of our public servants.

In the two years before Labor came to office, people employed in the public sector clerical area were receiving pay rises of about 1½ per cent. This was clearly inadequate to maintain a professional public service, so in the first round of agreements the public sector received a 10½ per cent increase over 18 months. We have now finished negotiations on template 2, which is the collective template for all clerical public sector agencies. Those agencies will now negotiate their own schedules. This template delivers a 13 per cent pay rise over three years; it will deliver five per cent in the first instalment and then two payments of four per cent.

Importantly, the conditions in the new template build on the conditions in template 1, which included 14 weeks paid maternity leave, 14 weeks paid primary carers leave, flexible working arrangements through access to part-time employment, job sharing, purchased leave, home based work, financial assistance for vacation care, child care programs, assistance with family care costs, facilities for nursing mothers and, in addition, 18 days personal leave with access to leave for caring purposes up to the available credits.

In template 2 we have taken all the conditions from template 1 and improved them in areas which allow public sector workers to better balance their work and family lives. Improvements in conditions include formal recognition of employees with caring responsibilities, flexible working arrangements for SOGA and SOGB officers, including access to five days off once additional hours have been worked, and access to flex time across the public sector up to SOGC level. Template 2 includes a new bonding leave entitlement of five days leave on the birth or adoption of a child.

The template 2 agreement also includes reimbursement for vacation child care programs when leave is rejected due to school holiday periods and a two-day formal closure period over Christmas. employees will now be able to access pro rata entitlement to long service leave, in case of severance, after seven years of service. Casuals, who were receiving a 15 per cent loading, have had their loading increased to 20 per cent.

I think those conditions have been worked out in a collective spirit between the government and the unions. The parties held their negotiations in good faith. Whilst there was a little turbulence around the edges, it is pleasing to see that we have reached an agreement and, in time, all those agreements will be certified to the benefit of public sector workers. As members would know, the government has reached in principle agreement with the teachers. We will be waiting on that vote by members of the AEU on around 22 July.

That agreement will again improve conditions around payments for casuals, a new permanent teacher scholarship scheme, additional executive positions to support teachers and reduce their administrative workload, additional promotional positions to improve teachers' career prospects, and improved support for beginning teachers in their first three years. That is something Mr Pratt has been seeking and making comments on in the last few days. It also improves wage outcomes from between 15 and 18.87 per cent over



an agreed period of 2½ years, placing our teachers as the best paid in the country. This is something the government is very proud of.

**MR SPEAKER:** The member's time has expired.

### **Pharmacies**

**MS TUCKER:** My question is for Mr Stanhope as Chief Minister and minister representing the Acting Minister for Health. Mr Stanhope, I notice that, in your letter to the Prime Minister regarding the regulation of pharmacies, you have raised the question of the lack of certainty around how competition policy payments will apply and whether penalties will apply. I also notice that, in this letter, you say that in the ACT it is proposed that friendly societies will be able to operate up to six pharmacy outlets each, so you are saying that is the proposal here in the ACT. You also say that you understand that the Prime Minister arrived at an arrangement with Premier Carr that will see a different approach in that state being acceptable to you.

In light of the fact that you have said that you propose to have friendly societies in the ACT—although you also say that there is a lack of certainty around how competition penalties apply—can I ask you to make a commitment to this Assembly that the expressions of interest that you are asking for right now for the study into pharmacy services in the ACT will be broadened, in consultation with stakeholders, to look at the question of friendly societies before we make a decision about what we are saying to the Prime Minister? Would you also then write to the Prime Minister, letting him know that this work is occurring and asking that he not impose a penalty until the ACT community has had an opportunity to make its mind known to you concerning the question of friendly societies?

**MR STANHOPE:** Of course, there is a range of issues in relation to the operation of pharmacies in the ACT, and one of them is the fact that friendly societies currently do not operate or own pharmacies in the ACT. My colleague, Simon Corbell, the Minister for Health, has already introduced the Pharmacy Amendment Bill into the ACT Assembly. That was done, at one level, in response to our concerns about the operation of national competition policies.

In relation to the operation of pharmacies, members of the Assembly would be aware that, in the last year, the ACT incurred a penalty in relation to national competition payments from the Commonwealth. We incurred that penalty as a result of progress not yet made essentially in relation to the taxi and hire car industry and in relation to the deregulation of pharmacies. So the ACT, at this stage, is incurring a significant penalty. I think that \$1.5 million was the penalty that we incurred in this last year as a result of a level of progress acceptable to the Commonwealth in relation to competition reform in the taxi and hire car industry, and as a result of what the Commonwealth perceived as a lack of progress in relation to pharmacy.

The ACT government has sought to address those concerns. It has sought to ensure that we do not continue to be penalised by the Commonwealth in payments to the ACT as a result of what the Commonwealth perceives to be a lack of progress. There is an issue of concern for the ACT and, indeed, all other jurisdictions in relation to what we see as a specific arrangement, an off-the-edge concession made by the Commonwealth to New

South Wales in relation to how the National Competition Council would view so-called reform of pharmacy in New South Wales, where different arrangements apply. We wish to ameliorate that.

I have, quite appropriately, written to the Prime Minister, to ask him for some explanation about what it is that the Commonwealth now expects of all jurisdictions in relation to the deregulation of the way pharmacies operate, accepting that it has just taken money off us in its last budget for what it says was a lack of progress by the ACT.

In the context of the operation of friendly societies and the need for further investigation or inquiry, I understand that the Minister for Health has agreed with the Pharmacy Board and, I believe, with the Pharmacy Guild about how the friendly society amendments to the Pharmacy Amendment Bill that the minister has introduced might operate, and whether additional work is required on the operation of friendly societies.

Work has already been done by the department. A bill is before the Assembly. I am more than happy to take up with the Department of Health, and with the acting minister on his return this evening or tomorrow, how the inquiry, which the minister has already directed his department to undertake, might be expanded to cover the issues that you raised in the question. I will take some further advice on that. We will see whether the further work that the minister has already required does, in any event, encompass the issues that you raise.

**MS TUCKER:** Thank you. Can you confirm that you will wait until this inquiry has been completed before you bring your bill back to the Assembly, and that you will clarify with the Prime Minister the process that is now being undertaken in the ACT?

**MR STANHOPE:** Certainly, the Minister for Health, Mr Corbell, has directed his department to undertake further negotiations and to work with the Pharmacy Board and the Pharmacy Guild in relation to certain aspects of the amendments to the Pharmacy Amendment Bill, which is being introduced into the Assembly and which applies to the operation of friendly societies in the ACT. I cannot imagine that the minister or the acting minister would bring that matter back to the Assembly until that inquiry has been completed.

Similarly, to the extent that the questions that I have raised with the Prime Minister affect or impinge on the operation of national competition policy and the steps that we are taking in the ACT, of course I would expect that we would await a response from the Prime Minister before we proceed with the amendments. However, I will take those issues up with the acting minister tomorrow, he can take some advice from his department and we can get an up-to-date statement on the inquiries that are being pursued and the basis for them. I am more than happy to provide that further information to you, Ms Tucker.

### **Smoking in pubs and clubs**

**MRS CROSS:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the minister representing the Acting Minister for Health. It has been brought to my attention that the government, in issuing smoking-related exemptions to pubs and clubs during the transitional period, will be accepting applications seeking an enlargement of the area in which smoking will be

permitted. Minister, is this true and, if so, has it come about because of pressure from pubs and clubs on all members of your government?

**MR STANHOPE:** I thank Mrs Cross for the question. I have to say at the outset that I am not aware of any representations that may have been made to the Minister for Health or the department of health in relation to recent initiatives relating to smoke-free enclosed public places, including the proposed expansion of restrictions in relation to the operation of pubs and clubs. So it is difficult for me.

I am sorry, Mrs Cross, I am just not privy to what representations may have been made or what further negotiations are occurring in relation to the application of the announced proposals in relation to smoke-free places in public places, particularly smoke-free environments within clubs and pubs. I will need to take some advice on the specific issue you raise, Mrs Cross, and I will be more than happy to ensure that that is provided, hopefully by tomorrow.

**MRS CROSS:** Mr Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. Minister, is the government still committed to seeing smoking completely banned from enclosed public places, effective 1 December 2006? Can you inform the Assembly whether the health department is in the process of drafting guidelines to reflect these additional requests by pubs and clubs to enlarge the size of smoking areas?

**MR STANHOPE:** Mrs Cross, the government has not moved away from its commitment in relation to ensuring that pubs and clubs are smoke free by the designated pre-announced date. We have no intention of moving away from that commitment.

In relation to issues that have been raised with the government by pubs and clubs, certainly we will take seriously those representations. To the extent that the department of health has accepted that there is perhaps some validity to any of the representations, perhaps I can provide some further explanation of that in the answer that I have indicated I am more than happy to provide to you tomorrow.

Yes, we will respond to those representations that we believe to be acceptable, and we will respond to them obviously in the appropriate way. If that requires the department of health to provide additional information or to work on additional proposals that they would put to the government, then I would expect that that work would be duly undertaken. But I will confirm that in the further answer.

Certainly in relation to the first part of your supplementary question, the government has not moved away from its commitment, and I have absolutely no expectation that it will. As far as I am concerned, the date has been specified and I do not believe there is any reason why we would move from it or abandon it. As far as I am concerned, that will not happen. But to the extent that the government may provide some adjustment to the operation of the regime, then of course we will take seriously the representations that we have received; and to the extent that those representations have been received and are legitimate, I would expect the department of health to be working assiduously to meet the government's deadlines.

### **Bushfires—warnings**

**MR PRATT:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the Chief Minister, Mr Stanhope. Chief Minister, in response to a question from me on Tuesday about the advice he received about the progress of the fires in January 2003, Mr Wood said:

I took it upon myself as much as anything to keep myself informed, especially by attending those morning briefings.

At the Thursday cabinet warning, you were told that there was a 40 to 60 per cent chance that you would have to declare a state of emergency that weekend because of the bushfires. You were warned that the urban edge of Canberra faced a significant threat from the fires, yet you did absolutely nothing on the evening of 17 January or the morning of 18 January to keep yourself informed, despite having received a clear warning at the cabinet meeting of this serious threat that the ACT was facing.

Why didn't you, like Mr Wood, keep yourself informed about significant developments in the fires on the evening of 17 January and the morning of 18 January?

**MR STANHOPE:** Mr Speaker, that question is based on a whole range of false assumptions and simply is not able to be answered.

### **Child protection**

**MRS BURKE:** My question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support, Ms Gallagher. Minister, on 24 June 2004, in response to a question from Mr Cornwell, you stated that you did not know why the Murray report would be six weeks later than the Vardon report had promised. You corrected the record on 29 June by saying:

In the brief—and I'd like to correct that part of my answer where I said I did not know why it is being delayed. In the brief to me Ms Vardon stated:

On 17 May 2004 I received a request from the acting CEO of the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services for four out of eight audit team members to return to substantive positions to deal with urgent matters of child safety.

Minister, you went on to say:

I supported this request as the audit had been dealing in the main with legacy issues and current matters had priority. The effect of the reduction of numbers of the audit team was to double their remaining time for the completion of the audit which I now expect to be completed by mid-July.

The Vardon report was delivered on 14 May 2004 and the request was received on 17 May 2004—interesting timing, Minister. I find it interesting also that you did not remember this request and your support for it when you answered Mr Cornwell's question.

**Mr Stanhope:** Is there a question here, Mr Speaker?

**MR SPEAKER:** Come to the question.

**MRS BURKE:** What were the urgent matters of child safety that these staff had to return to deal with?

**MS GALLAGHER:** When I corrected the record yesterday after question time, perhaps I should have said that I was putting that in quotation marks. I was reading from the brief that had been provided to me by the commissioner and, in fact, it was not I who supported the request; it was the commissioner who supported the request of the acting CEO of DEYFS that four out of eight of the audit team members return to their positions.

From my recollection of a discussion I had with Mr Tim Keady, that request had been made because of the number of reports of alleged child abuse that were being received by, at the time, the department of family services and there was significant pressure in handling those urgent calls. The eight staff members who had been working on the audit team had been taken out of family services and the acting CEO at the time took the view that there were more urgent matters to be dealt with—that is, the day-to-day management of child protection issues—than doing the audit work that was required under Gwenn Murray’s report. He made the request to the commissioner and the commissioner supported that view.

In relation to why I did not remember, I did get a brief on it and, with question time, you do go back and look at your answers. Perhaps a better choice of words would have been, “I cannot recall the reasons in the brief.” I did acknowledge that I had had some advice around it and I did go back and look at it. Yesterday, after question time, I corrected the record because there was a reason given in the advice that I had received.

**MRS BURKE:** I have a supplementary question. I thank the minister for her answer. Minister, why was this request made three days after the Vardon report was released? When did the CEO of your department decide to make this request and when did he advise you of it? I think that you have answered a bit of that.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I will have to check on the exact dates. I am not sure that I can give you an exact date as to when Tim Keady advised me. It was certainly in a verbal briefing that he indicated to me that he had made a request that the commissioner had supported; so it was following 17 May. From the advice I have had from the commissioner, she received the request on 17 May. There isn’t any reason behind that other than that resources were low, reports were coming in and the acting CEO made the decision that he needed those staff back. I think the timing was just the way it was; there was not any reason that it was following the Vardon report. I will see whether I can get an exact date as to when Tim Keady advised me, but I do remember that it was in a verbal briefing, which I usually have on the Monday and the Friday of a week. I imagine that it was on the Monday or Friday following the 17th.

## **Education**

**MR CORNWELL:** My question is to the minister for education. Minister, your predecessor was fond of saying that the government strongly felt the necessity to push all secondary students to achieve a year 12 leaving qualification. I believe that you have supported, indeed, reinforced that goal. Nevertheless, families and education community stakeholders have expressed concerns from time to time about the need to provide a good

deal more support to our students in secondary schooling to prevent some students from dropping out before year 12.

Minister, are you satisfied that your department is picking up, and retaining, students at risk of failing to complete their education? Can you advise what the drop-out rate of students in year 11 was last year?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I will take the second part of your question on notice because there is an exact figure for that, Mr Cornwell. We certainly have the best retention rates in the country, but it is disturbing that around 10 per cent of those entering year 11 might not continue to year 12. There is a population of students, particularly disadvantaged students who, if they do go to year 11, make a decision for one reason or another that year 12 is not worth completing. It is something that we take very seriously and that everyone in this place would take very seriously. The goal of anyone working in education is to have students complete year 12 because there is no doubt that, if you complete year 12, you are much better placed for your future in terms of the choices you will make.

Quite a bit of work is going on at the moment, particularly in years 9 and 10 and the transition to year 11, to support students and to make that transition easier. Pathway planning is happening for every year 9 and 10 student. They have an individual pathway plan, where in year 9 they start writing down where they would like to be and what courses they would like to do. That is continued in year 10, and then they make the transition to year 11.

The Career Education Support Service, which was funded in last year's budget, has just had a very successful conference in the ACT. Non-government and government schools came together and talked about how they can best provide career advice and support to students transitioning between year 10 and year 11. That work is being done.

The training pathway guarantee, funded in this year's budget, targets those students who leave year 12 and may not go on to any other form of employment or training in that first year. I have said that we would not necessarily restrict that to year 12 leavers—but only in the sense that we do not want to encourage people to leave before year 12. But if there are young people who would really benefit from that program, we will be looking at them as well.

I will get back to you with the exact figure. We do well compared to national trends, but there is a population of students we would like to keep in school that is not staying in school.

**MR CORNWELL:** Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Thank you, Minister, for taking the question about year 11 on notice. Can you advise, simultaneously, the drop-out rate at year 10 and, if possible, the percentage of students who start year 12 but do not finish it?

**MS GALLAGHER:** Yes.

## **Child protection**

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support. I understand, Minister, that at least 10 police officers raided a house in Kaleen on the weekend, on the advice from family services that a baby had been murdered. It seems that the basis of the raid was a text message to family services and that your department did little to get more information before they passed the message on to the police.

As it transpires, Minister, it was a vexatious message and caused great embarrassment, to say the least, to the householder who was having a quiet family lunch when the police raided. The gentleman whose house was raided is feeling considerably unsettled by the incident. It shows the impact of failed leadership at the top on the effectiveness of family services workers.

Minister, while it is important that family services act promptly on serious reports, it is also important that some effort is made to verify the information before the police are called in. What investigation did family services do into the reliability of the allegation delivered by text message before the police were called to raid the house in Kaleen?

**MS GALLAGHER:** Yes, I have sought advice on that matter, Mrs Dunne. I think it is quite difficult in terms of giving information, but my understanding is that there were a number of calls made to family services in relation to that issue.

On the third or fourth call—and I want to be careful about what I say here because it could be a matter that goes before the courts; it is a matter that family services have had some dealings with—or the final call it was reported to police that the allegations were escalating and family services had significant concerns about that and they had to respond to the allegations they had received. From the information I have, they responded appropriately by calling in the sexual assault and child abuse team to go and investigate the calls that they had received on the after-hours service.

## **Children—playgroups**

**MS DUNDAS:** Mr Speaker, my question, through you, is also to the minister for family support. Minister, considering that there are 12,000 children of preschool age in the ACT who are currently not in preschool, organised child care or playgroups, does the government have a target for the number of new playgroups that it would like to see established, perhaps over the next three years, to give these children an opportunity to interact and learn with other children before attending formal schooling?

**MS GALLAGHER:** We do not have a specific target. I guess we promote and fund the Playgroups Association to provide playgroups to people in the community, particularly those parents who stay at home because they are the people who seem to access, on a part-time basis, playgroup services.

I know there has been some concern with the playgroups about their ability to meet demand for their services or to continue at the level that they have been providing those services. It is an extremely valuable service provided by playgroups in terms of

affordability and access to child care and educational activities for those children prior to going to school.

I have asked the department, from memory—I always get myself in trouble here—to meet with the Playgroups Association to work through some of the concerns. Last year we did provide them with some one-off funding to assist them with what they were going through—I guess, looking at how they provided their services. They have written back to me saying they are still experiencing financial hardship. We need to work that through with the Playgroups Association.

