



DEBATES
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Wednesday, 4 May 2005

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Wednesday, 4 May 2005

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.

Office of Fair Trading

Debate resumed from 6 April 2005, on motion by **Ms MacDonald**:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the Office of Fair Trading continues to enhance its activities to the benefit of the ACT community;
- (b) successful prosecutions have been undertaken of traders in the fitness, real estate, motor vehicle and credit provider industries that have acted against the interests of consumers; and
- (c) a wide ranging licensing and enforcement regime has maintained a high level of professionalism amongst businesses and has resulted in increased protection to ACT consumers; and

(2) recognises the achievements of the Office of Fair Trading and acknowledges the important contribution made by the Office to the well-being of the Canberra community.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (10.32): I rise to express my support for Ms MacDonald's statements about the activities of the Office of Fair Trading. I would like to recognise, in addition, a number of other community and consumer initiatives of the Stanhope government.

The Fair Trading Advisory Committee was re-formed in June 2004. The charter of this committee, featuring representation from business interests, consumer agencies and community groups, is to advise the ACT government on consumer policy. The value of these special interest groups having direct access to the ACT government and a strong influence on consumer policy is inestimable. I am sure that the ACT community will continue to be well served by this committee.

I would also like to recognise a number of specific activities of the Office of Fair Trading. In March 2004, the office undertook a targeted alcohol awareness program at Canberra Stadium. The program enjoyed the double success of prosecutions arising from the purchase, supply and consumption of alcohol by minors and an adult supplying alcohol to a minor and of raising overall public awareness of youth-related alcohol issues.

The office has raised its community profile through an ongoing presence at the Royal Canberra Show. Initially from its own display and latterly as part of the award-winning ACT government display at this year's show, the office has used popular promotional

items to distribute wise consumer messages. It has also taken its services directly to the community and to consumers at shopping centres and has run a series of successful stalls at each of the town centres.

The office has also worked assiduously to strengthen its relationships with the key stakeholders of the office, including the Consumer Law Centre, the Motor Trades Association, the Australian Hotels Associations, ClubsACT, the Real Estate Institute of the ACT and the Australian Federal Police. The very successful and innovative priority 15 and infield education services programs are two activities that the office takes to local businesses to ensure that they are properly informed of the best ways to deal with customer misunderstandings and problems.

The office recognises that there are times when members of the community must receive assistance to resolve problems and complaints. However, the office also realises that many disputes can be avoided by empowering consumers with clear and simple guidelines for sensible and informed purchasing decisions. The office takes its educational services to schools, senior citizen groups, the Canberra Institute of Technology and business forums.

Strategic use is made of the media to report high-profile matters and to achieve public information and education. The Commissioner for Fair Trading has appeared on 666 ABC to address and discuss topical consumer issues. Over the past couple of years, the office has mounted a concerted effort, in cooperation with the police, against drink-spiking. This program has involved both messages to the general community and the provision of point-of-sale material to entertainment venues and liquor retailers.

The office also prepares publications and newsletters that are regularly issued to its regulated industries. These bulletins address detailed issues and general topics that affect specific industries. Subjects featured include legislative changes, contemporary problems, national and international trends, and case studies and prosecutions that are relevant and interesting to local traders.

The Office of Fair Trading will build on its successes and strengths to continue to promote consumer and business confidence by providing effective consumer affairs information and education. Strong and clear messages designed to prevent consumer problems from occurring will be relayed to the community.

Dispute resolution services will be further developed to achieve rapid and inexpensive closure, with the minimum possible inconvenience for both consumers and traders. Regulatory regimes will be further refined and enhancements such as electronic lodgement of data and online data verification are being scoped and evaluated. These improvements will be of great benefit to individuals and organisations that fall under the office's regulatory umbrella.

The office will continue to promote personal and community safety by educating the community about safe products and the proper use and supervision of many common household items. The rigorous enforcement of product safety with retailers will also minimise the sale of unsuitable and dangerous items.

I congratulate the Stanhope government for major recent initiatives such as the revitalisation of the Fair Trading Advisory Committee and the establishment of the enforcement and litigation unit within the Office of Fair Trading. The unit has obviously been instrumental in giving teeth to the office's enforcement activities as well as improving the quality of advice given by the advice and complaints unit. Clearly, the local community is well served by the 35 staff at the ACT Office of Fair Trading who implement government policies that are both protective of consumers and conducive to good business.

MS MacDONALD (Brindabella) (10.37), in reply: I thank members for their contribution to the debate. Mr Stefaniak, who spoke to this motion when it first came up in the last sitting week, talked about a couple of issues which he believed that the Office of Fair Trading needed to address. One of them, I think, shows the difference in attitude between people in the way the place operates.

He made mention of there being an excessive amount of bureaucratic red tape—I think that was what he was alluding to—for somebody trying to show something at the Royal Canberra Show. I am sure that the Office of Fair Trading would be happy to look into that. As the matter happened a couple of years ago and the Chief Minister's office did look at it at the time, I am quite sure that that problem has been addressed.

The other one that I took note of in what Mr Stefaniak said was the issue about a nightclub in the city being near a hotel or serviced apartments and there being an excessive amount of noise. Mr Stefaniak has suggested that the way to solve the problem with that, and the Office of Fair Trading should have something to do with it, is to close down this nightclub at 11 o'clock at night, because that is when guests go to sleep.

I suggest, Mr Speaker, that if Mr Stefaniak travels to any other city in this country and stays in a hotel or serviced apartment in the city he will discover that there are nightclubs within the vicinity of the hotel or serviced apartment which also make noise, and they do not shut at 11 o'clock at night. Whilst I appreciate that guests in a hotel wish to go to sleep and do not wish to be disturbed by an undue amount of noise, I am sure that it is an issue that can be resolved without trying to take the fun out of the city. I think that Mr Stefaniak's suggestion of closing the nightclub at 11 o'clock at night because that is when the guests wish to go to sleep would not be greatly welcomed by a number of the people who patronise that nightclub.

Apart from that, Mr Speaker, I thank members for their contribution to the debate and I commend the motion.

Motion agreed to.

City Hill and the city centre

MR SESELJA (Molonglo) (10.40): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the importance of the revitalisation of the City Hill and the Canberra City Centre;
- (2) recognises the contribution of the National Capital Authority through the “Griffin Legacy”;
- (3) notes the importance of giving the Canberra community adequate opportunity to contribute to debate on the issue; and calls on the Minister for Planning to consider all options with a view to the best outcomes being delivered for the City Hill/Canberra City area.

This motion addresses the debate that has emerged over the last month—one that has, in fact, been going on for a long time—in relation to a vision for our city, the completion of its heart and the way forward for an area which is widely accepted as badly in need of renovation and revitalisation.

The *Canberra Times*, during its recent focus on the city heart, ably demonstrated many of the problems that exist with the city in its present state. The points made by the *Canberra Times* include the general condition and appearance of shops along Northbourne Avenue; the overall condition of city centre footpaths, which are in a state of disrepair, are mismatched and haphazard, and are presenting a poor image to interstate and overseas visitors; and planning delays and red tape which have removed the incentives for business to invest in the ACT. In a recent press release, Keep Australia Beautiful drew attention to the state of the city, saying, “Canberra is a city scarred by graffiti, left untidy by litter.” There is an obvious need for us to focus our attention on Canberra.

Mr Speaker, citing the litany of problems could continue for the majority of this speech. I am sure that many members of this place could cite an endless number of matters that require attention. I think it is more pertinent, however, to address the importance of the city centre being revitalised—not just City Hill, but in regard to overall traffic flow, vehicle parking, pedestrian access and amenity provision. We need to think in terms of facilitating ongoing and growing success of business and making the city centre once again a desirable centre of activity for both locals and visitors. But we need to achieve these objectives through a process of community consultation and full consideration of all the options.

Needless to say, we also have to achieve these objectives by giving full consideration to the original objectives of the Griffin plan, whilst not blindly adhering to the vision of a city created almost 100 years ago and originally designed for just 70,000 residents. If we are serious about improving tourism, about bringing conferences and other functions to our community, about creating a city heart of which we can all be proud, the revitalisation of the city centre is of crucial importance.

There has been widespread acceptance from a number of stakeholders, the government, the business community, and the opposition in recent times that now is the time for this revitalisation to happen. In fact, we have had a number of business leaders and heads of industry groups make comment. I will read just a couple. Chris Peters said, “I am enthusiastic about the living city plan. It is a visionary plan.” John Miller, from the Canberra Business Council, said, “The time for talk is over, the time for action is now. If

money is to flow from such a monster project, the government must take it on board, and so too the NCA and business leaders.”

The city centre is sadly lacking in presenting an image of the city as the heart of the nation’s capital. Certainly, the commonwealth sees the city centre as an important aspect of national pride, maintaining its overall planning approval responsibility for the city centre. Let us be sure that we recognise the importance of this role by giving due and complete consideration to the options for planning the future of the city centre. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of thorough planning, including complete and effective community consultation.

Whilst I appreciate the very important role of the NCA in Canberra, I would like to see the NCA having less influence over our planning system. Canberra should be able largely to stand on its own feet and the NCA should be limited to the parliamentary triangle and limited aspects of the city outside the triangle. However, the point does need to be. When Mr Corbell suggested that recently in relation to Civic, the NCA said that they would consider it if the ACT had an open, effective and efficient planning system, something which they do not believe exists currently. So it is over to the minister.

I wish to say a few words on the Griffin legacy. The debate over City Hill was brought to light once again by the Griffin legacy proposals that the NCA released in December 2004. Those proposals deal with development of the city in the mould that Burley Griffin had envisaged and are reflected in the comments made by the NCA in relation to the Griffin plan. I quote from that:

Yet Canberra still has not realised its full potential. The landscapes and monuments are not matched by a cosmopolitan lifestyle expected of such an important national and international centre.

Parts of the city give a glimpse of the grand civic design envisaged by Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin—of parks and boulevards, public buildings and monuments—but other areas are an anticlimax.

Urban development pressures and traffic threaten to diminish the capital’s special qualities, to encroach on its leafy garden suburbs and erode its celebrated landscape setting. It is time to address the future.

A far-sighted strategy is needed to ensure that the nation’s capital in the 21st century realises its potential and can accommodate the best of contemporary urban development.

The work conducted by the NCA on the Griffin legacy is to be commended. It certainly provided a great kick-start to the debate and it is an important contribution. It has been welcomed widely as an important vision for the city, recognising the important work of Walter Burley Griffin in his plans for a perfect city. Burley Griffin has been acknowledged worldwide as a visionary and influential architect. He trained under Frank Lloyd Wright, universally accepted as one of the great names in architecture. It is useful therefore to look at his original vision for the city of Canberra.

I commend the living city proponents for their efforts in providing a measured and thought through option for the community to consider, even though it is not perfect.

There are aspects of it with which I agree, there are parts that I am not sure about, and there are aspects that I believe need to be modified or improved. However, I believe that it is an excellent contribution to a debate that needs to be had. I think that it provides a good framework to further the debate. I think that in a number of important respects it is superior to the plan which has been put forward by Mr Corbell, not least of which is the fact that Mr Corbell's plan would bring more traffic into the city centre and turn City Hill into a huge roundabout.

It is absolutely crucial that, before a decision is made on city centre planning, a wide-ranging debate take place in the community, quickly and effectively, so that progress can be achieved. The living city plan is an example of effective community input. It has precipitated discussion amongst ordinary Canberrans, who are now talking about how they would like their city centre to look in the future.

I therefore find it odd and quite disappointing that the planning minister has failed to promote or even to accept the living city plan as an alternative for discussion. He does appear to be threatened by having an alternative plan being presented to the community. On radio last Friday, Mr Corbell said that it was inappropriate for people with a lot of money, influence and contacts—meaning, I guess, Terry Snow—to seek to unduly influence the planning process. My question to Mr Corbell is this: what is inappropriate about Mr Snow's behaviour? How is he seeking to unduly influence this process?

He is a man who has spent his own money to flesh out ideas he has for the future of Canberra and he has presented the ideas to the government and then to the community through the *Canberra Times*. He was, in fact, responding to a call from the Chief Minister for local businessmen and entrepreneurs to contribute to the future of our city. How does Mr Corbell respond? He says that he does not want to see the process unduly influenced. He even said that he does not want to see the process railroaded.

Was he suggesting that, by making public his view, Mr Snow was unduly influencing the process, or that he was railroaded the process? In the context of the conversation on ABC radio last Friday, no other reasonable conclusion can be drawn. Another interesting thing that Mr Corbell said last Friday in relation to the issue was that it was important that the process be a public one. What could be more public than a four-page spread in the *Canberra Times*? Mr Snow was not exactly seeking to hide his plan.

These defensive, ridiculous responses that we have seen from the planning minister demonstrate his real position on this issue. In the minister's mind, it is not about what is best for Canberra. It is about his control over what happens in Canberra. If the ideas did not originate with Mr Corbell or from within the Labor government, they could not possibly have any merit; they could not possibly be good if they originated with a local developer.

That leads me to one of Mr Corbell's biases as a minister—his bias against local developers. We saw that demonstrated when Mr Corbell improperly commented during the tender process for the new suburb of Forde. Mr Corbell said that he would prefer to see the contract awarded to an interstate developer, like those from Sydney or Melbourne, so as to avoid “higgledy-piggledy” developments. Mr Corbell's position appears to be that, preferably, any plans for the future of our city should come from him or his department, if it is left with adequate staff after yesterday's budget. If they have to

come from outside his department and a local could not possibly be capable of coming up with a good idea, we need to look outside Canberra.

This kind of attitude is not good for Canberra. We need to have a reasonable, rational debate about our city heart. Entrenched, defensive, obstinate positions as expressed by the planning minister will not contribute to that debate. Remember that it is becoming a pattern for this government: to shut down debate as much as possible. We have seen that in the Assembly on numerous occasions in the past few months. We have seen the government try to shut down inquests. We have seen the government finishing early when it runs out of business on the notice paper. We have seen debates shut down when the government has not liked the subject matter and we have seen the estimates committee stacked to avoid scrutiny.

Mr Corbell's approach to the issue of City Hill can be contrasted with the experience of Ian Graham, the planning manager for the city of Wagga, whose experience was reported in the *Canberra Times* last week. He said, "It's important to consider everyone, to keep them on side." Mr Corbell, far from considering everyone and keeping them on side, seems to be simply defending his own model, at the expense of valuable suggestions from others. When Terry Snow dared to enter the debate, Mr Corbell attacked him for doing so.

When Mr Corbell put forward his proposal, he said nothing about its being intended to stimulate debate or being a starting point that would attract other ideas. He said, to quote from this press release:

... the concept planning had opened the way for more detailed planning, engineering and traffic investigations regarding the impacts on traffic and parking. This will lead to the preparation of appropriate planning instruments to allow development to proceed.

It appears that Mr Corbell never intended for other plans to be considered. His press release made no allowance for that. He speaks purely of doing a couple of studies and preparing the instruments, spending the money and off we go. That is not quite the public process that the government has been speaking of in recent days. There has been a bit of ambiguity over exactly what is the government's position. I also read yesterday on page 222 of budget paper 3, reference to a feasibility study of "City Hill, Constitution and Edinburgh Avenues and Lake Burley Griffin Connections" at a cost of \$500,000; so the money is now being spent to put Mr Corbell's plan into account.

That brings me to this point: what is the government's position on City Hill? Yesterday, in response to a question, Mr Corbell refused to say whether he had cabinet approval. He just said, "I spoke to the Chief Minister, so it is all fine."

Mr Corbell: What is the Liberal Party's position on City Hill? That would be a more relevant question. Do they have a position?

MR SESELJA: I am asking the question. On the one hand, we have Simon Corbell with his defensive, shoot the messenger approach. If someone puts up a good idea that is contrary to his, he is going to attack them. He attacks them for being rich. He goes after the man. On the other hand, we have the Chief Minister, who has at least said in relation to this matter that he is open to some of the ideas being put forward. Mr Corbell

confirmed yesterday that cabinet had not approved his City Hill plan. Yet, as I have stated before, his press release and the budget documents seem to suggest that the decision has been made.

On the one hand, we have lip service about listening to stakeholders and welcoming input and, on the other, we have a minister acting like the concept has been decided and all that is left is the detail. In the midst of all this, we are told there has been no cabinet decision. So, with all this confusion, I feel compelled to ask the planning minister again: what is the status of your plan? Is it the government's position that your plan for City Hill will go ahead? If so, why is the government pretending to listen to alternative ideas when a decision has been made? If not, why do the budget papers and Mr Corbell's press releases suggest that it is the government's plan? These are questions that must be answered, and they must be answered now. When tourists and relatives from interstate talk about Canberra, they often refer to roundabouts. The Corbell legacy still leaves a very large roundabout, still leaves City Hill isolated and potentially raises more questions than it answers.

I would like to quote a little something I found on a local website. It says, "It would appear that Snow is raining on Corbell's parade. But then again, Snow could probably get it done whilst Corbell would just have endless meetings, plans and consultancies, and more plans, et cetera." For a government which is known for, and seems to take pride in, the number of plans and consultations it puts out, it would be helpful if occasionally it actually listened to what the community was saying on the issue it is consulting about. It is one thing to put out a plan and seek consultation and it is another to listen and respond to the community. It should not be about who proposes what, who created what or who makes the suggestion. It should be about a plan of which all of Canberra can be proud.

I call on the planning minister not to be blinkered, to listen to what others say. He has been entrusted with managing this city and the planning of this city for the short term. This plan could be the basis of our city for the next 100 or 200 years. We already have the legacy of Walter Burley Griffin. I do not know that Canberra can afford the legacy of Simon Corbell. Mr Speaker, I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Minister for Health and Minister for Planning) (10.54): Mr Speaker, the government welcomes this debate regarding City Hill and the revitalisation of the city centre and is pleased to see that the opposition is once again following the lead of the government on this very important matter. It does, however, strike me as a bit rich that, after many years of neglect by the Liberal Party when it was in office, Mr Seselja comes along with a motion now as if to say he is taking the lead on the issue. Indeed, for someone who claims that I play the man and not the ball, Mr Seselja perhaps needs to reflect on whether he practises what he preaches.

The government has made a commitment to resurrect the fortunes of the central city area. Indeed, we identified this in our first term, long before anyone else was talking about the need to revitalise the city centre, when we set aside in the 2003-04 budget over \$1 million to fund the investigation and administration of actions that are needed to be taken to attract new investment in the city and make it the cultural centre of Canberra. Indeed, the government, and I, as Minister for Planning, are on the record as saying that the city must become the first amongst equals, the paramount cultural, retail and commercial centre of the city of Canberra.

In the initial 12 months of work, the government, through the Canberra central project team and its task force, have commenced or are undertaking the following:

- policies in relation to transport modelling;
- a car parking strategy for the city—never been done before;
- a planning document for the city so that, for the first time, we do not have the duplication of planning control that exists between the National Capital Authority and the ACT Planning and Land Authority;
- the integration of public artworks;
- improving the safety of the city;
- work to undertake the marketing and promotion of the city.;

We saw this last Christmas; we had Christmas events and activities being held for the first time in the city centre; and Canberrans responded positively to that. I continue:

- fireworks in the city;
- concerts and activities in the city;
- dance parties in the city;
- cooking demonstrations in the city;
- fashion parades in the city.

All these have been sponsored by and driven by the ACT government through the Canberra central program. That, Mr Speaker, was indeed the Canberra central events program. I know they do not like that but it is worth putting the government's record on the table.

Mrs Dunne: Well, it is just not true.

MR CORBELL: Are you saying those events did not happen, Mrs Dunne? Where were you?

The government has also undertaken exercises to identify locations for new major public buildings in the Canberra central area. We are developing a design manual for Canberra central, an urban design charter. We are developing a street furniture palette for the Canberra central area. As my colleague Mr Quinlan has outlined, we have also put on the table and are now progressing the idea of a special levy to promote and market the city centre. Interestingly, the Liberal Party is split also on that issue. Mr Mulcahy thinks it is a bad idea, Mr Smyth thinks it is a good idea. I wonder what Mr Seselja thinks? There is a diversity of views over on that side of the table.

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

MR CORBELL: There is no point of order; he is just going—

Mr Smyth: The minister cannot mislead the Assembly. I have never—

MR SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. Resume your seat.

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, the government has also—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Withdraw the assertion that the Assembly has been misled.

Mr Smyth: I withdraw the words, Mr Speaker.

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, it is not just the exercises and the investigations that are being undertaken; there are also the projects to make it happen. For example, the government has signed a major commitment with the Australian National University for the implementation of the City West master plan.

Mr Seselja: Did you support that, Simon?

MR CORBELL: A project that I am very proud to support and one that I believe, through the very detailed work the government has undertaken, will mean that, unlike other partnerships that have been put in place by previous territory administrations, will actually work. It will actually work, and it will work because we have got in place the framework, the decision-making context and the obligations of the various parties spelt out very clearly so that it will work and cannot be renegeed upon by either party.

There is also the issue of signage for Canberra central. Members will have seen in the budget yesterday the implementation of the project for the complete revamp of the signage in Canberra central—clear and consistent signage in terms of the style and designation.

We are improving the quality of the public realm, and you can see that with the work that is currently happening along Alinga Street, which my colleague Mr Hargreaves is leading, in terms of revitalisation of that pedestrian area. There are dedicated maintenance programs, the preparation of a capital works program, tourist signage. Of course, there was \$6 million in the budget yesterday for the Childers Street precinct master plan and, as I have already indicated, Alinga street urban improvements.

Linked to these activities the government has also assisted in the further development of section 84 in city east as one of the key retail destinations within Canberra. As I have already indicated, we have entered into an arrangement with the ANU to better integrate the university into the City West precinct; facilitated, through a direct grant process, the establishment of the NICTA proposal; and overseen a number of other key development projects, such as section 88 and section 6 in the city.

I would like to make this point: look at the city now and look at the city four or five years ago when we came to office; look at the amount of redevelopment activity now happening in the city; look at the new office buildings going up; look at the new residential developments going up; look at the new public realm being improved; count the number of cranes on the skyline. These things are happening, and they are happening under a Labor government. They are happening because the government has released the land; they are happening because the government has put in place the planning framework; and they are happening because the government has worked with the private sector to assist development such as NICTA and to assist work such as City West. These things are under way, and the government has been central in assisting and helping it to occur.

Through its 2005-06 capital works program, the government has allocated \$6 million to commence the streetscape improvements for Childers Street, which is one of the key destination points for cultural and artistic activity—indeed, the very cosmopolitan activity that Mr Seselja refers to in his speech. This money will also assist in commissioning a unique furniture range for Canberra central that will ultimately be rolled out across the city.

As I have already indicated, \$700,000 has been included to replace all the street name signs in the city, again to help create a unique image but also to improve clarity of location for those visiting and wanting to navigate their way around the central area. Go to Melbourne, go to the central parts of Sydney, go to Brisbane and you will see that these initiatives have been replicated in those cities. Those cities have put in place comprehensive signage, comprehensive public realm improvement, and they make a difference to the look and feel of the city centre.

The initial engineering feasibility and design for extending Edinburgh and Constitution avenues to Vernon Circle and removing the cloverleaves of Commonwealth Avenue onto London Circuit will also be made possible by a \$500,000 allocation in the capital works budget. Again, Mr Speaker, through you, I want to take Mr Seselja to task because he claims in his speech that this project is, in some way, pre-empting the outcome of the government's consideration of what happens on City Hill. Well, I do not know whether Mr Seselja has actually noticed, but, regardless of which proposal we look at around the future development of City Hill, it involves the removal of the cloverleaves—the cloverleaf, on/off ramps off Commonwealth Avenue onto London Circuit and vice versa. It involves the extension of Constitution Avenue and Edinburgh Avenue in either a minor or major way through to Vernon Circle.

These are pieces of work that are commonly accepted as needing to be done so that we know how we can free up that land, which is currently made alien by traffic, into developable land that can be used to revitalise the city centre. Mr Seselja clearly does not understand some of the basic infrastructure issues that must be addressed in this very important issue.

In addition, the city, like all other centres in Canberra, will be the beneficiary of the \$6.7 million allocated for the installation of a real-time information system for the city's bus network, which will also tie in with the Belconnen to city busway designs that are being prepared and will have a further \$3 million provided in the next financial year. I would have thought that the Liberal Party would have been aware that those cities that are competitive, those cities that are modern and that attract young people into them, are also cities that deliver quality public transport services, particularly in the city centre.

This government, unlike the previous government, has made the investment in public transport. Real-time information will assist in completely changing the way Canberrans view public transport provision, because they will know when the buses are arriving, they will know how long they have to wait, and it will bring that reliability of service and that perception of reliability that people currently have difficulty with when it comes to choosing public transport over the private motor vehicle.

Real-time information will be in the city centre. You will be able to go to a bus stop in the city centre and you will know how long the bus is going to be, how long you have to wait, how long it is going to take to get there—all that information in a real-time digital display. That is something that other cities have which helps makes them competitive and attractive, it helps with transport in the city and it helps with the overall picture of the city.

The concept plan for City Hill released by the ACT Planning and Land Authority is yet another initiative of the Canberra central program, focusing on that part of the city that remains one of the unfinished elements of the Griffin plan and one that needs to be addressed in the wider context of an urban design framework for the central city area. The release of the Canberra plan, the spatial plan and the establishment of the Canberra central program by the government created the opportunity to establish a framework for the enhancement of the City Hill precinct as part of the government's commitment to the revitalisation of the city centre.

The conceptual framework put forward by the ACT Planning and Land Authority recognises the value of the Australian government's Griffin legacy project. Griffin's vision for Canberra was that it "would be an ideal city, a city that expressed, in its form and in the vigour of its community, the values of a strong, democratic nation". That has been reflected in the Griffin legacy work released by the National Capital Authority, a joint exercise between us and the commonwealth.

As part of his planning ideal, Griffin envisaged City Hill as the apex of the national triangle that would represent the national capital's territorial or municipal functions. The national triangle is the symbolic construct that links the city to its landscape and gives spatial definition to the values underpinning Griffin's plan. For the government, City Hill provides a symbolic focus for the ACT community. As all members in this place acknowledge, to date it has not been realised. City Hill is isolated by car parks; supremacy has been given to the private motor vehicle.

The concept for City Hill is part of the debate towards contributing to the revitalisation of the city. It is an important project for the ACT government. We are looking forward to the creation of a place that is an important symbol of the city's maturity, and we welcome input and comments from the whole community.

The concept plan for the future development of City Hill released by me in March was designed to initiate debate and provide a platform for the community to discuss the future of the City Hill precinct as we approach the centenary of the naming of Canberra in 2013. From the outset, the government and I, as minister, have acknowledged that the nature of this task is such that it can only be achieved through a partnership between the public and private sectors, but in doing so none of us can afford to lose sight of the significant community asset and planning legacy for which we are the custodians and which will be held accountable for.