In terms of targeting the number of children that go to playgroups, the government does not have a target but we certainly value and support the provision of playgroup activities offered by the association throughout Canberra.

**MS DUNDAS:** I thank the minister for her answer. I understand that the new triennial agreement with the ACT Playgroups Association has included funding for promoting participation in playgroups, as was indicated, but it does not actually include any more money to support new groups that are established to meet the demand that is out there. Why has the agreement been set up in that framework? Why are not we supporting the Playgroups Association as they try to meet that demand?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I will get back to you on the detail of the agreement and whether they have signed the agreement that is in place for the next three years because I just do not know the deal that has been done around that. I cannot remember whether the Playgroups Association wrote to me post that or prior to that, but I will certainly get some advice and get back to you.

### **Canberra social plan**

**MS MacDONALD:** Mr Speaker, my question through you is to the Chief Minister, Mr Stanhope. Chief Minister, I refer to the Canberra social plan released by you in February this year and, in particular, to one of its flagships—the community inclusion fund. Can you tell the Assembly how the fund will operate and what expressions of support for it have come from the community?

**MR STANHOPE:** Thank you, Ms MacDonald. That is a very important question. The community inclusion fund was designed to assist, and certainly will assist, the most vulnerable members of our community as part of a deliberate and concerted attack by this government on the causes of poverty and exclusion within the Canberra community. More than \$6 million has been set aside for the fund over this cycle. The focus of the fund will primarily be to build on existing initiatives, that have the support of local communities, by funding additional human services staff, such as community development officers, social workers, youth workers, counsellors, psychologists and other health workers in areas of high need.

Proposals for funding that fill gaps in current service provision or meet significant unmet need involve partnerships between the community and government providers. They have a service delivery focus and they meet the social plan objectives. Those are the sorts of proposals that will be encouraged. The first round of proposals for the community inclusion fund will be sought from agencies and community groups early in the new



financial year. They will be assessed within government and advice will be sought from the community inclusion board on the proposals that should be funded.

The partnership element of the fund will be crucial. Delivering effective services to assist the most vulnerable in our community is not, should not be, and cannot be, the responsibility of just one part of our community. The government cannot do it all; nor should it be left to community groups to carry the load on their own. We all bring important skills and resources to the table and the community inclusion fund will be a very important part of the government's contribution to that partnership. Although, as we all know, ours is a relatively prosperous community there are always areas of need. This is reflected in the strong community interest in the fund since I announced its establishment. That is why I have been very keen to get it up and have it running as soon as possible.

Despite that strong community support, I have some concerns about the sole source of negative comment about the community inclusion board and the community inclusion fund. That sole source of negative comment of course is from the Leader of the Opposition and some of his colleagues, who have described it variously as a complete waste of time, a slush fund and a hollow log.

It seems that neither the Leader of the Opposition nor the Liberal Party believes in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable in our community. The Leader of the Opposition does not believe in the government working for vulnerable people in the community. They did not manage to achieve it themselves in seven years of government and they do not believe in governments working in partnership with the community. It is not something they are interested in and it is not something they ever did.

Even as late as this morning the Leader of the Opposition was quoted in the *Canberra Times* as remarking, during the debate on the budget yesterday, that the community inclusion board—we assume he meant the community inclusion fund, or perhaps the *Times* got it mixed up, but I know what I would think—that it is just a pot of money for people to tell the government where it should be spending it. That is how he described it—in highly derogatory terms—as just a hollow log, a pot of money for people to tell the government what it should know itself.

It seems that Mr Smyth was not even prepared to give the community inclusion board or community inclusion fund a go. But, Mr Speaker, my fears were misplaced; they were unfounded. The Leader of the Opposition, despite his trenchant public criticisms of the community inclusion board and the community inclusion fund, is happy to give it a go. He continues to criticise it and he continues to put it down.

Even in today's *Canberra Times* he is out there putting it down. But, of course, I did misread him. That is not what he meant at all. I have a letter from the Leader of the Opposition that contradicts the position in the *Canberra Times* this morning. It contradicts all the negative speling we have had about what a grievous waste of time and effort the community inclusion board is; that the government should just get on and do the business of government; you do not need these community inclusion funds; you do not need to work in partnership. Mr Smyth has written to me in the following terms, along with his colleague Mr Pratt, on behalf of Valley FM, a community radio station

that they tell me is in financial difficulty. What does Mr Smyth ask in his letter to me? I quote from his letter. He says:

Valley FM is a valuable community asset. Perhaps there is scope within your community inclusion fund to assist this station.

Here we go—damning it in the debate, damning it in public, scarifying it, putting it down, defaming the chair and the members of the board! But as soon as he can see some political purpose, as soon as he can see some way of perhaps appeasing one of the very few members that he speaks to, he writes to me and asks if he can access the very funds that he criticises as a complete waste of time. What humbug! What a two-faced load of flim-flam from a flim-flam Leader of the Opposition who cannot even be consistent.

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

### **Supplementary answers to questions without notice**

#### **Digital divide program**

#### **Vardon report**

**MR STANHOPE:** Yesterday I took a question on notice in relation to the digital divide program. I have an answer to that question which I will table. I present the following paper:

Digital Divide Program—Answer to question without notice asked of the Chief Minister by Ms Dundas and taken on notice on 29 June 2004.

Also, yesterday I received a question from Mr Cornwell in relation to the reasons for the non-request by me of the Australian Federal Police to investigate a leak relating to the Vardon report. In my response, I said:

My memory is that only two offices within the executive received copies of the report, namely, my office and the office of the Minister for Education and Training.

I have been advised today that a copy was also provided to the office of the Minister for Health but I repeat the comments I made in relation to my confidence in my ministerial colleagues and their officers. I guarantee absolutely that the leak of the Vardon report did not come from the executive. It is a matter that continues to concern me. Yesterday I indicated that only my office and the office of the minister for education had received a report, but a report was also provided to the Minister for Health.

### **Students with learning disabilities**

**MS GALLAGHER:** On Tuesday in question time I took a question on notice from Ms Dundas on support for students with learning disabilities. I table the answer to that question. I present the following paper:

Support for students with learning disabilities—Answer to question without notice asked of the Minister for Education and Training by Ms Dundas and taken on notice on 22 June 2004.

## Suicide and self-harm prevention and management

**MS MacDONALD (3.21):** I move the motion standing in my name on the notice paper relating to the management of mental health issues, which reads:

That this Assembly:

- (1) recognises that a significant number in our community are resorting to methods of self-harm as a means of coping with the stresses they face;
- (2) expresses concern that suicide attempts and other self-inflicted injuries account for almost 15% of admissions to public hospital emergency departments;
- (3) notes the integral role that support services, educational programs and members of the community play in assisting those suffering mental illness to cope, manage and overcome the troubles they are facing;
- (4) acknowledges the progress the ACT Government has made in addressing mental health issues;
- (5) notes the importance of ongoing research into suicide and self-harm prevention and management; and
- (6) identifies that better knowledge and management of mental health is an important foundation for sound future mental health.

I appreciate this opportunity to bring to the attention of the Assembly a worrying trend of deliberate self-harm within our community. Alarming, both self-harm and suicide have been steadily on the increase since the 1950s across the world such that it has been estimated that tens of thousands self-harm or put themselves at risk each year. Lifeline Canberra took 18,000 calls last year, with more than 1,500 calls related to suicide. The service had a 50 per cent increase in suicide related calls from June till December last year and has reported that a call related to self-harm would be taken at least twice a day, if not more.

It has been recognised that practices of self-harm are sometimes precursors to suicide and it is vital that research into and management of self-harm be both continued and developed. Self-harm covers a range of practices but is mostly represented in hospitals by deliberate overdoses and other actions to injure oneself. Generally, it has been identified that what leads many to self-harm is a complex matrix of factors. For most, however, self-harm represents release, an avenue through which to contain or control the distressing feelings being suffered. By directing this anger and confusion towards their body, self-harmers find a sense of relief and control over their pain. In 2002, the ABC's *7.30 Report* explored this face of self-harm through Cooma inmate Paul Marshall who has also published his experiences on self-harm over the past decade. Marshall describes self-harm as being like a drug. He comments:

You have it enough times, you've got to keep doing it to feel normal ... especially when feeling lonely or just really caged in and no-one to talk to. When I used to cut myself, it was like releasing the dirt I was feeling at the time.

Psychologist Gavin Wesson, commenting on Marshall's condition, noted that, in a closely monitored environment, acts of self-harm could be quickly identified and managed. The problem in the greater community is that it cannot be easily identified and traditionally could not be effectively managed. As a result, at face value a person can be considered happy and healthy but at the same time may be grappling with any number of mental disorders without any support.

It is the clandestine nature of self-harm, through the way it can be easily concealed and excused, which has meant that many self-harmers remain out of the loop of treatment. Additionally, this has also led to the issue of self-harm losing the attention that it needs in order for it to be properly funded and treated. The extent of self-harm in our community can be partly reflected in a recent estimation that put 15 per cent of admissions to public hospital emergency departments as following from suicide attempts and other self-inflicted injuries. If this figure is correct, this equates to 25,000 patients each year. It is not necessarily the case that self-harm will then lead to suicide. I have spoken to people from Lifeline who have identified the issues as two quite separate mental health issues. They are both methods of self-injury—one with a permanent ending.

This is indeed a shocking figure but it cannot begin to accurately reflect the extent of the problem. People who deliberately self-harm have traditionally—even now—continued to remain anonymous and distant from the necessary support services needed to help them through their illness. The challenge then for government and the wider community is to, firstly, increase the awareness of self-harm so the community can identify self-harmers and refer them to appropriate support networks; secondly, make such support services accessible to self-harmers; and finally, support the continued research into and development of strategies for treatment and management.

Mental health as a prominent issue is only a recent phenomenon. I would say that awareness of self-harm is almost non-existent. As a consequence, this has significantly slowed the possibilities for policy to be developed to effectively prevent, identify and manage instances of self-harm. This traditional lack of awareness and education was identified in a report out of Western Australia published in 2001. In this report it was found that this shortfall manifested itself in the inadequacies of many key “gate-keeping” stages in the identification and treatment of self-harm. Having looked mainly at emergency departments, the report found that there was both an inadequate level of education and policy to identify and deal with instances of self-harm. In particular, it was found that opportunities for patients to “slip through the gaps” occurred at too many stages in a patient’s care—for example, during waiting periods and in transition between services. This was particularly significant given that in the period following a deliberate act of self-harm the risk of subsequent self-harm or suicide is considerably higher.

While the report also made recommendations for remedying these shortfalls, which accordingly have now been more or less uniformly adopted in many emergency departments across the country, similar policies have not been employed in other less obvious “gate-keeping” environments which frequently deal with self-harmers. One of the main reasons for this is that most of us will have come into contact with someone who has harmed or is harming themselves and we simply either have not or could not have recognised it.

At this point, a number of issues have been identified in the community’s capacity to identify and manage self-harm and other mental illnesses. Arguably, a common thread among these issues has been a traditional inadequate level of understanding and awareness of mental illnesses such as self-harm. What this has then meant is that self-harm as a target for funding, research and policy has been neglected. However, this is not to say that recent research and policy have not made inroads into remedying these

shortfalls. Certainly, one of the more significant initiatives tackling this traditional shortfall has been the impact of educational and awareness campaigns. Organisations such as Beyond Blue and SANE Australia have played a significant role in addressing many of the stigmas surrounding mental illness. SANE Australia, for example, has played an important role as a watchdog, monitoring the portrayal of mental illness in the media. SANE Australia has committed itself to fighting the stigma surrounding mental illness and achieves this by improving the community understanding of it, mainly through its StigmaWatch program.

Over the course of 2003, through the StigmaWatch program, SANE Australia identified an increasing public intolerance of inaccurate and insulting reporting of mental illness, as well as an improved understanding of the harm done by such portrayals. As a consequence, it has also noted an improved sensitivity among health, medical and social affairs journalists as to how they report on mental illness.

SANE Australia is just one organisation among many that have been helpful in addressing many of the stigmas surrounding mental illness and, as such, has contributed largely to changing the community's consciousness in its perceptions, awareness and tolerance of mental illnesses such as self-harm. The impact of this is not only to reduce stigma. Notably, these campaigns and organisations are also to establish important safety nets in our community. Greater awareness and knowledge are also able to generate a greater confidence and capacity for those in our community not only to identify those who may be suffering with a mental illness but also to intervene and refer such people to appropriate support services for treatment and/or management, as well as offer friendship and support.

The importance of this grassroots network of support has been identified by the Australian National University Centre for Mental Health Research which has established a mental health first aid program working within the ACT and throughout Australia. This program has been designed not only to raise awareness of mental illness but also to equip people with the skills to understand, identify and support those suffering with such illnesses. The more our community is able to identify and reach out to those suffering from mental illnesses such as self-harm, the greater our capacity to manage the extent of mental illness. Importantly, this program has been grounded on world-renowned research into risk factors, causes and management of mental illnesses. This research is crucial and is a key to developing an effective framework to coordinate best practice in treating mental illnesses associated with self-harm.

Self-harm is a complex illness and thus also requires a diverse and comprehensive program for treatment and management. As just mentioned, it is important that we are able to identify those with illnesses, such as self-harm, and refer them to the appropriate support services. However, this is mostly very difficult as self-harming may often live outside the previously mentioned networks of community surveillance and support. Such people often weather their reliance on self-harm themselves. It is therefore encouraging to note the gradual development of such a diverse response to managing self-harm and other mental illnesses. For those reluctant to seek direct help, again the ANU Centre for Mental Health Research has established a "mood gym". This is a free online service available to all curious about mental illness or, more importantly, those suffering and reluctant to seek direct personal help.

The “mood gym” helps sufferers to understand their emotions and develop strategies to combat feelings that may, for example, lead to self-harm. In addition, the website is also able to provide the Centre for Mental Health Research with ongoing information to be studied and collated and which can then be used to continue to develop existing frameworks for treatment. This is a valuable program that continues to contribute to the growing body of knowledge surrounding mental illnesses like self-harm. However, we still need continued investment into such programs and research if we are going to make further inroads into combating this illness and changing the public’s perceptions of it.

On this point, it is encouraging to see that, in the ACT government’s 2004-05 budget, suicide prevention, which encompasses self-harm, was targeted as a major area of mental health funding with \$1.373 million allocated over the next four years. Importantly, this initiative includes the employment of a full-time prevention project officer to develop strategy and promote a more coordinated approach to the management of self-harm and suicide in the ACT. Hopefully, this will begin to address the traditional shortfalls in the management of mental health as well as provide for a healthier, happier and more tolerant community.

This initiative will ensure that adequate resources are provided for programs and services to be founded to ensure that those needing assistance are able to access it. The reluctance or inability of those with mental health issues, such as self-harm, to access these services has been identified as a major inhibitor in the management of mental health not only in the ACT but also across Australia.

Lifeline has commented that little more than one out of three people with a mental health disorder is accessing care. This was similarly recognised in the ACT’s development of the mental health strategy and action plan in 2003. Within the 2004-05 allocation, the government has aimed to remedy this problem by providing the OzHelp Foundation with \$240,000 to make support available to those who may need it. This foundation supports many of the trade industry’s apprentices, trainees and other workers who may need additional support in both work and non-work related areas. While I have just mentioned that only one out of three persons needing help actually seeks it, it is important that sufferers know that they can seek help and where to go to receive it.

Allocation to the OzHelp Foundation attracts resources to a portion of the community at high risk of mental illnesses such as self-harm—namely, young males and females between the ages of 18 and 24. In addition to this, it is important that this network has been provided and is accessible within a working environment, making the likelihood greater that sufferers will access help. It is essential that we make support services both visible and accessible and also without stigma. Continued awareness campaigns, in conjunction with greater support networks, are slowly beginning to achieve this ideal. (*Extension of time granted*). I thank members of the Assembly for their indulgence. I assure them that it will be only a short extension.

It is, however, disappointing that the same commitment to mental health cannot be found in the federal government’s 2004-05 budget. Patrick McGorry, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Melbourne, has recently stated that the mental health sector in Australia needed more government funding if it were to keep pace with the rest of the world. Traditionally, Australia is behind in worldwide trends in its commitment to mental health. Professor McGorry identified that mental health problems contribute

a monetary cost of 15 per cent to 20 per cent of the federal health budget but continue to receive only seven per cent of the funds available.

This year has been no exception; in fact, it has been difficult to find any mention of mental health in the federal budget at all. The federal government's failure in this instance to adequately address the shortfalls surrounding issues of self-harm and of mental illness generally leaves Australia lacking in its commitment to combating mental health problems. Additionally, and more significantly, it also does little to bring such issues out of the dark within our community and, therefore, seriously stunts our ability to counter and manage this growing problem at a national level.

Governments at state, territory and federal levels have a pivotal role in addressing the problems associated with mental health and self-harm in our community. As mentioned many times, because of the clandestine nature of this problem, in many cases such issues also fail to receive the political spotlight. Governments therefore have a duty to ensure a continued effort to fighting this problem which indeed requires a matrix of strategies and programs if we are to achieve a sustainable outcome. I have said that we need funding for research into mental health problems, but issues such as self-harm are not resolved purely by throwing money at them.

The shortfalls in the treatment of self-harm can reflect the more serious shortfalls in both the perception and treatment of mental health in our community. In the community, it is paramount that the perception of mental illness, often stigmatised with associations of weakness, be altered to more accurately reflect not only its medical reality but also its prevalence. Without doubt, current media campaigns and research addressing such issues have played a significant role in addressing such shortfalls. However, without directing appropriate mental health resources and training towards such problems, any progress made through, for example, awareness campaigns cannot be developed. Self-harm, along with other mental health issues, continues to be a major concern in our community. Mental illnesses affect one out of every five citizens and require a serious and continued commitment if we are to be able to more effectively manage both their extent and consequence throughout our community.

I commend the motion to the Assembly. This is an important issue. I have talked about how attitudes and perceptions have changed because of the programs that have been conducted within Australia over many years. Mental health is now not a taboo subject, as it used to be. There is still a stigmatised attitude towards it, but it is getting better. We have to be continually vigilant and make the community aware that mental health is an issue for all of us, not just for a select few who can be ignored, locked away or just not dealt with. We can all play a role in raising the awareness of issues such as self-harm and other mental health issues.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (3.41): I congratulate Ms MacDonald for bringing on this motion relating to the management of mental health issues today. Every opportunity should be taken to talk about mental health because, as Ms MacDonald concluded, it should not be a taboo subject. There have been recent national initiatives lately by organisations such as Beyond Blue, and Jeff Kennett, a prominent former politician, has said that he has suffered from mental health problems. The only way we can minimise the impact of mental health issues on the community and on individuals, I suspect, is to talk about it. So, well done to Ms MacDonald for bringing on the motion.

This motion has a number of paragraphs. The opposition will be supporting some of them. I will attempt to amend some of the others. Paragraph (1) states:

That this Assembly:

- (1) recognises that a significant number in our community are resorting to methods of self-harm as a means of coping with the stresses they face;

That is true. Most of us are not confronted with that, but certainly officers and staff of Mental Health ACT are, as are families, friends and the individuals themselves. Mental health issues were reported in the *Canberra Times* throughout January and February. A recent case, which highlights the problem for the community, is that of Tammy Holm. Tammy, who had taken a drug overdose, threatened to throw herself off a bridge and then spent a couple of nights in a hotel, courtesy of Mental Health ACT. That is not to blame the staff of Mental Health ACT. Ms Holm had been previously charged with assaulting staff at the psychiatric unit and, of course, we must put the safety concerns of the staff on a par with those of the individuals themselves. The case of Tammy highlights the dangers and the lengths to which people will go to commit self-harm. The ultimate act of self-harm is to commit suicide.

We have a problem in the community for which we do not have answers. Hopefully, with today's discussions and with the amendments I will make, we can move another step towards reinforcing the need for the government to act strongly and firmly. We as an Assembly should back them up, along with the support of the community. Paragraph (2) of Ms MacDonald's motion states:

- (2) expresses concern that suicide attempts and other self-inflicted injuries account for almost 15% of admissions to public hospital emergency departments;

I am not sure where that number comes from. I would be intrigued to find the source. Perhaps Ms MacDonald will give us an accurate source when she concludes the debate.

I am aware that a number of cases of attempted suicide present to the emergency room. Of course, those who attempt suicide deserve and require treatment. It is curious that in the government's own mental health strategy and action plan on page 119, Appendix Two, in the data for the adjusted 2002 population estimate—if I am reading the chart right; I am open to correction—there is a line that says "Emergency department attendances—total 1,690." The chart is a little unclear, but it looks like the total for the year is 1,690. With that number in mind—if that is the correct number, of course—that is nowhere near 15 per cent of the emergency room attendances. So I would be very intrigued to find the source of that number. I think it highlights that, irrespective of the number, these people end up in the hospital system. What we must do is intervene early and make sure that we minimise the number of people with psychiatric problems, with mental health problems, who make it into the hospital system. Paragraph (3) of the motion states:

- (3) notes the integral role that support services, educational programs and members of the community play in assisting those suffering mental illness to cope, manage and overcome the troubles they are facing;



That is absolutely true; I cannot agree more. We need to enhance educational programs. The most fundamental and probably the most effective way of doing this is to have members of the community doing it for us. It is the old thing of "Why didn't you talk to a mate?" It can be as simple as that. But, of course, as cases go on and episodes become worse and more complex, more formal help might be needed. That is why we have said in our mental health policy that we know that we have to provide additional community based resources, greater inclusion and consultation with carers and consumers and increased training for community based teams, so that we get it right in the community. It would be nice if the government, rather than its backbenchers, brought on motions like this and put a bit more effort into these services. Paragraph (4) states:

- (4) acknowledges the progress the ACT Government has made in addressing mental health issues;

Unfortunately, the opposition will not be agreeing to this paragraph simply because we do not believe that the government has made much progress at all; in fact, one could almost accuse the government of neglecting mental health issues in the territory. I think one of the ways you can look at it is simply to take the document from the *ACT Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan 2003-2008*. The final draft was circulated in October or early November last year, yet the final version launched with the usual morning tea and fanfare did not appear until May this year, some six months later. That hardly indicates a government that is interested in acting on this matter. There is no action in this action plan. Unfortunately, it is just impossible to acknowledge the progress the ACT government has made in addressing these issues.

I will put another example to the Assembly: yesterday we all received our quarterly reports for the March quarter on the capital works program. If members check, they will see that \$350,000 was put aside for the refurbishment of the psychiatric services unit in the Canberra Hospital to improve on the work that we had done previously. I do not disavow that. The odd thing, though, is that this project is due for completion in June 2004, which would be today. I do not believe that it is anywhere near completion. At the end of the March quarter, of the \$350,000 that was allocated to refurbish the psychiatric services unit, \$20,000 had been spent. This unit is right at the heart of hardcore treatment; these people are desperately in need of help and are often held there, as in the case of Tammy Holm who had spent three months in the psychiatric services unit. The shame in that is that we just do not seem to have the commitment from the government to make these things happen. Sometimes this is about leadership; it is about ministers saying to their departments, "This has to happen. I want it happening on the timetable. I want no excuses. I want that work done because it is necessary, it is urgent and it is required." I do not think we can support this paragraph that says that the government has been addressing mental health issues.

We had a revelation last year. I asked the minister how many suicides had there been of those in the care of ACT Mental Health. This is not a reflection on the staff. Some of this is beyond the control of the staff of ACT Mental Health. At that stage there were 19 suicides in 19 months. I think we are now up to something like 27 successful suicides in 27 months. Yet in the health action plan I do not see a single target or a strategy that says, "This is what we are doing to try to bring the number of suicides down to." I say, "try", because with issues like mental health, some of it will just simply be trying. Sometimes you cannot stop people taking their own lives, but we have to at least make

the effort. So we cannot acknowledge that progress has been made by the ACT government.

I have discussed the delay of the plan. I think it is important when you look at the government's plan—this is the plan that it is using to address mental health issues—there are no tangible targets and time lines. There are a few examples, such as that somewhere between July and September 2004—this is action plan No 2—there will be the establishment of an interdepartmental implementation group. A couple of study groups and planning groups have to be established some time this year. But, in the main, there is no target or time line that says, "We are going to try and achieve something special here in reducing the impact of mental health on our community." The paucity of initiative in the budget and the lack of action in the action plan mean that I do not believe that we can support paragraph (4).

Why do we not aim to reduce the rate of suicide, for example? I am sure if we all sat around the table we could come up with a target that we can work towards together. Why do we not aim to reduce the workloads of case managers? Ms MacDonald was berating the federal government because she could not find any federal mental health initiatives in the federal budget. The government has left its funding for mental health at about seven per cent again, apparently, which is exactly what has happened in the ACT. The total health budget for mental health in the ACT budget is about seven per cent. I think it is the pot calling the kettle black if we are going to try to force all the blame onto the federal government when mental health is one of the services delivered through state and territory health systems. We need to be careful about passing the buck.

We need a decision to be made, as Ms MacDonald said, on whether we should be going to world best standard. To do that, you need to spend between 10 per cent and 12 per cent to reach world best standard. Jurisdictions that are spending the most, like the Scandinavian countries, are spending as much as 14 per cent of their health budget on addressing mental health issues and they are the ones who are making a difference. Where is the target to reduce the case workload? Our caseworkers have between 32 and 40 cases. Again, in our policy I have said that over four years we aim to bring the workload down to 12 clients per mental health case manager. What we have to do is have real targets, put some real bucks in and make sure that we achieve what we are setting out to do.

The interesting thing is this was launched in May. The budget in May has something like \$600,000 worth of initiatives for mental health. To the government's credit, in the 2002-03 budget \$1.6 million has been allocated and in the 2003-04 budget, \$1 million. In the 2004-05 budget, unfortunately, I can find only about \$665,000 worth of new mental health initiatives. How the government can release an action plan and then not fund it is beyond me—unless the lack of funding is an acknowledgement that there is no action in the plan. The excuse we got at estimates was, "Oh, we put the money in last year's budget," which is perhaps an indication that the plan should have been out in time for last year's budget for expenditure.

There is no money to back up any mental health action plan in the ACT. If you need any proof that this government is not interested in mental health, I think that is it. We have a plan that was funded in last year's budget. Before the consultation, before the final draft went out and before the community had their say, the government was either intent

on ignoring the community totally and its consultation process is nothing but a sham or the reason that the money for the health action plan is in last year's budget is just an excuse because it forgot to put it in for this year's budget. Paragraph (5) of Ms MacDonald's motion states:

- (5) notes the importance of ongoing research into suicide and self-harm prevention and management;

I think everyone would agree with that but, again, when you go to the mental health action plan and look for instances of research, there are two. Action 11 states:

Form partnerships to establish a research project that identifies and improves the management of consumers with complex needs ...

That is a project to look at management; it is not research into suicide and self-harm prevention and management. There is some management there. The other one, Action 40, states:

Maintain and enhance relationships with academic institutions in relation to research and advice on the current state of knowledge in the field of mental health.

"Maintain and enhance relationships"—that does not sound like the government is really committed to carrying it out. If you go to Action 11, the interesting thing is that it is meant to commence in June 2004—that is this month. It should commence today. If you go to Action 40, you will see that it also starts in June 2004. The paucity of real research in this document again shows the lack of commitment of the government to mental health in the ACT. Paragraph (6) states:

- (6) identifies that better knowledge and management of mental health is an important foundation for sound future mental health.

I think we all agree with that. It is self-explanatory. The opposition will leave paragraphs (5) and (6). I move the amendment circulated in my name. I move:

Omit paragraphs (4), (5) and (6), substitute:

- “(4) notes the lack of progress the ACT Government has made in addressing mental health issues;
- (5) notes the Government's delay in releasing the Mental Health Strategic Plan;
- (6) notes the Plan's lack of tangible targets and timelines;
- (7) decries the lack of funding for the Plan in this year's Budget;
- (8) notes the importance of ongoing research into suicide and self-harm prevention and management; and
- (9) identifies that better knowledge and management of mental health is an important foundation for sound future mental health.”

**MR SPEAKER:** Do you want to speak to your amendment?

**MR SMYTH:** I will speak at the end.

**MS TUCKER (3.56):** I would like to talk about a few key factors in this equation that this motion skates over. One of the crucial consequences and compounding factors for

people living with mental illness is loneliness. It is not simply a question of mental health; it is also a result of the shape of our society.

I think it is worthy of note that there is an alarming and growing increase in the suicide rate of older women. In essence, our social fabric is generally a much thinner one in this increasingly individuated society. So if you are alone personally, you run the risk of social isolation. If you are at home due to age, disability or health, then there will be less support and engagement around you.

The deinstitutionalisation of people with mental or physical disabilities or dysfunctions has basically left people alone to build their own lives and, on occasion, become further trapped in their own diagnosis. Human beings are, in essence, social beings and unwanted isolation can be very damaging. People living with mental dysfunction so often feel that they are stigmatised or rejected by society. The problems of physical isolation and lack of communication with others become compounded by the feeling that there is nowhere to go. I think for many people it is the hopelessness in that lack of connection which hurts them the most. Self-harm and suicidal behaviour can be a product of those processes.

When we come to the point about acknowledging the progress the ACT government has made in addressing mental health issues, I cannot see that we can go overboard. Comments from the field still suggest that there is a shortage of community level support. It is hard to be convinced that there are sufficient caseworkers, that caseworkers do not have too many clients and that those clients or consumers are not suddenly bereft when they lose their caseworkers. Obviously the crisis end of mental health services is crucial—and I would argue that progress appears slow on the major physical and organisational shifts that need to happen at the PSU—nonetheless, it is true that many people do not get support until they strike an acute phase.

There are other key aspects on how we organise ourselves as a society that have an impact on the health and wellbeing of people living with mental dysfunction or illness. For example, the fact that there is no public transport link, no comprehensive or even viable bus service, to Oaks Estate, where a number of people who find themselves quite isolated in other ways are effectively trapped, compounds for them the problems of isolation. There is an alcohol shop there, but no buses. Indeed, transport is one of the key problems if we are talking about loneliness. There is certainly scope for providing more programs that get people out and about. Poverty is a key contributor to these problems. The federal government push to get people off benefits and disability pensions into work is really just a cruel torment for so many people for whom there is no work. Of course, people trapped into this cycle of ill health and isolation want employment. The presumption that they may be dodging work is wrong and unfair in most cases.

I think this debate echoes something of the previous debate. Perhaps we should be looking at investing more in fairly low skilled employment through the public or the community sector. Anything that can lift people a bit above the poverty line and value their contribution to the community will make a real difference. It is not just employment. I know too that arts and cultural projects, if they are substantial, really can affirm for people their place in the world—but not so much if they are one-off projects, rather if they are a part of ongoing cultural development programs. Initiatives such as these would be supported by the social plan, so we can perhaps look forward to them.

I would also like to reflect on alcohol as one of the substances—arguably the major substance—that people have problems with, combined with mental illness. While there are restrictions on tobacco promotion, and health warnings attached, alcohol is an extraordinarily visible product. In many supermarkets now you cannot get in without walking past alcohol. Often it is being handed out for free. For people who are attempting to deal with alcohol, that kind of visibility and availability are damaging. The links between alcohol use and self-harm, violence and depression are well established.

We need to look at how we organise our society in terms of planning, services and regulations. In this instance, as we did have legislation which meant that tobacco should not be so visible in supermarkets, I do not see why we cannot have a similar legislative response to alcohol. On that subject, I have been noticing supermarkets lately where cigarettes are very visible. I am not quite sure whether that is because supermarkets are not compliant with the law or whether we have changed the law. I do not recall our changing the laws, so I think it is something I should alert the government to.

We need to look at an extension of the health promoting school model to our city perhaps. The idea, which can be read into this motion, that mental illness—and for that matter self-harm—always exists as a pathological condition in need of education and research is too simplistic. Mental illness, self-harm and suicide are often a natural, understandable response to or consequence of a person's life experience and situation. That it is through engagement with people and understanding their narratives that some of the damage can be repaired and that people can build better lives have to be part of any debate about the issue.

Richard Eckersley speaks about the morale of our society and the importance of a sense of belonging. I would like to quote a little from one of his articles in a recent *Families Australia Bulletin* in spring 2003, because I think he is extremely good and very articulate on the issues. He states:

People accept, and reflect in their behaviour, the psychological truths that what matter most to happiness and health are the quality of people's personal relationships, social affiliations and spiritual attachments, and the intimacy, meaning, support, belonging and stability these offer. Instead of conflicting with these associations, and often undermining them, material aspirations and achievements assume a much less dominant role in people's lives.

He goes on to talk about the potential for us as a society to deal with these issues and talks of change. He states:

This change is largely a grassroots development, not a politically led movement. As scholars had noted, postmodern society had demolished the grand narratives, universal creeds and institutional authority that had in the past been the regulator of values and beliefs about the world. It had thus left people morally adrift, but also with the opportunity to be truly moral beings for the first time, exercising genuine moral choice and accepting responsibility for the consequences of those choices. Some writers called it responsible individualism or proper selfishness. Critically, this responsibility applies not only to people's personal lives but also to their social roles.

He goes on to speak in detail about what that means for us as a society. I think this kind of thinking is really important in a debate like this. We have to be prepared to look at it. The pathologising of people in this particular way is not understanding or respecting that reality and, in some ways, is an unfortunate attitude for the individuals concerned.

I am amending and supporting Mr Smyth's amendment because I think there is a value in using it to urge for a stronger and sharper response to mental health needs in the ACT. In particular, I am happy, through this motion, to support ACTCOSS in its campaign to attract greater support for the newly formed mental health peak organisation, the Mental Health Community Coalition, to further develop the mental health consumers' network and see the development of a wider variety of mental health facilities and services to deal with the diversity of mental health concerns and treatment options. To quote from the ACTCOSS budget response:

These issues have been canvassed in detail with the various mental health consumer and peak groups over the past few years and ACTCOSS calls on the Government to now carry through on those consultations and reviews.

That is why the issues, once again, of tangible targets and time lines take on a particular resonance. To go through this motion point by point: points (1), (2) and (3) are arguably self-evident, although they fail to recognise the social or economic dimensions to these problems—and I have spoken about that at some length. Point (4) is as pointless in this form as it is in the original motion. Clearly, there is some progress. I would say that there is not enough. Either way, we do not need to put that point in the motion. Point (5) is well supported by people in the field who have described the process to me as both slow and badly managed. Point (6), as I have said, is the measure of it all. The consultation and the reviews do not really deliver until targets are in place, which is why, at point (7), it is important to identify that there is not any specific funding being committed.

I seek leave to move my amendment to Mr Smyth's amendment.

Leave granted.

**MS TUCKER:** I move:

- (1) Paragraph (4), omit.
- (2) Paragraph (7), add the following words: “, particularly outreach and other community services for mental health consumers;”

**MS DUNDAS (4.06):** I will try to speak to everything that is before us. I am happy to support Ms MacDonald's motion. I understand what Ms Tucker and Mr Smyth are doing with their amendments and I am happy to support both amendments—Ms Tucker's amendment to Mr Smyth's amendment and Mr Smyth's amendment as part of the motion.

I want to talk specifically about youth suicide and how that impacts on the population. Over the last seven years the rate of youth suicide in the ACT has doubled and the incidence of teenage depression is at epidemic levels. Statistics show that about one in seven children and young people will experience mental health problems in the next six months. That makes it as common as asthma. Young people with problems often do not know where to turn for support, despite the fact that there are a number of excellent

organisations providing resources, including a number of web sites such as the Reality Check web site.