An exercise such as this is not realised in a short time and is not confined solely to the planning and design concepts, in all their manifestations, which we collectively arrive at. It is also critical to understand the capacity of the market to absorb the scale of any development contemplated and its potential effects on other centres of activity within the

city centre and Canberra as a whole. The feasibility of the potential funding models and the appropriateness of any chosen delivery vehicle are also important considerations.

The government will not take any of these matters lightly, and we will determine the appropriate outcome within an environment that appropriately recognises the responsibilities of the commonwealth, represented by the NCA, and the aspirations and the ideas of Canberrans. The Canberra central task force will be given responsibility for examining all of these matters, having regard to commentary received from the community, and the government will decide on a way forward in the coming weeks.

The concept plan for the future development of the City Hill precinct is a vital and important contribution, and so is that put forward by Mr Snow in his private sector proposal. But, ultimately, the views of everyone in our community must be properly considered and must be considered in the context that I referred to earlier.

The government welcomes this debate. I have circulated some amendments that give proper regard to the other work that has occurred in the city centre. I now seek leave to move together the amendments to Mr Seselja's motion circulated in my name.

Leave granted.

MR CORBELL: I move:

- (1) paragraph (1), omit "Canberra".
- (2) insert new paragraphs:
 - “(2A) recognises the contribution of the ACT Planning and Land Authority through its City Hill ‘Concept for the future’ proposal;
 - (2B) recognises the contribution of the private sector proposal ‘Living City’ put forward by Mr Terry Snow;”;
- (3) paragraph (4), omit the paragraph; and
- (4) add the following new paragraphs:
 - “(6) affirms the importance of the Government's Canberra Central Program as a key element to help drive the revitalisation of the City Centre; and
 - (7) affirms the importance of considering all options for the future development of City Hill and its environs to ensure the successful and sustainable revitalisation of the City Centre, including City Hill.”.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (11.10): It is a sort of entertainment, but probably a poor one, to sit here today and watch Mr Corbell squirm and spit out words like “Mr Snow's private sector proposal” in the way that he has. His performance, as it was reported to me, in the media on Friday—his complete lack of grace: “I am the planning commissar; I am the person entrusted with having ideas; no-one else may have ideas”—is what it has boiled down to.

We have Mr Corbell's concept and if you would believe the Corbell rhetoric you would think this was the first time in Christendom that anyone had ever thought about how we deal with the alienation of City Hill caused by Vernon Circle. I would like to quote some of the very fine words that come in the foreword of this document:

Only rarely do opportunities arise to consolidate a capital city's central area and to address elements that remain unfinished 100 years after they were first conceived. The combination of the release of the ACT Government's Canberra Plan, with the subsequent establishment of the Canberra Central Program, and the Australian Government's Griffin Legacy has created this unique opportunity.

But that is not all. And this is the important part. Mr Corbell used some of these words himself:

Griffin's vision for Canberra was that it would be an ideal city—

I think he used the term "a city like no other"—

a city that expressed in its form and in the vigour of its community, the values of a strong, democratic nation.

It goes on:

The National Triangle symbolises the links the city has to its landscape and gives spatial definition—

I love that term—

to the values underpinning Griffin's Plan. Griffin conceived City Hill as the apex of the Triangle that would represent the territorial, or municipal, functions of the national capital.

And he goes on to talk about the symbolic importance of City Hill. This is really about City Hill.

But what do we have in this concept plan? What we have in this concept plan and what we have all thought about in relation to City Hill, over the nine or 10 years that I have been involved in various ways in this Assembly, is: how do you ameliorate the impact of Vernon Circle? How do you actually make it less awful than it is?

What we saw with the living city project was a group of people who dared to think outside the square and to say, "Let's pretend that Vernon Circle isn't there and if it weren't there how would we design our city?" You come up with a very different image. It has been a signal failing of a whole range of planning organisations and governments of both persuasions that no-one had the vision to say, "Just for a moment let us pretend that Vernon Circle is not there; let us look at what would happen to this city if Vernon Circle were not there. And is it possible to execute this?"

What you actually see from the living city proposal we saw launched last week—and if we all care about the city we would have been to a briefing or an exposition at the

university or at least watched the DVD—is that it is possible to conceive of Canberra city without Vernon Circle; and if you can conceive of Canberra city without Vernon Circle you have a better city. And that is the difference. It is an idea that no-one else has been prepared to have the courage to have. We have all wrung our hands—I count myself amongst those people who have wrung our hands, collectively—and said, “Gee, we can’t do anything about Vernon Circle.” Somebody had the courage, the audacity, to think outside the circle, to imagine Canberra, imagine Civic, without it and come up with a proposal.

While Mr Corbell has said that all ideas are on the table, there should be consultation and it should be open and public—and I hope that he stops spitting out words like “private sector proposal” because some private citizen rather than the planning commissar has had this idea and it is inherently wrong. While he is having all those ideas and is swanning around the world looking at garden cities, he might look at the ways that they found in Portland, Oregon, or in Florida, when we go to Disney World or whatever we are doing in Florida. We are going to visit the garden towns of the UK. I hope that we would actually look at what steps they have taken to ensure that the public parklands—the pinnacle of our city, the symbolic heart of our city—of Portland, Oregon, of Florida and of Disney World, those public hearts, are not alienated by expressways and roundabouts.

I hope that the minister can come back from his jaunt around the world with some ideas about how not to alienate important public spaces. And instead of, using Mr Seselja’s words, “having entrenched an obstinate opposition to any idea which is not his own” we shall have a real, open discussion.

What Mr Seselja’s motion, a very welcome motion, does today is recognise the history of the work that has been done in the Canberra city. It goes back to the Griffin legacy. As we have said, Griffin designed the city at the turn of the last century. Much of what he designed in many ways will need to change, but the essential elements are there. What the living city program proposal does is to go back to those essential elements and say, “How can we make this happen?” It is daring and it is more daring than any of us dared to be.

When the National Capital Authority and the Australian government put out its Griffin legacy it actually could not look beyond the fact that Vernon Circle existed. The Griffin legacy documentation says that we are stuck with Vernon Circle. The previous Liberal government, when it looked at its city heart plans, basically said that we were stuck with Vernon Circle. This minister says that we are stuck with Vernon Circle. What this is about is someone daring to have an idea that thinks outside the circle, and this minister does not like it.

What we have in answer to that is a range of strategies. We have got a parking strategy. That means we are going to remove all parking and take repressive steps against all drivers of cars. We have got a tax system. Of course, we have now got an extra levy to tart up the city because it is so run down that suddenly we are making people in the private domain pay for things that are normally paid for by the public domain.

We talked about Mr Hargreaves’s dedicated maintenance programs. I am not quite sure how much blue paint will be involved in that dedicated maintenance program. I love it.

We are going to have uniform colours for our street furniture. Again, we have got the planning commissar coming down saying, “We can’t have any innovation. I will tell you what colour and what design the street furniture will be. And we will roll it out.”

Again, in a government that is running into a \$91 million deficit or a \$143 million financial turnaround year on year, we are going to spend \$700,000 on new signs for Civic. Yes, signs are important. Making a city legible, as the planners would like to say, is important. Making the city accessible is important, but \$700,000 on signs? I know that the officials like to call it signage but, Mr Speaker, you and I know it as street signs. They are things that say Alinga Street, Allara Street, City Walk—all of those things; they are signs. You can’t tart it up. It is \$700,000 that really could be better spent.

What we have is concept after plan, after report, after project, after proposal. And all of us have failed in this; we have all done it in a segmented way. What we saw last week with the living city proposal was an integrated, holistic look at Civic. This minister was terrified by what he saw, but he was principally terrified because it showed him up as a planning commissar with no real ideas of his own.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (11.19): Mr Speaker, I am going to speak to the general gist of both the motion and the amendments. I think one of the wonderful things about living in Canberra is how passionate people are about planning. Of course, one of the most infuriating things about being in government is that we do have a community that insists on its right to object and to have a say. That is not that easy for governments.

This is an issue that I have been following for a couple of decades. I wrote my masters thesis about the politics of planning in Canberra. Because I submitted it in 1992, I did not really get to have much of a good look at self-government; I was really looking at the politics of planning under what used to be the NCDC, now the NCA. As you can understand, I might be a bit sceptical about any motions that elevate that particular body in terms of its interests for Canberra.

My concern about this motion is that I really think it is unnecessary. That is the bottom line. Because it is unnecessary I think the amendments are also unnecessary. The motion does not go to resolving any of our significant or specific planning issues, including those around City Hill and the Canberra city centre.

I agree with the opposition—as I think Mr Corbell would also agree—that the Griffin legacy is a very interesting and useful document. I think that anything that goes back to the original Griffin plan and reminds us of the spirit that was behind that plan is valuable for us. However, I am very aware that Griffin gets resurrected over and over again for political purposes that he would probably have nothing to do with now.

We also need to remember that Griffin’s wife, Marion, may have been the main instigator in this instance. She certainly drew the plans and, from my reading, it is she that got him off his butt to get the plans in so that they actually could be considered for the competition. So let us not forget Marion.

Just before I go on: I do care about Civic. I have chosen to live near it so that I can ride my bike to it. I believe that it is very good to have the ability to live near whichever centre one chooses. I do support the ongoing maintenance and efforts to enliven the

place. In fact, the Greens have a number of proposals for doing just that. We will be revealing those in the course of this Assembly, but I think you will find that none of them is anywhere near as costly as the plans that Mr Snow and others put.

There are a number of priorities that should be higher on this government's agenda than the revitalisation of City Hill and the Canberra city centre. For example, I am proposing a motion today—and you are aware from earlier efforts that I made in the Assembly—that says we need more affordable housing in the ACT. None of the proposals so far for Civic has made any mention at all of what they will do for affordable housing.

Also, Mr Speaker, we need community space. What we have seen over the last decade or so, and since self-government, under both flavours of government, is an erosion of community facilities and a lessening of community space. We have some ideas on how we might grapple with that problem as well.

The debate about City Hill is very good. It needs to be had, but we also need to be aware that our newspaper, which has been the prime driver of it over the past couple of weeks, has been very grateful for the opportunity to fill up pages with pretty pictures. I endorse that happening, but I think we should be aware that perhaps that was more the point of it than anything else. Also we do need to be aware that the paper thrives, like other media thrive, on adversarial issues. And it is interesting to see that the Liberals are prepared to fulfil that particular part of the paper's agenda.

But we need to talk about the whole city. What has happened is that we have got this incredible focus on Civic. The city was designed—and I know the Canberra plan subtly made a difference to this—to have a number of town centres, neighbourhood centres and intermediate centres. This was basic to our plan: the idea that everyone should be able to walk to their shop and kids should be able to walk to school. I think we would all agree that that is good planning policy, even though it is becoming a little bit expensive.

What has happened to Belconnen? There is a place that needs attention. I am not a member for Belconnen. I hope that the members for Belconnen in this place will stand up for it. Let us not see all our dollars go into Belconnen and neglect Tuggeranong and Woden. Woden is in my electorate. I know that the community council there has a number of major concerns about it. So let us look at Civic in its context as part of a city.

The real substance of Mr Seselja's motion was part 4, which "calls on the Minister for Planning to consider all options with a view to the best outcomes being delivered for the City Hill/Canberra city area". I would be disappointed if the minister did not consider all options and I would be prepared to consider a further motion if he did not. I also hope that he goes out and seeks more options and talks to people other than the Snows and planners and architects who of course all want to realise their vision on our space. That is what they do.

As I said before, there is nothing yet revealed to show that either of the main proposals would consider the need for affordable housing, if housing is to be part of any development. We are told that it will. In Ireland, for instance, developers, before they even get planning approval, must show how 20 per cent of their developments will be affordable housing. I would like to see that one put into the revitalisation of Civic.

How are we going to ensure that there is broad community access to any of the revitalised areas? Really, there are a number of questions that we should be asking before we decide to put ourselves behind Snow or put ourselves behind Corbell, if that is the way the debate is going to be framed, although I do not want it to be framed in that way.

The motion is unnecessary in the context of the debate that is occurring on planning issues. It is useful in muddying the waters with a bit of stirring, but that is not the way to advance the development of good policy. I also believe it is not good use of the Assembly's time, because the future of the city seems to become yet another pawn in a trend which I am seeing developing in this Assembly where the Liberals pit the federal government, which is of its own political flavour, against the territory government, which is of a Labor Party flavour. And the Labor Party does the same. What we are doing is seeing state/federal politics played out as party politics, and it is not helpful.

I rest my case, Mr Speaker. I expect we will be talking about this again. I would certainly be happy to contribute to any future debate and do anything that is likely to stop it becoming yet another pawn in party politics, which will not be for the benefit of the future and the revitalisation of Civic or any of the other town centres.

MR QUINLAN (Molonglo—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Business, Minister for Tourism, Minister for Sport and Recreation, and Minister for Racing and Gaming) (11.29): I will not take too much of the Assembly's time. I think this motion was all about an attack on Mr Corbell really, and some of the other issues seem to be tangential to that.

I happen to be one of those philistines, Dr Foskey, who think we ought to do up Civic and that we do need a city centre. I am a representative of a political party and I am involved in party politics.

I have to say that I received a presentation on the living city plan designed by Colin Stewart, backed by Terry Snow, and I was very impressed by it—not besotted by it but quite impressed by the plan, by its boldness. It does have, as Mr Corbell has rightly pointed out, some elements, which I am yet to find so far, that would turn me off it—the creation of a large island in the midst of London Circuit, divided from the rest of the city. That proposition does need thorough examination.

I can also say to this Assembly that I have been equally impressed with the depth of analysis that has gone into the presentations that we have received from the ACT Planning and Land Authority. And certainly the work that ACTPLA has done has taken into account some of the planning concepts and needs against which the Colin Stewart design needs to be tested before we all embrace it straight away.

I think that I should not, in this place, divulge to any degree cabinet proceedings, but I can assure members of this Assembly that cabinet—in this case led by Simon Corbell—is taking a balanced view of the planning options available for the development of Civic, as it should. A hallmark of the previous government that we had here, before they stopped doing anything, was just pure ad hocery: good idea, oh yeah. And most of that failed. Tell us what plans, what achievements, there are in Civic that are a testament to the previous government. Tell us what they did. They were not here.

We have an integrated plan in place here. Yes, okay, this government does do planning. I think that is a good thing. And it is a particularly good thing in as much as we are doing things as well in City West, on the other side of London Circuit from here. So the town is actually growing now. The city centre is being developed now. It is quite clearly the intention of this government to continue that and to receive all ideas, but not to grasp them just because they look good first up and have been spread, as Dr Foskey says, all over the *Canberra Times* in living colour.

Mrs Dunne, as usual, added her own particular brand of charm to this debate and somehow says, “Boldness in design is akin to courage.” I do not quite get that link, but I do see in Colin Stewart’s concepts some boldness of thought. But others have actually thought of, if not eliminating Vernon Circle, eliminating it as a through road for traffic. What about the tunnel? Where is the tunnel? What about that concept? Or is that out the window? Well, that was bold.

So let us not fall into the pop vein and grab hold of a pretty concept, without thinking it through and without the benefit of examination by planners. Look at the planning concepts and look at the prospect of having one form of division of the city replaced by another. We have complaints that Northbourne Avenue splits our city, and yet we are talking possibly about a road equally wide becoming London Circuit and splitting the city in another fashion.

There may be answers to it. We will consult on and work through all the concepts available. I hope that somehow, because of the bold thinking of the Colin Stewart plan, some other bold-thinking people might throw in ideas and we will get the benefit of all the input that we need and we will be able to canvass all of the issues and not replace one problem with another.

I saw a letter to the editor the other day that virtually said, “Why don’t you start at Garema Place? Canberra city actually does work. If you wanted to build from the centre out, why don’t you build from the current centre of activity and build the city?” Maybe that is a good idea as well.

I think the Corbell approach is an absolutely correct approach. It is to examine all of the concepts and make sure that we do it right—for the very reasons that Mrs Dunne, as I said, in her own unique style, put forward in this place, about the results of this process having such long-lasting effects. At this stage, there is action taken; there is progress in the development of Civic now; there is the possibility of a quantum leap forward. And that will be a very major step and has to be done, like it or not, most carefully for the benefit of the city of today and for the city of tomorrow.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (11.37): I think I need to start by addressing Mr Corbell’s memory of history. Mr Corbell emerges from this debate as some sort of planning minister Pol Pot: apparently, good planning for the city started in 2001. Mr Corbell is very good at making all sorts of assertions: “There is no integration of public art”; “We finally had some Christmas celebrations and activity in the city”; “We finally got the first integrated plan”; and “I said I would get rid of cloverleaves before Mr Snow said he would get rid of the cloverleaves.” But all of these assertions do

not stand the test of time. They are wrong. Our planning Pol Pot over there did not start all this work on his own in 2001. This process has been going for some time.

Let us just refute some of his assertions. We actually put out a number of integrated plans for Civic—our city, planning our city, building our city—contrary to what Mr Corbell said. Indeed, on page 18 of *Building our city*, published in September 2001, there is a map that, lo and behold, has no cloverleaves at Parkes Way. Goodness me! I think I got there first. But others proposed it before me, Mr Corbell, as well you know. Planning in this city did not start with you in 2001—and, thankfully, it will continue after you are gone.

In terms of the Christmas celebrations, anybody who was in Civic on Christmas Eve, on the Friday before Christmas, would have joined in the legal profession's Santa Claus parade. All sorts of activity goes on in Civic over Christmas. I think we put up the first Christmas tree. I am open to correction on that, but we certainly put up a Christmas tree for people to come together in Petrie Plaza. So Mr Corbell's assertion does not stand the test of time. The other thing is that none of these celebrations happened under this government in their first two years in office—no fireworks, no celebrations; we had turned into Pleasantville.

Mr Corbell says that we have to keep the key cosmopolitan outcomes—yet the Minister for Urban Services is going to raise by 100 per cent over the next three years the taxes on outdoor cafes. That is a very strange commitment when looking for a key cosmopolitan outcome.

Mr Quinlan stood up and said, "Well, what did the previous government do? Ad hocery, absolutely nothing." Well, again, to Mr Quinlan I say: our city, building our city and creating our city are the strategies that we had in place between 1999 and 2001. They are the basis of much of what has happened in the city today. But let us go further. We were not content to do that. We actually said that this was a very big issue because, as Mr Quinlan said, it is not about us in the next 10 years; it is about the next 50 to 100 years, and we have got to get it right. We called in the OECD and asked them to do a report, and they did a very good analysis of the changing need for the city, in particular the need for mixed use. I think the OECD got it right. Minister Corbell received that report, but unfortunately very little has happened since that report arrived.

Mr Quinlan said that the previous government did nothing. Yet we had the our city, creating our city and building our city plans, and the OECD's report. We had city east concessions, we had City West concessions, we had residential concessions and we had public art. I will just name some of the public art: the cushion in Garema Place, the Ainslie sheep, the Honour Walk, the integrated circuitry and the talking piece of art down in City Walk. Section 40, the Canberra Centre, went ahead. Section 56 was done. We refurbished the street furniture. We refurbished City Walk. We built the new Playhouse. We started the Civic Square upgrade. We started the link project, which is only just going on now. We commenced the Hobart Place upgrade. We upgraded Garema Place. We put in the big screen, extra lighting and the street signage boards that are both art and information, and we upgraded the Civic bus interchange. So the work was being done; let us not have this Pol Pot arrangement or view of the world from Mr Corbell where everything starts in year zero. Lots of work was being done—and the shame of it is that that work has not been followed up.

I will agree with Mr Quinlan on one thing: where is the tunnel? I have to say that I raised the concept of a tunnel with Mr Snow and Colin Stewart when they briefed me. They had some arguments against the concept of a tunnel. I would personally like to see through traffic and city traffic separated. We raised the concept of a tunnel back in 1999-2000. We raised the concept of land bridges over Parkes Way. We talked about many things that perhaps were right in the context then. But I do not think they are right now, and maybe we should have had more courage in those days to say, "Let us put the tunnel under City Hill." The quotes then were somewhere between \$30 million and \$60 million, which at that stage was money we could not afford. But, in the context of the time, if we really are going to build a cosmopolitan city heart, perhaps all of those things need to be on the table. That is what Mr Seselja is asking for today. Let us get these things on the table. Instead, Mr Corbell was dismissive of Mr Snow's living city proposal, simply because he is rich and potentially influential, for which you can read: "will undermine my authority as planning minister". That is what Mr Corbell's objection is about.

Dr Foskey asked, "Well, what about Belconnen?" It was a good question: what about Belconnen? For Belconnen, Gungahlin, Woden, Weston and Tuggeranong town centres to be successful, you have to have a successful city heart. It is not called the city heart for nothing—the CBD, the central business district. It is the point at the centre of the equation. The other town centres in the hierarchy, in a well-accepted and logical hierarchy, hang off that. If the city heart is dead, if the centre of the city is dead, you will kill the rest of the city. That is a summary of what the OECD said, and I think most people accept that. So, in answer to Dr Foskey, yes, we have got to do the work in Belconnen and Tuggeranong and all the other town centres; but at the same time—and perhaps most importantly—we have got to get the city right.

Mr Corbell, in his normal way, said, that I, apparently, am in favour of the city heart levy. I have never been in favour of the city heart levy. I do not believe we should have additional levies in this regard. There he is again misrepresenting things, and I think we need to remind members that on 24 June 2004 the Assembly passed the following censure motion of the minister:

That the Assembly expresses a lack of confidence in the Minister for Health and Planning for persistently and wilfully misleading the Assembly on a number of issues.

I would like to say that there are no divisions in the Liberal Party on city heart. We do not believe businesses should be paying more money for the services they should already be getting. We have been consistent in our approach. But this does highlight—and perhaps this is the minister's defence—and raise the issue of divisions in the cabinet and whether or not the Corbell plan has any endorsement. Apparently, it is not cabinet approved. He mentioned the other day that he spoke to the Chief Minister about it and he thought it was okay to go out and talk about it. Well, is it part of government policy or not? Is this what the government puts forward as its view, or is it not? When a minister makes a statement, the ordinary person out there would believe that that is the position of the government. I suspect the majority of people in the ACT believe that the official government position is Mr Corbell's plans and that, therefore, his attacks on Mr Snow, saying he should not be rich, he should not be influential, are about protecting his plan and his view—which most people would now say is inadequate.

What we have had done has been challenged by people. We have been challenged by a couple of private citizens. They have the right to do it and should be congratulated for expressing their opinion in a democracy. I assume that their ability to express their opinion in this democracy is guaranteed by the Human Rights Act. They should be out there challenging and questioning and they should not be subject to attack from Mr Corbell on some ideological basis.

To summarise: the previous government did a great deal for Civic at a time when it was in the doldrums. I can list these things for members, or provide them with a list of all the concessions, at any stage. We had a very solid plan for the city, and had we stayed in office it would have continued. But, in the context of the time, now is the time for a debate. It does not have to be hasty, but I do not think it should be a long-winded debate or take another two or three or four years, which most of the plans that this government puts together seem to take.

What we need to do is come to a position that most people can agree on about the future of their city, about how we make it liveable. We should not be afraid to say how we get an economic return, from the land that is available in the city, to provide new public infrastructure, whether that be courts, Assembly buildings, libraries, galleries, public housing, new roadworks or whatever. We should get on with building the potential that the city of Canberra has, which was envisaged by the Burley Griffin plan—acknowledging that both Walter and Marion had a huge role to play in it—and do it so that, 50 to 100 years from now, people will say, “Isn’t it wonderful that in 2005 the people of Canberra came together, sparked by some great concepts, some audacious concepts, put on the table by the living city plan, and did something about it.”

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (11.47): The government welcomes the debate on City Hill. The revitalisation of the Canberra city centre is recognised by the government as a matter of great importance to the Canberra community. With this in mind, the government initiated the Canberra central project in 2004, to add vitality to central Canberra through partnerships between government, the private sector and the community. It is an essential part of implementing one of the key initiatives of the Canberra plan, the Canberra spatial plan and the economic white paper, which is the establishment of Canberra city, Civic, as the dynamic heart of the territory. The work that the government has commissioned, as outlined by the Minister for Planning, also responds to the recommendations of the OECD review, mentioned earlier, into the urban renaissance of Canberra.

The Canberra plan envisages that Civic will be a vibrant hub of activity, energised as the commercial and community heart of Canberra. Through the Canberra central program, the government established three overarching objectives for the city:

- to develop a central area that is vibrant, of exemplary urban quality and imbued with local and national symbolism and that is the focus of the territory’s and region’s administrative, business, social and cultural activity.
- to establish a shared approach with the Australian government, the ACT government and key stakeholders to the actions and priorities for the development of a central area, and

- to create a system of governance for the planning and development of the central area that is clear and accountable and will foster excellence in design, creativity, economic prosperity and cultural vitality.

Projects of this nature do not materialise overnight. They require careful consideration of a multiplicity of issues and engagement with the community. To this end, the Canberra central is a long-term commitment designed to bring sustained social, cultural and economic activity to the city. A key task of Canberra central is that of ensuring that pertinent knowledge and skills in government, the private sector and the community are brought together to analyse the issues and identify key strategies and actions that will establish the city as the dynamic heart of Canberra.

The City Hill concept for the future, launched by the Minister for Planning, is a significant component of the Canberra central program, sitting within the planning framework for the whole of the central area, which seeks to establish the city as the meeting place of Canberra—a dynamic cultural heart with enhanced character and integration of isolated precincts. The concept builds on the work of the National Capital Authority's Griffin legacy project in promoting City Hill as the city focus and provides a conceptual framework for the future development of Constitution Avenue and West Basin as the city connection to the lake. The concept was launched in order to generate community comment and input into the development of a way forward for the enhancement of the City Hill precinct. The concept has already begun to generate debate and constructive ideas for the future of City Hill, and the government is keen to ensure the involvement of the community in future decision making.

The government is committed to ensure that the views and ideas of the entire community are drawn out and that due consideration is given to the various positions presented. The government is also putting money in resources where its mouth is. This government has established a strategic framework to guide our city forward through the Canberra plan, the spatial plan, the economic white paper and the social plan. This government has given commitment and resources to the establishment of the Canberra central program, with a dedicated project director. This government produced the City West master plan to revitalise the western half of our city. This government developed the City Hill concept to kick off debate about the future of City Hill. This government, under the Minister for Planning, through the statement of planning intent in the ACT 2003, reinforced the commitment to the strategic importance of city to Canberra's progress. Under this government, there has been a substantial increase in land sales, construction activity and economic development in the city. This government will provide the passion, will and drive to deliver real outcomes for not only a more equitable, egalitarian and sustainable Canberra but also a more prosperous city heart.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo) (11.52), in reply: This is an important debate. I agree with the Treasurer on some of the points he made not only about the importance of the debate but in welcoming the bold ideas that have come forward. I also would agree with the Treasurer in that I do not agree with all of the ideas put forward by any of the proponents. But this is about looking for a good framework from which to have a debate, and I am glad we have been able to have this debate.