Earlier this year I again promoted National Board Shorts Day run by Here for Life. Here for Life is an organisation dedicated to raising awareness and education of youth suicide and self-harm and National Board Shorts Day is one of its major fundraising activities. I usually participate in that on the theme of 'Life is a beach—but not for all'. This year, it raised over \$45,000 nationally to help support young people, especially in rural communities, and deal with problems that they experience.

Here For Life and other organisations like Reach Out have for some time been providing resources and raising awareness on youth suicide and depression. Some of the resources these organisations provide are amazing and excellent examples of how well community organisations can do when they are well supported and funded. We hear constant testimonials particularly about the work of Reach Out and how it has helped so many isolated young people deal with their issues and to continue their lives.

It is ironic that this motion comes after the government is, for the first time, funding a full-time youth suicide prevention officer and a range of suicide prevention initiatives. It appears that money for these projects is set to decrease over the next four years. There has been an increase this year for an establishment cost, but that money appears to then dwindle into the future. We have already spoken today about the high level of youth unemployment, which I think is a key factor in the levels of depression among young people. So this is not the time to be decreasing funding for suicide prevention initiatives or to be walking away from supporting young people in the things that they want to do and helping them contribute to the community.

The original motion called on the Assembly to “acknowledge the progress that the ACT Government has made in addressing mental health issues”. To echo Ms Tucker: yes, some progress has been made but, clearly, it is not enough. If genuine progress were being made, we would not have the alarmingly high rates of youth suicide and self-harm. Hopefully the initiatives in this budget can help turn that around. There have been increases in spending on mental health, but maybe there are other things that we should be doing, such as supporting organisations in the community to go further and targeting enough funds to support people on the ground and in our hospitals.

I would like to touch briefly on the government’s “road to wellness kit”, which is given to inpatients when they have been deemed well enough to leave hospital and to their families and carers to provide them with links to the community about what community support there is. When I tried to obtain a copy of the “road to wellness kit”, I was told that copies had run out and that a new lot was being printed. It is obviously a resource that is needed in the community. Far too often we see a cycle of people coming into hospital, going out of hospital and then coming back into hospital because the support they need in the community just is not there or they are just not finding it. Hopefully the “road to wellness kits” are being reprinted and are going to everybody who needs one and that it is not just a case of “It was a great idea once, but we don’t have the ability to follow it through.”

This motion also states the obvious—that is, better knowledge of management of mental issues is an important foundation for sound mental health. It is clear that we have

identified and monitored this problem. We have also spoken today about the terrible impacts of mental ill health. We need to start applying our research and programs and helping not just young people but the whole community with health and education programs. It is time we started to prioritise suicide and self-harm prevention and to move the talking into action, so that we have some positive outcomes for everybody in the community.

**MRS DUNNE (4.11):** It is very timely that we have this debate today because the problems associated with mental health in the community are increasing. I think some of the significant figures that have been talked about today in the chamber require the community as a whole to act very positively and very quickly. The most telling and the most damaging figure is the one in paragraph (2) of Ms MacDonald's motion—that almost 15 per cent of admissions to public hospital emergency departments are as a result of self-inflicted injuries.

**Mr Smyth:** I question that.

**MRS DUNNE:** I know that Mr Smyth has questioned that but, even if the level is lower than that, the message is that we are doing something wrong in our mental health processes.

I would like to refer to the experiences of someone close to my family who from time to time presents at accident and emergency as a result of self-harm. This is a young person in their 20s who has the prospect of a fine academic career in front of them if they could get their life in order. However, the person is a serial presenter.

One of the things that is obvious to me and members of my family who have been helping this person through their current situation is there is no coordination. From time to time members of my family spend a lot of hours in accident and emergency because this person is there and needs help. What happens is that the resident psychiatrist, the psychiatric registrar, the mental health crisis team or someone else comes to see them and, for the most part, after some consultation they are packed up and sent on their way.

I contacted this person to see whether they were comfortable with my raising this matter in the debate today. I would like to assure members that I am speaking with the consent and, in fact, the enthusiasm of the person concerned because that person is so distressed by the lack of service that is being received.

The mental health crisis team says that this person needs someone to case manage them. This person has applied for a case manager but that application has been rejected. As a result, this person is receiving disparate treatment. They have a GP; they have a psychiatrist who prescribes but does not talk; they have contact with the member of the mental health crisis team who happens to be on at the time. This is not to criticise but there is no continuity—these people are there to deal with a crisis. This person also has contact with the psychiatric registrars of the hospitals. But this is not a coordinated service. This person is begging the system for coordinated services.

No matter what this figure is—whether it is 15 per cent or some lesser or larger figure—this person is part of that statistic. I know what impact that is having on this young life, on their family, on their extended circle of friends. This is a devastating situation where



a young person's life is in complete turmoil. They are begging the current ACT mental health services for case management, and they are being denied that. The experts in the mental health crisis team are saying, "You need case management." Everybody knows that they need case management, but its not happening.

This is a flaw in the system, and it is a flaw that contributes to a statistic like the one in Ms MacDonald's motion. This is why this is such an important motion. We should not be spending our time just slapping ourselves on the back: we should be setting ourselves strong, firm, targets—things that we have to work hard to achieve—so that people like our friend do not have to beg for services that are not forthcoming.

**MR STANHOPE** (Chief Minister, Attorney General, Minister for Environment and Minister for Community Affairs) (4.16): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am happy, of course, to support this motion and I thank Ms MacDonald for bringing it before the Assembly today. Mental health is one of the priorities of this government. I share Ms MacDonald's concern about the impact of mental illness on our community. There is strong evidence of the increasing burden of disease caused by mental illness.

Depression has been listed as the fourth leading cause of burden of disease and injury in Australia, with suicide and self-inflicted injuries rated as the 11th leading cause of disease burden. This burden places increased pressure on the workload of our public hospitals, emergency departments and community services and support networks, and my government has made a commitment to facing the challenges associated with mental health care and to addressing that need.

The recently released ACT Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan 2003-08 promotes an innovative and collaborative approach to suicide prevention and managing mental health, and has acquired commitment across all sectors of the Canberra community. The mental health strategy articulates with the ACT social plan, the children's plan, the health action plan, the caring for carers policy and the ACT homelessness strategy to work in conjunction with mental health specific policies and programs to address the issue of mental health and suicide prevention more broadly.

In acknowledgement of the role of support and other services outside public mental health services, the government funds a range of community agencies to provide mental health services in the community to improve outcomes for mental health consumers. During the 2004-05 financial year we anticipate a total allocation in excess of \$5.3 million to non-government community organisations to provide support, accommodation, education, psycho-social and vocational rehabilitation services.

Since coming to office, this government has increased mental health funding significantly to \$117 per capita in the 2003-04 budget. We anticipate this amount to increase to \$131 per capita in the 2004-05 financial year.

We have made very significant progress in reversing the neglect of the previous government and, as Ms MacDonald says, this should be acknowledged. Initiatives we have funded have enhanced services for mental health consumers in a range of areas, including supported accommodation, respite care, suicide prevention, child and adolescent mental health services, older persons mental health and community outreach and after-hours services.

In the 2004-05 budget the ACT government allocated an additional \$365,000 to suicide prevention activities, including the development of an ACT suicide prevention strategy; \$300,000 for the establishment of a community forensic mental health team; and a total of \$200,000 for feasibility studies into the provision of a high security mental health care facility, a replacement for the PSU and a child and adolescent inpatient service. We have also commissioned a number of reviews into the status of mental health services in the ACT and ACT Health is working to implement all the recommendations to those reviews aimed at continuing to improve mental health services.

However, of course we are not content to rest on these past improvements. We continue to look to the future and to develop a strong strategic direction for the delivery of mental health services across the whole of the territory. As Ms MacDonald has said, one of the areas requiring our ongoing commitment is that of research into suicide prevention and other mental health issues, to improve our understanding of mental illness and to develop evidence-based programs to ensure the best possible mental health outcomes for the community.

Australian and international research shows that people with mental illness have a higher risk of suicide than the general population. The rate of suicide in the ACT and nationally has remained relatively stable over the past five years, with the most at-risk age group in the whole population being 25 to 39-year-old males.

Although it is useful to refer to mortality statistics, it is important to address the latest evidence in suicide prevention initiatives. Last year the Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention reported that mental health is really only one factor that contributes to suicide risk. The report emphasises the need to increase understanding of the relationship between mental health and suicide and the impact of other risk factors on suicide rates.

This government is, as all members know, committed to the expansion of our knowledge and understanding of suicide and other issues in relation to mental health, to enable us to continue to improve our ability to provide quality mental health care into the future for all Canberrans. It is on that basis that I am more than happy to support Ms MacDonald's motion in relation to this.

Bearing in mind the progress that has been made by this government, I guess it is with regret as much as anything—not surprise but certainly regret—that I comment on the amendments that have been proposed by members. The motion moved by Ms MacDonald is designed to put before the Assembly the progress that has been made in relation not just to issues around mental health but to suicide prevention and the government's commitment to putting those issues on the agenda and funding them specifically—that we have developed a mental health strategy into the future. But we have had an attempt to score, really, just fairly cheap political points, noting a lack of progress in a circumstance or an environment where mental health funding has grown enormously in the last 2½ years under this government.

As you would know, Mr Deputy Speaker, the ACT, under the previous government, under the Liberals, funded mental health to a lesser degree than any other jurisdiction in Australia. That is the road we were travelling; that is the mess we inherited; that was the

legacy of the Liberals in relation to mental health—the lowest level of funding, commitment or recognition of issues affecting people with a mental issue of any government in Australia.

We have travelled significantly over the last 2½ years. We have redressed that situation and we have increased funding significantly. Yet, in an environment where Ms MacDonald wishes to raise for debate within the Assembly issues around progress—the development of a mental health strategy and specific funding for suicide research and recognition—we have this unavoidable determination to simply decry that progress, to cover up the lethargy and the lack of attention that was the legacy of the Liberal Party.

The amendments really should not be supported. Certainly, they are not consistent with the spirit of the debate that Ms MacDonald has generated. Essentially, when one looks at the amendments that have been proposed, one can see that they do nothing really other than seek to make some very partisan political points.

In the context of the amendments, I think this point needs to be made: where is the Liberal Party's mental health strategy and policy? Where is the mental health strategy of any other party in this Assembly? Where are the details of the policy? Where are the details of the policy that they are going to take to the election? Where is the history of their achievement in relation to mental health? Where is the acknowledgement of their complicity in reducing the ACT to the lowest funding and the least performing jurisdiction in Australia in relation to mental health?

It is a bit rich of the Liberal Party—in fact, I am amazed at the effrontery—to come into this place and moralise about a lack of commitment to mental health. The legacy of seven years of Liberal government was to deliver to the people of the ACT a mental health system that was the worst in Australia and that was under-funded to a greater degree than any other place in Australia.

We have been in government now for just over 2½ years. We have begun to address those wrongs. We acknowledge the shortfalls, we are working to redress them and we have provided significant additional funding across the board for mental health in the ACT. We have begun to undo the damage that we inherited and we will continue to do so. We will increase funding incrementally.

We recognise how fundamentally important it is that we address the full gamut of issues that affect people who suffer from a mental condition. This is something that is fundamentally important to Labor governments; it is something that we have concentrated on. As I indicated yesterday during the debate around the budget, some of the decisions that we took in relation to the funding of public hospitals were affected by our determination to commit funding to all the areas, such as mental health, disability services, respite care and reasonable pay rates for our nurses, that the Liberal Party simply neglected and simply did not fund.

That is our record of achievement, and it is a record of achievement that is unmatched in this place by any other group or party, and certainly by the previous government. It is a record that we are proud of; it is a record that we are happy to stand by, acknowledging that there is still an awful lot more work to be done. We know that and we will continue to increase and improve not just funding but the provision of services with the partners

that we have developed and the partnerships that we have created with the community—those with whom we are working and those who are working with us willingly to develop the mental health strategy.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (4.26): Mr Deputy Speaker, the opposition can accept Ms Tucker's amendment No 2 to my amendment. Paragraph (7) of my amendment states:

decries the lack of funding for the Plan in this year's Budget;

Ms Tucker's amendment seeks to add to paragraph (7) the words "particularly outreach and other community services for mental health consumers". Outreach and community services are particularly effective in dealing with mental health and so we will accept that. Ms Tucker's amendment No 1 seeks to omit paragraph (4) of my amendment, which "notes the lack of progress". I can live with that as well.

It is interesting to address the Chief Minister's assertions that we left his government the worst mental health service in the country. I have not seen a report that says that. It may have been at the lowest funding level but that does not necessarily equate to the worst service.

The Labor Party has been saying consistently for the first half of this year that they have actually doubled mental health funding. They have used an old report from 1999-2000 to say they had taken funding from \$67 to \$117. We have disproved that. There is another debate inside that debate, though. I do not have my numbers with me but the funding when we left office was approximately \$82 per capita. It is now \$117 per capita and it will go up because of the budget passed yesterday.

But what elements go into the jump from \$82 to \$117? There are two elements. One is additional funding and that equates to about \$10 per head per capita. So that takes it from, say, \$82 to \$92 in broad figures. This leaves a discrepancy of about \$25. That \$25 is the transfer of overheads from the department into a stand-alone Mental Health ACT, and that is all it is. So let us be quite clear that when they claim they have lifted it from \$82 or \$83 to \$117, it is not all new money. There is approximately \$10 of new money per capita in that figure, and for that they are to be commended.

It is pleasing that we are in a position with the budget to afford to put more money into things like mental health. That is not a luxury we had when we came to government in 1996, and everyone will remember the \$344 million operating loss that we were left with. We need the Chief Minister to say that all he did was transfer operating costs out of existing budgets to inflate the figure. That is the important part.

That said, we will be supporting the amendment. I will then call on the Assembly to support my amendment.

**MS MacDONALD** (4.29) Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank members for taking the time to contribute to this debate. I have no doubt that we all have a genuine desire to see mental health services being provided to support those people in our community in need.

I might begin my speech by going through a few of the things that have been said and then do a general wrap up. I do not think I need to add anything to what Mr Stanhope said. He was well across the issues and I believe he quite adequately addressed the amendment that Mr Smyth put up.

Mrs Dunne spoke about the issue of a friend who is in desperate need of case management. I have never denied and I will never deny the need in this area. I do not believe that the amount of money put into mental health services will ever be enough. Until such time as we can find the cause of mental health problems, truly address the issues and find a solution, we will never have enough money to deal with the day-to-day issues of people who are affected by this illness.

I know that there are always examples of where the system has fallen down. Mrs Dunne's friend and Mrs Dunne should continue to lobby for case management. We need to have extra case management. I think the old adage of the squeaky wheel gets the oil is one that certainly applies in the case of mental health funding and, in fact, in the case of any funding for health issues.

I appreciate that Ms Dundas brought up the issue of the Here for Life program. The aim of this excellent program is to try to prevent youth suicide. This issue, which unfortunately has been burgeoning in the last few years, causes no end of personal pain for the families who have lost young family members due to youth suicide. Here for Life and other community groups are doing excellent work.

Both Ms Dundas and Ms Tucker talked about the issue of unemployment and how it relates to, I suppose, a general feeling of malaise within the community. There are no short-term answers to that. We just have to keep working at those issues.

Mr Smyth referred to the figure of 15 per cent in my motion. I did check that figure. It is my understanding that it is a combined national figure, and I understand that it comes from the ABC program that I mentioned earlier in my speech.

Mr Smyth also made the comment that mental health is dealt with by state and territory governments, and that was his justification for having a go at me for talking about federal funding for mental health. While state and territory governments can make a contribution, the federal government has the prime responsibility to fund mental health research as well as other research. As I said before, finding out why people have mental health issues is much better than people having to continuously go through the cycle of needing acute care. So I make that suggestion to Mr Smyth.

I will deal first with the amendment put forward by Mr Smyth. I think Mr Stanhope addressed fairly well the issue in paragraph (4) of Mr Smyth's amendment about lack of progress. During similar debates in this place I have referred to the situation when the Liberals lost government and what has happened since the Stanhope government came to power. They are two quite different things—like chalk and cheese.

When I was a new member of this place—I had been here for about a year—I decided to organise a trip for members of the health committee to look at mental health services. I made that decision after seeking a briefing from Mental Health ACT. I am very pleased

that Ms Tucker as the chair and Mr Smyth as the other member of the health committee were able to join me on that trip.

I remember—and I have said this before—asking several times about the facilities that we were seeing and the programs that were in operation. I was continually told that these programs had been in operation for only the last six months. In other words, they had only come into effect after the Stanhope Labor government had come into power and had actually instituted them. Mr Smyth can get up and scoff and say that it is all very easy to do it when we had such a surplus and that all they got was a deficit. However, I do not believe there was ever the commitment by the previous Liberal government to actually put in to mental health funding.

I believe that Mr Stanhope addressed issues concerning the mental health strategic plan in paragraphs (5) and (6) of Mr Smyth's amendment. Mr Smyth decries the fact that we have not implemented the plan and that we do not have clear targets. Mr Smyth, we have looked at mental health issues in this mental health plan by consulting with those people who are actually part of the mental health community. That is why our plan was delayed, Mr Smyth. Would you prefer that we did not fully consult with them, or is that the way that you would approach it? I would suggest that the answer to that is probably yes.

I note that Ms Tucker's amendment No 1 seeks to omit paragraph (4) of Mr Smyth's amendment. I suppose that neutralises the issue, which is a good thing. I do not have an issue with that. However, I think it is erroneous to suggest that there has been no progress. That is not to say—and I think Mr Stanhope said this quite clearly—that we cannot do more. We cannot rest on our laurels; we can always do more about mental health funding.