I was interested in Dr Foskey's comments about not wanting to stir the pot and suggesting that maybe this is a debate that should not be had. I would have thought that this is the sort of thing the Greens should always be engaging in—a debate about the future of our city, calling on the minister to be open to all plans. So I am not quite sure where Dr Foskey was coming from on that, but I think this is a good debate for the Assembly to be having and I am sure we will be having many more like this in the future.

The minister spoke a bit about cosmopolitan activity. As Mr Smyth mentioned, there is a mixed message coming from the government on encouraging cosmopolitan activity in the city. There is an appalling lack of parking in the city at the moment, which has been well documented, so that people cannot come in for a quick bite and find a park anywhere close to where they want to dine. That obviously undermines what the minister said.

Another thing is the proposed taxes. What does the government do? On the one hand, it talks about a vibrant city heart and we have these pictures of people dining outdoors. Then what does it do? It goes and taxes them out of existence. The plan was for an increase of 330 per cent. So we are looking for the detail of what the city heart levy will mean and what it will mean for cafes and for business. There are definitely some mixed messages coming through on that. The lack of economic management always comes back to bite. They can have all the plans in the world, but a lack of economic management means they have to claw the money back from somewhere; that is what we are seeing at the moment.

Mr Corbell also spoke about not playing the man, and he has accused me of playing the man. Well, this is not about playing the man. But that is exactly what Mr Corbell did last week. As soon as someone came out with an alternative proposal, he attacked the man. He said, "Oh, this is unduly influencing; this is railroading," when all Mr Snow was doing was putting forward a vision for the city. Mr Corbell can reject the vision. He is well within his rights to say, "I don't like it." But to say that Mr Snow is somehow unduly influencing or railroading the process is inappropriate and he should apologise to Mr Snow for those comments.

The other issue here is that there seemed to be a bit of a change of heart from Mr Corbell during this debate, and even in some of the words of Mr Quinlan. In fact, the Treasurer spoke of being open to all plans and said he would welcome more plans for City Hill. Yet Mr Corbell's press release says; "The concept planning had opened the way for more detailed planning, engineering and traffic investigations regarding the impact on traffic and parking. This will lead to the preparation of appropriate planning instruments to allow development to proceed." Those words talk about detailed planning but they do not leave the way open for an alternative plan; it is just tweaking the details of Mr Corbell's plan.

I am quite fascinated with the debate that has gone on today. I want to know, the opposition wants to know and the community wants to know what is the position. Is Mr Corbell's plan, as put forward in his press release, set in stone, apart from the detail? Will that be the plan for the future or is he open to other ideas? We are getting a number of mixed messages from the government. We do not know what cabinet's view is on it.

We do not know what the government's view is on it. All we are getting is a bit of wishy-washiness or a bit of Mr Corbell stepping back from his initial position. If Mr Corbell is stepping back from his initial position, I would certainly welcome that. But I just want Mr Corbell to make that clear, because I do not think the position is very clear as to exactly where things stand.

In summary: we will not obviously be supporting the amendments. I do not think they add anything. As usual, they just have a very self-congratulatory tone, so obviously we will not be supporting them.

Question put:

That **Mr Corbell's** amendments be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Mr Berry	Ms MacDonald
Mr Corbell	Ms Porter
Ms Gallagher	Mr Quinlan
Mr Gentleman	Mr Stanhope
Mr Hargreaves	

Noes 8

Mrs Burke	Mr Seselja
Mrs Dunne	Mr Smyth
Dr Foskey	Mr Stefaniak
Mr Mulcahy	
Mr Pratt	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Affordable Housing

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (12.00): I move:

That the Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services reconvene the Affordable Housing Taskforce with the following terms of reference:

- (1) review progress in improving housing affordability since the Taskforce report Strategies for Action was tabled in 2002;
- (2) review recent developments and initiatives to increase housing affordability in Australia and overseas, and assess their appropriateness in the ACT context;
- (3) provide advice to the Government on the implementation of strategies outlined in that report;
- (4) oversee the development of a long-term Affordable Housing Strategy for the ACT; and
- (5) provide ongoing advice to the Government on housing affordability in the ACT and the effectiveness of strategies and actions implemented by the Government.

This motion is timely. Despite the desperate need for affordable housing, particularly rental properties, the ACT government's budget has failed to provide any funding to help remedy the problem. This motion offers a way for the government to progress its thinking and devise strategies on affordable housing at little or no cost. It allows us to bring together people working at the coalface with people who are experts on the topic. The task force will have the ability to look at the latest research and programs in other municipalities. I urge the Assembly to support this motion.

The affordable housing task force is well placed to provide independent, balanced and representative advice to the government to improve housing affordability in the ACT. The intent behind this motion is not to shame or blame anyone for the crisis in affordable housing. A chronic lack of affordable housing has been experienced across Australia and is widely thought to be due to myriad factors, not the least of which is the failure of the private housing market to respond to a rapidly increasing need for low-cost single accommodation.

A number of issues touch on this. I note, for instance, that the revitalization of City West will lead to the loss of "homes" or places to sleep for the homeless. When we think about revitalizing our cities, we need to think about where people will go.

Mr Hargreaves: Give them a house. That's daft.

DR FOSKEY: Yes, of course: let us give them a house.

Mr Hargreaves: Would you rather have them sleeping on the street than in accommodation we are providing?

DR FOSKEY: I think if you believe that is what I said, Mr Hargreaves, you are wilfully misinterpreting me.

Mr Hargreaves: Well, you just said it.

DR FOSKEY: In Australia, state and territory governments and the commonwealth government have been grappling with solutions, as evidenced by the number of reports, inquiries and research articles on the topic produced over recent years. Overseas, there are also many examples of governments testing various approaches, with mixed results. There is broad agreement that access to affordable housing is critically important and provides the basic foundation from which individuals and families can lead healthy and productive lives. Finding policy solutions, and enacting them, to the decreasing availability of affordable housing has proven much more difficult and that is why there are people who are homeless in this town and sleeping wherever they can.

I acknowledge that the ACT government has taken steps to improve housing affordability through such strategies as the affordable housing initiative in last year's budget, which did see a capital injection of \$20 million over the four years 2004 to 2008 for social housing. We have had the first home buyers concession scheme and the low to moderate income land ballots—though I notice the government is now putting emphasis on the word "moderate" rather than "low", as it is certainly very clear that low-income people cannot afford to buy land even through the land ballots. We have also seen an

increasing flexibility in the source of capital funds available to social housing through the use of funding from the ACT home loans portfolio.

The Canberra plan, which includes the spatial plan, the economic white paper and the social plan, encompasses a commitment to address need and disadvantage in housing while at the same time providing a framework for economic growth. The first term of reference that I have suggested for the reconvened affordable housing task force is to review progress on affordable housing since 2002. I believe that there have been two areas in which improvements in affordable housing are evident. The first is affordability for first home buyers with moderate incomes looking to purchase a home and the second is assistance provided to public housing tenants to sustain tenancies. These improvements are important, but I believe that they are relatively modest sized pieces of a much bigger puzzle.

ACT Housing continues to report growing demand for public housing, particularly amongst people with urgent and complex needs. Service systems across the disability, mental health, aged care and homelessness sectors report a chronic lack of housing options for people in need, and there has been no softening in the private rental market, with the ACT remaining one of the tightest and most expensive markets in the country.

We need to do much more if we are to make a real impact on the affordability of housing for low-income households. The *Housing people, building communities* report, produced by the government in August last year, acknowledged that there is a range of challenges ahead, including: ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing; building a viable and sustainable social housing sector; identifying strategic opportunities for development in partnership with the private sector; investigating affordable housing options such as shared equity and land rent schemes; and meeting the ongoing commitment to modernise, improve and grow public and community housing.

Most importantly, this report identifies the need to encourage further debate about affordable housing at a local and national level. To me, this is recognition that one government alone cannot address this complex issue. A whole of community approach is needed, and the affordable housing task force is an excellent platform to engage stakeholders and continue the debate.

The second term of reference I have included in this motion relates to the affordable housing task force undertaking a review of recent developments and initiatives to increase housing affordability in Australia and overseas and to assess their appropriateness in the ACT context. One of the major challenges in affordable housing is addressing the supply side of the equation. The need for strategies to stimulate private investment in affordable housing through subsidy options and/or public-private partnerships has long been recognised. There have been some important developments in this area since the affordable housing task force report *Strategies for action* was produced in 2002. There is an opportunity to revisit the recommendations of this report and examine the experiences of other jurisdictions in key areas of policy development.

For example, a recent article by Peter Williams from the University of New South Wales compares mandatory statutory planning approaches for affordable social housing in New South Wales and in Ireland, finding that although these approaches have had considerable difficulties they are necessary as part of the suite of policies to ensure

affordable housing provision. His research also highlights significant advantages of a holistic strategic approach such as that taken in Ireland. There have been major policy and program initiatives announced this year in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, all of which would be worth close inspection and consideration. There have also been initiatives implemented since 2002 in various Australian and overseas jurisdictions which can be compared for effectiveness and applicability to the ACT context.

The other three terms of reference proposed to the affordable housing task force relate to overseeing the development of an implementation strategy and providing ongoing advice to government. I believe that it is important that responsibility for ongoing improvement in affordable housing is conceptualised as a responsibility shared across the community, private sector and government. A partnership approach in which stakeholders come together to find solutions is to be preferred. Members will know that I have been calling on the government to develop an implementation strategy for affordable housing in line with the commitment stated in the social plan. It is absolutely necessary to establish clear targets, time lines and performance indicators if we are to measure our progress on affordable housing over the next four to five years. The affordable housing task force has an important contribution to make to the implementation of strategies that were identified in the *Strategies for action* report. The government has, on the whole, agreed to the majority of these strategies, but many are yet to be acted on.

Recent budget submissions from organisations such as ACT Shelter and the ACT Coalition of Community Housing Organisations are packed full of ideas and recommendations for making progress on affordable housing. These organisations invest considerable time, energy and expertise in developing advice to government, but have limited opportunities to contribute to policy in a meaningful and ongoing way. Studies of attempts by other governments to provide housing should be considered. If there is not enough money, we need a body that can examine the mechanics of a number of the schemes, including government bonds, which give citizens the ability to invest in their community. A lot of these schemes have been considered by a number of consulting firms, such as Allen Consulting Group, which I know the government uses in other matters. The task force would enhance these opportunities and also bring together community groups and private sector interests in a spirit of collaboration.

I was hoping that on both sides of the Assembly this motion would be seen as a genuine attempt to provide a way forward in the affordable housing dilemma—crisis, as the government characterises it—and gain the bipartisan support it deserves. However, I believe that neither of the larger parties intends to support my motion. I am extremely disappointed about that and I find that the amendments put forward and circulated by the government do not go far enough. My motion is really asking the government to do those things it should already be doing as part of its role as government. So far, those things have not been done to the extent to get action. The reason we are putting forward this proposal for the affordable housing task force is to bring into the process some driving force. It would bring new information into it. It also will require the set-up of a parcel of goods that can then be looked at in the next budget. We have got to do something during the term of this government. We cannot just keep talking about it. I ask both the opposition and the government to reconsider their stance on my motion.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services and Minister for Police and Emergency

Services) (12.13): The government will not be supporting Dr Foskey's motion as it stands. I will move a series of amendments a little later, but in the meantime I would like to address some of the things Dr Foskey has said. I am grateful that she has in fact acknowledged that the government has moved some way towards addressing the issue. The grudging acceptance of some people in the public arena about the extent to which the government has moved towards addressing affordable housing is sometimes a disappointment to me. I do believe that we should stop using people's housing difficulties, which are often at the core of their social dysfunction, for political point scoring. I think it is just a bit disgusting, quite frankly.

Dr Foskey talked about the chronic lack of housing options. We know that some time ago that was probably true. And then the Stanhope Labor government got elected. We started to put some money in; we started to put some more thought into it. We revitalised the department that had responsibility for housing and, under Mr Wood's stewardship, changed the face of the provision of affordable and public housing in this town.

I remind members of debates that have gone on in this place where I have actually indicated exactly what is going on. I will just mention a couple of them; there were quite a few. We have got the good old commercial rental market. People can go out and buy themselves a house if they have got the money; those are two options. Then there is public housing. People can rent public housing; they can rent at market rents—although I would not take the position, of course, of Mrs Burke, who would have us boot out from government properties all of the people who are paying market rent.

Mrs Burke: That's not true, and you know it.

MR HARGREAVES: That is what press releases say, and she has uttered that over the illustrious airwaves of 2CC, that magnificent radio station. She has actually said on a number of occasions, "We should be encouraging them," and that is code. It is Mr Stefaniak's and Mr Mulcahy's way of encouraging people not to commit murder any more. It is a good one: "Capital punishment's a great encouragement in my view." But Mrs Burke says, "No, we should be encouraging these people who pay market rents, if their income is of such a level that they do not get a subsidy, to move on and release those properties for people who need assistance." There is a bit of sense in that, I suppose. Let us suggest, for example, that there are some market renters in the public housing stock in, let us say—I will just pick a suburb at random—Red Hill. We could realise that property and buy some more. That would be a good idea. What about Wanniasa? We could do that; there might be some properties there. How about Yarralumla? We could realise that one, too, I suppose. But I say to you that one of the cornerstones of this government's commitment is security of tenure and we are not about to do that.

There is another option—community housing—that is all about transitioning. Then we have got the Canberra Emergency Accommodation Service for people who are in real strife. TAS Housing is involved. A number of other people are involved. We know we work closely with Shelter. The very people whom Dr Foskey wants to have abandon their place of camping out in City West—we are going to pick those people up, dastardly government that we are, and rescue them, against their will, it would appear. They do not want to stop sleeping rough there.

We have been talking about a quota of affordable housing in that City West area. What is one of the big motivations for us going down there? It is student housing. These people usually cannot afford the sort of accommodation those of us in this chamber enjoy. Most of us here in this chamber, I understand, are home purchasers; some of us are renters. But we get to choose that; these people do not, often. We have to understand those people who are sleeping rough and who are picked up—single men usually, so I am told. What do we do for them? We could go through all of these options. Dr Foskey says there is a chronic lack of housing options. At its very worst, we actually put them up in the backpackers hotel across the road. We also put them in caravan parks around town, as a stopgap to stop them from freezing and dying in the night under the shrubbery at the rear of the Legislative Assembly building. So I do not accept this argument that there is a chronic lack of housing options. I accept the argument that there are people out there who are in genuine need and that perhaps we can do some more to help them. I accept that, but I do not accept that there is a chronic lack of housing options.

Dr Foskey says that we need a body to investigate the various schemes. We have one already; it is called Housing ACT. It is populated by people who are experts in housing matters. I would single out for mention, for example, David Collett, who is a member of the staff of Housing ACT. It is he who has provided a vision for our multiunit complex situation with regard to some of the older pieces of infrastructure that we have that Mrs Burke delights in standing outside and screaming blue murder about. The record of Housing ACT in turning over the properties, in predicting how much will be returned on those properties at auction, is second to none in this town. As it happens, even the illustrious Peter Blackshaw does not have as good a record as Housing ACT does.

The affordable housing task force concluded its work in December of 2002 and the government maintains a strong commitment to the ongoing implementation of agreed recommendations. As will be detailed later, the ACT is also involved in interjurisdictional forums to collaboratively address housing affordability issues at a national level. On that issue, I do not need another little committee created to advise the government on where we should go. What we need is an engagement with the people out there who are dealing with services on the ground.

Mrs Burke: Action.

MR HARGREAVES: “Action” says Mrs Burke—and action, Mrs Burke, you have seen and you have had. The only problem is that the last two you did not get invited to. I am sorry about that, but I was not doing the inviting. The first one was the tenant summit, talking about the affordability of rental accommodation in this town. I noted some of the views that came out of that. I convened another summit of people talking about rental issues, tenant issues, just the other day. I would prefer to talk to tenants, to low-income earners and to those groups that advocate on their behalf, such as ACTCOSS, Shelter and a range of other NGOs and organisations. I would rather talk with them about issues and how to solve them by bringing them together in an issues-based forum. When you do that, you do not end up creating yet another strategic plan that gets thought about; you come up with a clear identification of the issue and, hopefully, some clear solutions that can be brought into action pretty well straightaway. That is where we are heading, and I reject the idea of having yet another committee to advise yet another minister on this.

The final report of the affordable housing task force, entitled *Strategies for action*, included almost 12 months of investigation into affordable housing in the ACT. I want to pay tribute not only to the former minister Mr Wood for this but also to members of that task force, because they did the job that was needed of them at the time and gave us a very clear direction. The government released its first response to this report in May 2003. This response comprehensively canvassed the recommendations made by the task force and detailed a range of actions to address declining levels of housing affordability. A number of these initiatives were detailed in last year's budget.

A further response to the final report of the task force was released by the government in August 2004. This response detailed progress in implementing the government's housing affordability measures and flagged a number of future commitments. In addition, a further 10 recommendations of the task force were agreed to in this response, resulting in a total of 33 recommendations agreed to, nine agreed to in principle and four noted for further investigation.

An interdepartmental committee on affordable housing continues to oversee implementation of the government's response to recommendations of the affordable housing task force. Do we have a strategy? Well, you would hope so, if you have got a committee to oversee it, would you not? What we have is an interdepartmental committee doing just that. So why would I want to go and create another committee to do it while I have got one already in existence? This committee also monitors and reviews affordable housing progress and innovation nationally and internationally and considers new affordable housing initiatives and opportunities that may be appropriate for the ACT—another point raised by Dr Foskey. Go and have a look at South Australia. Go and have a look at all of these other places anywhere between here and Venezuela that she rattles off from a list. Guess what? That interdepartmental committee does just that: it reviews progress and innovation nationally and internationally. And whom does it advise? The government. Additionally, that committee regularly engages with key stakeholders in the housing sector, such as Shelter, the Housing Industry Association, and the MBA through industry briefings conducted by the LDA.

The government, therefore, does not support reconvening an affordable housing task force. Revisiting this process is unnecessary, as it would be a retrograde step and a duplication of previous and current work. This should not be taken to indicate that the government is not committed to and does not support affordable housing. This government regards affordable housing as an important issue on which it will continue to focus.

Let me also strike yet another word of warning. I have done this publicly a few times. Mrs Burke will have heard me say it, and I know that in this regard I have her support. There has been a focus hitherto on affordable housing concentrating on home ownership. That is fine to a degree, but there are people in our community who will never be able to buy their own home. There are people in this community who never want to buy their own home, for reasons known only to themselves—and good on them. It is about choice. Freedom is about choice. The absence of choice is the absence of freedom.

I do not denigrate those that have concentrated on home ownership as the panacea when it comes to affordable housing evils, but I signal these words of warning: we need to take

a holistic look at this. The rental market has to be in our focus as well. The role of the public sector in determining rents needs to be looked into—I agree with the approaches that have been put to me about that—but so too does the private rental market. Private rental profits garnered over the last few years, as well as the government purse, ought to be applied to support those less well off in our society.

We cannot say; “Oh, well, we can continue to subsidise all of these people in the private rental market or in the government market” and not get these people who are investors to carry some of the load with us. This is a community problem. We need a community solution to it, and the way I am tackling this solution is to talk to the people right at the bottom of the heap. I am hoping that at the end of the day, piece by piece, solutions will emerge and that everybody will have the dignity of a decent roof over their head in this town.

I seek leave to move the following amendments to Dr Foskey’s motion.

Leave granted.

MR HARGREAVES: I move:

(1) Preamble

omit “reconvene the Affordable Housing Taskforce in the following terms of reference”

Substitute “provide a report to the Assembly on”

(2) Paragraph (1), omit “review”

(3) Paragraph (2), omit “review”

(4) Paragraph (3), omit the paragraph

(5) Paragraph (4), omit the paragraph

(6) Paragraph (5), omit “provide ongoing advice to government on”

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

Sitting suspended from 12.28 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice

Mental health—funding

MR SMYTH: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. Budget paper 4, output 1.2 Mental Health Services, shows that the target for admitted patient separations for 2005-06 is 1,300. This is 120—or eight per cent—fewer than the outcome for 2004-05. Minister, why are you cutting mental health inpatient services by eight per cent?

MR CORBELL: We are not cutting patient and health services. But I am happy to take the details of the question on notice and provide an answer to Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. I assume that the minister will have to take this one on notice as well. Why are children and youth mental health services being reduced from 28,660 in 2004-05 to 24,300 in 2005-06—a cut of 15 per cent?

MR CORBELL: Again, the government is not cutting the provision of services in mental health. The revision of the targets is probably due to a number of reasons, but it is certainly not due to a decision to reduce the overall level of service. I will take the detail of the question on notice and provide an answer to Mr Smyth.

Hospital waiting lists

MS MacDONALD: Mr Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Minister for Health, Mr Corbell. Yesterday, the ACT budget for 2005-2006 was released, with a record total overall spend of \$689.9 million on health, the highest amount the territory has ever allocated. Minister, within this record spend, how is the government committed to improving elective surgery waiting times and providing more beds in hospitals?

Mr Mulcahy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: this matter is the subject of inquiry before the Public Accounts Committee. I ask that you rule it out of order.

Ms MacDonald: On the point of order, Mr Speaker: I asked a question with relation to the overall spending, not in relation to the Auditor-General's report No 8.

MR SPEAKER: The question was in relation to hospital waiting lists. The question, in my view, is legitimate and is a matter that the minister can respond to.

MR CORBELL: In relation to Mr Mulcahy's point of order: Mr Smyth's question would have been out of order as well. I do not think anyone is seriously suggesting that in this place you cannot ask ministers questions about the budget. If you do not want to ask questions about the budget, that is fine; we will get on with other business.

Mr Speaker, it was very interesting to hear the assertion made by Mr Mulcahy at the budget breakfast this morning, broadcast on ABC radio, where he claimed that the ACT government was spending too much on health—about \$100 million too much on health.

Mr Pratt: That's a lie.

MR CORBELL: I ask Mr Pratt to withdraw that.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Pratt, withdraw that.

Mr Pratt: I withdraw that.

MR CORBELL: That is what Mr Mulcahy asserted. The government is spending a record amount on health, \$689.9 million on health. The strength of that budget and this

record spend are designed to tackle the key issues of concern to the Canberra community, including issues such as elective surgery waiting times and emergency department access block.

Two million dollars has been allocated in the budget to increase elective surgery capacity. Apparently, that is \$2 million too much, according to Mr Mulcahy. That would leave another \$98 million to go. This funding is designed to overhaul not only the waiting times and to improve waiting times but also to overhaul the management of surgery at the Canberra Hospital in particular. So we will be undertaking a business review process at the Canberra Hospital to improve the way the whole system works in terms of throughput as well as improving access to elective surgery.

This will provide an additional 300 cost-weighted separations for elective surgery in 2005-06, rising to an additional 402 in 2006-07—300 extra cases of elective surgery that Mr Mulcahy thinks we should not be paying for. That is what the Liberal Party is saying. They are saying that we are spending too much on health; and not just a little bit—\$100 million too much on health.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! There is far too much noise in the chamber. Mr Corbell, direct your comments through the chair. The opposition will cease interjecting. And so will Mr Hargreaves.

MR CORBELL: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The budget adds to the \$20.4 million in additional funding for elective surgery already allocated by the Labor government since coming to office. Since coming to office, we have already allocated an additional \$20.4 million to elective surgery, and this budget adds another \$2 million. Apparently, that is just too much for Mr Mulcahy—too much money on elective surgery; too much money for Mr Smyth; too much money for the Liberal Party altogether.

In addition, as part of a portfolio-wide program to improve access to acute hospital services, the budget has allocated \$2.3 million for an additional 20 beds in ACT hospitals—an important commitment, an election commitment of the government fulfilled in full. It is worth making the point that, again, Mr Mulcahy would seem to think that this is 20 beds too many because it is \$2.3 million too much on health spending in the ACT. This extra bed capacity, though, would mean a better flow of patients from the time they enter ACT hospitals to the time they return home.

MS MacDONALD: I thank the minister for that answer, although it was a little bit interrupted. I am sure there were other things that were happening.

MR SPEAKER: Come to the question.

MS MacDONALD: Mr Speaker, my supplementary question is: how do other health initiatives funded in this year's budget complement the key initiatives of elective surgery waiting lists and additional medical beds in ACT public hospitals?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms MacDonald for the question because she is showing an important interest in how the overall system performs in ACT public hospitals.

To address the issue of the additional medical beds: 20 beds are in place, 12 at Calvary and eight at the Canberra Hospital. These are in addition, of course, to 60 rehabilitation beds at the subacute facility scheduled to come on line late next year. These will support our efforts in elective surgery, help reduce access block in emergency departments and improve the ability of the intensive care units to transfer patients to general wards once intensive care has been finalised.

Ms MacDonald asked me: how do other initiatives also complement these two mainstays of the health budget? It is worth noting, of course, that the government has set aside a quarter of a million dollars to continue the activity of our discharge lounges at the Canberra and Calvary public hospitals. These discharge lounges are working. For the first time in the ACT, they are working.

Since the Canberra Hospital's discharge lounge has come on line, over 1,100 people have accessed the lounge; that is, 1,100 people who would have otherwise been waiting in their bed simply for the process of discharge to be completed. Instead, we have got those people waiting in a comfortable lounge for the final process of discharge to be completed, freeing up the beds, of course, for other people to use. That is what that funding is all about. Of course, Mr Speaker, that is another quarter of a million dollars too much, according to the Liberal Party—another quarter of a million dollars that they think should not be spent on the public hospital system.

On top of that, an additional \$800,000 is allocated for the HACC program, the home and community care program, providing important care in people's own homes and, again, tackling pressures on the acute care system. This additional funding will allow more patients to be cared for in the community, providing the support that people need to remain in their homes. Of course, that is another \$800,000 too much, according to Mr Mulcahy—\$800,000 too much.

I just wonder whether Mr Mulcahy has consulted his leader and shadow minister for health, because Mr Smyth, as shadow minister for health, actually wants to do more in health. But Mr Mulcahy does not want to spend as much. I just wonder whether this is another example of the divisions in the Liberal Party when it comes to leadership, when it comes to the future directions of the Liberal Party.

It is worth highlighting also for members that the budget provides \$2.5 million for the implementation of a state-of-the-art imaging system for the Canberra Hospital. This new system, the picture archival communication system, or PACS, will replace the current film-based imaging service and will ensure that the development, distribution and storage management of hard-copy medical images is greatly simplified. Benefits to patients—and this is the key thing—include greater turnaround time from the time an x-ray is taken until it is available, greater reliability of the image and consistency of the image, and the image being able to be made available to several doctors simultaneously rather than having to be carted around by hand. That, again, greatly improves quality and safety and, importantly, decreases the number of delayed and rescheduled appointments. Again, that makes a big difference to the overall operation of the health system.

The government has got a comprehensive strategy in place to continue to tackle the key issues of concern to the Canberra community when it comes to health service delivery:

more beds, more elective surgery, improvement in access to the emergency departments and addressing issues to do with access block in the intensive care units—all things the community is looking for, all things the government is responding to.

Of course, you cannot do that without money; you cannot do that without extra money to pay for the services to improve the efficiency of the hospital; you cannot do that without making the investment. Sadly, there seems to be only one party in this place prepared to make that investment. I am glad to say it is the Labor Party; I am glad to say my colleagues and I are committed to improving access to public health services, to improving public hospital services. Sadly, the shadow Treasurer and the shadow minister for health seem to think that we are spending too much in our public hospitals, that we are spending too much on health, that we are spending too much paying our doctors and nurses. That is a view this government soundly repudiates.

Moderate income land ballot

DR FOSKEY: My question is to Mr Corbell in his guise as Minister for Planning. This government has often cited the moderate income land ballot as a significant strategy in increasing affordable housing in the ACT. However, feedback from constituents suggest that the land is unaffordable for many moderate income families and that there is little direct benefit in purchasing land at market value through the ballot. This is demonstrated by the fact that in the December 2004 ballot just 34 registered parties attended and only 17 blocks were sold, and in the recent ballot held on April 30 just 14 blocks sold from the 37 available for sale. Can the government explain why fewer than half of the blocks of land available to each ballot have sold? What happens to the blocks that did not sell?

MR CORBELL: I thank Dr Foskey for the question. The moderate income land ballot is designed to provide assistance to people who are in the third quintile of income earners, who can sustain a mortgage but are having difficulty getting into the housing market for the first time. It was a direct recommendation of the housing affordability task force that a moderate income land ballot be established, and the government has done that. The ballot threshold is an approximate income of \$100,000 per annum to be eligible to participate. That increases depending upon the number of dependent children. If you have five or more dependent children, the maximum income threshold that you must be under is \$116,000 per annum. Those income tests are designed to make sure that the land is available to those in that third quintile of income earners.

It is worth noting that the average price for a raw piece of land or housing block in the ACT is currently over \$200,000, whereas the value of land provided through the moderate income land ballot is no more than \$150,000—so that is \$50,000 less than the average price of a block of land in Canberra at the moment. That is a significant discount and it is being made available to a significant group of people in our community. The take-up in the ballots has, in my view, been disappointing. That may be down to the marketing of the process or it may be down to other factors. I will ask the land development agency to keep a close watch on the operation of the moderate income land ballot. If it is the case that the moderate income land ballot is not reaching the people it needs to reach, the government is always open to reviewing it to make sure that it does.

Dr Foskey also asked me what happens to those parcels of land not sold through the ballot. I will have to take the details of that question on notice. I am not familiar with the

exact process but I would imagine those parcels of land would either be made available again in subsequent moderate income land ballots or, alternatively, sold through the broader ballot process that the LDA conducts for general estates. I will take the specifics of that question on notice and provide further information.

DR FOSKEY: Thank you. I have a supplementary question. Has the government undertaken any follow up with people who inquired about the ballot to assess why so few of them registered, attended and purchased land in order to improve the program?

MR CORBELL: Yes, there has been some follow up with people who have registered and not subsequently purchased through the ballot. One of the reasons that people do that is that they have a particular block of land they are interested in. If their number is not called early in the ballot process often that block of land has been sold to someone whose number was drawn earlier in the ballot process. The feedback I have had from the Land Development Agency is that one factor—I am not saying it is the only factor—has been that people have had their eye on a particular block of land that has been snapped up by someone else whose number was drawn earlier in the ballot process. They have then decided not to proceed with choosing an alternative block. I would imagine there are other factors and I will certainly undertake to provide some further advice to Dr Foskey.

Budget—public service cuts

MR STEFANIAK: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Urban Services. Minister, the 2005-06 budget contains a cut of \$32.7 million to the DUS budget over four years. How many of the 260 jobs to be lost in the ACT government sector will be lost in your department?

MR HARGREAVES: I thank Mr Stefaniak for the question. The Department of Urban Services has a number of silos, shall we say, which were constituted in the stewardship of the Leader of the Opposition over there, and we inherited those. We know that one of the biggest sets of grumbles from that lot over there is that potholes are not fixed quickly enough, graffiti is never removed quickly enough—or even sometimes cleaned up a little bit too quickly. Sometimes they complain about cycleways, sometimes they complain about rubbish—that is because they are experts in rubbish.

In respect of the administration of the Department of Urban Services, the creation of the silos under the stewardship of Mr Smyth has created duplication in the administrative processes and contract management within that department. The over-administration and the over-management of that department have resulted in, in my view and in the view of this government, a detrimental effect on the quality of service delivery.

Mr Pratt: What services?

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Pratt, tryingly, as he has to do it under his breath, says, “What services?” That just displays the ignorance that he is becoming well known for. Do keep it up, Mr Pratt. The more you make a goose of yourself, the better we all look!

The simple fact is that there is over-administration and over-concentration on management because of the structures this lot put into place. Because of the

mismanagement of this lot over a period of six years, we are going to have to do something about it. And we are doing something about it.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Hargreaves has the floor.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The fact is that the savings to be generated by the Department of Urban Services as part of this budgetary process will be addressing the over-administration and over-management of municipal and enterprise services.

MR STEFANIAK: Mr Speaker, I wish to raise a point of order. I have now been listening for three minutes and he has not attempted to answer the question, which is: how many of the 260 jobs? He has said nothing about jobs.

MR SPEAKER: I think you will have to listen for another couple of minutes!

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you, Mr Speaker. And of course the maladministration that these people came up with, for which they have become very well renowned, not only has to do with jobs, it also has to do with the way in which we do things. It talks about the inefficient contracts these people were stewards over—locking us into contracts that we have had to pay through the nose for.

We do not need to do half of that. There will of course be staff reductions within the Department of Urban Services, as there will be in all of the departments. However, we have to concentrate on doing things better, on doing things that have more focus on people services and less focus on administration for its own sake. I can say quite categorically to Mr Stefaniak: watch this space.

MR STEFANIAK: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. That was fascinating, minister. How can you justify cutting the budget for local government services by \$32.7 million over four years, when you are going to raise rates by up to 20 per cent?

MR HARGREAVES: We intend to remove inefficiencies that we inherited from this crass lot over here; we intend to streamline management processes; we are going to remove the silos that these people created; we are going to remove the culture of administration for its own sake. The answer to your question, Mr Stefaniak, as to how I can justify it, is: very easily.

Stamp duties

MR MULCAHY: Treasurer, on 20 April 2005, you signed a letter, as ACT Treasurer, to the federal Treasurer setting out further stamp duties that six states and territories had agreed to abolish. Attached to this letter were two tables: one dealing with the timetable for the abolition of the stamp duties and another that quantified the duties being abolished. We have now been told that the figures in the letter were wrong.

Treasurer, why were ACT tax cuts to the value of \$37 million offered to the federal Treasurer, as proposed by the Victorian government? Did the ACT supply the correct

figures for inclusion in the table? If that is the case, who supplied the figure of \$37 million to the Victorian government and why did neither you nor your office check the veracity of these figures before you signed the letter to the federal Treasurer?

MR QUINLAN: I have to confess that the last part of that process was done in fairly short time because we were, as you would understand, struggling to get all of the states to agree. New South Wales and Western Australia wanted to fight on. The figures that we put forward were not the figures that were in the letter. The figures that were in the letter were the creation of the Victorian government.

I do not know that the actual numbers are particularly germane to the issue, because we were not dealing with Peter Costello by saying that we would give him \$37 million, \$26 million or something. It was about the pigheaded approach that he had taken: he had reinvented the intergovernmental agreement. He decided that an agreement to review taxes meant that we were going to abolish them—that was the be-all and end-all of it—and was quite clearly using it as an excuse.

I do not know what goes on in that mind, but it was of great concern to the states that this was a contrivance to try to destroy the intergovernmental agreement and, in fact, for the commonwealth to rein back on their control over GST funds and apply more control to the states and territories, even though the thing was initially introduced as a growth tax for the states. So the figures that the Victorians used, for whatever reason, were not the figures that they were given by our treasurers.

MR MULCAHY: I have a supplementary question for the Treasurer. Given that that is the case, have you communicated with the federal Treasurer or the federal government to explain what went wrong and provide the correct figures?

MR QUINLAN: Oh, yes, I do that all the time: rush off to Pete and say, “Whoops, I would like to explain myself, Pete!” As I tried to explain before, the actual numbers in the table are not germane to the issues at hand. We did this through officers.

Mr Mulcahy: Did they tell you how much you were willing to give back to the people of Canberra?

MR SPEAKER: Order! One question and one answer, please.

MR QUINLAN: There was a letter put together, signed at the eleventh hour. The letter came through and there were electronic signatures to get it together at the last—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Press on, Mr Quinlan.

MR QUINLAN: I was just waiting for the pathetic group giggle that the mob opposite gets going in question time. Give us a childish group giggle!

I do not consider that the numbers in that table make an iota of difference to Peter Costello or to the question at hand. Now that the issue has been raised, I am sure that my officers will have communicated that—if they have not, they will—through the heads of

treasury forum. But we were advised only afterwards and, quite frankly, I did not see any point in writing off to Peter Costello and saying, "Oh, Peter, John Brumby has used the wrong figures in the table attached because they worked them out their way."

With some of the numbers that are in those figures there is a gross amount that you lose and then those numbers that we lose in taxation revenue fold back into the machinations of the grants commission, so that when you are trying to estimate what the ACT will lose, or not, there will be a gross and a net figure. There will be an original figure and, for some states, what they lose might actually grow somewhat. For us, it is probable that it will decrease because the balance of taxation collection is changed as between the states. Therefore, the relativities between the states have changed and the net numbers will be different from the actual gross numbers in the tax.

I do not have the numbers in my head, and I apologise for that, but there is a difference for us in some of the taxes between the actual money that will be forgone, initially in tax collection, versus the ultimate impact on us as estimated—members know that the grants commission process is very complex—by the grants commission. The impact on some of them is likely to be a bit less.

Police recruitment

MR PRATT: My question is directed to the minister for police, Mr Hargreaves. By the way, congratulations minister on arresting a graffiti offender. Now to the question: over the weekend you announced the recruitment of 20 new police for the ACT over a period of two years. Added to the 20 police you have announced in the budget, this now means you are committed to 40 new police over five years.

As we do not have the training budget and need to wait two years apparently to recruit and train these first 20 police, why are you not undertaking a significant number of lateral recruitments concurrently? Why are you not prepared to rectify your abysmal position on our woefully under-strength police by laterally recruiting as well?

MR HARGREAVES: As Mr Pratt would know—he has gone out and had a free glass of wine at the training centre and he would have seen the recruitment process—we do recruit laterally. That is happening, in case you have not awoken to that. Mr Pratt might know—after all, this man spent a lot of time in uniform—that you have to put people through a recruitment training course as well.

It is time Mr Pratt was given a little history of the evolution of police numbers in this town. He is quite right: the Stanhope government is putting in 40 extra police officers over five years. In the budget, \$1.1 million was allocated for 10 sworn police officers to patrol the north district covering Canberra city, Belconnen and Gungahlin taking effect from 1 July 2007.

After that, another \$1.1 million will be available from 1 July 2008, allowing for the second patrol of 10 sworn officers to be allocated to south district, covering south Canberra, Woden and Tuggeranong. These new patrols are in addition to the 20 extra police committed in the 2004-05 budget, 10 of which will be coming on stream from 1 July 2005. The overall effect is an increase of 40 sworn police, full-time equivalents, between 2004-05 and 2008-09.

In a minute Mr Pratt will probably pop up and display his ignorance on the difference between counting the eyes and dividing by two, and full-time equivalents, but I look forward to dealing with that at the time.

This increase will enhance the capacity of the ACT police to respond to their general duties, and investigative and inquiry functions. The increase represents a continuation of the investment of the Stanhope government in increasing policing strength with approximately \$6 million allocated over four years in the 2002-03 budget. Do you have your pencil and paper? You are not writing this down, Mr Pratt. Student, write this down. Six million dollars allocated over four years in the 2002-03 budget; \$7.7 million allocated over four years in 2004-05. How much is that? Quickly Mr Pratt.

Mr Pratt: That is a pathetic number actually.

MR HARGREAVES: Yes, 13.7—good one—and now, \$3.3 million over four years. For Mr Pratt's information, this is enhancing on the base. You better write this down: the final budget of the Carnell-Humphries Liberal government delivered only 781 full-time equivalent police. The first Stanhope government increased this number to 799. On 1 July 2005, as a result of previous budget commitments, this number will increase to 829. With the new measures announced in the budget, this number will increase to 849 in 2008.

Are you ready? Are you writing this one down? You better write this one down, because I will quote this to you until you are blue. This is 68 officers more than the Liberals funded, and the highest number of police in the history of self-government.

MR PRATT: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Minister, how many police will be recruited over the next five years to meet the promised new 40 police plus attrition?

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker may the good Lord spare me. Mr Pratt should know, because of his relationship with some of the "deep-throat" people, that the AFP contingent for the ACT is part of a very large police force. That large police force has 7,000 members; it is called the Australian Federal Police. I repeat: the Australian Federal Police.

The attrition rate is not affected by any of the numbers that I have just quoted; the attrition rate is covered by such things as lateral recruitment and recovery. If that cannot happen, the policing arrangement with the AFP is to have, over a year—wait for this—in 2008, 849 full-time equivalents. That is 68 more full-time equivalents than these people ever dreamt of. That is in a year. That is a guarantee under the arrangement. I will just wait while he writes this down because he is slow at that too.

We can also draw on the resources of the AFP at large, because it is a full-time equivalent. When there are significant operations in force, we have additional police. When there is a lull, we have fewer officers on. It is the full-time equivalent. You should know that Mr Pratt. Shame on you for not knowing that. When I was the shadow minister for police it took me about 16 minutes to figure that out, and it has taken you six months, because I have just told you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

I have to share this with you, Mr Speaker: it amuses me somewhat that I have to teach Mr Pratt the fundamentals of full-time equivalency in the same way that the Chief Minister had to teach Mr Seselja the fundamentals of accounting. One at a time we will go through this bunch of crows on the fence over there and each one of the ministers on this side will give them a lesson in fundamental accounting. Until Mr Pratt understands what a full-time equivalent is, he ought to stop making a fool of himself in this place.

Mr Pratt: What's the truth about the under strength, John?

MR HARGREAVES: They are not under strength. What part of 68 do you not understand? You do not understand.

Mr Pratt: They are under strength and you are concealing the figures.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Pratt, resume your seat.

MR HARGREAVES: If you do not understand 68, you are a goose.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Pratt, Mr Hargreaves, stop squabbling.

Disability services—taxi fare subsidy

MRS BURKE: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Mr Hargreaves. Minister, what is your government's rationale for reduced funding, by way of your community service obligation, from \$962,000 to \$760,000 as a part-subsidy for taxi fares for eligible persons with a disability?

MR HARGREAVES: If you have a good read of the budget, you will see in it that our support for people with a disability is brilliant.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: They are going to go around the budget and pick a little hole—I hope this guy stumbles into it. Mrs Burke was at the Client Guardian Forum when people pleaded with us for extra money. What did we do? We delivered \$3.29 million over the next three years.

Mrs Burke: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: this is not relevant to the question. I was asking about a subsidy for taxi fares, if the minister could answer the question.

MR SPEAKER: Come to the subject matter of the question, please, minister.

MR HARGREAVES: I will, Mr Speaker. The substance of Mrs Burke's question is the government's financial support for people with disabilities. The government's support for people with disabilities has extended over many millions of dollars over the years. I believe, in fact, that the response from the disability sector to this budget has been positive. I have not had one call to my office from one person in the disability sector since the budget was announced—nor in fact since those people inadvertently leaked all this stuff—to say that they were disappointed with it. In fact, I have had a few people

convey to me, through departmental officers and people who have a disability, that they were thoroughly pleased with what was in the budget because, like everybody else, they felt that there might have been a bit of pain in it and there was not.

Mrs Burke threshes around the place, trying to find some way to suggest that this government is not supporting people with a disability. I am sorry she has got it wrong again.

MRS BURKE: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. Minister, when will your government restore this taxi fare subsidy to people with a disability?

MR HARGREAVES: Unlike those opposite, we do not regard the services to people with a disability in little pieces—like jigsaw pieces—and address those. We look at them holistically. It is about quality of life for these people, and the quality of life of these people is far more important to us than one little element. I have to say that the Stanhope government's record of addressing the quality of life for people with a disability makes those people opposite look shameful.

Vocational education and training

MS PORTER: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. Could the minister inform the Assembly of the Stanhope Labor government's recent actions to address the skills shortage in the ACT?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank the member for Ginninderra for her question. The ACT Labor government has invested heavily in addressing the skills shortage in the ACT throughout our entire term in office. Through the budget presented yesterday and the previous budget, we have committed a total of \$14.1 million in extra funding to address skills shortages in the ACT. Total funding to address skills shortages now stands at around \$80 million per annum. This is great news for the Canberra economy, for business and construction and particularly for young Canberrans and those seeking to update their skills or find a new trade.

In the ACT we saw a 16 per cent growth in traditional trade commencements over the nine months to September 2004 and a 22 per cent growth in the numbers of traditional apprentices in training. We continue to work to meet the pressures being experienced in the areas of skills shortage in the ACT job markets, across a number of industries. We have seen a 48 per cent growth in commencements in the automotive and transport industries, a 46 per cent growth in apprentices in building and construction, a 70 per cent growth in community services and health, a 44 per cent growth in finance, banking and insurance, and a 101 per cent growth in tourism and hospitality.

All of these areas are identified as areas of skills shortage. The ACT government has strongly responded to the skills pressure in the ACT economy and delivered excellent training alternatives to young people, as well as a higher profile for training in our school communities. We have experienced a huge peak in training commencements linked in part to a strong economy, coupled with the need for skilled tradespeople to rebuild after the bushfire. The growth in building and construction is now at record levels. The latest statistics from the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research indicate the

numbers commencing new apprenticeships and in training are increasing in the ACT while they are decreasing nationally.

The ACT training sector has been addressing the majority of skills shortages as they emerge, with significant growth in training in these identified areas. We are continuing to work with industry groups, unions and stakeholders to address skills shortage areas as they emerge. We are addressing the supply side of the skills shortage equation through programs such as user choice, which provides funding to all apprentices and trainees in the ACT. Our VET in schools program continues to introduce young students to a future career in a trade or an interest in an apprenticeship. All ACT government senior secondary colleges are also registered training organisations, which strengthens our capacity to offer training programs in schools. We have put in \$14.1 million in new money since the 2004 budget to address areas of skills shortage. We do this because we know there are areas of skills shortage that we have to invest in to ensure that young people have access to the opportunities and career opportunities that they seek but also that we can meet labour shortages being experienced by businesses in the ACT.

MS PORTER: I have a supplementary question. Minister, could you outline the commonwealth's response to the pressures being experienced in the area of skills shortage? Could you also provide detail of the complete failure of the commonwealth to adequately resource the VET sector in the Canberra region?

MS GALLAGHER: The very short answer to the commonwealth's response to the pressures being experienced in the ACT is that they are doing absolutely nothing to assist us in our programs to ensure that we are meeting the needs of young Canberrans. The commonwealth government provides about 28 per cent of the funding to training in the ACT—around \$17 million. We are currently negotiating the national training agreement and the commonwealth is offering us \$500,000 next year to meet the needs of young Canberrans seeking training and people seeking to upskill. All they can afford next year in new money to the ACT is \$500,000. That is not even indexation: it is the base level of 2004. There is not even any money to index their grants from last year. It is an absolute disgrace.

The Prime Minister, the education minister and the training minister are all the time on national TV and in the papers talking about skills shortages and how the country needs to work together to make sure we are addressing skills shortage—and \$500,000 is what they will give us to make sure that we can meet the needs of training in the ACT. They want to provide us with 28 per cent of the funding for training yet they want a 100 per cent say in how that money is spent—not only their money but our money as well.

At the ANTA meeting last month, states and territories were asked to sign up to a new ministerial council. Now, this is a very interesting new ministerial council. Get this: the states and territories all get one vote, and that's fair, but the commonwealth gets two votes and they get to chair the council and the chair gets another vote. So they get three votes on this new ministerial council—the states and territories get one vote—and they provide less than 30 per cent of the money going into training in the country. States and territories will provide \$20 billion in training funding over the next four years and the commonwealth will provide \$4.7 billion. They are providing 30 per cent of the money yet will have 100 per cent of the say.

They also want to establish a new national industry committee, a new national advisory committee to the ministerial council. But, guess what? That new committee will have eight employer representatives and one employee representative—that is a fair and balanced national training system, if ever I have seen one! So we have three votes to the commonwealth and then they stack the advisory committee with all their mates—eight employer votes and one employee vote. I have never seen such an out of balance agreement on the table for states and territories to sign up for. The agreement being sought by the commonwealth does not offer one cent of new money, not one new training place around the country. That is what they are seeking to achieve with this agreement—not one new training place on offer for any Australian seeking a training opportunity.

We will continue to push the Australian government to acknowledge that they are contributing to a significant funding shortfall in VET, not just around the country but here in the ACT. Our commitment is clearly demonstrated—\$14.1 million over the next three years in additional funds to training. We will continue to push for a better deal. Those opposite should do the same in the interests of young Canberrans and those workers seeking to upskill or change their employment and I expect that we will have the support of the opposition as we continue to dialogue with the commonwealth. If they do not support us, they are not working in the interests of people in the ACT, and particularly young Canberrans who need the support of both governments to have opportunities for career advancement and appropriate training. If they do not get behind us, they are being negligent to their community. That is why we will continue to argue with the commonwealth to up their offer and meet their responsibilities.

Budget—public service cuts

MR SESELJA: My question is to the Minister for Planning. The budget delivered yesterday highlights expected savings in the ACT Planning and Land Authority of \$1.4 million. The cash flow statements on page 216 of budget paper 4 show that employee expenses will drop from \$24.056 million to \$23.5 million, despite increases in public sector wages. Given this cut, how many jobs will be lost from ACTPLA in 2005-06?

MR CORBELL: Somewhere between nine and 11.

MR SESELJA: What further delays in the approval process can be expected now that you are slashing staff in ACTPLA?

MR CORBELL: You can hardly say it is slashing. ACTPLA has over 250 staff. For between nine and 11 staff, either their contracts will not be renewed or they will be offered a redundancy. ACTPLA will be rearranging their administrative arrangements to better reflect the budget position they have to address. As with all government agencies, the government is focusing—and ACTPLA is therefore focusing—on delivering efficiencies that the government expects to manage the overall budget position.

I can assure members, however, that we do not believe it will have any impact on DA assessment or processing times. A number of the positions are contract positions that will not be renewed; others will be achieved through a level of natural attrition.

It is worth noting, first of all, that we do not believe there will be any impact in terms of DA processing times and, secondly, the government, through the work it is now doing in planning system reform—and I will be making an announcement on that in the very near future—will put in place a system of development assessment, environmental impact assessment, territory plan variation processes and leasehold administration that actually means that our development assessment system and our planning system overall will be more modern, contemporary, easy to understand and easy to use and administer. That is an important piece of work which is well under way.

Mrs Dunne: In another three years time!

MR CORBELL: No, Mrs Dunne, it won't take three years. You can quote me on that. The government's process is one which is comprehensive. We are looking both at the long term and the short term in terms of managing the development assessment process.

Budget—vocational education and training

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. I refer to the section of budget paper No 2, which notes that the projected expenditure in 2005-06 for vocational training is \$103.4 million and says:

Compared to the 2004-05 estimated outcome this represents a decrease of \$2.1m.

Minister, despite all your rhetoric about \$14 million of new money, why have you cut the overall spending on vocational education by \$2.1 million, given that there is a shortage of skilled workers in Canberra?

MS GALLAGHER: The figure of \$14.1 million is absolutely correct: we invested \$8 million in the 2004-05 budget over four years to address skills shortages.

Mrs Dunne: You took three out.

MS GALLAGHER: Will Mrs Dunne just let me answer the question, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mrs Dunne!

MS GALLAGHER: We invested a further \$3 million over two years in the budget announced yesterday. Mrs Dunne will remember that, to meet the emerging pressures that we saw in 2004-05 and that we do not expect to continue in that we believe our peak huge increase in training commencements occurred last year, we invested \$3.1 million in the second appropriation and we were very clear at that time that that was to address the numbers that we were experiencing in the 2004-05 budget. That money did not continue in the second appropriation and we have put in \$3 million over the next two years, which is what we expect we need to deal with the uptake in training over the next two years. Because training is demand driven, because it relies on a person getting a job, going into an employment relationship and then making a decision to take up training, we cannot absolutely guarantee the total amount of funding that is required to meet that training. It is demand driven. We do our best guess. Our best guess is that we reached a peak last year of, I believe, around 6,700 in training. That was a huge increase.

When I first became minister, we were not meeting the training commencements required under the ANTA agreement and I had to go and seek the growth money from the ANTA agreement as special dispensation from the commonwealth because those opportunities were not there. To their credit, they gave us that money in recognition of the pressures we were being faced with because of the bushfire that had just occurred. We got that growth money, even though we were not seeing the growth that was required under the agreement. We invested then in a publicity campaign—put enormous resources into making sure that everyone knew what their entitlements were—and we have seen an absolutely massive growth in training in the ACT. We have seen it peak—go right up to the top—and we are seeing some flattening out of that. The money provided for in the budget is in recognition of the fact that we expect that the peak has occurred and that we have enough money there to meet our responsibilities to fund training in the ACT.

I should say, on the other hand, that, whilst we have invested that money, the commonwealth has not added a cent. We put \$5.1 million in last year alone—not one cent from the commonwealth, in a situation where we are in a joint partnership—so \$14.1 million from the ACT government, meeting their responsibilities, and \$500,000 from the commonwealth.

MRS DUNNE: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. Minister, to what extent is your decision to slash funding to the VET sector a reflection of your obvious ideological objection to the national training agreement?

MS GALLAGHER: I do not have an ideological objection to the national training agreement. We want a national training agreement. What we do not want is a commonwealth training agreement. There is a difference. What the commonwealth wants is a commonwealth training agreement whereby the states fund it 70 per cent of the way and the commonwealth funds it 30 per cent of the way. What the states and territories are saying is, “Hang on a minute. That’s not fair. That’s not a national training system. That’s not governments working together. That’s one government using their muscle to say, ‘We will provide you with less than 30 per cent of the money but we want 100 per cent of the control. We want to tell you how to hire and fire your staff in TAFE colleges, even though they are your employees; we want to do that. We want to remove apprentices from state-based awards, from the protections they seek there. We want to have a council that is not representative of training across Australia. We want eight employer representatives and one employee representative’—that is not representative of training arrangements—‘we want three votes on the ministerial council, we want to chair the ministerial council and we want to tell you how to spend \$20 billion.’”