In wrapping up this debate I want to make a couple of comments which were not in the speech I made when moving my motion. I want to thank particularly Amanda Tobler from Lifeline Canberra for her insight into the issue of self-harm. This issue was raised with me a few months ago by a young friend of mine, and that is how the idea to talk about it came about. I have to say that I was incredibly surprised to hear from this young friend that she had self-harmed. I have to say that she was surprised herself that she had done it. (*Extension of time granted.*)

Here is a young woman who has everything going for her. She is bright, she is young, she is well liked by those around here, and she had a job. She is not somebody that you would look at and say would be inclined to suffer from a mental health problem. She would be the last person in the world that most people would think had a mental health problem. She wanted me to raise this serious issue because she believes it is a growing problem.

I talked to Amanda Tobler today and I believe that this problem is certainly increasing and that it needs to be addressed. People who self-harm often slip out of the system. They slip through the cracks—and this is something that I did not address in my speech—because they do not want people to know about what they are doing. They burn themselves, they cut themselves, and they injure themselves in other fashions in areas that we cannot see. They do it in the armpits, they do it behind their knees. If they do it in an area that could be readily seen, they will cover it up. They will not admit to what they have done and they will not seek help.

Amanda Tobler said to me that a number of people in contact with Lifeline on a regular basis have got to the stage where they know how to harm themselves without having to seek medical help. They cut themselves just enough to release the pain.

The point of this motion today is about giving support to these people and about raising awareness. I said at the end of my previous speech that I hope everybody in this place will seek to put the information out there and assist. I am sure that everybody in this place would give people who self-harm the support that is needed. But this is also about raising awareness.

Finally, I want to say thank you to Jeremy Johnson from my office for the research and the excellent work that he did for me on this speech. I also thank Lisa Brill from my office who assisted Jeremy with the speech. The work that they did has raised my awareness and their awareness of this growing issue. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**Ms Tucker's** amendment to **Mr Smyth's** amendment agreed to.

**Mr Smyth's** amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## **Land (Planning and Environment) Amendment Bill 2004**

Debate resumed from 3 March 2004, on motion by **Ms Tucker**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (4.44): Mr Deputy Speaker, the government cannot support this measure. I gather from the research that has been presented to me that this hoary chestnut has been before this place before. So it is a regular.

It is fairly clear why such powers exist but they will always be controversial. The various issues that arise from time to time may be different but the underlying issue has not changed, and the underlying issue is that there needs to be some way of dealing with exceptional circumstances—issues of territory-wide significance—that might occur.

So the framework that exists which requires the minister to obtain the comments of ACTPLA and the comments of the Planning and Land Council before a decision is made and to advise the Assembly are, I think, about the best controls that you could put on this. In fact, I think it has been this side of the house that has actually enhanced the controls that exist over the use of call-in powers. I think the checks and balances are sufficient.

It is important that we recognise that from time to time there will be a particular development that will not appeal to everybody but that in the public interest, because it has a major influence on the community, the government of the day has to have that final

power. I have to say that the existence of that power or the threat of the possibility of that power may operate to obviate some of the vexatious complaints and appeals that could come through.

We only have to look at the GDE exercise where the primary feature of the objections and appeals and the legal action that has been taken has been one of timing. It has not been a pursuit of a particular objective and a pursuit of putting things right. It has quite obviously been a very carefully crafted campaign with applications being made at the very last possible moment to protract and frustrate the process. It has not been at all about the pursuit of a decent decision, a balanced decision, for the community.

To a lesser degree that sort of activity can occur, and it will not always be a road or a commercial development. It may well be a matter of development or change for the benefit of the community; it may be for the benefit of a section of the community that needs the assistance of government to get some facility constructed, open and available as soon as possible.

The history of call-in powers shows that although obviously there has been a bit of spitting across this place from time to time, to the best of my recollection I do not think you could in any way claim or even imagine that call-in powers have been overused and abused within the town, and I hope and trust that that will always be the case.

I have been in the job of Acting Minister for Planning for only a couple of days and I have got some new friends knocking on my door. But rest assured that every issue will be examined on its merits and, wherever possible, the full application of the appeals process will be observed so that every stakeholder in our community has the maximum input. Of course, as I said, there will be occasions when unfortunately it is necessary to circumvent those processes because they have either been abused, as we have seen in recent times, or there is a genuine public interest reason why those powers should be used.

So, I am sorry, we cannot support the legislation.

**MRS DUNNE (4.50):** I would like to congratulate Mr Quinlan on his maiden speech as the planning minister, and a very sound speech it was, too. I hope that perhaps this is a portent of more agreement across the chamber between the opposition planning spokesman and the government planning minister.

**Mr Quinlan:** Hang on for 10 minutes.

**MRS DUNNE:** The minister says, "Just hang on for 10 minutes." The Liberal opposition will not be supporting this proposal. I understand the genesis of this measure and I understand the ongoing concerns of the Greens in particular and various crossbench members over the years about the use of call-in powers. But as the new planning minister has said, the call-in powers are a very important and useful tool in the armoury of any planning regime.

It is true to say that call-in powers have been used from time to time, and there has been criticism about them. However, there has been less criticism about their use in this



Assembly than there has been in previous Assemblies. Also, I think there has been a change in attitude on the part of the Labor Party in relation to their use.

Very rarely in the previous two Assemblies with which I have had an association did the Labor spokesman, quite frankly, not go berserk at the prospect of a minister exercising his powers under the land act to call in a development. I made the particular point when I took up my job as shadow planning minister that I would not follow down that path, that I would look at issues on their merits. In fact, I have been, on occasions, one of the people who have gone to the planning minister and said, "I think you should consider exercising your call-in powers in this case." There have been occasions when I have congratulated the minister for so doing. But there have been occasions when I have made the point that I did not think their use would be appropriate in the circumstances, and when the minister has gone ahead and used them, I have criticised him for so doing.

My recollection—and it may not be a complete recollection—is that during the 2½ years of this Assembly the minister has exercised his call-in powers on five occasions. He has exercised those powers once in relation to Kingston foreshore and once in relation to the development known as Space on the corner of Northbourne Avenue, opposite the Rex Hotel with Condamine Street on the Turner side and Ipima Street on the Braddon side. He also exercised this power once in relation to Tanjil Loop. I thought that was important and I congratulated the government for cutting through what I saw as needless delay in the bushfire recovery process. I think, however, it is unfortunate that after the minister exercised his call-in powers to speed up the process and a decision was made, this work then sat in housing for many months before any activity was undertaken in relation to tendering for the buildings. The tender process has fallen over and there has to be re-tendering.

I have been very critical of the minister—not the acting minister—for his use of the call-in power in respect of the two other instances, both of which relate to developments in Gungahlin. It is my view and the view of many in the planning community that he did so in contravention of the territory plan. But it is one of those things that you cannot really test, except through Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act and there is no-one with standing who has the will to do it. So unfortunately those issues remain untested. I think this creates a very bad precedent because, in exercising his call-in powers in those cases, I fear that the minister may have approved things that are completely contrary to how the territory plan relates to Gungahlin. And that is really the crux of the matter. It is not the tool that is a problem. The underlying mechanisms in the territory plan and in the land act are more of a problem, and we have talked about that in this place on a number of occasions.

ACTPLA is currently reviewing, and has \$350,000 over the next two years to review, the planning regime, which includes the land act, and it may be that there will be more constraints on the exercise of call-in powers as a result of that review. When the Planning and Land Act was introduced and passed there were some conditions placed on the use of call-in powers that had not been in place previously and I think generally the legislation has worked moderately well. It does create some checks and balances.

This is not an arbitrary exercise of executive power, and under the current regime the impact is less than what applied prior to the changes that were made through the Planning and Land Act. My colleagues and I believe that the call-in power is a very

important tool that, from time to time, helps break through the nonsense. There have been occasions where many members in this place have gone to planning ministers and begged them to use their call-in powers. Not just members of the major parties but members from the crossbench have from time to time said, "This cannot be allowed to happen."

We must remember that the minister can exercise his call-in powers not only to approve but also to reject an application. It is a double-edged sword. It is not that the minister is going to spend his time saying, "Oh, which developer can I please today?" or "Which community group can I please today by knocking off a development?" There are enough checks and balances. The call-in power is a powerful tool and it needs to be exercised with care and caution. All of us should observe and be very vigilant. We need to be critical of the minister when he acts inappropriately.

Earlier this year in the case of Karralika we saw the potential for the minister to act in a way that may not have been in the spirit of the act. However, that was fairly much nipped in the bud by the vigilance of this place. As things currently stand, we must always be observant and vigilant about the operation of power and we should never close our minds to perhaps more changes and more constraints.

It has been put to me that perhaps the exercise of call-in powers might become a disallowable or an allowable instrument. At this stage, I am not prepared to go that far. I think we need to wait and see whether the changes that were made in 2002 work. So far the call-in power has been used on five occasions. Perhaps in the context of the new review of the land act, which we will see in the next Assembly, we may revisit this and want to apply more constraints. But never should we propose removing that power from the minister.

**MS DUNDAS (4.58):** The ACT Democrats will be supporting this bill. The Assembly did not support amendments we moved to the Planning and Land Bill when the Assembly debated that legislation a little while ago and it is quite clear that it will not be supporting this bill today. We have had this debate in the last Assembly and in this Assembly and it is disappointing that the outcome will be no different.

This bill removes the so-called call-in powers of the planning minister from the Land (Planning and Environment) Act. The ACT Democrats went to the 2001 election with a very clear commitment to oppose the continued operation of call-in powers in our planning system. Planning call-in powers undermine our system of planning and they reduce the certainty of the rights and responsibilities that residents and developers expect to have. Planning call-in powers subvert the role of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, which has been installed as an independent arbiter of the relative merits of a case.

I know that this Assembly has previously exhibited a dim view of appeal rights, as it has had few qualms in quashing them to speed up the construction of the Gungahlin Drive extension. But I am happy once again to state clearly that the Democrats see appeal rights as a crucial element of our planning system and they should not be tampered with.

We have created an appeals system to ensure that the outcomes of our planning system are implemented fairly and justly. The role played by the AAT ensures that there is an independent umpire on planning decisions, not a politically influenced one. This is

particularly the case since we have brought in a specialist division of the AAT to deal just with planning issues. The minister has noted on a number of occasions that the vast majority of AAT appeals are actually decided through mediation.

*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.*

**MS DUNDAS:** Mr Speaker, it is time to demonstrate our confidence in our planning system and to remove the minister's unnecessary ability to meddle in development approvals. Call-in powers subvert the proper checks and balances on planning approvals in the ACT.

At the last election the Labor Party also went to the people campaigning against the former Liberal government's use of call-in powers. Yet it now becomes clear that they are not prepared to stop the same problems occurring into the future. It appears that the ALP is of the opinion that they are qualified to decide when the AAT should be blocked from exercising its proper functions. The Minister for Planning in this Assembly has repeatedly used the call-in powers, often in defiance of community opinion. We had much debate in this place about the Karralika development and the Gungahlin town centre development.

The presence of planning call-in powers remains unpopular in the community and degrades confidence in our public institutions. Even if they are used with the best of intentions, members of the public invariably see them as examples of political expediency—be that for or against a development—and this leads to suspicions of less than transparent deals with developers. It has the unfortunate effect of making our political institutions look grubby and unnecessarily blocks well-meaning objectors from having their day in court and their voices heard.

I find it paradoxical that while the government has aimed to create a planning system that operates at arms length from government and has gone to great lengths to reduce political influence on the new planning authority, it retains the most obvious and controversial instrument of political interference in the planning process. This should be seen by our planners, our judges and members of our community as an act of political opportunism. If the government generally believes that our planning review processes are not functioning correctly, then let us sit down and look more closely at fixing that system.

Although we have set up the ACT Planning and Land Authority to be an independent statutory authority, the government in this Assembly still has control of policy. If there are problems with the policy, such that the minister feels he needs to call in a development, then let us work through those policy issues.

And let us work in the community. We need to recognise that LAPACs have not been operating for quite a while. The community planning forums were scrapped and the community councils have not yet taken on their role of picking up planning issues and consulting with the community. We know that when the community and developers are involved, issues are often resolved before they get to the appeals stage; or if they get to

appeals stage, mediation occurs and these issues are resolved. By using the call-in powers and taking away that right to have consultation, everybody is disadvantaged.

It is important that we have a planning system that provides confidence for the developers and the community and that we have the best outcomes. It should not be the role of government to prevent members of the community from having their concerns examined impartially by officers of the tribunal. I commend this bill to the Assembly.

**MRS CROSS (5.05):** Mr Speaker, the purpose of Ms Tucker's bill is to remove the power of the planning minister to call in development applications. The power to call in a development application will be transferred to ACTPLA, the same agency that actually processes the application in the first place.

I will be opposing this bill for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is important that the minister has the power to call in development applications if such a step is for the good of the community. Community interest must be paramount. At times it is necessary for the minister to be able to circumvent minority dissent if it is in the best interests of the community to do so. The call-in powers allow for this. It is particularly important that projects of territorial significance are not delayed or prevented by the deliberate misuse of the appeals process.

Secondly, the call-in powers are a protection against projects that are not in the interests of Canberrans. The planning minister can call in applications and then not approve them if the minister believes the project is not in the interests of the ACT. This is an important and often unrecognised role of the call-in power. The minister certainly needs the power to stop projects that, whilst following application guidelines, are not in the interests of the territory.

Thirdly, I believe it is the right of the government to implement its policies with, of course, the approval of the Assembly. If a project raises an important matter of policy, the government, through the planning minister, should be able to determine what is done so that the project is consistent with government policy.

It is my understanding that this government has used the call-in powers six times. These have been for Coles in Gungahlin, Big W in Gungahlin, the Metropolitan in Civic, the Space Apartments in Turner, Stage 1 of the Kingston foreshore development and the Tanjil Loop in Duffy. That is not a great number of times for the minister to invoke the call-in powers. Nor does it represent a misuse of these powers.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! There is too much conversation in the chamber. Mrs Cross has the floor.

**Ms Tucker:** Everyone else puts up with a bit of chat, Helen. So precious.

**MRS CROSS:** Ms Tucker, I did not interrupt your speech. I do not appreciate your interruption. I can understand why Ms Tucker is upset. We are not supporting her bill but I would like her to let me finish. To the contrary, I would suggest that Mr Corbell has been remarkably restrained in his use of the call-in powers, showing a due deference to the current planning process.

Further, the four principles included in the government policy on “accountability for the ministerial call-in power”, which I believe have all been adhered to by this planning minister, have provided me with some confidence that the call-in powers are not being or have not been abused by this planning minister. No recent event has provided evidence to suggest that it is necessary to strip the minister of these powers. Rather, there remain a number of very important reasons why it is important for the minister to have such powers. I state once again that I will not be supporting the Land (Planning and Environment) Amendment Bill 2004 and I encourage other members to do likewise.

**MS TUCKER** (5.08), in reply: I can assure you, Mrs Cross, that your vote is not critical.

**Mrs Cross**: Yes it is. I could tell—you were really distressed.

**MS TUCKER**: This is the third time that I have brought this up but I was a little bit hopeful this time, for reasons that I will explain.

To summarise: call-in powers basically fast-track developments which are favoured by the minister of the day and, in doing so, third party appeal rights are overridden. We have seen these powers used regularly by ministers, with legitimate community concerns being pushed aside. It makes something of a joke of all the claims about independent planning authorities and commissioners and the rigour and accountability of the planning system.

The justification used by ministers, as we have just heard from Mrs Cross, is that the use of these powers is in the territory’s interest because they give rise to substantial public benefit. But, of course, that criterion can be used to justify any development. Substantial public benefit is obviously a matter of opinion and the Assembly has debated exactly what is of substantial public benefit in a number of policy areas. We have developed an appeals system to allow claims of public benefit to be tested. The Greens are concerned that that legitimate access to having claims of public interest tested has been removed.

In 1999 amendments were put by Labor to my bill supposedly to tighten up the process. The criteria that Mr Corbell in opposition put at that time have shown themselves to be weak. They have not made any difference to the use of call-in powers from any perspective. My attempt in 2001 to at least make the call-in power disallowable was also defeated and one might wonder why I would attempt do the same again, given that my legislation is being considered by basically the same members. But I was thinking there might be hope. In particular I was interested in the outrage expressed by the Liberals and Mrs Cross on the question of Karralika in response to the community’s concern and outrage over the notion of call-in powers.

As Ms Dundas said, the community is always surprised and concerned when it becomes aware of what the call-in powers are. People ask, “Why do we have this power vested in the minister when clearly we thought, as citizens, we had appeal rights and that those appeal rights were legitimate?” Contrary to the impression that has been given by members in this debate, people do not have the capacity to lodge vexatious appeals. Our appeals system to test public interest is removed by the minister of the day.

I was wondering whether the Liberals might at least consider rethinking their position on this after what they saw as the potential abuse of the use of call-in powers in respect of

Karralika, although I take Mrs Dunne's point that the Assembly did make its feelings clear and the minister changed his position.

I might just refer to public interest. Let us look at the question of the great benefit to the community that came out of the development of the Metropolitan. It is unfortunate that Mr Corbell in his press statement of 19 December said that by calling in this development he had given the go-ahead to Civic's renaissance as Canberra's pre-eminent centre and that the Metropolitan was a key to the revitalisation of the Civic West precinct.

Let me say something about its social unsustainability. The housing component of this development will be expensive, adding to the glut of upmarket two-bedroom city units. More importantly, this intensive residential development included no affordable housing strategy, no plans for adaptable or accessible units and no commitment to public housing.

Turning to ecological unsustainability, while the minister talked about PALM's high quality sustainable development process, there was no mention in this development of grey water recycling, fresh water collection, solar passive design, solar water heating or roof gardens. It can be argued that he used call-in powers to override complaints over the removal of trees in the middle of the car park. However, the development proposal linked to the planned variation in Narrabundah has demonstrated that social benefit conditions can be imposed on developments. It is ironic that when it comes to sacrificing community use land, the government will impose conditions but for car parks it will not.

Members have said that the call-in powers have not been used very often. Well, I do not know—that, too, is a matter of opinion. From 1997 to 2001 the Liberal Party used call-in powers 20 times. From 2001 to now Labor has used it six times, and members have already mentioned some examples. I certainly would not regard any of them as particularly cutting edge. I do not think they were so dramatically in the public interest that normal appeal rights should have been overridden.