Any joker in the street could see that that is not fair: “States, you fund \$20 billion and then we will tell you how to spend it. We will spend that money for you and we will spend it in a way, and with strings attached, that does not meet what states and territories say they need in order to deliver training in their own jurisdictions.” So it is not an ideological opposition to a training agenda. It is a straightforward, “This is not fair.” If Mrs Dunne were in my position and she sat here and said, “Well, that is fair. That is fair for Canberrans, for young people,” she would not be doing her job properly.

Budget—public service

MR GENTLEMAN: My question is to the Chief Minister. I understand that, at the Business Council's ACT budget breakfast this morning, the opposition Treasury spokesman made certain statements about the value of the public service. Can the Chief Minister explain how these statements contrast with the government's support of the public service, particularly through its continued budgetary provision for pay rises for our nurses, teachers, firefighters and other public servants/

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Gentleman. It is a very important question. Today, at the budget breakfast, of course, we saw the first inkling from the Liberal Party of the sort of budget that they, if in government, would bring down. It was the first opportunity that the people of Canberra had to test what sort of treasurer Mr Mulcahy would be, if he were still to be shadow Treasurer at the next election.

It was important that there be some insight. We are all expecting, of course, that tomorrow, in the budget reply, we will have an alternative budget on the table across all the issues that have been raised today in question time by members of the opposition and that they will be giving us their response to each of the issues that they have raised at question time today and in relation to which they have a particular interest. We will see that tomorrow, in the detailed budget response—the alternative budget. That, of course, is what tomorrow is about—in reply, the alternative budget.

We will see on the table tomorrow, by 4 o'clock, the Liberal Party's alternative budget, the budget they would have delivered on Tuesday of this week had they been in government. It is interesting. We wait, of course, with some anticipation for that alternative budget to be delivered tomorrow.

But there were some signals this morning of what we might expect. In relation to the public service and public service funding, the unequivocal statement made by the shadow Treasurer was that the Liberal Party would cut \$100 million from the health budget. The statement was made, replete with an overhead, straight from Mr Mulcahy's speech—which, I am sure, he is more than happy to table or release—to verify the statement. Mr Mulcahy said this morning, for all the world to hear, that in relation to the health budget, as delivered, the funding provided in the budget delivered by the Treasurer on Tuesday of this week is excessive to the tune of at least \$100 million. There is the first indication of what we can expect in the alternative budget tomorrow—a \$100 million cut to the health budget.

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Mr Mulcahy did not say that this morning. If the Chief Minister can prove it, then he should put it on the table. Otherwise, he is misleading the Assembly.

MR SPEAKER: Withdraw that.

Mr Smyth: I withdraw, Mr Speaker.

MR STANHOPE: The second of the issues that give some indication of the sort of budget-in-response that we can expect tomorrow goes to the issue of the public service.

Mr Mulcahy took the opportunity today to repeat the furphy—now familiar—that public servants are overpaid and that if the Liberals had been in government the public service would not have received the pay rises they have received over the past three years. Of course, we know that to be true. We know it to be true from the money they included in the forward estimates when we took government. A one per cent provision for public service pay rises was made in the budget at the time we took over.

That comes from a history, in the last term of the last government, of 5 per cent total pay rises to the ACT public service over the term of that last Liberal government. Their contribution to, their acknowledgment of, the work and value of the ACT public service was pay rises of a total of 5 per cent over their last term, compared to the 13 per cent that we have delivered.

In the environment we were in at the last election, at the death, Mr Moore, the then Liberal health minister was negotiating with the nurses. He actually negotiated a 14 per cent pay rise without any allocation for paying it in the forward estimates. That is what we inherited at that time.

An interesting thing—and an interesting point to make—in relation to Mr Mulcahy's \$100 million cut to the health budget is, of course, that that essentially represents the quantum of the pay rise that we made to nurses and health professionals in the last round. I think that is essentially, perhaps, what Mr Mulcahy is saying: nurses and health professionals received a pay rise—which, over the period, was actually to the tune of \$100 million—that was completely unwarranted.

The other intriguing and interesting issue about what we can expect of a Liberal government in the future is that Mr Mulcahy made it absolutely clear this morning that no pay rise should ever be made to public servants without offsetting productivity gains or concessions. That was the point today in this speech: pay rises should simply not be negotiated or agreed in any circumstance on the basis of no granted or conceded productivity gains.

Exactly what are Mr Mulcahy and the Liberals going to expect of our nurses? Which productivity gain or change or concession was to be made by our nurses? Which was to be made by our schoolteachers? Which was to be made by our fire fighters? What was it that Mr Mulcahy expected of them?

Mr Mulcahy: Mr Speaker, I wish to raise a matter under standing order 46. You indicated previously—

MR SPEAKER: I don't know whether the Chief Minister has—

Mr Mulcahy: You said last time, Mr Speaker, to raise it at the time and not leave it to the end of question time.

MR SPEAKER: You can raise the matter when question time has concluded.

Mr Mulcahy: Right. I took it the other way.

MR SPEAKER: Do you have a supplementary question, Mr Gentleman?

MR GENTLEMAN: Was the Chief Minister surprised at the opposition Treasury spokesman's view that the normal course of business should have allowed the government to anticipate the budgetary impact of the Gallop report into disability services, the Vardon report into child protection and the McLeod review into the operational response to the January 2003 bushfires?

Mrs Dunne: Mr Gentleman's first question was about funding to the hospital. Mr Gentleman's supplementary question does not relate to hospital funding. Therefore, it is out of order.

MR SPEAKER: It is in relation to the budget.

Mrs Dunne: No. Mr Gentleman's question was about funding for the hospital and the specific statement made by Mr Mulcahy. He cannot, if asked a question that is in order, then labour all over the budget. He asked a specific question about a specific statement. The question that he is now asking is in no way related to his first question.

Ms MacDonald: On the point of order, Mr Speaker: Mr Gentleman asked a question that related to the payment of nurses, firefighters and a lot of people. It did not relate specifically to hospitals. It was a general question.

MR SPEAKER: I will listen to your supplementary again.

MR GENTLEMAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The supplementary question was: was the Chief Minister surprised at the opposition Treasury spokesman's view that the normal course of business should have allowed the government to anticipate the budgetary impact of the Gallop report into disability services, the Vardon report into child protection and the McLeod review of the operational response to the January 2003 bushfires?

MR SPEAKER: The question is in order, Mrs Dunne. Let me explain why it is in order. The first part of the question was in relation to the shadow Treasurer's comments at the budget breakfast this morning. The theme continues in his supplementary question.

Mrs Dunne: Standing order 119 says that supplementary questions may not introduce any new matter.

MR SPEAKER: I am sorry; I disagree on that.

Mrs Dunne: He is bringing in the Vardon report and the McLeod report on the bushfires. Mr Speaker, can you tell me which matter that Mr Gentleman raised in his supplementary was raised in the original question? Standing order 119 says that no new matter may be introduced.

MR SPEAKER: I am not going to enter into a debate about this. Mr Gentleman asked a question in relation to comments by the shadow Treasurer. He has asked a supplementary question in relation to comments by the shadow Treasurer. I am going to allow the question.

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Gentleman. It is important that the people of Canberra have an opportunity to understand what will be in the Liberals' alternative budget tomorrow. The rationale and the basis for the decisions will be revealed tomorrow in the response.

There were many aspects of the presentation and responses by the shadow Treasurer this morning that came as some surprise, I think, to all of us, for example, not being gratuitously offensive about it, the complete lack of grasp or understanding that he has of the budgetary process.

It is interesting—and everybody should know and understand—that Mr Mulcahy this morning took the opportunity to sneer at decisions taken by the government included within the budget in relation to the funding of a human rights commission and to our continued commitment to a community inclusion on a board which is doing fantastic work in relation to addressing issues around disadvantage, disconnection and poverty within the ACT. Indeed, Mr Mulcahy also expressed major surprise and concern that we were prepared to continue to support the social plan with significant funding and even going to the point of actually funding a review, analysis and report on the implementation of the social plan.

I think perhaps a week or so ago I would have been surprised by the vehemence of Mr Mulcahy's attack on these things until I learnt—I have only been advised of this; I have not had it confirmed; I would be happy for Mr Mulcahy to confirm it today in relation to this hardline view he takes on social issues—that at the last Liberal Party policy council it was Mr Mulcahy who led the charge, taking over from Mr Stefaniak, on the introduction of the death penalty in the ACT. I guess, in that particular context, his attitude to the social plan really should not surprise any of us.

One of the issues of enormous concern is the dismissive attitude adopted by Mr Mulcahy in relation to the unanticipated expenditure the government has faced over the last three years in relation, for instance, to child protection and the need to respond in a very direct way to the recommendations of the Gallop report and the McLeod report—initiatives which, over the last three years, have been funded to the tune of some hundreds of millions of dollars in resources and funded in the budget for the outyears. Mr Mulcahy insisted that all of these issues, all of this expenditure, should have been included within the budget bottom line as an anticipated or expected incident of government; that the government should have in place, in the circumstance of the situation, the wherewithal to deal with the outcomes of the bushfire, to deal with the recommendations of the Vardon inquiry in relation to the need for us to better protect our children and the need for us to actually support and respond to people with a disability.

What a remarkable statement for a shadow Treasurer to make: the hundreds of millions of dollars expended and anticipated and budgeted for were just part and parcel of the day-to-day business of government that they should have been included. This is from a mob that did not even include in the outyears in government any allocation or provision for pay rises.

Yet Mr Mulcahy, the shadow Treasurer, would have us believe that we should have been able to anticipate and have built into our bottom line the \$80 million or \$90 million that

we have actually provided for the bushfire recovery, the \$40 million for implementation of the McLeod report, the \$75 million that we have committed for disability services for the implementation of the Gallop report and the \$150 million that we have provided to ensure that our children are protected; it should have been built into the bottom line.

It does beg the question: why wasn't it in the bottom line, budgeted for in the outyears, in the seven years that the Liberals were in government? Where was it then? Where was the money for the emergency services authority in the Liberal Party's outyear budgets? Where was the money for disability services? It was just an ordinary incident of government, according to Mr Mulcahy, to budget for these things; it should be there.

What absolute nonsense! What an appalling grasp this shadow Treasurer has on the budget process! It really is staggering in the extreme. We have a shadow Treasurer who actually believes that there was no need for the government to expend these additional resources on protecting our children or providing appropriate services to people with a disability or ensuring that our emergency services were of a standard that we could have absolute confidence in, as we now do.

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

Personal explanations

MR SPEAKER: Mr Mulcahy, do you wish to make a personal explanation?

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo): Yes. I would like to read into *Hansard* a transcript of remarks of mine that were broadcast this morning that have been misquoted today. The words were—and these are my words, “There is no suggestion that we're about to cut the health budget, but what I've said is relative to every other state and territory. We should be getting that much more value. We're, in fact, running over costs significantly for what we're getting. I'm not advocating a reduction of \$100 million. I think the Chief Minister—if you take the trouble to seek comparative data for all states, you will understand your health system is the poorest managed in the whole country, and that's what we need to tackle.”

Mr Quinlan: Table your presentation.

MR MULCAHY: I am happy to table that, Mr Speaker.

Mr Quinlan: No, the presentation.

MR MULCAHY: I am happy to table the presentation. I do not have it with me, but I am more than happy to table it.

MR SPEAKER: You will need leave to table it. But earlier on, when you sought to raise the matter of a personal explanation, I think you verbalised me. I am going to respond to that because you said that at some other time I told you that, in relation to personal explanations, you had to raise them at the very moment an issue arises. In fact, the issue that you raised at the time was whether or not a particular matter was offensive. I responded by saying, “If you find something offensive, you ought to raise it at the time

and I will deal with it under the relevant standing order,” which is standing order 56 or 57. So it is not quite in relation to—

MR MULCAHY: I was not seeking to verbal you, Mr Speaker. It was my understanding of your advice in a future course of action.

MR SPEAKER: The point I was making is that if people are going to plead that something is offensive and they have been seriously offended, they ought to raise it at the very moment it occurs and I will deal with it. But, so far as personal explanations are concerned, we usually deal with them at the end of the segment, whether it is a debate or question time.

MR MULCAHY: I thank you for the advice, Mr Speaker.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Moderate income land ballot

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, in question time today, Dr Foskey asked me what happens with those blocks of land offered through the moderate income land ballot but not sold on the day. I am happy to advise Dr Foskey that those blocks not sold on the day of the ballot are now for sale directly over the counter from the Land Development Agency to eligible moderate-income buyers, the same people who would be eligible through the ballot process.

Answers to questions on notice

Question Nos 321, 322, 323, 324, 325 and 333

MRS BURKE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I just bring to the attention of the Minister for Health, Mr Corbell, unanswered questions 321, 322, 323, 324, 325 and 333 due 15 April.

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, I am pretty sure those answers have now been signed off by me and they should be on their way to Mrs Burke.

Question No 229

MRS DUNNE: Mr Speaker, under standing order 118A, I seek an explanation from the Minister for Health about his failure to answer question 229, which was due on 7 April.

MR CORBELL: Again, I think that reply has been signed off by me and is on its way to Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Speaker, I asked for an explanation for its lateness, not where it was. I would like an explanation for its lateness.

MR SPEAKER: The minister has told you that it has been signed and he thinks it is on its way to you.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Speaker, 118A (a) does not give the member a right to chase a matter up. It gives the member a right to seek an explanation as to why it has not been answered. I would like an explanation as to why it has not been answered.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mrs Dunne, standing order 118A enables you to ask a question in relation to an answer that has not been provided. You have asked the question and the minister has provided you with an explanation about what has happened, that is, it has been signed and it is on its way.

MRS DUNNE: But, Mr Speaker, my point is that 118A (a) actually says that you can ask a minister for an explanation as to why it is late, and to be told it is on its way is not an explanation as to why it is late. This question is now nearly a month overdue and I think a member is entitled to an explanation of why a minister has taken more than a month, over the month already allocated, to answer a question. To say, "I think I might have signed it off and it is probably on the way to you" is not an explanation for why it is late.

MR SPEAKER: I think you have misinterpreted the standing order. The standing order enables you to ask the relevant minister for an explanation.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, and I have not got one. Being told it is on its way is not an explanation.

MR SPEAKER: It is really a matter for you to take on in terms of the standing order, but as far as I am concerned, the minister has provided an explanation.

MRS DUNNE: In that case, Mr Speaker, in accordance with standing order 118A (c), I will move that the Assembly take note of the fact that the minister has failed to provide an explanation as to why question 229 has not been answered.

MR SPEAKER: No, I do not think (c) is open to you, Mrs Dunne. The minister has provided an explanation. The fact that you do not like it is not the point. It is whether he has provided one.

MRS DUNNE: It is not an explanation.

MR SPEAKER: A particular point of view about the adequacy of it is not covered by the standing order. It is not open to you to move a motion pursuant to that standing order.

MRS DUNNE: On the ruling, Mr Speaker—

MR SPEAKER: I think we have dealt with this. I am not going to change my view on this and you are not going to change yours. I think we might as well end it there. That is my ruling. If you want to dissent from it, it is open to you. I am in the hands of the house.

Affordable housing

Debate resumed.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (3.52): I have three amendments to Mr Hargreaves's amendment.

MR SPEAKER: We can only deal with one of them at a time. You will need to circulate the amendments.

DR FOSKEY: Yes. I have not yet moved the amendments. I am hoping that they are going to be circulated any minute. I would like to respond to Mr Hargreaves's amendment, and I guess Mr Hargreaves will hardly be surprised that I am disappointed that he responded to my motion—

MR SPEAKER: Pardon me for interrupting you, Dr Foskey, but we do not seem to have a copy of your amendments at the table.

DR FOSKEY: It was handed to the Clerk just after lunch. I have another copy here. Perhaps it was given back to me uncopied.

I feel that Mr Hargreaves's amendment really just states the procedures the government should be taking anyway, given that it responded to the affordable housing task force report and reports upon that every year or so. What we really need here is something that comes close to an implementation plan. The meat of my motion was about proposing a route by which we might get to that implementation plan.

I proposed that the affordable housing task force be reconvened. Mr Hargreaves amended the motion in order to remove any reference to the affordable housing task force and my amendment, which I hope you will soon see, will take on board Mr Hargreaves's amendment but add a little more strength and meat to it. We would like to amend Mr Hargreaves's proposed amendment to the preamble to include a date, so that Mr Hargreaves would be required to report to the Assembly "on 30 June 2005".

Then we would then like to add two new paragraphs to Mr Hargreaves's amendment. New paragraph 6 is to the effect that the report include an implementation plan to implement the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Taskforce report *Strategies for action*. New paragraph 7 would require the minister to consult with community groups and housing industry representatives as part of the process of developing his report.

I have added those because the Greens are serious about having this government do something about affordable housing. I appreciate Mr Hargreaves's heartfelt commitment to improving the situation. I also acknowledge that the government is taking a bit of a turn in its policy approach to the issue of affordable housing by realising that it is not just about a certain number of people being able to purchase blocks of land in a land ballot and become first home owners. It is really about people who are a long way from ever being able to do that. The issue is rental accommodation in this city.

I acknowledge that all of that is very good but, because the Greens are very keen to see something happen, and happen soon so that the crisis does not become a disaster, we have put a date on which we ask Mr Hargreaves to report. We have also added an implementation plan, because that is what has been lacking all along, so that when

preparing his report and implementation plan, the minister must consult with community groups and housing industry representatives. When we put our earlier bill on the table, the one about a certain proportion of medium density residential units being allocated to affordable housing, we had an approach from the Property Owners Association to say that they would really like to talk about it. How are we going to do this? We need to have a structure set up whereby we bring all these parties to the table together. That is what our proposal is about.

Because the government has the numbers, we expect to lose our amendments, but we want to improve Mr Hargreaves's amendment. That is the reason for my amendments. The government is probably aware that we are going to pursue this issue all the way through. If this one gets rejected, we will be coming back with something else because this issue is at crisis point. We want something to happen. The government has acknowledged that we have a crisis here. I believe the government is committed to this. I will take Mr Hargreaves's word for it that he and the government are committed to do something about it, and here is a plan to do so.

MR SPEAKER: Just to clarify, all of these amendments are being moved together, I trust, Dr Foskey?

DR FOSKEY: My understanding was that my amendments would be voted upon first and then Mr Hargreaves's amendment, which may have been amended.

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Speaker, with your leave, I propose that Dr Foskey's amendments be considered seriatim. The reason is that the government wishes to support one of Dr Foskey's recommendations and to reject the other two, and I would hate to see them all go down.

MR SPEAKER: We will come to that in a moment. Firstly, Dr Foskey, you need leave to move the amendments together. Would you do that and then we will come to you, Mr Hargreaves.

DR FOSKEY: I seek leave to move my amendments together.

Leave granted.

DR FOSKEY: I move:

(1) preamble, after "provide a report to the Assembly on", insert "30 June 2005 on";

(2) add the following new paragraph:

“(7)add the following new paragraph:

‘(6) that the report include an Implementation Plan to implement the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Taskforce Report Strategies for Action; and’ ”; and

(3) add the following new paragraph:

“(8)add the following new paragraph:

‘(7) that the Minister consult with community groups and housing industry representatives as part of the process of developing his report.’”.

Ordered that the question be divided.

Amendment No 1.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (4.02): With the agreement of my colleagues, to save the Assembly an enormous amount of time, I will comment on Dr Foskey’s amendments and the amendments I have moved myself. I understand what Dr Foskey has said. I have no difficulty with her first amendment, which puts a time limit on reporting. I am delighted to have that included as an amendment to my own amendment. So I signal the government’s support for that particular amendment.

However, the government will not be supporting the other two amendments. We do not support the implementation plan because we have been down this track before. As I mentioned in my original speech, the government has agreed to 33 recommendations, with nine being agreed to in principle and four noted for further investigation by the affordable housing task force. An interdepartmental committee on affordable housing is overseeing the implementation of the government’s response. The government’s response to the affordable housing task force is the implementation plan.

The interdepartmental committee, as I mentioned before, regularly engages with key stakeholders in the housing sector, such as ACT Shelter, the Housing Industry Association and the Master Builders Association, as well as through industry briefings conducted by the LDA. I also indicated that we have formal discussions with those affected. The two that we embarked on recently were about tenancies, involving people who were affected by the tenancy regime in the town. That included industry and sector representatives. It also included people paying rent. So we are engaging with people in that sector.

I do not propose to put another layer into this. There is just too much talk and not enough action. Dr Foskey’s amendments include an implementation plan. Well, I have dealt with that. We are not going to support that. A further amendment would require the minister to “consult with community groups and housing industry representatives as part of the process of developing his report”. We do anyway.

I have already indicated that the interdepartmental committee talks to the industry groups. When we talked to the people here in the reception room the other day, community groups and industry representatives were there. I have had chats with the HIA on a range of issues. I have signalled my intention in public a number of times that we will get away from actual home ownership and into rental so that we can talk about it holistically. I have no difficulty with the chamber saying to me, “Tell us where you’re at, minister”, or, if that is not good enough, giving me a smack on the bottom and saying,

“Get on with it”, or any other measure that the Assembly sees fit. But I do not propose to tie up people in the housing department who should be out there trying to find solutions and solving problems with those solutions. This intergovernmental committee also considers national and international initiatives in the affordable housing arrangements.

I have to take issue with something that Dr Foskey said. She said we have all agreed that we are in crisis. I do not agree at all that we are in crisis. I agree that there are some people in this community for whom a crisis looms or a crisis exists. I do not accept that we as a community are facing a wholesale crisis. That would be to put the lie to it. What we are seeing in fact is a crisis in approach because not all the community is embracing the fact that we have got a problem. We in the Assembly are embracing it. Mrs Burke and I regularly have fights over what we are going to do about it.

We do not fight over the issue. We have fights over what is being done about it, and then we disagree on that. We do not have involvement by the private sector, and I was delighted to hear Dr Foskey say that they are starting to knock on the door. Brilliant! Let us now convene the sorts of forums that we had for the tenants the other day and get those people in a room and do exactly the sorts of things that Dr Foskey says. To suggest that this government has done nothing about it, either by inference or by press release suggesting that things are missing from budgets; ergo we have done nothing, I find an abysmal piece of work—

Mrs Burke: I never said that.

MR HARGREAVES: No, you did not, Mrs Burke, but another member of this chamber did and I had to respond at lunchtime. It was not you. To that I responded that we have restructured the whole of the Housing ACT, and we continue to go through that process. The executive director, Martin Hehir, has turned the place upside down and is doing some fantastic things with alternative ways in which to assist people with their accommodation. I have listed the range of initiatives, such as the emergency accommodation service—and I know this is a big favourite of Mrs Burke’s. There is our backpacker and caravan park initiative. It is only a holding thing, but it stops somebody from freezing to death overnight.

Then we have transitional housing through Havelock House Association and Community Housing Canberra. We do not always think that everything they do is bang on the money but, generally speaking, we are attacking the problem and we are attacking it academically and with some vigour.

Mrs Burke: Even the drop-in night centre that I suggested.

MR HARGREAVES: Even the drop-in night centre. We have got another \$100,000 in this budget to look for solutions for the homeless. I do not see Dr Foskey saying, “I note in the last few budgets, minister, that you people have put \$200 million into this.” We have—\$52 million in 2005-06. It is not in this budget. It was in the previous budget, the 2002-03 budget. In 2002-03, 2003-04 and 2004-05—and I could be a year out—there was a total of \$200 million. That is an enormous amount of money by anybody’s measure.

I think we are doing some pretty amazing things. But getting together a collective of so-called experts is just a complete and utter waste of time at this stage. Now that we have these structures in place, we need to be evaluating them to see whether they are delivering on the ground and, if they are not, fix them. Then we need to take the answers back to those people affected and say, "How is this working for you?" If they say, "It's working for us", well, good. But if they say, "No it's not," we modify it again.

It is the same as with wheelchair accessible taxis. I am sick and tired of talking about this. The people that I have convened to look at it, in a very short time frame, are people affected by the problem. They will tell me exactly what they need, and I have to say that we will deliver on it because I am sick and tired of having folks talk about it. We have been talking about it, in and out of government, for too long.

The government will be supporting its own amendments, obviously, but I will happily agree to Dr Foskey's first amendment, which requires me to provide a report to the Assembly on 30 June. I would prefer to comply with that, rather than "by 30 June". Quite frankly, that gives me a way of doing it whenever I feel like it. I would rather say to my department, "The Assembly expects it on this date." That also gives me an opportunity to road test the strategies between now and 30 June, because I have very definite views on this. We will not support Dr Foskey's amendments 2 and 3.

MRS BURKE (Molonglo) (4.12): I will be speaking to all the amendments, but I will be making only one speech. To start with Dr Foskey's amendments, I take on board and welcome the government's approach. Striking a balance within the ACT in relation to the government offering affordable housing is a complex matter and there is no one single solution. Today I commend Dr Foskey's valiant attempt to try and move the government to act. However, I would like to take Dr Foskey's amendment and the minister's comments one step further.

The affordable housing task force has done its job. The minister has articulately stated that and I think that what Dr Foskey is trying to do is to get the government to act now upon the recommendations. I can see and hear the frustration coming from her office, and we join with that frustration, as the minister well knows. I do not believe there is any need to reinstate a renewed form of the affordable housing task force, as the minister has well put it. It adds another layer. Already I have concerns that we are beginning to see the government moving too far away from where the action is on the frontline, and I applaud the minister for saying he does not want another layer.

We do not want to see the reinstatement in order to see further recommendations collated and compiled into yet another set of reports for the government to consider, digest and then perhaps implement some further recommendations placed before it. Public debate certainly needs to continue. We do have a current government that is, unfortunately, renowned for delays. What we need is action, outputs and better management of the asset, and I have been on the public record as stating that. It is an asset worth, as I understand it, on recent revised figures, some \$2.9 billion.

Dr Foskey made some comments in her anxiety, I suppose, to see something happen. I have been banging this drum for two years or more. She wants a genuine attempt to find a way forward. The opposition agrees with her. She calls on the government to do

exactly those things that it should already be doing. So it would follow that, even if the government—and a majority government can do whatever it pleases, and when—were to agree to this motion, which they clearly are not going to do, except for the amendment on a timeframe for reporting that we are talking about, which is positive, it would not necessarily take us any further forward.

Perhaps, as a starting point, a review of the suggested actions outlined in the findings of the task force back in 2002 would show evidence of whether the government has considered the merits of the actual reports, and that hopefully will be revealed come 30 June. I can see your officers scurrying around, minister, now that you have dropped that on them. Indeed, this debate today may serve to refresh or wake up the imagination of a sometimes, from where I stand, tired and lacklustre government that is simply taking forever to do anything. I think this is the problem. We need to somehow find a way. Yes, implementation is one thing but, once you have got an implementation strategy, you have to have the willingness and ability and energy to make those things happen on the ground.

A number of the findings in the 2002 affordable housing task force report have, I believe, to the credit of this government, been taken on board, and I think the minister alluded to that. Some 33 recommendations were agreed to and moves have been made to implement them, which is a positive, where the government sees it fiscally appropriate and within the scope of its social planning to do so. I would anticipate that the minister is faced with a sometimes insurmountable task of not only convincing the Treasurer to see the merit of injecting further funds into the management of, for example, the public housing asset base, but also to see that the funds allocated to the housing portfolio are adequately and responsibly expended. This is what the Treasurer calls “responsible budgeting”, yet the government is not sufficiently equipped to sustain the social policies and initiatives that it built its platform on. Fiscally and ideologically, you cannot have it both ways.

Mr Hargreaves made some points in regard to using people’s housing difficulties to attract media attention. Minister, I have to address this point right now, and you have raised it before. It is a concern on a couple of fronts, one, that you are saying to people, “Don’t think by going to media you are going to get any further forward with your case.” I would like to say to you right now that you should stand up and say that publicly before TV cameras, say that to the people who are pleading their case on behalf of the hundreds of people in similar predicaments.

We are not talking about cases in isolation. We are talking about brave, courageous people prepared to stand up and say, “I am making a stand. You are not listening and you are not acting.” Listen to the individual and you may well learn that the collective approach of individuals will give you and the government a way forward. Contrary to popular belief, people who choose to go to the media do so as a last resort. Nobody wants to do their washing in public, but you cannot deny people the human right to be able to do that, to voice their feelings and their opinions. They do not feel that they are being heard and they do not feel, when they are heard, that it is being acted on.

Let us have a look at Mr Hargreaves’s assertions that I want people out of public housing. This is people who are on high incomes, who have assets and the means to move into the private market or purchase their own home. It is an assertion that your

predecessor Mr Wood fully agreed with. We had many discussions about how we would move people through a public housing system, which is there for people who are in greatest need. People in a position to be able to move out of public housing should be given every opportunity to do so, surely. Perhaps, minister, you should be looking at the sensible approach to this crisis in the way your New South Wales counterparts are doing. They are being upfront and honest with people.

What we are seeing in the ACT is not sustainable. We started off with a rather false base of encouraging people to come to Canberra, providing them with public homes and we have never really come to grips with that. I would be happy again to talk to you about how we work through that. Your own asset management strategy will show you that you cannot and do not provide security of tenure for every tenant—I think you will have to watch your words when you look at that—and I do not blame you; I am with you on that. It is an unrealistic and unsustainable position to take and, unfortunately or fortunately, I will not sit by, unlike you at times, minister, and watch our very fine crisis accommodation service providers struggle to provide alternative accommodation. People who can see their way out of the public housing system should be encouraged and assisted wherever possible, as your former minister did, to do so.

You were talking about having an issues-based forum. I suggest that we have had enough talking. You said it yourself, minister—less talk and more action. You have everything at your fingertips. Use it. We are now well into the second term of this government, so you have had two or three years to act upon these recommendations, and I acknowledge that you are slowly—slowly being the operative word—chipping through them. An ever-present dilemma for government is finding the right balance between the provision of all appropriate forms of housing, housing that is not only affordable, but also sustainable. There is much more I could say, but I think we have to say that reconvening a task force at this point in time will not further any action that is required to find forms of housing for people who need assistance in finding affordable housing options.

The opposition supports a bipartisan approach and the distinct need for a longer term affordable housing strategy in the ACT. We will agree to the time frame. We certainly do not agree to the reconvening of the affordable housing task force. We ask the government to get on with it. There are three volumes of books sitting here gathering dust. Let us get a move on, work more expediently to get the recommendations implemented and make sure the frustrations of the community do not continue to build as we have seen, yes, through the media, but also through the debates in this place.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (4.22): I rise in support of Mr Hargreaves's amendment. I do not support Dr Foskey's amendments. I agree with my colleague Mr Hargreaves that we do not have any problems with the reporting time frame. I do not agree with Dr Foskey's amendments 2 and 3 as I think they are redundant.

The establishment of the affordable housing task force was an important first step in addressing declining levels of housing affordability. We would all agree with that. However, since then the task force has concluded its work and the government has developed strategies that cover the entire spectrum of the housing system, that is, home ownership, private rental market, public and community housing and homelessness. These measures are designed to work together to ensure continuity of assistance across the range of housing needs in the community and will be examined on an ongoing basis.

I would like to detail some of the actions taken by the government, and these are substantial. The government has injected \$33.2 million in additional funding for public and community housing, the largest single amount by any government since self-government. It has also injected \$13 million for homeless initiatives. Measures implemented as a result of the work of the affordable housing task force include a commitment of a release of 500 affordable blocks of land over the next five years, the first of which was released in the moderate income land ballots held in December last year and again recently in April. We have just heard Mr Corbell saying that we are continuing to monitor the way that these are offered to the community.

There have been increased stamp duty concessions for first-home buyers, with further concessions linked to price movements in the market and the introduction of rental bond loans for low-income earners and incorporation in the City West master plan of a requirement to deliver affordable housing in five per cent of total residential development. I must say that, like Mr Hargreaves, I am somewhat confused about Dr Foskey's statements about homelessness in this context.

There have been changes to the public rental housing assistance program which broadened eligibility, improved access for people at risk of homelessness, reduced minimum rent for those most in need and gave additional assistance to tenants to help them sustain their tenancies. Moreover, the ACT, along with other states, has called on the commonwealth government to take a lead role in the development of a national housing policy. In the meantime, under the provisions of the commonwealth-state housing agreement, housing ministers across all states and territories are working together to develop a strategy for joint action on housing affordability.

While reconvening the affordable housing taskforce is not supported, this government has a strong commitment to addressing declining levels of housing affordability. It does not do this in isolation. It will continue to implement its strategic approach to the provision of affordable housing while working in partnership with the building and development industry to investigate new affordable housing products. It does not need to spend scarce resources on reconvening the taskforce to do that. I believe that, in light of what the government is doing now, Dr Foskey's second and third amendments are redundant. I am happy to support Mr Hargreaves's amendment to this motion and also the reporting commitment that we have already undertaken to support.

Amendment No 1 agreed to.

Amendment No 2 negatived.

Amendment No 3 negatived.

Mr Hargreaves's amendments, as amended, agreed to.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (4.26): It is a very interesting process when you bring a motion to this Assembly and you end up not even really having the opportunity to have that motion put. That is fine. That is democracy. It also a product of the government's having the numbers in the house.

However, I have been listening, unlike others, who prefer to hear the sounds of their own voices even when others are speaking, and what I have heard here are words like “bipartisan approach”. That came from Mrs Burke. This is really interesting because when it comes to the crunch, Labor and Liberal tend to vote together. I think we do have a bipartisan approach.

It really makes me wonder. For a start, where does it leave the other party in the Assembly? There are three parties in this Assembly and probably my own approach is far less adversarial than either of the other two parties towards each other. I find this sort of reversion to bipartisanship very interesting, and probably very rhetorical actually. So thank you. I am very happy to remain a political commentator because, as a political scientist, I do watch what happens here with some interest. I always remain interested and amused even while I see really sad things happening here.

When we offered a way that was a very low-cost, possibly almost a no-cost way of dealing with this issue, we started hearing, “It is too expensive.”

Mr Hargreaves: I didn't say anything about that.

DR FOSKEY: It must have been you, Mrs Burke. The government will do something when it is its idea but when it is someone else's idea, they are not too keen on taking it on board. What we have ended up with is, I think, a little improved. We do have a date now and although that is a very meagre achievement, perhaps in the context of this place it is an achievement. So I feel as though there has been a little bit of progress today.

It disappoints me when people who say they are strong advocates for social justice and that they really care about the homeless and so on really just buckle at the knees when it comes to doing something. That is what our motion was about.

Mrs Burke: Where were you the last two years?

DR FOSKEY: Mrs Burke, it was about doing something. Every other thing that we have so far put up has been rejected. This was just a little thing that might have got done.

Mrs Burke: Keep on trying.

DR FOSKEY: Okay. I just wanted to put that on the record. Housing, health and education are really at the crux of movements towards social justice. Access to housing is the basis for enabling people to get a job. You have to have an address. You have to have somewhere to wash your clothes. You have to have a bed to sleep in.

Mr Hargreaves: I do all that myself.

DR FOSKEY: My house does not do that either, but I still find that a house facilitates my doing it. I close there. We will be following this. We will certainly be looking forward to the minister's report and it is very likely that there will be a lot of input in that report from the people whom he says are the so-called experts. Some of them are experts through experience. They live with the situation. Others are experts because they work with it and others are experts because they have done heaps and heaps of study and

written things and are very much respected by other governments. I would be very happy to let you know who they are, Mr Hargreaves, if you should decide that you would like to advance your knowledge a little more.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Graffiti

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (4.32): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the general untidiness and shabby Third World country look of the city as a consequence of the proliferation of graffiti across suburbia and through the city and town centres;
- (b) this shabby image is having a profound impact on how people generally are feeling about their city, including a feeling of declining safety;
- (c) that graffiti is encouraging an erosion of pride in the look of our city and consequently encouraging further vandalism;
- (d) the threat to tourism and the development of business caused by the impact of graffiti and related vandalism; and
- (e) the Government's failure to significantly reduce graffiti, including its failure to implement serious policies aimed at preventing graffiti, protecting government and private property and prosecuting graffiti offenders; and

(2) calls on the Government to take immediate action aimed at:

- (a) strengthening policies to seriously tackle graffiti prevention;
- (b) providing additional support to owners of private property repeatedly afflicted by graffiti;
- (c) prosecuting graffiti offenders and strengthening rehabilitation; and restoring a sense of pride in the community.

There is a growing feeling that Canberra is becoming one of the most graffiti-stricken towns in this country. That, in itself, is bad enough. But that the national capital, for which this government has custodial control and the nation's trust should have descended to this level of decay is way beyond acceptable. This government should be deeply ashamed for having let this town run down to the extent that it has. I move this motion today to illustrate the level of neglect and the failure of this government to manage this growing problem and to call on the Stanhope government to get serious about tackling the graffiti problem.

The look of a community reflects the pride of that community and reflects the strength of the community—or the lack of a feeling of strength. Whether that is fair or not, that is the fundamental judgment that visitors to the ACT will make. Sometimes I feel a little ashamed to show visitors, particularly our international visitors, graffiti-stricken parts of our town. I recall a lot of cities, towns and villages in developing and Third World countries. Many of them are graffiti stricken but many, regardless of the lack of opportunity, are not. In their own simple way, they are clean, well ordered communities

and their people are proud of what they have got. I suggest they are a damn sight prouder than we are in the ACT. I find this embarrassing situation untenable. The ball rests squarely at the feet of the Stanhope government.

Graffiti vandalism is consistently spread across the town. Nothing is sacred any longer. I believe that even the war memorial, that greatly adored national icon, has now been attacked. Our national assets have become collateral damage because the Stanhope government is too weak to tackle graffiti in its own jurisdiction. The Chief Minister and his Minister for Urban Services should hang their heads in shame.

Let me give one example of the scope of this problem. From the southernmost regions of Athllon Drive well south into the Tuggeranong Valley and from there into the Canberra city centre we see dozens and dozens of the graffiti tag "Axiom". This destructive person Axiom, whoever he is, has splashed his tag over everything imaginable: power, utility and post office boxes in the centre of the Tuggeranong Valley; colorbond fences along upper Athllon Drive in the vicinity of Torrens and Pearce; bridges across Adelaide Avenue and public and private buildings in the city. Commuters who take that route into the city daily assure me that Axiom has been hard at it for about two years.

How can a serial graffitist vandalise the whole community for years and evade arrest? If he has been arrested, why has he continued with the same tag? The answer can only be that the Stanhope government does not care to arrest even serial graffiti offenders. If they do, they do not have the heart or the willpower to strike the fear of God into these people who vandalise property across the ACT. Even when these tags are not directly on a particular building, there is sure to be graffiti in the vicinity of the building, making the whole area look rundown and uninviting.

Someone who spends a fortune installing a new colorbond fence becomes a target of irresponsible vandals who brazenly spray their tags up and down the street. These vandals know they can get away with it because the Stanhope government is not doing enough to deter these criminals. As a consequence innocent residents suffer not only the destruction of private property, but also the enormous cost of having it cleaned up.

To continue to paint the picture—pardon the pun—just about any shopping centre in the ACT is affected by this problem. By way of example, the Ainslie shops, the topic of recent publicity, is one of many urban shopping centres continually covered in the stuff. It has suffered this problem for years, with little sign of improvement. We have recently also seen the widespread publicity in the media about how business owners and visiting tourists to the city are fed up and disgusted at the graffiti vandalism that plagues just about every building and alleyway. It has been said by many that the extent of this problem makes this place look something akin to a Third World country. Even the Chamber of Commerce has said:

We have been hearing from businesses for about a year that graffiti is an issue and that the Government has refused to remove it from privately owned sites, and has become slower in removing it from government owned sites.

The cost of graffiti removal to the community is enormous, not only the direct financial cost, which I will go into in a moment, but also the loss of trade for business owners in areas covered in graffiti. The area then looks rundown and uninviting, turning potential

customers and much needed tourists away. This is something that has not to date been fiscally measured, but theoretically it would have a significant financial impact on business turnover.

If we analyse the costs that have been measured, we see that the Stanhope government has spent about \$3.5 million in the last three and a half years on graffiti removal. This figure, however, does not include the costs incurred by private property owners to have this mess remove. It is estimated that graffiti removal is costing business tens of thousands of dollars and, in some cases, hundreds of thousands of dollars to remove. Now the Treasurer is going to impose a levy on business owners to cover the cost of graffiti and general rubbish removal.

But there is no guarantee that this money will be used for such a purpose and no guarantee that it will actually have any impact on the problem. It does not necessarily mean that the Stanhope government will ensure that graffiti is cleaned up more extensively or that it will reimburse business owners for the cost of graffiti removal, which it is not doing currently. It just seems to me to be another excuse to raise revenue and punish business owners for the problem instead of punishing the real offenders. To add to the burden, residential property owners are also slugged with the cost of graffiti removal from their own fences and brick walls. This is an unacceptable burden.

The number of incidents of reported graffiti in the last three and a half years has exceeded 50,000. If we break this down into yearly figures, there does not seem to have been that much of a drop in numbers in the years since the Stanhope government came to office. There has been an appreciable drop but, given the very high level of that activity in the first place, there has not been any measurable inroads into this problem. In 2001-02, there were 15,292 reports; 16,000 the next year; 13,000 the year after and, in the last six months, 5,200 reports of graffiti to the ACT government. I got those figures from answers to questions on notice.

I strongly suspect that even more reports could have been made in recent years. It would not surprise me if many Canberrans have given up reporting many of these graffiti attacks as the amount of graffiti at present around the place never seems to decline and nothing ever really seems to be done to address the problem. So why bother? People simply could not be bothered to report something that will probably never be fixed by this government anyway. So if the number of reported incidents do, in fact, decline by the end of 2004-05, it will probably be simply because people have stopped reporting them.

Let us look at arrests. If we look at the actual number of arrests or penalties issued to graffiti vandals in the last few years, we see that the Stanhope government certainly is not serious about deterrence. It is unbelievable that, of the 50,000-plus incidents reported to the Stanhope government over those years that I mentioned, there has been a total of 77 arrests—and not all arrests either. That figure includes cautions, summonses or diversionary orders issued. That is pathetic! That is less than a 0.2 percent success rate by this government in actually dealing with offenders. This indicates to me and to the community at large that this government is not serious about tackling this type of crime. The problem is that the majority of perpetrators escape punishment because they are not caught. If they are caught, they are not given appropriate severe penalties. The arrest rate is pathetic.

What attitude underlines this failure of action to deter graffiti? Is it philosophical? Does Jon Stanhope order his minister and the department to go soft on graffiti vandals? Does he order that no action should be taken? Does Mr Stanhope think that it is okay to deface the people's buildings, particularly if it is political graffiti attacking his political enemy? Or is the government just bone idle, as it is in every area of good governance and the fundamental delivery, or non-delivery, of services?

Whatever the unfathomable attitude permeating this government is, they do not care to prevent graffiti. They do not care to deter offenders. They do not care to clean up graffiti on time, unless, of course, it is politically embarrassing to leave it on display. Then we have some poor hapless and confused urban services officer and contractors out to clean it up immediately. How pathetic!

The government's graffiti management strategy, introduced in August last year, is clearly not working. Firstly, the community looks as graffiti stricken as it ever has. Secondly, it takes too long to have graffiti removed, even if it is offensive, although the government's policy boast is that it will remove offensive graffiti within 24 hours. Recently it took seven days, after much complaining, for offensive, explicit graffiti to be removed from a school crossing. Many more stories of this calibre come to my attention. Thirdly, the government's policy basically depends on cleanup and not prevention. Vandals instinctively know they are not going to be caught and, if they are caught, they do not seem to be hit with any serious penalties. The government's policy is a reactive policy, rather than a preventative policy, which it must become. The government's policy reflects in fact a soft-on-crime approach to tackling the crime of graffiti.

The Stanhope government's graffiti management strategy, introduced in August 2004, is just that. It is a management strategy, not a prevention strategy and not a reduction strategy. It is almost as if graffiti does not matter: it is a minor miscellaneous issue. It is almost funny, in light of the current proliferation of this graffiti rash that has appeared all over Canberra's epidermis, that the first objective in the ACT government's graffiti management strategy is to "enhance the ACT's built and natural environment by reducing the incidents of graffiti vandalism within the ACT and its cost to the community". Members should note the reference to "graffiti vandalism". They know that it is a crime. Yet the cost to the community has not decreased and definitely will not decrease now, especially with the introduction of the new levy, supposedly for graffiti cleanup, which has now been imposed on business.

A further objective of the government's graffiti management strategy is that the government will "promote a do-it-yourself approach in responding to illegal graffiti issues at a local community level". Again, they are clearly shifting the onus for dealing with the problem away from the government and placing the burden on our law-abiding and hard working citizens to clean up the mess the graffiti vandals have left behind.

What the Stanhope government is really saying is that the cost to the government on paper will go down, but the cost of graffiti cleanup will simply be shifted onto the community, the business sector and the private property owner. In other words, the cost will miraculously be removed from, or significantly reduced in, the ACT government's books so that they can say, "The cost of graffiti cleanup has fallen." They will claim that there has been some miraculous reduction of the problem. However, all that will really

have happened is that the government will have shifted the financial burden elsewhere and it will appear in somebody else's books.

If Mr Stanhope is going to be soft on graffiti, if he is going to be sympathetic to graffiti vandals and treat graffiti as just a joke, indeed a political joke, then he must be responsible for removing graffiti from private, as well as public property. You cannot have it both ways, Chief Minister. If we look at the removal of graffiti, the Stanhope government's approach actually identifies that the rapid removal of illegal graffiti is an important and effective strategy in prevention and reduction.

In conclusion, we have a territory that is adorned with graffiti. We see a declining standard, a government soft on prosecuting graffiti crime, young graffiti offenders not deterred from creating graffiti—that is, from committing an offence—and a government which is not prepared to accept responsibility to clean graffiti off private property, not willing to protect private property. We see a government that has failed to address graffiti in the ACT. We must see direct action from this government to take on this insidious scourge.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella-Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (4.47): I move:

Omit all words after “notes”, substitute”:

- (a) the Government is keenly aware of the issues associated with graffiti in the ACT and has taken a pro-active role through the development of the ACT Graffiti Management Strategy released in August 2004;
- (b) this Strategy is the first of its kind for the ACT and represents an innovative and comprehensive approach to the management of graffiti;
- (c) the Strategy addresses graffiti through 5 key elements—prevention, removal, diversion, community awareness and education, and legislation;
- (d) the establishment of the Graffiti Management Steering Committee in February 2005 and the appointment of a Graffiti Coordinator to work with the Committee, to implement key actions of the Strategy and liaise with young people and stakeholder interest groups;
- (e) a successful graffiti art workshop program was established in 2004-2005 in partnership with Arts and Recreation Training ACT, with funding support from Urban Service's Community Partnership Program;
- (f) 15 legal graffiti art sites have been identified on public assets and another 15 sites are currently being assessed for their suitability for legal graffiti art;
- (g) approximately \$1 million dollars is provided annually for an ongoing graffiti removal program from public and private assets. Of this about \$780,000 is spent on graffiti removal from assets within urban open spaces and \$212,000 on removal of graffiti from private assets in public view;
- (h) the Graffiti Hotline (6207 2500) was established last year to coordinate all requests for the removal of graffiti from public and private assets; and
- (i) a community awareness, involvement and education campaign targeting various elements of the Strategy is also being implemented.

What an outburst! I have to say I take issue with Mr Pratt's suggestion that Canberra is one of the graffiti-stricken cities in this country. Mr Pratt says that we are in a Third World country. I suppose he is drawing on his experience of skulking about the Balkans and looking at people adorning the place with graffiti.

Mr Pratt: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. The statement that I was skulking around the Balkans is offensive. Under the standing order dealing with offensive language, I ask that that statement be withdrawn.

MR SPEAKER: I can see that you would be offended by that comment. Mr Hargreaves, withdraw that comment.

MR HARGREAVES: I withdraw it, Mr Speaker, and say instead that it was while Mr Pratt was swanning around the Balkans looking at these people perpetrating this heinous crime. Third World country is an interesting label. I do not suppose that Mr Pratt has been to Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Darwin, Hobart, New York, London, Paris, Washington, Boston, Singapore or Bangkok.

Mr Gentleman: LA.

MR HARGREAVES: LA. Thank you very much, Mr Gentleman. They are not all in Third World countries, but let me tell you: they have graffiti in spades in those countries! This scaremongering does not wash with me. I think that Mr Pratt ought to apologise to the good burghers of this town for bringing this town into disrepute.

On the one hand he says we are not doing anything and on the other hand he says we have added \$3.5 million into trying to remove it. One might suggest an inconsistency. He says that he has had many reports on how it takes a long time to get the graffiti removed. We can have reports at 50 paces, if you like. Do you want to see the number of reports I have had from my own colleagues and from constituents about the new face of Hindmarsh Drive? It was a good target. It is not anymore.

Mr Pratt complains that the government has not removed the graffiti from private assets. Why have those people not removed it from their private assets? It is not the government's responsibility to remove anything from private assets. If there are filthy alleyways behind the private assets of those very rich banks that bankroll the Liberal Party, then why are they not actually doing it? Why is it that someone can adorn the National Bank and the Liberal Party instantly jumps to their defence and says, "Oh, that poor bank can't afford to remove that graffiti."

Mr Pratt talks about tags. The Axiom tag is a good example. Everybody has seen that one. I have to say that very few graffiti items appear on a pristine wall at half past two in the afternoon just as a police car is cruising by. These people are a little bit sneakier than that, Mr Pratt. You know, anybody would know, that you need to have proof. You have to catch people in the act of doing it with a spray can in their hand. Guess what happened to the Ainslie shops?

I also suggest to you, Mr Pratt, that the tags are unique. You would know that. Guess what, Mr Pratt? The Department of Urban Services keeps a register of the tags, so that if

a person is caught by the constabulary doing a particular piece of graffiti, then that evidence is provided to the police.

Mr Pratt: When are you going to catch Axiom?

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Pratt, you will not be happy, will you, until every household has their own police officer parked out the front of their house?

Mr Gentleman: Two coppers in every schoolyard.

MR HARGREAVES: Two coppers in every schoolyard. Mr Pratt is the bloke who wanted to have attack dogs walking up and down the supermarket aisles. This is the guy who wanted to have police going through the schoolyards with police dogs disarming five year-olds. Well, good on you, mate. Your reputation is in tatters, pal.

This government is keenly aware of issues associated with graffiti in the ACT and it has taken a proactive role through the development of the ACT graffiti management strategy released August 2004. This character across here says, "Your strategy's not working, guys." It is not a year old and it has still got more intelligence than you have. It is brighter and more effective than you are ever going to be and it is not a year old yet.

Mr Pratt: Maybe Axiom has got a government grant. Has it?

MR HARGREAVES: Maybe it has, Mr Pratt. Do not blame these guys if you have a problem with drawing, mate.

The strategy addresses graffiti through five key elements: prevention, removal, diversion, community awareness and education and legislation. There are 35 key actions listed in the strategy, of which a number of key initiatives are currently under way. Has this character over here ever gone to the CIT and talked to those people who were actually removing it? No. Has he ever seen the training courses these people go through? No. Does he know the law about removing things from private property without their permission? No.

Mr Pratt: I am just looking at graffiti, John.

MR HARGREAVES: He is just looking at graffiti. Where is the piece of graffiti that you pointed out, mate? It is at the back of the National Bank building. Your rich mates can afford to rip it off themselves. It is not our problem to remove it.

The graffiti management steering committee was established in February 2005. This committee comprises representatives from relevant ACT government agencies and stakeholder groups. The purpose of the committee is to adopt a whole of government approach to graffiti management and to coordinate implementation of actions in the management strategy across the ACT. We have a graffiti coordinator who was recently appointed to work with the committee to implement key actions of the strategy and liaise with young people and stakeholder interest groups.

In 2004-05 a successful graffiti art workshop program was established in partnership with Arts and Recreation Training ACT, with funding from urban services community

partnership program. These art workshops gave young people interested in graffiti art the opportunity to develop graffiti art skills in an environment that promotes legal graffiti art as a legitimate outlet for creating activity. A similar program is planned for 2005-06. As a result of this program, an addition four official mural sites are being established. Fifteen legal graffiti art sites have been identified on public assets and another 15 sites are currently being assessed for their suitability for legal graffiti art.

These sites have been developed in cooperation with graffiti artists and the community. Legal graffiti art sites recognise the role that graffiti plays in youth culture and provides the opportunity for graffiti writers and artists to express themselves in a responsible way, receive public recognition and practice their skills legally. Official murals, of which there are currently 30, including graffiti art pieces, have also been established on public and privately owned assets.

Murals play an important role in the community as they provide the opportunity for artists to demonstrate their creativity and skill, whilst reducing graffiti vandalism and enhancing the urban environment. The recent mural painted in Bible Lane shows the government's commitment to working with the private sector and community artists to minimise graffiti in the community.

Here is a contrast. I went down and had a look. I will bet that Mr Pratt has not, unless he took a can with him. I would not know. It might have been a can of something to remove something. Who knows? I went down this lane and on the one side there is this massive great mural, a beautiful piece of art, a massive beautiful piece of art sponsored by Blades, the private business that is leasing premises on one side of this alleyway. On the other side of this alleyway, there is just writing. They are not offensive words. They are just tags. But it looks pretty ordinary and there are bills stuck there.