The basic point is that if a development is worth while it should be able to withstand appeals, scrutiny and testing. If we allow that process to occur then we have some hope that a development will meet social and environment standards and requirements. We have to remember that in some cases we are stuck with developments for up to 50 years. Developers are not necessarily going to be hanging around but neighbours and the city as a whole will have to live with these developments. So, from the Greens' perspective, it is certainly not a good idea, on the grounds of what is basically a matter of opinion, for the minister to be given power to override all the normal procedures for ensuring some kind of rigorous planning process.

It is obvious that I will not be getting support for my bill but I thank members for their contribution.

Question put:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 2

Ms Dundas  
Ms Tucker

Noes 11

Mr Berry  
Mr Cornwell  
Mrs Cross  
Mrs Dunne  
Ms Gallagher  
Mr Hargreaves  
Ms MacDonald  
Mr Pratt  
Mr Quinlan  
Mr Smyth  
Mr Stanhope

Question so resolved in the negative.

## **Water and Sewerage Amendment Bill 2004**

Debate resumed from 13 May 2004, on motion by **Mrs Dunne**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

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

### **Water and sewerage legislation Statements by members**

**MRS DUNNE**: Mr Speaker, I seek leave to make a statement.

Leave granted.

**MRS DUNNE**: The reason that this bill has been adjourned today is because of the complete embarrassment of the government. It came out earlier in the week and said, “We cannot possibly support a water efficiency measure.” We agreed that it would be brought on and debated, and the Liberal opposition listed it on the understanding that it would be debated. The government has, presumably since then, suffered some inconvenience and embarrassment when it realised what it had done. It has spent a lot of time in the last two or three days spreading indecision in the ranks and causing division in the ranks so they could undermine this very simple and straightforward piece of legislation. It is a shame that the second act in this place of the acting planning minister was to undermine his own government’s policy on water efficiency.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning): I seek leave to make a statement.

Leave granted.

**MR QUINLAN**: I am sorry to disappoint the opposition but I am not embarrassed. Let me say that the bill presented today is in very poor shape. The bill that may ultimately be passed—should it be passed—will be very different.

## Quit smoking counselling for smokers

**MS DUNDAS (5.21):** I move:

That this Assembly, recognising that (a) smokers have poorer health and longer hospital stays than non-smokers, and (b) people hospitalised for a smoking-related illness have a high motivation to quit smoking, calls on the ACT Government to start offering free quit smoking counselling to all smokers admitted to ACT public hospitals by no later than January 2005.

This motion, at its heart, calls for the ACT government to offer free “quit smoking” counselling to all smokers admitted to ACT hospitals and to have this program in place by no later than January 2005. We know many people are admitted to hospital with smoking-related illnesses, and we know that smokers take far longer to recover from major surgery than non-smokers. At a time of serious illness requiring a hospital stay smokers are most likely to be receptive to support and advice to help them to stop smoking. They are already in an environment where smoking is clearly not permitted, yet there is no systemic program to ensure that every smoking inpatient in Canberra’s public hospitals gets advice on quitting.

The government is heavily focused on our surgical waiting lists as a main indicator of health outcomes in the ACT, and they are also trying to address clearly expressed community concerns about the length of the waiting lists. However, we also need to be thinking longer term and investing in preventative health programs. The Canberra Hospital’s health promotion officer retired in 2001 and has not been replaced—that is a position that has gone unfilled since 2001—and there is no health promotion position at all at Calvary Hospital.

The health promotion officer at TCH visited patients at their bedsides and delivered counselling and printed information on quitting smoking. We need such a dedicated position at each of our public hospitals because our nurses are too heavily burdened to take on that role by themselves. Action in our public hospitals is now quite patchy, and largely relies on nurses fitting smoking cessation counselling into their already extremely busy days. Quite simply, it is not realistic to place this demand solely on the shoulders of nurses. Of course this is not to say that nurses cannot contribute; it is simply an acknowledgment that not enough can be done by existing staff. Just one extra position in each of our public hospitals could make a real difference to the health outcomes of the entire community.

I have specifically included the word “counselling” in my motion because research has shown that counselling is an essential element of successful smoking cessation programs. Simply handing a smoker some printed information is not nearly as successful. I would not like to see this motion cut back so a cheaper and less successful approach is adopted. This, while it would be penny-wise, would obviously be pound-foolish policy making. The Cancer Council has been given a few opportunities to present information to nurses at TCH in the past. ACT Health also recently commenced limited delivery of a “train the trainer” program for nurse administrators in the cardio-thoracic rehabilitation ward at TCH, ward 6A—respiratory—and the Canberra midwifery program.



However, nurses, who are already working overtime and undertaking double shifts, have struggled to find the time to attend these courses. So I am doubtful that these same over-stretched staff will be able to find enough time to pass on that smoking cessation training to their own staff so the nurses can pass that on to the patients. This is why we need either dedicated health promotion people working in our hospitals or funding for the Cancer Council, or similar organisations, to provide those services in the hospital setting. We need a bedside patient service in this regard.

The government has recently begun offering inpatient smoking cessation courses to some patients at TCH that include post-discharge follow-up as part of a one-year trial, but it is the luck of the draw whether an inpatient who is a smoker will be given the opportunity to participate in that trial. They need to be in hospital on that particular day to pick up that particular program. This is why we are calling for a program that focuses on all those hospitalised for smoking-related illnesses. We need to focus on all smokers admitted to ACT public hospitals.

We do not need another trial. We had this position operating in 2001. We know how this program is working across other states, and literature has shown us that it is working across the world. We need an ongoing program. Six months to January 2005 gives the government long enough to put such a program in place. There is already abundant evidence that inpatient quit smoking programs work. There have been numerous studies of the effectiveness of inpatient quit smoking programs.

Literature reviews of these studies have drawn the conclusion that effective programs that offer counselling sessions of at least 20 minutes duration, involve at least five contacts with the smoker, have post-discharge follow-up and are delivered over a period at least three months duration, result in the most successful outcomes for the health system and for patients. We simply need to implement established best practice here in the ACT.

I hope that the Assembly and the government see the benefits of such programs operating here in the ACT and that the Assembly can support this motion. The failure to capitalise on opportunities to help people quit smoking would demonstrate a lack of commitment to the health of ACT residents and a lack of commitment to preventative health programs. We need to ensure that people who are admitted to hospital have the best outcomes and that they do not end up back in hospital because their health has not improved. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (5.27): I think this is a fabulous idea. When patients are lying in bed, cannot go anywhere and are probably tied to a drip, it is a good time to give them a bit of counselling. There are probably not many people alive who do not know that smoking counselling is available. I think it is generally given free, but I would have to check on that. I think the medication you take, patches or whatever, costs money.

I do not think there is a direct link. I do not think that because a smoker is in hospital, it is necessarily the most effective way of saying that we want to approach all smokers. Why don't we get them before they end up in hospital? Of course we do not want people bunging on and having their appendix out just to get into hospital to pick up some free

counselling, do we, Mr Speaker? I think we want to avoid the situation where quite wealthy people who are having minor surgery are given some sort of service that others cannot receive. Although it is a pretty good idea on the surface, I do not think the government can support it.

**MR SMYTH** (Leader of the Opposition) (5.29): Mr Speaker, the opposition can live with the motion, simply because I think we have to take all opportunities and all avenues when presented, and I think it is a shame that the “acting acting acting” health minister has decided to take such a negative view on the motion.

We all know that we should give up smoking; we all know that there are various forms of anti-smoking counselling available; and we all know that we probably should avail ourselves of those opportunities. I think what Ms Dundas is saying is that, when you are admitted to hospital, it is often a time for reflection on your personal health, and where you are at in your life. If you are admitted for a smoking-related illness, that might give you that little edge of motivation to make the effort, take the plunge and give up smoking.

Ultimately it will rely simply on that. People who smoke have to feel the motivation to give it up. I understand an average smoker will normally go through an enormous number of attempts before they can give up smoking. The dilemma is where do we catch them? You see advertisements on the buses; on TV; you hear it on the radio and it is in the magazines. That is good—there should be more of it. There are very stark, grim warnings on cigarette packets, and they do not deter people either.

Where you have the time and you are in a situation where you can reflect on your personal circumstances, if in fact you have been hospitalised because of the effects of being a long-term smoker, perhaps that is the point in one’s life where the motivation exists, in a confluence of circumstances, where some counselling and support are available. Your family are probably looking at you from the end of the bed and saying, “Look, it’s time to give it up”—and you may well feel that motivation yourself. I think it is reasonable to say, “Let’s take advantage of that confluence of circumstances and put it into action!” This is a call to arms to offer people assistance to carry that out.

We all talk about health promotion, and it is interesting that the health promotion officer at the Canberra Hospital has not been replaced since 2001. There is a question on notice that one of the members might put, or I might put myself: why haven’t we had a health promotion officer for the term of this government? Why is the Canberra Hospital without that very important position if, as we often claim in this place, we are all dedicated to moving towards the health prevention model? With those few words in mind, the opposition will be supporting the motion.

**MRS CROSS** (5.32): I support in principle Ms Dundas’s motion to call upon the government to offer quit smoking counselling services to all smokers. It is important for the government to recognise that smoking can retard recovery from physical illnesses and surgery. Smokers are at a greater risk of experiencing complications and infections after surgery due to the damaging effect of their habit on their lungs, heart and immune system.

According to researchers from Bispebjerg Hospital, University of Copenhagen, pre-operative smoking counselling can help prevent such complications from occurring. The 2002 study found that smokers who underwent smoking counselling prior to their surgery, in order to reduce their habit, were less likely to develop the post-operative complications typically found amongst smokers receiving no counselling. According to one of the researchers, smokers should refrain from smoking at least six weeks before surgery.

Whilst I fully support the intention of Ms Dundas's motion—which I will be supporting—I would like to note that it would be more beneficial for patients to receive pre-operative counselling prior to their admission to hospital. I therefore would encourage all patients undergoing elective surgery to undertake pre-operative counselling.

Subsequently, I shall move an amendment, which will shortly be circulated in my name, in part amending Ms Dundas's motion, adding that the Assembly “notes that pre-operative counselling six weeks beforehand substantially reduces the risk of post-operative complications”, and replacing “admitted to” with “utilising” because it would be contradictory for me to move an amendment when I am suggesting that counselling should occur at least six weeks out to have any physical benefit to patients.

I would like to commend Ms Dundas for this motion. I have been an advocate not only of banning smoking but also of educating people about the adverse effects of smoking and passive smoking. I think that Ms Dundas is a very responsible member for bringing this motion before the Assembly. I commend the amendment that I will be moving in the detail stage. Once again, I commend Ms Dundas for her motion.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mrs Cross, why don't you move the amendment now?

**MRS CROSS:** Because we had to have it reworded, Mr Speaker. The Clerk is finalising it, and it is not ready yet.

**MR SPEAKER:** You can seek leave to move it, if you like, just to get the debate started.

**MRS CROSS:** I seek leave to move the amendment, which is being physically prepared at the moment and which the members will have in about three minutes.

**MR SPEAKER:** It has not been circulated but, if people understand enough about it to discuss it, we will.

Leave granted.

**MRS CROSS (5.35):** We have had to rephrase the amendment a little bit for accuracy and consistency. For the reasons that I stated in my speech, Mr Speaker, I move the following amendment to Ms Dundas's motion to be circulated in my name.

Omit all words after “smoking” (first occurring), substitute:

“(c) notes that pre-operative counselling six weeks beforehand substantially reduces the risk of post-operative complications and calls on the ACT Government to start offering free quit smoking counselling to all smokers utilising ACT public hospitals by no later than January 2005.”

**MS TUCKER (5.36):** The Greens will be supporting this motion and the amendment. Tobacco smoking is perhaps the single most preventable cause of premature death and disease in Australia. There is little doubt that dealing with tobacco smoking is a major public health issue for all jurisdictions in Australia. It is estimated that smoking kills more than 19,000 Australians each year, with thousands more suffering debilitating illness.

The ACT has been quite progressive in implementing dates to remove smoking from clubs and pubs. However, there is debate about how to manage patients in our hospital system who are nicotine dependent. New South Wales has introduced clear protocols that propose that hospital staff identify nicotine dependent patients, give patients information about the smoke-free policy, provide prompt and appropriate treatment to patients experiencing nicotine withdrawal, provide brief intervention for smoking cessation and advise discharging patients on options for permanent cessation.

This program for patients in hospital is followed up by a call-back service provided by Quitline where callers can arrange for a day and time to suit them. These steps were incorporated into routine patient care in 2002. The program has not yet been formally evaluated, so there is no evidence about the effectiveness of the program. However, there are reasons to believe that this program will significantly contribute to the health and wellbeing of the patient population and sends a clear message to the public of the health consequences of smoking.

I am happy to support the substantive motion recognising that smokers have poorer health and that people hospitalised for smoking-related illness will have higher motivation to quit smoking. It seems that patients in hospital would focus on their own health, and it may reaffirm a desire in them to quit smoking. I do not think that any quit smoking programs should be made compulsory for smokers. However, an opportunity to look at health issues while in hospital seems sensible.

We would also be interested to see the evaluation of what happened in New South Wales, whenever that comes about, because that could inform government policy. As I understand it, this motion does not have significant cost implications because a position has been funded. That person is no longer working there, and the position has not been refilled. It seems as though some quite good work was done in this area and then it dropped off. This motion draws attention to that fact.

I once again briefly raise the fact that it is the same with substance abuse, it is the same with alcohol abuse and it is the same with mental illness. The whole thing has to be seen in the context of society and the social condition of people. I am always concerned when I hear people taking the line, "These people are poor already. How come they can afford cigarettes?" There is a real correlation between being poor and doing things that are not good for you. It is all about how you feel as a human being, and it is pretty obvious if you think about it.

This sort of health campaign is great and it is useful, but let's not pretend that is the fundamental issue, because it is not. You need extreme discipline to stop smoking. It is extremely difficult. I have been told that getting off tobacco is harder than getting off heroin and, if people are not feeling good about their lives, they are not going to bother if

it is something that makes them feel a bit better. That is reasonable and a justifiable decision for people to make. These conversations about substance abuse, including tobacco, have to be situated in the social context. We have to understand those social influences as well in any discussion about this.

I will repeat, because it is relevant to this particular debate, my concern about what is happening in supermarkets at the moment with cigarettes. They are very obvious when you go to the checkout, and I remember that that was not supposed to happen.

**MS MacDONALD (5.40):** Mr Speaker, I will attempt to be brief. In the ACT the quit service is provided by the Cancer Council ACT, with funding from ACT Health and other sources. The Cancer Council ACT is also piloting a staff training information session at the Canberra Hospital with a focus on the antenatal and cardiac wards. Ten patient information sessions are planned for the next 12 months, along with two eight-week quit courses for patients. This is at no cost to the patient.

The ACT government has provided \$75,000 to the Cancer Council ACT for support of Quitline. These funds will be used to promote increased awareness and use of Quitline and to provide additional staffing to ensure that Quitline calls are answered. Providing intensive, one-to-one counselling is not an efficient, or indeed effective, way of addressing the issue of smoking for patients in a hospital setting for a number of reasons.

One reason is that most patients attend as day only patients so are not in an ideal position, for reasons of time, to receive any long-term benefit from counselling. Another reason is the associated cost of this type of approach. It is quite intensive and would require the resources of many individual counsellors, which would be far beyond the resources of any service provider.

The current approach of the Cancer Council ACT—providing hospital staff training, group session work and brief intervention—provides an opportunity to develop an effective, efficient and comprehensive hospital based anti-smoking strategy based on the principles of best practice. I would add that it is my understanding that in the ACT we also provide quit smoking counselling free of charge to anybody who wants it, not just people going into hospital, which is the thing we ought to be doing. In hospital you might be in a captive situation, but that is usually on a short-term basis. We want to get to people before they get into hospitals, rather than once they are in there, to try and get them off the nicotine in the first place.

As you are aware, Mr Speaker, I am not averse to looking at any means of trying to get people off tobacco. We all know the associated risks; I, and many people in this place, have spoken about them before. Indeed, I would consider that I have conducted a little bit of a campaign on this issue—not for quite as long as you have, Mr Speaker. I am definitely devoted to getting people off tobacco and nicotine for their own health's sake.

There was an issue of nicotine replacement therapy. It is my understanding that in New South Wales there has been no evaluation of the trial of nicotine replacement therapy. They have just started doing nicotine replacement therapy in New South Wales, and the results of that evaluation will not be known for nine or 10 months. It would be a better idea for us to wait and see the evaluation of nicotine replacement therapy—whether it

works or not—before we proceed down that path. As such, I believe that this motion is unnecessary.

**MS DUNDAS (5.44):** I will speak to the amendment and, if nobody else is going to speak, I will also wrap up the debate in general. Firstly, I am happy to support this amendment. It picks up on some of the concerns that Ms MacDonald raised. If she had heard what Mrs Cross actually said, she would know that the amendment goes to the point of supporting patients when they know that they are coming in for surgery, before they get to hospital, and that pre-operative counselling six weeks beforehand substantially reduces the risk of postoperative complications. We are trying to work at this in a holistic way, supporting people while they are in hospital, before they get to hospital and after they leave hospital.

Ms MacDonald went through what the government is currently doing; I also noted that in my speech. I again make the point that our nurses and the people who work in our hospitals are currently very stretched and very stressed. Having a train the trainer program for nurse administrators relies on them to have time to sit with their nurses and train their nurses, and then it relies on nurses having the time in their already busy daily schedules to work with the patients.

What this motion calls for is getting one staff member, who used to work in the Canberra Hospital, to be able to sit next to a patient, work through the issues with them and provide them with information and with ongoing networks through to the quit programs and other programs that are being run by the Cancer Council.