You tell me which one of those two pictures was in *Canberra Times*, with some person standing next to it saying "Isn't this awful?" There would not have been 12 feet between the two of them. Did the *Canberra Times* put them both in? No. It got the owner of one of the clothing businesses to stand beside this dirty piece of graffiti outside a privately-owned asset. None of the graffiti was offensive. None of it depicted violence or racism, yet they bag the government for not removing it. It is not the government's responsibility to remove it. Anybody who has a look at the law will see what it is we are responsible to remove. Mr Pratt says 24 hours to remove the offensive stuff is far too short.

Mr Pratt: I didn't say that.

MR HARGREAVES: You said it was too long. I do not care. Either way you said it was not right. You were criticising the fact that we do remove the stuff in 24 hours, and we do. As soon as it is reported, it is actually checked out. If it meets the criteria, it is removed within 24 hours. About \$1 million is provided for the ongoing graffiti removal program. Of that, \$780,000 is spent on graffiti removal from assets within urban open spaces and \$212,000 is spent on removal of graffiti from private assets in public view. But Mr Pratt reckons we are not doing enough.

The graffiti hotline—62072500—was established last year to coordinate all requests for the removal of graffiti from public and private assets. If you have had so many reports to

your office, Mr Pratt, how many of those have you passed on to the hotline? I will wager none. You are quite happy to come in here and say, "I've had all of these people say there are crimes being committed out there." Not once have you reported those on to the police. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Start doing it.

A community awareness involvement education campaign targeting various elements of the strategy is also being implemented. Residents, businesses and community groups such as Neighbourhood Watch are being encouraged to monitor and promptly report graffiti offenders to the crime stoppers hotline—1800 333000—and to remove illegible graffiti from their property as soon as it appears. That is graffiti that is not the responsibility of the government. If it is racist, if it depicts violence, grossly offensive or sexual in nature, we will do it within 24 hours.

Information about graffiti removal techniques, graffiti removal contractors and graffiti prevention strategies are provided to private leaseholders via the hotline. The ActewAGL is supporting this awareness campaign through informing the public of graffiti strategy in their quarterly magazine.

The government considers the current penalties for punishment of graffiti offenders to be adequate. There is a range of provisions dealing with damage to property in both the Crimes Act and the Criminal Code. The Criminal Code provides a maximum penalty of—wait for it—\$10,000, that is, 1,000 penalty units, and/or 10 years imprisonment for damage to property, which includes defacing property. Sentencing options available include restorative justice, particularly for young offenders. This is a form of mediation, where the victim meets the offender to make them aware of the impact of the crime. Punishment often includes removal of graffiti by the offender or other community service. First time offenders are now being considered for participation in legal graffiti art workshop programs as a diversionary measure.

As we implement the graffiti strategy over the next 12 months, we will continue to work with the police, building owners, community youth groups and graffiti artists themselves to reduce the incidence of illegal graffiti and encourage graffiti artists to employ their artistic talents to enhance the vitality of our city, rather than defacing it. The graffiti management steering committee will play a key role in bringing government agencies, stakeholders and youth groups together to resolve the current graffiti problem. However, I should warn that there are unlikely to be instant solutions.

The graffiti management strategy came into place in August 2004 and the steering committee started work in February 2005. I suggest to members that the strategy in the former regime, in the pre-2001 period, was zip, nothing, absolutely nothing. There was a little bit of penalty in the Crimes Act. But was there any strategic approach to this? Was there anything in the way of saying, "How can we discourage people from doing this?" No. We have been told that there has been a huge upswing in all of this graffiti. That is rot, absolute rot. This guy is building up a straw man so he can he pull it down.

I am looking forward to seeing your response to the budget tomorrow to see how many millions of dollars you guys are going to put into it and what strategies you have got. I reckon it is going to be—

Mr Pratt interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: It is your policy, mate. Your policy on this is going to be, “Please turn over on both sides of the paper.” You will keep yourself busy for a fortnight reading it.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (5.02): I do not support this motion as it is currently stated, and I have quite a few reservations about the amendments. Firstly, I do not think graffiti gives this city a shabby, Third World look, and I do not believe it is the Third World that has a problem with graffiti. I feel I can pretty confidently say it is likely to be cities like New York, London and Sydney that have more of a problem with graffiti than, say, Darfur, Mandalay or Kabul.

I feel sure that Mr Pratt has been to a number of Third World cities and is probably going to agree that a rising degree of homelessness is more a characteristic of Third World cities than graffiti. Sadly, he has rejected the opportunity to do something about this particular Third World problem today in our own city. Our federal government’s aid program also is not too good about approaching the problem of homelessness in the Third World.

Mr Pratt’s motion represents an attitude commonly expressed in the *Canberra Times* letters pages over the past few weeks that is based on negative assumptions about graffiti and its writers but has the unfortunate tendency of polarizing the community into “us and them”. A leading researcher from the University of Sydney, Dr Kurt Iveson, says:

Those wishing to regain control over urban surfaces tend to group together a vast and diverse array of textual and artistic practices as the “graffiti problem”. These different forms of graffiti may have very little in common, other than the fact that they are seen as a problem in need of a solution. A tag in a housing estate stairwell, a colourful mural on a railway line, a political slogan painted on an advertising billboard, a racist message on a shop window...

He says that all of these instances of graffiti are likely to have been written by very different people with very different purposes in mind, and that these various instances of graffiti are also likely to have quite different impacts on the quality of life of citizens.

Grffiti has been an important mechanism in political movements over the years. I do not know, but I am sure Mr Pratt is old enough, as I am, to remember the “buga up” campaign. That is spelt b-u-g-a—in case people think I am swearing.

The buga up campaign involved groups of concerned citizens in every capital city—I am not so sure about Canberra, but certainly Sydney and Melbourne—that used to protest about sexist billboards for smoking by going in and removing a few key letters, so that something that was promoting something would become something that was far from an advertisement for it. It was a very successful campaign. In retrospect, it has been hailed and there have been things on TV about it. So there you go—there is graffiti and there is graffiti. Nonetheless, it is not really for us to judge. I think graffiti is in the mind of the beholder, just like art and a number of other things.

Consultation with young people undertaken last year by the youth coalition found that graffiti is an important part of youth culture; that, in a way, it is a way young people

communicate with each other; that they can recognise different types of graffiti, rather as Norwegians recognise different kinds of snow, even though to us it all looks the same.

Youth place some value on certain forms of graffiti and 96 per cent of participants in this research thought that graffiti is always, or sometimes, a form of free speech. Nearly three-quarters believe it is at least sometimes a form of public art.

Young people also recognise that some forms of graffiti are a form of vandalism, but the key point here is that it is not always vandalism to them. Many young people feel that the presence of graffiti marks an area as youth friendly rather than less safe. In particular, large colourful murals are considered to add value to public spaces and to be a valued part of the streetscape.

It is important to balance the views and feelings of various groups in our community. While the views of young people are important and the least likely to be heard—I do not think we saw any of them writing to the *Canberra Times* recently—so are those of other members of the community. It is clear that many people do not like graffiti, that some find it offensive and that some feel less safe in areas where it is prolific. It also has, of late, been used as a political football.

It is important to point out that feelings of being unsafe are based on perception. Research conducted on behalf of the New South Wales police in 1996 and 1986 emphasised that there is no statistical connection between graffiti and potential or actual violence.

Perhaps we could look at issues such as that graffiti artists are expressing their own search for identity—their response to an anonymous city which appears to have no place for them. These are deeper issues that are overlooked by both Mr Pratt's motion and Mr Hargreaves's amendments.

Nonetheless, in this city we want public spaces that are inclusive and welcoming to everyone. This means that we need graffiti management strategies. It is important that these strategies are based on evidence of effectiveness and are not knee-jerk, emotional reactions. The research would suggest that solutions do not lie in further criminalizing this behaviour, increasing prosecutions or feeding community anger. I quote Dr Kurt Iveson again. He says:

Any attempt to find a simple or final "solution" to the "graffiti" problem will invariably produce very blunt policy instruments which are not sensitive to the diverse range of practices and motivations of those who write different kinds of graffiti...research on Australian cities suggests that blunt policy instruments typically fail to achieve their own goals, and worse, they catch young people in a regulatory net which can result in unnecessary marginalisation and social exclusion...wars on graffiti are effectively wars on certain young people who come to be defined as enemies, unfairly scapegoated as the cause of apparent declines of shared community values. Those who may already feel alienated or marginalised are pushed further into conflict with authorities and away from any public institutions or agencies which may exist to engage them as active members of civil society. Harsh penalties for graffiti offences also bring more young people into contact with the criminal justice system, an outcome which contradicts more progressive efforts to

prevent juvenile crime. More sophisticated and inclusionary policies must be developed and politically defended.

According to researchers, such as Dr Iveson and groups representing young people, removing graffiti and trying to prevent it with costly paint technology and surveillance equipment is going to be ineffective and expensive.

An alternative approach to graffiti is to recognise that the problem is where it is written, rather than the graffiti itself. Projects that seek to provide spaces where graffiti is not considered a problem, by creating more legal sites for graffiti and advertising them so that young people know where they are—sites that are attractive to graffiti writers because they are visible and accessible—can provide acceptable alternatives.

The youth coalition produced a report last year and the ACT government developed a graffiti management strategy, partly in response to that report. I am going to run out of time in a minute, so I just want to say that I might be able to bring some of this in when I respond to Mr Hargreaves's amendments, if I get such an opportunity.

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra) (5.12): I refer to Mr Hargreaves's amendments and the substantive motion of Mr Pratt. Might I say to Dr Foskey's comments: the vast majority of young people simply do not do graffiti. I remember as a young bloke that none of my mates did that. One part of Mr Pratt's motion jumps out at me a bit here and that is paragraph (b), which reads that this shabby image is having a profound impact on how people generally are feeling about their city, including a feeling of declining safety.

I remember, as a 10 or 11-year-old, going on the train from Canberra to Sydney to stay with the rellies. In inner Sydney you had a whole lot of graffiti in a few stations as you were coming in towards central. That did give it a rather scary look, so I can well and truly imagine a lot of people feeling like that.

In 1988 I had the opportunity to go to New York. As I walked through parts of that place where there was a lot of graffiti it made me feel that it was shabby, and there was a feeling of a lack of safety there. I find that that is especially something that a lot of my older constituents feel.

I do not mind graffiti art. There is, I think, ample opportunity in Canberra to legitimately do that but over the years and certainly over the last 12 months I have noticed that there seems to be that much more graffiti in our city. If Mr Hargreaves has had his strategy up and running since August 2004, I question whether it is working.

I speak to a lot of people who came to Canberra in the 1970s, 1980s or early 1990s, who went away for a while and then came back, who comment on just how tacky the city looks. Invariably they comment about there being a whole lot more graffiti than they ever noticed before. I think that is a very real problem.

I do not think it is terribly appropriate to compare ourselves with other cities, although I note that I probably see a bit less graffiti in Sydney these days than I did as a kid. I note that Mayor Giuliani in New York introduced a zero tolerance policy where instead of the police allowing people to commit minor acts of vandalism such as graffiti they would go and ping them and take them into the station. That had a fairly significant proactive

effect. Not only did it make the city look better by fixing up things like broken windows and graffiti but the crime rate also dropped by 40 per cent. So there are those ongoing effects.

Mr Hargreaves says that the government does not have any real responsibility if it happens on private property.

Mr Hargreaves: No, I did not—I said “not all”.

MR STEFANIAK: The government does have a responsibility, however, to uphold law and order and ensure that the laws are not broken. Graffiti vandalism is not the most heinous crime in the statute book—one could hardly equate it with crimes like selling drugs, murder, robbery or anything like that—but it is a significant crime in itself. It is malicious damage. It impacts on a lot of people and the government needs to do all it can to try to stop it.

As I said, I have noticed a lot of extra graffiti in the last 12 months. Whilst our former colleague Mr Cornwell was away for about a month prior to the election before last, I looked after his portfolio. During that time I had to do our urban services launch. Someone asked me to do that somewhere where the place looked tacky, and I thought I would do it in my electorate. It was rather difficult finding the best tacky spot because there were quite a few very tacky spots where there was lots of graffiti. I think I finally did it at the MacGregor shops.

It has not got much better. Looking around William Hovell Drive, Belconnen Way and Coulter Drive, there is ample evidence of graffiti everywhere. If you go around any suburb you will see examples of graffiti. Some of it is on private property, on colorbond fences or on wooden fences. Other examples are on things like Actew electricity boxes. There is indeed a plethora of unwanted graffiti in this city and I think it is high time the government did something about it.

Mr Hargreaves also said: what did the previous government do—nothing. He mentioned that we might have done something with the Crimes Act. I am not too sure if we did something with the Crimes Act—I think that in itself might be reasonably sufficient.

We did something that I would encourage you to do. In the very early days of the Carnell government in 1995—in fact it might have been an initiative in our first budget—the graffiti action squad in the Department of Urban Services was implemented by my then colleague Mr Tony De Domenico, better known as “the Dipper”, to clean up graffiti as quickly as possible after it occurred.

If you can remove it within 24 or 48 hours, often the graffiti vandals do not come back. But if they do come back and you keep removing it, they get sick of it. I would encourage you to do that, Mr Hargreaves. The amount of money you are spending on it is perhaps not dissimilar to what we did, except it was done a hell of a lot better then, for whatever reason. It was all done within urban services.

I think you are quite wrong to say that nothing occurred. I would commend you to go and have a look at what the anti-graffiti action squad did when it started as a result of, I think, the 1995-96 budget. You might find that that is very helpful to you.

I think it is grossly unfair for the government to flag in its budget that it is going to put a tax on property owners and business owners in Civic to clean up graffiti. I think the minister's comments to Mr Pratt on that are indicative of an attitude within the Labor Party. He said, "Your rich mates can afford to rip it off themselves."

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

MR STEFANIAK: He confirms that. Mr Pratt, whether they are rich or not, they should not have to remove it if they did not put it there. They are, in fact, innocent victims of it.

Mr Hargreaves: We didn't put it on!

MR STEFANIAK: No, I am not saying you did; I am asking why on earth should they have to do it. With respect to that typical bigoted ALP response, might I tell you that there are a lot of businesses in Civic, which are not rich and are struggling, which can certainly do without unwarranted graffiti on their premises. I think it is very unfair to expect them to pay extra taxes for graffiti to be removed, when it should be the role of the government to do its best to prevent it in the first place.

I would be the first to say that I do not expect you to completely wipe it out. I have absolutely no problems with some legal graffiti art sites. We did that ourselves. I do not know if you need quite as many as you have. That in itself is certainly not going to stop it, because some people simply do it in the area they live in. You cannot have about 150 legal graffiti art sites. Even then, I do not think you would stop it completely.

I do not think that in itself is a panacea that is going to end it. I do not think anyone here has a problem with legal graffiti art—some of it is indeed quite attractive—but to hang your hat on just that I think is a very real problem.

If you want me to make a few suggestions as to how you might minimise it, apart from going back into your department and having a look at the Dipper's anti-graffiti squad, might I also commend to you Mr Cornwell's bill in the last Assembly, which was naturally defeated by the comrades over there, to ban the sale of spray cans for under-18s.

Dr Foskey probably does not like that idea at all but it has been shown to work pretty effectively in other parts of the country. It does not stop legal graffiti, because that can be done properly, but it has a big impact on illegal graffiti. It is not a great impost on anyone who wants to lawfully use paint cans. It works elsewhere and I would commend that to you, Mr Hargreaves.

You mentioned—and you read out quite accurately—the powers available to the courts. I would impress upon the courts that they should also look at something that is effective and which they occasionally do. That is, when people are apprehended, make the person who is picked up, charged and found guilty of placing graffiti on something clean it off themselves. That has a very salutary effect. That is something that I think should happen in more instances than not, because it brings home to the person, be they young or not, that it is an antisocial, vandalistic act, and that they have to spend a hell of a lot more time cleaning it off than they did putting it on.

That, more than anything else, is probably a very effective way of ensuring that those particular people do not offend again, especially when graffiti crimes, in the general gamut of the criminal law, are at the lower end rather than the higher end of the scale, as I said earlier. I think that is a particularly effective thing and I think the courts should do a lot more of that than they do. As Mr Pratt said, only 77 people were in fact apprehended. Obviously your government could do more there, Mr Pratt, but equally, for those people apprehended, there is more the court system could do.

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Pratt is not in government at the moment, Mr Stefaniak.

MR STEFANIAK: You have only apprehended 77—he gave the stats. I am impressing upon the court, in this instance, Mr Hargreaves, to take the most effective action, which has been shown in the past to be a significant deterrent. It also cleans up the mess these people make. People need to be made responsible for their own actions. We cannot excuse antisocial behaviour. I commend all that to you, Mr Hargreaves, and will be opposing your amendments.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (5.22): Apart from the government's progressive approach to the management of graffiti that was outlined by the Minister for Urban Services, the government has also been employing a range of other strategies to improve the look of our city and instil a sense of pride in the community.

The new Litter Act 2004 was passed by the ACT Legislative Assembly on 30 September 2004, providing a more effective piece of legislation to deal with littering. The new provisions broaden the definition of "public place" to include any place that members of the public have access to, enabling an authorised officer to request the removal or formal clean up of litter, and include the revision of penalties to better reflect the varying degrees of severity of littering offences.

Under the new Litter Act 2004, there is the ability to issue infringement notices for offenders, ranging from \$60 to \$1,000. The new Litter Act has given our city rangers some teeth. A campaign is soon to be undertaken, concentrating on illegal dumping at charity collection bins, dumping in public laneways in Civic and in main shopping centres. On-the-spot fines of a minimum of \$200 will apply to the city, and the city rangers will patrol the areas well into the evening, including some nights and weekends. The sites selected for surveillance will also be those known to suffer illegal dumping.

The ACT government has also initiated and supported several community-based programs aimed at raising public awareness and to address the issue of littering. These include the adopt a road program, clean up Australia day, and a trial of the butt-free city campaign in conjunction with the Butt Littering Trust.

The government is currently in discussions with the people from Keep Australia Beautiful, regarding participation in their sustainable cities awards program. Keep Australia Beautiful is an organisation that works with local government, community groups and dedicated individuals to promote a community ethos of taking care of the environment.

In addition to the programs already discussed, the government is currently working on the Canberra central project implementation team, to deliver capital works programs in the 2005-06 financial year, which will improve the city's look and feel. As mentioned earlier by the planning minister, \$700,000 is being provided to improve signage throughout Civic, including the implementation of new street blades and various forms of information signage to complement the existing beacons, arcade directories and information pillars.

The year 2005-06 will also see the delivery of the \$6 million first stage of the Childers Street redevelopment, which will be a benchmark project in a realisation of the City West master plan. The government is active in positively tackling the range of issues that impact on the look of our city through a range of constructive measures. I commend Mr Hargreaves's amendments to the motion.

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (5.25): I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments on the issue of vandalism and graffiti. Despite the government's promises to reduce the instance of graffiti vandalism across the ACT, the problem is still visibly out of control. Indeed, it ranks as one of the issues on which I receive the highest level of complaints. I think it is probably exceeded only by planning and possibly health.

Mr Hargreaves: That's rubbish!

MR MULCAHY: The minister refers to this as rubbish, but I would encourage him to listen to the sorts of complaints that come from constituents. I receive regular communications—phone calls, emails and letters—on this issue. Graffiti is a form of vandalism. As we know, graffiti usually carries a negative message, and sometimes it is the trademark of a particular group of people and, in other cities, gangs.

I am not sure of the nature of some of those repetitive symbols and signs in this city, but it certainly is a fact that graffiti causes property owners a headache and hits both the public and private purse. Mr Snow described Civic last week as "tired, rundown, plastered in graffiti and untidy with rubbish". He said there was a lack of pride in civic presentation. I am sure that most members of our community would agree with that view. It is certainly one I support.

He went so far as to describe parts of Civic as being Third World. I am not sure if it is Third World but there is certainly evidence throughout the city centre of a very poorly maintained centre for the nation's capital. The appearance is largely contributed to by graffiti. The appearance of graffiti in the centre of a city gives an adverse impression to tourists.

I refer to the "broken windows" theory advanced by Wilson and Kelling in 1982, which was that allowing neighbourhoods to become rundown and neglected encourages more criminal behaviour. In an attempt to reduce the graffiti problem, the territory government introduced a graffiti management strategy last year; however, it is quite clear that the problem remains active.

I have many complaints that come through. When private businesses are the target of a graffiti crime there is a hefty cost involved with the removal process, which comes out

of the individual business owner's pocket. It is an unscheduled and unexpected expenditure for many businesses that has to be met to maintain an acceptable appearance.

Complaints are received pretty much every week from property owners, and sometimes residents, in Canberra who are fed up with the appalling occurrence of this damage. I find there is a particular level of complaint in the Weston area, especially in relation to graffiti on signage on frontages bordering Hindmarsh Drive, but I have also received complaints from other parts of Canberra. I will quote from a letter recently sent to me by a resident. It says:

Having recently escorted some overseas and interstate visitors around Canberra, without any prompt they initiated a comment about the amount of graffiti on buildings and fences that was visible in the Nation's capital.

If Canberra, specifically Civic is not cleaned up quickly, there will be great losses for the Territory through tourism, business and general appeal of ACT residents. A more attractive public area will draw more numbers.

A cleaner and safer city will provide a more inviting environment for tourists to visit.

I have lived in larger centres than Canberra, but it is a feature of the landscape in this city that it has a very high level of graffiti. That is a matter of concern to many ratepayers in our city. I think it behoves governments to make a greater effort to improve the situation. Solutions have been advanced by members on this side of the Assembly.

I take some encouragement from what Mr Gentleman mentioned in relation to intensification in monitoring of the city. Hopefully that will ensure that more people who are involved in the some 15,000 acts of graffiti vandalism that I am advised are reported each year in the ACT are apprehended. With only 20 per year being dealt with, it is clear to me that greater vigilance is required, with potentially tougher penalties, if that is what is needed to divert people from this activity.

I reject the suggestion that came from the Greens that this is some form of creative expression. People have an obligation to live within the rules of our society, and vandalising the property of others is simply unacceptable. I have much pleasure in supporting Mr Pratt's motion and would encourage members to give serious regard to this issue which impacts on the overall appearance of our city.

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (5.30), in reply: Much has been made of the New York "broken windows" program. I do not intend to go into that in detail but would stress again that, by taking a vigilant approach to petty crime and working from the ground up, the New York police and the public services in that city indeed reduced crime significantly.

The figure of somewhere in the region of 85,000 robberies per year was reduced to 50,000 per year or, as Mr Stefaniak said, there was about a 40 per cent break. So you see, when you are vigilant and focus on those minor issues, there is a win-win and a moving up effect. New York, which was previously a very dangerous city, benefited greatly from the "broken windows" campaign approach to petty crime, including vandalism.

The minister was wondering why we were not comparing Canberra to other larger cities such as Sydney, Melbourne, New York, London, et cetera. That is a fair comment in one respect. You would have to say that the sort of graffiti problems cities of that calibre around the First World have had have been serious problems. It would seem to me that those problems have remained fairly constant over the years with the exception of New York, where inroads have been made. But we are talking about Canberra, where we have seen a dramatic deterioration in standards in 20 years. You are comparing apples with oranges if you take that approach.

The Greens wondered why I have been describing Third World cities, countries and villages. Clearly the Greens did not listen to what I said. I said that, in travelling through developing countries, there is a lot of graffiti; but I also said that there are many proud communities in the Third World that do not have graffiti. They compare and relate quite favourably to what we see here in Canberra.

The minister was bemoaning the fact that the *Canberra Times* had only selectively photographed graffiti in the city and photographed what he described as the “dirty graffiti” on the back of city buildings, but had failed to photograph the nice graffiti—somehow to develop some sort of balanced picture of what we are seeing in the city. It does not matter, because the issue was that business owners in the city centre were concerned at the level of dirty graffiti on the backs of their buildings. That was the issue and, understandably, that is what the *Canberra Times* was focusing on.

By the way, a lot of people do not particularly like so-called nice graffiti or art graffiti adorning buildings. A lot of people in Canberra, whether they like the architecture or not—and there is a lot of criticism about that—would prefer to see buildings left as they are, not covered in graffiti murals and the like. Maybe there is a place for that, but it is not necessarily out in the public square or in the public street.

There is surely an outlet for those who want to exercise their graffiti art tendencies and talents but perhaps it is somewhere out of sight and out of mind, where it does not impact on the community, when the community does not feel particularly supportive about that sort of activity.

Dr Foskey’s ebullient, poetic descriptions of graffiti and her lame excuse for the graffiti problem simply do not help the problem. No graffiti is good in public places. Taking the poetic approach that, “Oh well, we let these young things exercise their artistic talents and express themselves in some way” is not the answer to tackling the problems we have in Canberra, which is simply rundown, looking dirty and covered in graffiti.

We would hope to see the Greens join with us here in this place to take a more responsible and proactive approach to trying to lift the standards of the city, to take a more accountable approach towards trying to head off at the pass this growing graffiti problem, rather than worrying about various artistic talents. That is not the answer; and, besides, the greater community does not really care, as I was saying, for this so-called graffiti art. I think it is the responsibility of all of us in this place to be concerned about the greater good, not simply always what concerns certain interest groups in the community.

To finish off, I want to talk about what I think the government must do to tackle the graffiti problem in the ACT. What is the point of simply reacting to the problem—that is, running around and cleaning up after the deed has been done? Do we just keep cleaning up more and more mess, faster and faster, adding more graffiti clean up contracts to the mix, or do we tackle the real issue, do everything possible to prevent this problem from occurring in the first place, and deal adequately with those who engage in this destructive and illegal behaviour in a way that will act as a deterrent to others?

The Stanhope government must deploy additional inspectors, with police, to detect and arrest the graffiti vandals. Given the apparent difficulty of arresting graffiti vandals as the extremely low success rate of 2 per cent shows, an example must be made of those arrested in order to deter others from committing similar crimes.

The reality of the extent of the problem points us towards this tack being taken. There should be no more cautions or slaps on the wrist. These criminals should be charged with the serious offence of graffiti vandalism and defacing or damaging property, in order to lead them to understand the consequences of their actions.

I have said here today that the graffiti management strategy is not enough. I am not criticising the mechanics of that; the minister got that wrong. I quite support the elements that we currently see in that strategy. It is a step ahead. It was a good move put in place a couple of years ago—effectively a year ago. It is a good start, but I am arguing that much more needs to be done to add value to that management strategy. I say again that we need to put in place a preventative strategy as well.

We are not advocating that there should be an automatic jail term for all offenders. In fact, most offenders arrested committing graffiti crimes would not go to jail. Recidivist offenders must face the prospect of going to jail if they continue to want to destroy property in the ACT and continue to pull down the standards. I am proposing the imposition of a binding court penalty, weekend detention and clean-up squads in order for these people to understand the implications of their actions. We would like to see the banning of spray cans to under-18s. Another essential change is needed in that regard.