I thank the Acting Minister for Health for his initial support when he said that it looks like an excellent idea. It is important to recognise that smokers enter hospital for a range of reasons, be they smoking-related illnesses or other situations, and it is the perfect opportunity, while they are there working through the health problems that led them to be in hospital, to provide them with the extra advice and the extra support they need to quit smoking.

Ms Tucker has mentioned that it is a hard thing to do. While somebody is in a hospital, in a sterile environment, it is a great opportunity to work with and support that person. Many people do not ring Quitline when they are out of hospital because they are not really thinking about it. But when they are in hospital and are forced to not smoke, when they are forced to consider their health options, there is the perfect opportunity to offer them counselling. They do not have to take it up, but at least the offer has been put to them in a focused environment.

Studies that have come out in the last two days have shown that legal drugs pose more health risks than illicit drugs, especially to young people in our community. So we need to focus on legal drugs, such as cigarettes, and support people who, for one reason or another, have entered hospital and have the opportunity to be supported to quit smoking.

**MRS CROSS (5.48):** I have a document on smoking that I thought members would be interested in: “Smoking ‘damages surgery recovery’”. I seek leave to table this document, which confirms and reiterates the message that I conveyed in my speech regarding smokers abstaining from smoking at least six weeks before surgery to reduce the risk of complications.

Leave granted.

**MRS CROSS:** I present the following paper:

“Smoking damages surgery recovery”—Extract from BBC News website, dated 11 January 2002.

**MR QUINLAN** (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming, and Acting Minister for Planning) (5.49): Mr Speaker, I had surgery coming up a year ago. Before that surgery I was checked out—blood pressure and whatever—to make sure that I was in reasonable shape to have the surgery, and of course the matter of whether I smoked came up then.

I think this motion, as amended, is well intentioned, but we are getting to the point where we are standing in here being very prescriptive about what the medical profession in our hospitals do. I just wonder how the medical profession, which we are to some extent demeaning by telling them how to suck eggs, would feel if they were listening to this debate. What has been said is all quite high-minded.

I do not know what your relationship has been with whatever medical practitioners have provided service in recent years—

**Mrs Cross:** Pretty good.

**MR QUINLAN:** Yes—and your doctor is going to say you have got to get off smoking. What some doctors are even talking about now is, “If you don’t intend to give up smoking, you can’t have bypass surgery. Get to the back of the queue.”

**Mrs Cross:** That’s not what the motion says, Ted.

**MR QUINLAN:** Yes, but what I am saying is that, when you become involved in any form of surgery of a major nature, do you think you are not going to go through this process? Do you think your doctor is not going to be telling you that? I just wonder how you do it. If the ACT government was going to tell me to give up smoking when I had surgery a year or so ago, I wonder how they were going to do it. I do not know—by finding out that I was going to hospital and sending me a note? Or did I have to attend somewhere—this is the pre-op?

It is well intentioned, but this is really telling the process to suck eggs. I am also advised that the hospital is going through training programs and training nurses to handle smokers and to assist.

**Ms Dundas:** No, training administrators to train nurses.

**MR QUINLAN:** Yes. Well, they are the ones who actually relate to the patient on a regular basis. I know you want the smoking Nazi to come around—

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! Order! One at a time.

**Ms MacDonald:** Anti-smoking Nazi.

**MR QUINLAN:** Anti-smoking. So the hospital is taking positive steps. I know a lot has been said. I will repeat what I said last evening, at the risk of a very strong adverse reaction. It is often said that our nurses are under strain. You just say that; it is automatic, we assume that. But I do counsel you to look at some of the figures and look at our productivity versus the rest of Australia before you make those claims.

Amendment agreed to.

**MS DUNDAS (5.53):** I thank members for their support and participation in this debate. I think we agree that health care outcomes for members of the community are paramount, and it is something we are all focused on. The motion calls on the government to offer free quit smoking counselling to all smokers admitted to ACT public hospitals. It is not calling on the government to ram this program down smokers' throats; it is an offer of counselling—and it is the counselling that makes a difference.

It is not just information being provided; it is a one-on-one discussion with somebody who is in the hospital about the best way for them to get healthy, especially in relation to the detriment smoking will have on their health. I hope that that is clear. I think the concerns that have been raised by the government are a little bit over the top. This is a quite simple motion about health promotion in our hospitals.

The Treasurer closed by making a remark that we need to look at the statistics. Looking at statistics is one thing. The statistics might say that our hospitals are doing really well, and I would not want to doubt those statistics. But for each statistic I read I also get a call or a letter from a nurse saying that nurses' working conditions are quite onerous, they are feeling stretched and they are feeling under pressure. We are talking about individual health care here, and our individual delivery of that health care, and supporting the nurses and doctors in our hospitals in their work to make the community well again.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## **Core values for school students**

**MR PRATT (5.55):** I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the need for the presence of core values to be taught in ACT schools up to year 12 level;
- (b) the need for school culture to reflect the practising of those core values; and
- (c) that some schools are effectively teaching and supporting values;

(2) rejects the Government's piecemeal approach to the teaching and supporting of values; and



- (3) calls upon the Minister for Education and Training to implement the teaching of, and the support for, core values across the ACT education system.

I moved this motion today to bring to the attention of the Assembly the current state of values in the ACT education system. Our kids are pretty important to us. As they will inherit society, it is our duty to prepare them to be good citizens. That has been society's historical duty since time immemorial. The family is primarily responsible for inculcating good values and respect for society, people, property, culture and the nation. But schools must also play a role in that. I vehemently disagree with some of the voices from the education community that have said that the teaching of those values should not be the province of schools; rather that they should be taught at home.

The Liberal opposition believes that schools must play a vital role in supporting families in their task of inculcating good values. Additionally, we strongly argue that schools must increasingly pick up the responsibility to kick-start the teaching and supporting of values for children who come from troubled families or those who are at risk of prematurely cutting short their education. Some schools do not teach and support values or, if they do, they are not doing it properly or against any firm ACT benchmark.

If, as some members of the education community are saying, there is no need for the teaching and supporting of good values, why has there been a constant trend over the past decade of students moving to the non-government sector, especially in their early high school years? For 2½ years members of the community have been telling me that they want their children to develop a strong sense of values outside the home environment and to pick up a sense of self-discipline.

Members of the community have told me that they have lost confidence in the ability of government schools to teach and support educational values—a trend that is reflected nationally and against which we in the ACT fare better. That trend needs to be arrested. Schools that hold students for nearly 30 per cent of their childhood daylight hours should do more than simply deliver skills and develop a learning capability. They have an enormous responsibility to develop the character of students—which in part relates to developing their learning capabilities—and they must also prepare them for the world outside school.

Schools have to prepare students to be responsible and good citizens. We believe that some schools in both the government and non-government sectors already do that well and they have a long tradition of doing so. Given the growing distractions of modern society, it is not easy for schools to inculcate values or to sustain them if they have tried to kick-start programs. Regardless of external pressures, opposition members believe that schools must strive to inculcate those values. There is a widespread call for schools to formally adopt the supporting role of teaching values to children both nationally and in the ACT.

I would like to take some time to look at statistics relating to students who, for a number of reasons, are at risk of prematurely cutting short their education. I obtained these statistics from answers to questions placed on notice and from some other sources. In 2001, 986 school students in ACT government schools were suspended. One year later, 1,009 school students were suspended, and in 2003, 1,125 school students were

suspended. However, no students were expelled in that three-year period. The number of ACT government school students suspended to 31 March 2004 is 346.

As at the February 2004 census, 882 indigenous students were enrolled in government schools. Of those students 541 were in primary schools, 230 were in high schools and 95 were in colleges. Of the 49 indigenous students who enrolled in an ACT government high school in year 10 in August 2003, 38.8 per cent were not enrolled in an ACT government college in February 2004. That could mean that they moved away, that they did not go on to year 11, or that they enrolled at a non-government school. Regardless of the reason, that figure of 38 per cent is a worrying figure.

Of the 56 indigenous students who enrolled in year 11 in an ACT government college in August 2003, 19.6 per cent were not enrolled in an ACT government college in February 2004. Again that could mean that some of them moved away, that they simply did not go on to year 12, or that they enrolled in a non-government school. Of the 52 indigenous students who enrolled in an ACT government college in year 12 in February 2003, 76.9 per cent were still enrolled in August 2003. That equals a loss of 23.1 per cent of students throughout year 12.

Ninety indigenous students were suspended in 2002 and 109 were suspended in 2003. Working on current figures for indigenous enrolments, assuming that they were similar for past years, that means that approximately 10.2 per cent of indigenous students, including those at primary schools, were suspended in 2002 and 12.3 per cent were suspended in 2003. The next group of statistics to which I wish to refer are those presented by the ACT Parents and Citizens Association in its February 2004 report to the government entitled "Improving Outcomes for Young People."

Only 57 per cent of high school students felt safe at schools compared to 79 per cent of primary schoolchildren who said that they felt safe. Over 40 per cent of high school students reported that they were not receiving satisfactory assistance to deal with harassment. According to the ACT Parents and Citizens Association, 30 per cent of students enrolled in year 11 in 2002—a figure that I find mind-boggling and about which I wanted to ask a question of the minister today—failed to achieve a year 12 certificate. These statistics are sending out a mixed bag of signals.

Clearly, some successes have been achieved in turning around deteriorating trends, but there are a number of signs that school environments—this is not reflective of all schools and it occurs mainly in the early high school years—are not the happy or gripping learning and teaching environments that they should be or that perhaps they once were. That is due to a range of new pressures over which the government has no control. We have talked about stress and casualties among our students, but we must be concerned also about the stress suffered by teachers.

The feedback that I have been getting and about which I am concerned is that too many teachers are worn out and they are disgruntled with the current education system. They are tired of being police officers, social workers, pseudo parents and drug and alcohol counsellors. They are tired of the confrontational environment with which they are faced in the current education system. The environment in which they are expected to perform disgruntles many young teachers who have put their hearts and souls into teaching.

It is clear to me that the teaching and learning environment in many schools in the ACT is not as harmonious, peaceful and conducive to good learning and the development of good values as it ought to be. The figures to which I have referred and the evidence that I have presented as a result of broad discussions that I have had with teachers and families show that discipline and student behavioural problems are leading to disruptions in the classroom, which is a major concern.

A significant number of students believe that they are being disrupted or bullied in schools. Student surveys similar to the one to which I referred earlier underpin that feeling and reflect alarming levels of dissatisfaction, despite the programs that have been put in place by the government and by the department to tackle bullying, discipline and the growing trend of violence and vandalism. It is evident from the budgetary appropriations that a number of programs have been put in place, but what results are they achieving?

When I have been at shopping centres or I have been out doorknocking, parents have told me that they are sympathetic as schools are trying to improve those aspects of school life. However, they lament that the results are mixed and that there are too many disruptive situations. In recent years those parents have either wanted to move or they have moved their children into non-government schools because the atmosphere is considered by them to be dramatically different and because of the oft-quoted phrase, considered by many in the education debate to be a dirty phrase, that those schools have discipline.

Schools that have a disciplined teaching and learning environment really do worry about values. So we are seeing a movement from one government school to another. Some schools in the Tuggeranong Valley have a good reputation, so there is a movement to them. It is clearly the view amongst families that children at schools that teach, support and practice values will grow up developing a sense of self-discipline. They will be able to learn better, pull their weight at home and in the community, and be part of a collectively disciplined but happy gaggle of school students.

Most importantly, parents see this investment in the development of discipline—underpinned by the teaching of values and the practising of valued behaviour—as fire-walling their children and preventing them from falling by the wayside as they grow older and, in particular, in their adolescent years when they are confronted with the attractions of drugs and alternative culture and they later fail to achieve acceptable educational outcomes. I am aware of a number of celebrated cases of parents complaining to schools because the schools dared to discipline their children. However, that is the flipside of the coin.

Most people have said that they would prefer their schools to be a little stronger in the discipline department. That issue and the more broad grab bag of issues surrounding academic concentration, generally decent behaviour, respect and tolerance, underpinned by the inculcation of values, are of paramount importance to families that are struggling or facing the challenge of getting their kids through school. It is important to make the point that a healthy environment in which values play a large role in everyday schooling minimises the need for overt disciplinary measures.

A number of studies around the world and in Australia have identified the need for a greater emphasis on teaching and supporting values from the first school years right through to year 12. The federal government commissioned the Department of Education, Science and Training to undertake a study. In August 2003 the department released its report entitled "Values Education Study." That report, which identifies some interesting work that has been done around the world, refers to the success stories of 69 government and non-government schools across Australia that have inculcated values education in their curriculum and, importantly, in their school routine.

The department recognised that significant advantages could be gained in values education and that rather broad benefits could accrue to schools and to individual students. Some elements in the report might be a little sceptical and in some cases the department has been a little slow to embrace the concept of values education. However, it has logically come to the conclusion that encouraging schools to inculcate values in their curriculum and to build those values into school routine and school life will make quantum differences in those schools, resulting in happy learning and teaching environments and achieving better educational and academic outcomes. The report states:

In Australia, the vision is that, ultimately, every school would address values education on an ongoing, planned and systematic basis.

That is the vision referred to in this report. The report encourages schooling authorities across the country to take that issue on board. The Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs has taken note of that report. Despite its domination by Labor education ministers, MCEETYA has agreed, perhaps grudgingly, to the need to introduce formal and systemic values education. However, it has not yet stated how or when that will happen. It wants to conduct further studies, which is a problem.

The federal government will spend \$30 million to foster school forums at every school and it will encourage the introduction of values education. I do not know when that is to occur, but that is what the federal government is talking about doing. I will refer later to some of the recommendations in that departmental report. As I said earlier, a number of government and non-government schools in the ACT, of their own volition, have developed and are practising values education.

It is traditional for some schools to address systemic problems. Other schools have been forced into doing that because concerns have been expressed at those schools. The teaching of values should not just be another part of a school curriculum; it should be an integral part of a school's culture. It should permeate a school's curriculum and the way in which that school operates. (*Extension of time granted.*) Only in that way can the teaching and supporting of values have an immediate and a lasting effect on students, the school and the community that supports it. Only in that way can we militate against many of the negative impacts that currently exist in schools. That is what values teaching means.

Teachers, schoolchildren and families have expressed concern about some of the negative aspects that they have had to face. This government would be taking a quantum leap if it laid down firm policy and benchmarks that enabled all schools to adopt a values

system approach to education. The department is aware of a number of schools that are doing their best and that have put in place good values systems. I am aware that the department is looking at those schools and it is trying to establish what should be applied. But I do not get the feeling—I hope that the minister corrects me—that a departmental plan or government directive is in place that states that all schools should adopt these successful models and implement values education.

The best place for the government to start would be to look at the model of the Department of Education and Training, pick up its recommended framework, and say to schools, “Take this framework, have a look at it, let us talk about how you might take on board those values and we will support you in the best way we can.” Values education is important in developing our children’s characters as well as giving them a leg up to assist them in achieving good academic outcomes. That is important in this challenging world. If we are to get our kids ready to go out into the world they need to take on board a good set of values.

**MS DUNDAS (6.13):** I am unable to support the motion moved by Mr Pratt. After having listened to his contribution, I found his motion quite insulting. Mr Pratt, when presenting his argument earlier, quoted a number of statistics to give a snapshot of ACT government schools at the moment. At no time during his speech did he articulate the core values that he thought should be taught in ACT government schools. He did not lay down a vision for what he believes to be the missing values from our schools.

Core values are being taught at ACT government schools, but there might be some disagreement about what values are important. I had a quick look on the Internet and found some mission statements or school values that have been put forward by some schools. One school is able to promote the values of respect and care for others. Students are encouraged to be information literate, independent, resourceful and self-disciplined. Another school aims to provide education that is both meaningful and relevant to a child in a happy, secure and caring environment. Another school states:

Together we will seek opportunities that will empower students to strive for a quality life in a challenging society as informed, caring and responsible people.

Another school is founded on a tradition that encourages achievement in learning in a safe and friendly environment. So ACT government schools already teach respect, tolerance, an appreciation and understanding of Australia’s difficult past and what that means for our future. If those values are not good enough I do not know what is. I was thinking how only two weeks ago Ms MacDonald, Mr Pratt and I walked around a government school as part of our education committee inquiry into teacher numbers. That school impressed me. I am amazed that Mr Pratt did not think that that government school was teaching values.

**Mr Pratt:** I did not say that.

**MS DUNDAS:** You said that the ACT government needs to mandate the teaching and practising of values in our schools, but you have not yet outlined what are those values.

**Mr Pratt:** I did not say that that school did not teach values. I know that it does.

**MS DUNDAS:** I did not suggest that you did not say that, Mr Pratt. I am stating that this school, which is an example of the ACT government education system, is teaching respect and tolerance. It is promoting an understanding of the different cultures in our community. I am disappointed that Mr Pratt moved this motion when it is obvious that ACT government schools are imparting those values to students. If some of our students go through difficult times and they are suspended it does not mean that values are not being taught in our schools.

ACT schools participate in a number of programs and events that broaden students' experiences and understanding, for example, NAIDOC Week, Down Syndrome Awareness Week, Red Nose Day, World Refugee Day, health and other themes week, to name just a few. All those events attach positive values such as openness, being willing to listen and to learn different things, caring for others, looking after oneself and using courage to look after others. The only thing that is wrong in our schools at the moment is that they are not being funded by the federal and ACT governments to support all their students holistically.

If the Liberal opposition wants values it has only to look to its federal colleagues to see how they are doing their best to instil values of elitism and inequality in our students by spending money on non-government schools at a much higher rate than they are spending money on government schools. The values of elitism and inequality have no place in our schools or anywhere else. What will a flagpole teach our students about values? Mr Pratt has not answered that question. Mr Pratt referred also to statistics that show the number of students in the ACT who are moving to the non-government school sector.

One of the reasons why parents are moving students to non-government schools is that they are continually being fed a myth, in particular, by the Liberal opposition, that government schools do not teach values and that they will not protect and support our students and enable them to grow into valuable members of the community. We know that that is not true. Only this week, students and the chair of the Student Network visited the Assembly. I know that Mr Pratt had an opportunity to meet the chair, as did many other members—a young man who has been through the public school system, who has been taught well, who has drive and determination, who has respect for others and who is willing to impart and share that knowledge with others, which is to be valued.

Other students from schools that are supported through the schools as community project had an amazing understanding of the world around them. They were willing to share their knowledge. They wanted to learn and to grow in a respectful way. I thought it was valuable to be hearing those things from young people in our community. We can always do more to improve education and educational outcomes. We can increase the amount of pay that we give to teachers and we can stop demonising our schools and our teachers. We can employ support staff and give schools better resources. We can put in place better programs to support at-risk students and make schools more disability friendly.

Those are the things that we should be doing. We should not criticise our schools because they are no longer adhering to an outdated or obsolete value system—a system that was not clearly articulated by the opposition when moving this motion. The values being taught by government schools at the moment include working with others, caring for others, learning about the community, learning about our history and being able to

participate in the community. Our schools, which are doing those things particularly well in quite difficult circumstances, should be supported for and cheered on in their endeavours rather than being torn down by this insulting motion.

**MS TUCKER (6.21):** The Greens do not support this motion. Having listened to the contribution of Mr Pratt I am aware that we share some concerns, but those concerns are not new. Has Mr Pratt read the various committee reports that have been prepared in this place? In 2001 I prepared a report entitled “Adolescence: Some young adults at risks of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes.” More recently I prepared a report entitled “Looking at healthy school-aged children in the ACT.” I know that Mr Pratt was around for that report and he most probably was around for the earlier one.

In 1997 I prepared reports entitled *Violence in school* and *Closure of School without Walls*. So in the time that I have been a member, and before that time, members of the Legislative Assembly have addressed those issues in some detail. I have a report in my office *Young people with behavioural disturbance*—a report prepared by a committee of the Assembly before I was a member of parliament. I think we can all agree that we are concerned about the wellbeing of children. As Ms Dundas said earlier, Mr Pratt’s focus on core values was interesting because at no time did he articulate what he thought those core values were.

As Ms Dundas said, diversity, acceptance and respect for the world in which we live seem to be some of the basic values. Public schooling is about providing everyone with an education and some clear values are implied in that. I would like to remind Mr Pratt about some of this work. I ask him to read these reports because it does not appear to me as though he has been informed of the significant work that has been done and the research that has been referred to in them. Mr Pratt referred earlier to the fact that “Discipline needs to be obvious” and “We need to go back”. What are we talking about?

Let me inform Mr Pratt of the contemporary understanding of schools that are modelling values—something that he says he wants to achieve. I like that part of Mr Pratt’s motion that states that schools should model, implement and set values and that they should have value-centred environments for students. Referring to the question of discipline, to taking a firm hand and to setting core values, Mr Pratt spoke about kids at risk who were dropping out of school and who were not completing their education. I quote from a statement made by Galilee school, which is as follows:

There is a strong connection between the structure and functioning of the school and early school leaving. Students are leaving school because of alienating practices, structures and rules.

The Department of Education and Training has established how to provide an environment that does not alienate students—an environment in which they might even feel happy. That is what core values should be about. I refer Mr Pratt to some of the comments in my report *Looking at healthy school-aged children in the ACT* in which I made recommendations about the Gateway program.

Basically, that report states that school connectivity has been identified as protecting young people from a range of adverse health and educational outcomes. The Gateway project has identified three priority action areas: first, building a sense of security and

trust; second, enhancing skills and opportunities for communication and social connectivity; and, third, building a sense of positive regard through valued participation in school life. The strategy, which draws on the health-promoting schools framework, seeks to support schools to make changes in social and learning environments, to introduce relevant and important skills through the curriculum and to strengthen structures and processes that promote links between schools and their communities.

Ten guidelines will assist schools in planning, implementing and evaluating a whole school strategy to reduce risk factors and to enhance protective factors—that is, protective versus risk factors—that affect students' health and educational outcomes. We need to establish just how well we are supporting Canberra schools to develop that social environment. Health promoting schools are important and they are a good basis for work. The government has picked that up to a degree but I would like to see it picked up a lot more. I still have major concerns about how we are doing that, in particular, for students at risk and I have made clear those concerns in various presentations to the Assembly.

I give credit to the government for acknowledging, accepting and understanding where the research is leading us. It is not about going back to poor values and making discipline obvious; it is about understanding that many children who come to school have problems in their lives. When we prepared the report entitled "Adolescence: Some young adults at risks of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes" we looked at about 4,000 kids who were at risk of not completing their education. Most of them deserved a medal for even coming to school. So let us not talk about discipline and about going back to core values. Let us talk about the reality of the lives of children in our schools and the teachers who are trying to support them. That is positive and that is about values.

**MS GALLAGHER** (Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support, Minister for Women and Minister for Industrial Relations) (6.28): The government does not support this motion. I looked carefully at the wording of the motion because the government supports values being taught in schools. I looked at the motion from the point of view of supporting it or amending it to reflect what is going on and what work is being done. But the motion has been written to reflect that values education is not being taught in schools and it is not reflected in school culture.

The motion states that there is a piecemeal approach to the teaching of values education and that something has to be done to centralise values education across the ACT education system. It is a negative motion and a difficult one to amend. It is an attack on the education system and an attack on teachers. It is an attack on parents and an attack on students, which is unfortunate. I look to the shadow minister for education occasionally to introduce motions and business in the Assembly that progress work in the ACT education system. Unfortunately, that is not something on which this shadow minister has concentrated; rather he has concentrated on wedge politics—a political debate that the Prime Minister started in January and that the shadow minister decided to pick up and run with.

I repeat what other speakers have said in relation to core values. At no point during Mr Pratt's presentation did he mention how the Liberal opposition defines core values. He mentioned discipline at one stage but that was in relation to core values and discipline. A number of values spring to mind—values to which other speakers referred—for example, tolerance, trust, mutual respect, courage, compassion, honesty,



courtesy and inclusion. My daughter's class runs a program called SCARF, which stands for sharing, co-operation, acceptance, respect and friendship. Those are the values that my daughter is being taught in her classroom. There are scarves hanging all over the room so that children are constantly reminded what it means and how they must conduct themselves in their classroom.

Mr Pratt did not refer to what the Liberal opposition defines as core values. He continually stated that there was a lack of core values in schools. Mr Pratt has issued press statements that state that many ACT government schools are not serious about the teaching of values to students. During the estimates committee process I asked Mr Pratt whether he could name some of the schools that he was concerned about. If some schools were not incorporating values education into the school environment I would also be worried about them. But at no stage has Mr Pratt given me any example of a school that he is concerned about—a school in which he believes those values are not being taught.

As Ms Dundas said earlier, this motion, which is about a supposed, or alleged, lack of values education, is perpetuating a myth that non-government schools are addressing these issues a lot better than do government schools. The shadow minister for education is peddling that myth or perception in the ACT without any evidence to support his claim. Mr Pratt rattled off statistics about how many students had been suspended from government schools but he could not balance those figures with the number of students that had been suspended or expelled from non-government schools, as he did not know what those figures were. He referred to the government system as a whole and said, "Over 1,000 students in one year were suspended, so the system is in disarray."

It is really irresponsible of Mr Pratt to perpetuate the myth that the system is in crisis and that it is not supporting the young people and students attending those schools. Every day 37,000 children attend government schools. There have been no expulsions from those schools, which educate all children. Over the period of one year there have been 1,000 or more suspensions that could have lasted half a day, less than half a day or one day. Students can be suspended for a maximum of five days for a whole range of reasons.

Students are suspended as a last resort. Prior to suspension a whole range of mechanisms is put in place. At the end of the day we sometimes have students in our system that are difficult to manage. Schools do a tremendous job in trying to ensure that they have access to appropriate education. In January, after the Prime Minister's attack on public schools, the Australian Council of State School Organisations weighed into the values debate and said, very nicely:

Public schools are obliged to accept all students who wish to attend, without qualification, including those rejected or excluded by non-government schools.

Discipline issues are sometimes evident but schools employ a sophisticated range of strategies to ensure orderly learning environments prevail.

No public school principal has the level of autocracy and lack of social accountability available to their private school colleagues. For example, an elite private school policy in Melbourne reads:

If, in the opinion of the principal, it is desirable in the interests of the college that a boy should not continue any longer as a pupil, he may notify the parents, or either of them, or guardian to that effect and remove the boy's name from the school role and debar him from further attendance.

The Australian Council of State School Organisations goes on to state:

Surely exclusion and marginalisation of the different or difficult is not a traditional value.

I think that defines values really well. When we are measuring values a number of discussions should be held to determine what they are. Would opposition members espouse as a value the expulsion of difficult students from the system? Should those values be about inclusion, tolerance and acceptance and about supporting and providing proper environments for children and young people? It is extremely disappointing that Mr Pratt moved this motion today, as it is an attack on ACT government schools. When Mr Pratt referred earlier to ACT government schools he did not address the alleged lack of teaching of core values in non-government schools.

I reiterate my earlier challenge: If Mr Pratt knows of a school in which he believes that core values are not being taught, let us have that discussion rather than stating that some schools do not teach core values. Let us have a discussion about schools that do not teach values. I do not believe Mr Pratt will be able to find one such school—the issue about which I have been arguing with him for several months. The only part of Mr Pratt's speech with which I agree is the part at the end when he said, "Values are integral to school culture. They are not part of the curriculum; they permeate school life."

When Mr Pratt said that I thought he got that statement out of my speech because that is exactly what I have been saying. We cannot impose the Liberal Party's idea of core values on an education system and state, "That is where you get your values. Learn them and they will be your values." Frankly, I do not agree with many of the Liberal Party's values and I would not want them imposed in the environment that is referred to in this motion.

Values are shared, they are worked through and school communities discover them. Each school community, through its school board and the involvement of parents, teachers and students, determines the school's ethos. When a school conducts a review, it reviews that ethos and it reviews the values that are important to the school community. That is an ongoing and evolving process. Schools place different priorities on particular issues when determining how to bring communities together. We are not talking about imposing in a key learning area what one person believes to be an important set of core values—core values that still remain undefined.

This motion is unfortunate. I await the opposition's media release that will probably state, "The government does not support values education." We will continue this debate in the media—the arena in which we have been having this debate for the past few months. I ask Mr Pratt to find me a school that does not teach values and that does not support its students in an appropriate environment. If he finds such a school we will talk about it and establish what we can do to improve it. I challenge Mr Pratt to find such a school. I do not believe that he will find one.

**MR PRATT** (6.39), in reply: The Australian Democrats have their heads in the sand if they believe that the teaching and supporting of values is practised widely across ACT government schools against a clear-cut benchmark. The Democrats criticised non-government schools by making the outrageous suggestion that non-government schools were practising elitist values and that if they were teaching values more easily than other schools it was only because they were disproportionately funded—an outrageous and shameful attack on the non-government school sector.

The Democrats' criticism was an attempt to distract members from debating this motion, which seeks to identify the educational system that has been put in place by this government. We are used to those sorts of diversionary tactics from the Democrats and others on the left side of politics when it comes to school debates. Ms Dundas said earlier that recently she and I had walked around a particular school and that I had said in debate today that that school does not teach and support core values, which is rubbish. I will not name that high school because by doing so I would be implicitly excluding other schools.

**Ms Gallagher:** Just come and tell me.

**MR PRATT:** I will. Whenever I make such statements I would be happy to talk to the minister, confidentially and in detail, about the schools to which I am referring. The high school that we visited teaches very good values and it has in place a good system. The principal and teachers at that school, who have come from a good background, have initiated an educational system that is not necessarily reflected in any government benchmark or policy. Ms Dundas referred earlier to the chair of the Student Forum to whom we both spoke a couple of days ago. He is a leading student from a good high school in the south—a school that is successful in teaching and supporting core values. He is a credit to that school.

I have been watching that young man's progress and the progress of the school, so members should not go on with this garbage that I have criticised all these schools willy-nilly. This government does not have in place a clear policy or benchmark to enable all schools to attain adequate teaching and supporting values. A number of schools in the ACT, because of their initiatives and the calibre of their teachers and principals, have been able to ramp up their systems and ensure that they have good value systems in place.

I heard statements earlier to the effect that this is wedge politics and that the opposition is insulting schools, or whatever. The point that I am making today is that no clear-cut or consistent policy is in place, which is what we want to see. We think it is important to ensure that we have a uniform performance standard across the ACT education system in the teaching and supporting of values.

I refer now to the *Values education study* report and to the values recommended in that report. Those are not Liberal Party values, nor are they some throwback core values, as has been suggested by the Greens. I have not talked about ancient core values; I have talked only about values. In making these suggestions today I relied on the advice contained in the federal government's report *Values education study* and on what it had to say about the 10 most important values—a list of values that it determined after studying 69 schools.

Those values include tolerance and understanding, respect and responsibility. Responsibility includes personal discipline, exercising self-discipline, the way that one treats others and the way that one deals constructively and in a non-violent way with confrontational issues. Those values also include social justice, excellence, care, inclusion and trust, honesty, freedom—which includes the important element of a balance between rights and responsibilities—and being ethical. Those are just some of the values that have been referred to today in debate on this motion. We have not come into this place and talked about some old-fashioned supposed Liberal Party core values.

**Ms Dundas:** Why did you not say that in your opening speech?

**MR PRATT** Because I ran out of time, Ms Dundas. However, I now have the ability to reply to issues that were raised in debate. Those values, which were determined by some pretty clever people, could be referred to as discussion starters, or values at which all schools could have a look. I commend this report as being an interesting vehicle for the government to look at.

**Ms Gallagher:** I have the report.

**MR PRATT:** I ask the minister to have a good look at that report, to develop and implement a plan, to create benchmarks and to ensure that all schools comply with those benchmarks. The minister should show some leadership by ensuring that all schools are teaching and supporting values. If a school states that it is teaching core values the minister should have a look at it to establish whether it could teach those values a little better. The minister should show some leadership in this important area and she should lay down standards for all ACT schools.

This government must not wait until there is some form of MCEETYA recommendation, determination or action plan, nor should it wait until federal authorities come forward with the funding that they have promised to provide to all schools so that they can run their own forums. At those forums schools will be asked to develop their own values. I will put a pin in Ms Dundas's balloon by stating again that these are the core values that we want our schools to develop in consultation with their communities. But they have to be values that the government is happy to accept and that fit into its framework or policy.

Devil worship might be out of the question, but other important values could be taught. We need a quality assurance check on the values that are developed and taught by these schools after taking into account parents' beliefs, the input of children and consultation between schools and communities. That is how schools will establish what values should be taught. The minister must require all schools to draw up mission statements so that they know what values education is to be taught, and to ensure that they comply with firm government policy and benchmarks.

Earlier the minister said that she was not aware of any schools that were not teaching values education and she challenged me to establish which schools were not doing so, but that is not my job. It is the job of the minister to establish which schools are not teaching core values. She cannot do that if she does not have in place a policy against which to measure compliance or success. So the minister should get on with it. Let us see

some action. We want her to demonstrate clearly that core values are being taught at our schools.

Motion negatived.

## **Adjournment**

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## **Calvary Hospital**

**MRS DUNNE (6.49):** I pay tribute to Calvary Hospital's 25 years of service to the Belconnen and wider community. On Saturday night I was privileged to be amongst a large gathering at the Convention Centre at Calvary Hospital's Silver Anniversary celebration. Calvary Hospital, which has been part of the Belconnen landscape for 25 years, is becoming increasingly important in the ACT community as the centre of Canberra. Its catchment area is extending to the north with the growing suburbs of Gungahlin feeding into its services.

The hospital does a fantastic job. The Little Company of Mary has created an ethos—I was going to say a set of values, but perhaps I should not do so in the current climate—at Calvary Hospital. It is an institution that is loved by many people in the community. The hospital, which does fantastic work across all its specialities and in its accident and emergency department, provides essential services to the people of Belconnen and Gungahlin. Calvary Hospital now services 48 per cent of all accident and emergency patients, which shows just how important it is.

I have often been struck by the fact that Calvary Hospital is never referred to on the front pages of the newspapers for the wrong reasons. I do not know whether that is as a result of good luck or good management but I suspect that it is a commitment to hard work by medical staff. On Saturday it was a great privilege to spend the evening at the Convention Centre amongst staff, people on the board and people on the auxiliary who are so committed to furthering Calvary's influence in the community and providing services to the community.

Calvary Hospital is keen to extend its services to a wider number of people. On Saturday night we discussed amongst ourselves the fact that paediatric services are not available at Calvary Hospital but, because of the high presentation of children at its accident and emergency department, it has to provide a paediatric registrar. However, there is no area to which to admit those children. Several years ago conventional wisdom established that it was too expensive to have paediatrics on two campuses in the ACT. That was certainly conventional wisdom 10 or more years ago, but that may no longer be the case. For the benefit of the people of Belconnen and Gungahlin it might be time to explore this issue again.

People at Calvary are saddened about the length of time it has taken to progress the establishment of an aged care facility in Bruce. Members on this side of the chamber have spoken often about the three or more years that it has taken to obtain a lease, but no

sod has been turned and the issue is under a cloud because of cost constraints. I referred earlier to a list of places that are looking to establish aged care facilities. It has taken Southern Cross Homes three years to obtain a lease. Christian City Church has been trying to obtain a lease for over 18 months.

St Vincents, Aranda, has been trying to provide supported accommodation on its site for over four years but that has fallen foul of the planning system. Mirinjani has been trying to obtain a lease for more than three years and for five or six years St Andrews Village has been trying to get an allocation of land to extend its facilities. All those institutions and many more are coming up against a brick wall as a result of this government's policies.

Members of the community and I are starting to wonder what is the common element. The common element amongst all these institutions is that churches run them. Are this government and the planning system biased against institutions run by churches? I hope that that is not the case. I hope that quick action by the new Acting Minister for Planning will turn around this sorry state of affairs and allay my fears.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.53 pm**