In New South Wales they have introduced legislation to make the sale of spray cans to under-18s illegal. That would seem to be another positive step forward. The Labor government in a major state has proposed that as a major strategy towards combating this problem head on. Why cannot the ACT have a look at that and try to conform, particularly given that we are an island within the jurisdiction of New South Wales?

In conclusion, the ACT is in bad shape graffiti-wise. It is looking unkempt and the standards have gone down, despite making comparisons with New York and London. A mere decade ago the ACT was a much cleaner looking place. Standards are declining and this government has got to move directly and firmly to take this problem head on.

The Stanhope government is soft on graffiti crime. We are suggesting that the Stanhope government must arrest offenders, that it must put the majority of those offenders into weekend detention and graffiti clean-up activities; and that the Chief Minister must show that he is firm—he must exercise leadership by showing that he is fair dinkum about taking on graffiti.

Graffiti is affecting the city's look, it is affecting our tourist potential and it is affecting our business potential. For the sake of business, tourism and peace and quiet in this jurisdiction, graffiti must be directly taken head on. This government must get serious.

Mr Hargreaves's amendments agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Medicare

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (5.42): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) recognises the importance to the ACT community of maintaining accessibility to Medicare funded treatments and services based on objective merit rather than subjective value judgments;
- (2) notes the negative implications associated with restricting Medicare subsidisation for in vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatments on an arbitrary basis; and
- (3) affirms its commitment to accessible and affordable health services for all ACT residents, including the provision of IVF, at the discretion of the individual, in consultation with their medical practitioner.

Bill Hayden, on 29 November 1973, said that the purpose of Medibank—and later Medicare—was to provide the most equitable and efficient means of providing health insurance coverage for all Australians. Under the leadership of former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, the Australian government introduced Medibank to the Australian community in 1975 and, with it, the notion of universal health care. These visionaries of the 1970s recognised the need for the government to respond to a growing decline in health care and ensure that each and every Australian had access to high-quality health care, no matter their class, race, sex, status or station.

Universality of care, however, has consistently come under attack by the Howard government and its campaign to achieve a society where the user pays. John Howard, early in his career as Prime Minister, was quoted as describing bulk-billing as “scandalous” and Medicare as a “monster”. The Howard government has never been a supporter of Medicare, and it would appear that he is determined to undermine the universal health care system wherever possible.

In the ACT, bulk-billing rates per capita are the second lowest in the country, only ahead of the Northern Territory. Bulk-billing rates have declined so much in recent times that in the ACT the current bulk-billing rate is at a mere 37.6 per cent. Finding a doctor who will bulk-bill in Canberra is nigh on impossible, and for the everyday Canberra whose young child has fallen suddenly ill it is often the case of “Do I take my child to the doctor or do I buy groceries to feed my family this week?” We now have to live with a two-tier health system, a system based on wealth and capacity to pay, not based on need and equity of care for all. This is not universal health care.

The accident and emergency departments of our public hospitals face continued pressure as more and more people find that attending a general practice is simply beyond their financial means. The Treasurer, Mr Quinlan, reminded us yesterday that in the years 2000-01 to 2003-04 our two major hospital outpatient occasions of service grew from 361,000 to 427,000. The federal government has undermined the system of primary health care to the point where the ACT government has to pick up the tab.

ACT residents find it difficult to access equitable and affordable health care and, as I said, this is directly caused by the Howard government and its campaign to make the user pay. The Howard government has forced ACT residents to think twice about accessing health care—something no parent, no elderly person, no person with a disability, no ACT resident should ever have to do.

The Howard government has continued its campaign with a recent proposal to limit the number of IVF treatments women can access by limiting access to Medicare rebates on the procedure. It was not so long ago that the federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, exhorted women to have children, to “pop them out”, so to speak, in abundance—one for the husband, one for the wife and one for the nation. Aside from the fact that it is one of the most offensive things to have ever come out of Mr Costello’s mouth, it is interesting that women are now being told that their right to access IVF, a procedure that can enable otherwise childless women to have a family, is now being removed.

As many people would know, the decision to have a child is not an easy one these days and many women find the decision stressful at the best of times as they juggle conflicting demands of work, family and the economic realities of making ends meet. Many workplaces are not as family friendly as they should be and, for many women whose work is in an uncertain environment, it is impossible for them to decide whether to establish a career or to take time off to have a child or children.

Family finances are further put under pressure by the arrival of children and, for many prospective parents, having a child is simply not financially possible while the Howard government continues to erode childcare systems, the education system and our health care, not to mention our workplace terms and conditions.

The process of simply giving birth—not that giving birth could be ever described as simple—means financial pressures in itself: ultrasound, GP visits, specialist consultations and hospital stays. Pregnant women face increasing costs just to ensure that their child is brought into the world healthy and happy and that both mother and child remain healthy throughout. Add to all this the fertility issues and this decision becomes quite traumatic for women and their partners.

Before the recent federal election, Tony Abbott and John Howard were heard to be espousing the view that the best thing about Medicare is that it is uncapped, patient driven. The Prime Minister claimed that this was the fundamental element of Medicare. This would appear to be yet another Howard government lie as he and his mates undermine the so-called Medicare safety net and begin to cap treatments that patients have the right to access. The Howard government will continue to wage its campaign to make the user pay until the very end. No-one can deny the conservative bent of the

current federal government in terms of social issues, and it is clear that this move by Tony Abbott is one that has been prompted by this conservatism.

This proposed cutback on Medicare is a cruel denial of health care to ACT women and is only the very beginning. Once this cap is made, who is to say whether the caps will stop. What next will the Howard government cap in an attempt to reduce the effect of the blunder it committed in introducing the short-lived, so-called Medicare safety net?

Tony Abbott, as with all other politicians, has no place in the medical consulting room. However, this move by Tony Abbott is exactly where this places him. Tony Abbott has a degree in law, not medicine. Tony Abbott has worked as a journalist, not as a general practitioner. Tony Abbott is a member of the federal parliament, not a family planner. Tony Abbott is a government minister, not a gynaecologist. Yet this move places him directly in the consulting room with a woman, her partner and her specialist. It involves the federal government in a clinical decision where it has no place and no right to be.

It would appear that Tony Abbott is not the only member of the Liberal Party who has medical aspirations. A member of the ACT Liberal opposition has also weighed into this debate and is quoted in the *Courier-Mail* as saying that is it cruel to encourage older women to seek IVF. Perhaps members of the ACT Liberal opposition should first seek a degree in medicine before attempting to give medical advice.

The decision about whether to undertake in-vitro fertilisation treatment is a decision that can only be made by a woman and her partner in consultation with her specialist. It is stressful and traumatic, and women do not need the added pressure of the federal government being tight fisted and downright mean when funding medical procedures that women have the right to access.

The federal government has a responsibility to protect and enshrine the right of each and every Australian to access equitable and affordable health care. There is nothing in this proposed change that is equitable or affordable. This is merely a further example of the conservative campaign the Howard government has convinced itself it has the right to fight. The notion of universality of care is exactly that—universality, all, every. Access to Medicare-funded treatment should always be based on objective merit rather than the Howard government's subjective value judgments. Mr Speaker, this is the thin edge of the wedge. This is yet another attempt to dismantle the basic tenets and principles of universality of care—the basic tenet of Medicare.

Finding a bulk-billing doctor continues to become increasingly difficulty. Witness the promise of a safety net, cynically broken six months after we were told by Tony Abbott that it was rock solid, cast iron. And now the Howard government wants to deny some women and their partners the opportunity of having a family.

This is yet another shameful attempt to create a class system based on the principle of user pays. If you can afford to have IVF treatment, then it is available. But if your income is insufficient to privately pay for the procedure, then you miss out. To deny women access to Medicare-funded IVF treatments is a denial of the right of women to access health care—the very heart of the notion of universality of care. I ask members of this place to join me in affirming a commitment to accessible and affordable health services for all ACT residents.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.51): Mr Speaker, I thank Ms Porter for putting this motion on the agenda today because it is an important motion and we really need to have a discussion about the whole nature of universal health care systems. Ms Porter just said that the federal government is mean spirited because people cannot get access to whatever they want whenever they want it and that it is truly conservative and is running a conservative agenda. By that definition, Mr Corbell is the arch-conservative because there are now 5,099 Canberrans who would like to get access—

MR SPEAKER: Relevance, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: It is relevant to the funding of health care services, Mr Speaker, and access. According to Ms Porter, people should have the right to access health services whenever they want, wherever they want. There were 5,099 Canberrans and New South Wales residents on our elective surgery waiting lists as at the end of March who would also like to have that. So it would appear that Mr Corbell is the true arch conservative of the ACT Assembly because he is the one who is dictating which amount of money goes where inside the health budget, so that people get service when that funding is available.

At the outset, let me state that the Liberal Party fully supports the use of in-vitro fertilisation, IVF, and assisted reproductive technology, ART, and supports the continued public funding of access to IVF and ART. However, it is important to note that there are many competing priorities in public health funding and that it is an important matter for public debate. As I said, I welcome Ms Porter's motion today because it does provide an opportunity for that debate.

I note that the 2003-04 Health ACT annual report goes on at some length about something called clinical streaming. Ms Porter might have read this before she made her speech. Let me quote from the annual report:

The portfolio has begun to move to the clinical streaming of a number of services as part of an increased emphasis on establishing a client-centred health system. Clinical streaming builds on the networking of services, to focus on the provision of services across the care continuum in a number of care settings. Streamed services operate under one management model and cover services from health promotion, early intervention, community health services and outpatient services, through to acute care services.

The partnering of health professionals across a number of settings has provided opportunities to assess the demand and service needs of patients. Clinical streams allow clinicians and consumers to participate in the planning, development and improvement of services and to assess the best way to use available resources (human, financial and infrastructure) to meet client needs.

That is Mr Corbell's opinion of how one should allocate the available health funding. Let me read the last two sentences again:

The partnering of health professionals across a number of settings has provided opportunities to assess the demand and service needs of patients. Clinical streams allow clinicians and consumers to participate in the planning, development and

improvement of services and to assess the best way to use available resources (human, financial and infrastructure) to meet client needs.

Ms Porter just said Mr Abbott ought to butt out because he does not know anything about medicine; he is not a doctor. Perhaps Mr Corbell, by that same token, has to butt out of his plan to introduce clinical streaming, because he is not a doctor either.

The opposition supports the use of clinical streaming as a funding model. We do not have an argument with that. We are surprised that the government would adopt such a rationalist approach. Perhaps there is some hope for our beleaguered health system after all. The point here is that the clinical streaming approach explicitly requires a deep analysis of the cost and efficacy of services in health. It is in this context, no matter how emotive it is, that a discussion about the cost and effectiveness of IVF and ART must be had.

But it will not be alone. All streams should be addressed in this way—cancer, for instance. Some people in this debate have tended—in my view, wrongly—to focus on the success rates of IVF and ART without putting them in a clinical context. For example, cancer treatment is hellishly expensive. We all know that. The results vary with different cancers. But it is well accepted that, 20 years ago, the survival rate for leukaemia was very marginal. But the treatments were persisted with and the survival rates are now in the 90th percentile. No-one in this place, I am sure, is suggesting that we do not persist with cancer treatments.

The application of the cost versus the results of IVF and ART, outside the clinical setting, does not help this debate. But that is not to say that we should not see and not debate the clinical data in the context of the clinical streaming model. That is a valid debate, and it is one that we should have.

Having made these general comments, let us look at Ms Porter's motion seriatim. I note with interest that she again goes back to the Labor hobbyhorse: the Liberal Party is going to get rid of Medicare or is going to ruin Medicare, or it is just not what it used to be or the thing has changed. After 30 years of supposedly getting rid of it, the thing is still there. It is receiving extra funding all the time. I believe it is being reinforced and strengthened by the federal Liberal government to a position where it can actually survive into the future, unlike the unsustainable models of previous Labor governments.

Part one of Ms Porter's motion says that this Assembly "recognises the importance to the ACT community of maintaining accessibility to Medicare-funded treatments and services based on objective merit rather than subjective value judgments". We happily support that. Indeed, as I have already noted, the adoption of a clinical streaming model will allow us to ensure that accessibility to publicly funded treatment or services will be based on objective clinical merit.

Let us look at part 2. Part 2 "notes the negative implications associated with restricting Medicare subsidisation for in vitro fertilisation treatments on an arbitrary basis". I would also agree that restricting Medicare subsidisation for IVF and ART treatments on an arbitrary basis should be opposed. Restricting them on a clinical basis is another matter. If the evidence shows that there should be restrictions, then that is something that should

be considered. But we do not accept that all treatments are sacrosanct and not subject to an objective and clinical, especially clinical, assessment of their effectiveness and value.

Part 3 of the motion states that the Assembly “affirms its commitment to accessible and affordable health services for all ACT residents, including the provision of IVF, at the discretion of the individual, in consultation with their medical practitioner”. The idealist in me would say, “Of course, health should be free and everyone should be able to access it to their heart’s content. La, la, la; let’s go on.” But sadly, apart from Mr Quinlan, we do not live in that la-la land.

I think Ms Porter has to face the cold, hard reality. Maybe she should talk to the health minister, Mr Corbell. Let us run part 3 in the context of the elective surgery waiting list and the figures that were released today that saw it blow out to 5,099 Canberrans. It states that the Assembly affirms—I am sure the Labor Party is voting for this—its commitment to accessible and affordable health services for all ACT residents, which I assume means the people on the elective surgery waiting list, including the provision of IVF, at the discretion of the individual, in consultation with their medical practitioner.

Based on that, if your medical practitioner says that you need elective surgery now, under Ms Porter’s model you should get it now. You need, Ms Porter, to talk to Mr Corbell because there are people, including category 1 patients, who have—five or six of them—missed out this last month on getting critical surgery. So, if we are going to confirm our commitment to accessible and affordable health service for all residents, let us start with the elective surgery waiting list; let us talk to the 5,099 people on that list and see that we get equity for all.

At 6.00 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly was put.

Adjournment

Anniversary of Father Lynch

MR SMYTH (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (6.00): Mr Speaker, at the Holy Trinity Church, Curtin, last evening, then followed by a dinner at the Yamba Southern Cross Club, one Benedict Celcus Lynch, an 84-year-old resident of Australia, celebrated the fact that he had just served this community for 60 years as a Catholic priest. Affectionately known as Father Barney to all that know him, he was born on 11 April 1921 on the family farm “Deerpark” in a town called Doora in County Clare in the west of Ireland. Father Lynch studied for a degree in arts and a diploma of education at the University of Dublin, where he was also a fine hurling player. He was ordained a priest in Dublin on 24 June 1945 at All Hallows Seminary. He is actually about to return to Ireland for the 60th anniversary gathering of his classmates to celebrate the ordination of their priesthood.

Father Lynch’s parents were Michael and Ellen Lynch (nee Cahill). There were four children, three boys and a girl. The oldest, Kevin, came to Australia and tragically died in 1943 in the campaigns in Papua New Guinea. The daughter was to become Sister Eugene Lynch. She remained in Ireland. His older brother, Paddy, Father Paddy, became the parish priest of Doonbeg on the west coast. As you can see, it was a family of extraordinary commitment.

Father Lynch arrived in Australia in 1947, and I really do wonder whether any in the Irish church actually appreciated what a valuable export they were making to Australia for no reward for them but enormous reward for us. Father Lynch brought with him a variety of resources—spiritual, ecclesiastical, practical, social and others—none of which had then been fully developed. But years of hard work and dedication to the tasks to which he put his hand honed these resources to a fine pitch.

Father Lynch began his priestly life in this country as an assistant priest at Goulburn. In 1948 he was transferred to Crookwell. Father claims that it was in Crookwell he learnt, amongst other things, to transfer from the Irish game of hurling to the Aussie version of hockey. In 1949, when he was only 28, the bishop then appointed Father Lynch to be the inspector of Catholic schools in the diocese.

Father Lynch then moved to Canberra in 1954. At that time, apparently there were only three Catholic churches in Canberra—St Christophers, St Marys in Civic, which was then called St Patricks, and a somewhat makeshift church in the Causeway. Most of the churches and the masses were at that stage celebrated in halls where arrangements could be made for them. It was into this developing church in this developing city that the young Father Lynch, at that stage only 33, came to exercise what talents he had.

He was a man of conviction but not only on the spiritual front; in that life he not only worked as a parish priest but he established the first praesidium of the Legion of Mary. On the social front, he established a Marian club, a social club for young Catholics, and then had the ability to convince the manager of the Hotel Canberra to allocate them a room in which to meet once a month, which I think is pretty extraordinary.

He then got involved in sport. Hockey being his sport, he actually was the founder of St Patricks hockey club. Apart from all of those organisations, he was also working as the assistant parish priest in Yarralumla. Whilst at Yarralumla, Father Lynch also introduced the Cursillo movement to Canberra as a movement for young people.

In 1965, Father Lynch was appointed the family and parish priest of Holy Trinity Church in Curtin. He set up the presbytery; he then built a new presbytery; and then he helped set up the school. He was also instrumental in then setting up the church which, at that stage, was built as a result of some very innovative fundraising which included a paper drive, which paid off the bulk of the church in quite a short time.

With a friend, Pat Pentoney, he then set up Catholic marriage guidance and social welfare as well as looking after the local conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society. Again, he did all of these things while carrying out his duties as a parish priest. In 1987, he left the parish mission and became the first priest to look after other priests in setting up the directory for the ministry priests. In 1989, Father Lynch was 68, at which stage most of us are thinking that we would retire. Instead he was appointed parish priest of Cobargo on the South Coast. He set about rejuvenating the local church there as well.

I do not have time to read all this speech. This speech was written by a Brian Donovan. I would seek leave to table this speech and have the text of it included in *Hansard* if members are agreeable to that.

Leave granted.

The document appears at attachment 1 on page 1829.

MR SMYTH: Thank you, members. I will read just two of the concluding lines from Brian's speech:

Fr Lynch is, I believe, a great priest upon any standard both in himself and in the effect produced upon his people by his life work.

We wish to thank him:

for his 60 years as priest and his 58 years of labour in Australia.

MR SPEAKER: The member's time has expired.

International day of mourning

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (6.05): I rise tonight to acknowledge, in the chamber, the international day of mourning held every year on 28 April, just last week. The day commemorates those workers killed on the job across Australia and across the world every year. We also remember those workers and trade unionists tortured, imprisoned, murdered and oppressed because of their activism, and the pollution, degradation and destruction of our communities due to unsustainable work practices. A ceremony was held in the reception room of this very building to commemorate those ACT workers killed and injured on the job and to participate in an international commitment to continue to fight for decent and sustainable work practices.

The international day of mourning arose out of a concern for the occupational health and safety and trade union rights of workers in Canada. This concern clearly pre-dates the Canadian response. Since the Industrial Revolution workers have been organising decent pay and conditions and for protection of their physical, mental and social wellbeing on the job. More than 40 years ago, the International Labour Organisation defined the objective of occupational health as "the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social wellbeing of workers in all occupations".

In 1986, the Canadian trade unions organised a workers memorial day to remember those killed or injured as a result of their work. The day marked the third reading of the first comprehensive workers compensation act in Ontario in 1914. It was moved as a private members bill by NDP MP Rod Murphy, and the day was given official recognition in Canada in 1991. The idea was supported 10 years later in 1996 by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. Since then, the ICFTU and the Australian unions have recognised 28 April as the international day of mourning.

Currently the international day of mourning is commemorated in more than 100 countries. And the need for commemoration and for ongoing commitment to fighting for improvements is apparent when the figures are considered. Across the world there are at least 1.3 million worker deaths every year—nearly double the number of those killed in war. At least 12,000 of those killed annually are children. Over 160 million new injuries and work-related diseases are recorded every year. And it is

estimated that more than 200 trade unionists are killed or disappear every year; 8,500 are arrested; 3,000 injured; and almost 20,000 fired for fighting for improved basic working conditions. Those workers and unionists fighting for change are not immune.

In Australia, around 440 workers are killed each year in work-related incidents. Work-related diseases such as cancer and asbestosis cause an additional 2,300 deaths every year. In the 12 months ending September 2000, almost half a million people reported a work-related injury or illness. In considering these statistics, it is very important to know that many are not reported for fear of reprisal; and yet the national OH&S commission estimates that the vast majority of work-related deaths, injuries and illnesses are preventable.

The ACT government has worked hard to address these serious issues of workplace injuries, deaths and illnesses for workers and their families in the ACT. This change has been brought about by organising and agitating for change and through wide consultation among the Canberra community, our businesses, our unions and our families. While we are not there yet, we are on the way. It is so important that we not only recognise tragedy that has befallen workers on the job but also that these tragedies continue to occur and that there is still more to fight for.

The international day of mourning presents us with an opportunity to remember, to realise and to commemorate the tragedy and the struggle for more decent and safer workplaces. Last Thursday, across Australia and across the world, unions, workers and their families and friends gathered to remember the men and women who were killed or injured at work or became sick from exposure to hazardous substances, were tortured in prison, murdered or oppressed because of their trade union activities and who suffered degradation, pollution or destruction to their communities due to unsustainable work practices.

The aim of the international day of mourning is to remember the dead and to fight for the living. As a day of remembrance for workers killed and injured on the job, it is an enduring symbol of our commitment to protest, to organise against unsustainable work practices and to struggle for the rights and the dignity of working people.

Farmers market

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (6.10): Mr Speaker, I was very pleased on Saturday, 23 April, to go to the Canberra region farmers market. The farmers market was celebrating its first birthday. It takes place every Saturday, between about 8 o'clock and 11 o'clock—am, that is—and I must say that it has become something that is absolutely institutional for a lot of Canberra people. I met people there who travelled from Tuggeranong to the National Exhibition Centre. I think that is quite a journey, and it actually raises questions of sustainability in terms of using up a lot of petrol to go and get locally produced food. Seriously, we all do that anyway.

It has been Greens policy for a long time that we have a local food market. It is very important because of the issues of sustainability, for a start, and of making sure that we consume food that is grown as close as possible to where it is consumed. People will be aware of the ecological footprint measure that was used in the sustainability report, the name of which I cannot remember because it is so late in the day, which was produced

last year by the government. We should buy locally produced food for sustainability reasons but also for local reasons.

I think it is very important to realise that we live in a region. We all use the region; we are crossing the border constantly; we go to the coast; we go to the hills; we go to the mountains; we go to Sydney. We do live in a region, and I think it is really important that we, as a market—because we are primarily a market and consumers rather than producers—actually do whatever we can to foster our local economy. We get back from that because people then come here. They come here with their goods. Perhaps they buy something before they leave, given that most people take an economic approach to everything. I throw that in.

The farmers market was an initiative of the Rotary Club of Hall, and I think this is one example where a service club has managed to cotton on to something that really covers people's needs. It has really taken off. There are a variety of stalls; you can go there and buy pretty well anything that you need—fruit, vegetables, local meat, bread, flowers, local free-range eggs, local wines, plus of course the jams and sauces. You can sit down and have a coffee, and you can sit down and eat.

The flyer was put out for this one-year birthday party. It just showed how it is not really just a market where people come and sell; it is actually a group of stallholders where they are encouraged to interact. There are meetings of stallholders. The Rotary Club arranges their insurance on a cost-recovery basis; so it is made as easy as possible.

I guess that this ties in with something else that has just begun in the ACT, which is the slow food branch. I guess everyone has heard of the slow food movement which basically says that, instead of rushing into a McDonald's—I am sorry, I used a brand name—fast-food seller, we actually go to a restaurant, sit down and enjoy our dinner. This is perhaps a novel concept and one that certain fast-food purveyors would rather that we did not consider. But it is something that has taken off.

The slow food movement began in 1986. It is an international movement, and there are something like 83,000 members worldwide officially—people who bother to join the club. But slow food people often do not bother to join things; they just sit at home and chew their food 30 times, as mother told them to do. We can be sure that the slow food movement is actually quite a strong reaction to the fast food culture that we have had thrust upon us, and we can be fairly sure that it leads to good health not just of individuals but of our community.

I would like to see the farmers market extended, perhaps more broadly publicised, and perhaps brought into the city.

Fairbairn Park

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra) (6.15): Mr Speaker, this is probably for the Minister for Planning as much as anything, although I am delighted that Mr Gentleman and the minister's cabinet colleague Ms Gallagher are here.

Sometime last year the government started the process to renew the longstanding lease of Fairbairn Park. Fairbairn Park is run by the Fairbairn Park Control Council and the

Canberra Motor Sports Council. It is the only remaining motor sport facility in Canberra. It has the hill climb and the go-cart tracks, which is a wonderful training ground for young drivers, as is indeed the motorbike track where some of us were for the Rally of Canberra.

The government has put in, I think, \$100,000, although I understand it might go to \$180,000, for a full DA. I suggested some months ago that that is unnecessary. I would like the government, and the minister especially, to reconsider this because I think some problems have arisen.

The lease originally started in 1976 and expired in 1986. The motor sport community tells me that there is effectively a 20-year lease. I am not sure if it is equitable or what, but they certainly pay every three months on it. I assume the old lease had expired. To the government's credit, they are seeking to get them a new lease. They need a new lease, but problems have arisen.

Problems have arisen largely because of one man who goes under the name of the Ridgeway Residents Action Group. I have a few questions I would like the government to check out in relation to this. This supposed group paid \$10.60 when the development application went in—and there was public advertisement—to ask a number of questions. I understand ACTPLA or Environment ACT went in, and then ACTPLA issued a notice, I think, about a month ago to the Motor Sports Council as a result.

I might say that there has not been a huge amount of development going on at that site. There have been a couple of buildings put up for the various codes of motor sport and some track work on the hill climb to bring it back to a reasonable standard of maintenance. And that is about it, apart from a fair bit of work done for the Rally of Canberra, which we saw on the motorbike site. That really is about it, plus I think some rubble from the Canberra Hospital was dumped there once. Most of the substantive work there has been done probably in about the last 10 years by DUS and by whoever was doing the stuff for the Rally of Canberra.

In my view, I do not think you need a full DA. Basically, if problems have arisen, I would be asking the government to look at perhaps withdrawing that and issuing a lease. Obviously, if any further development is going to happen on that site, once the motor sport people get a full lease, that would be subject to a DA. Basically nothing much has happened because they are just ordinary community clubs who run the lease; they are volunteer labour; they get very little assistance from government, although in each budget there has been, in the sports budget, a little bit of assistance over the last 10 years or so. But it is never more than about \$10,000. They train a lot of young people, especially, to be good drivers. They are of great benefit to our community, plus they bring in a fair bit of business.

I ask the government to investigate the status of the Ridgeway Residents Action Group. I note there should be three signatories to it. Mr Murmain may well have a couple of mates who still sign, but Mr Wood, when he was minister, advised me that Mr Murmain is the only person who has complained about Fairbairn Park since 1995. It used to be just noise. He is a serial complainer and I would hate to see one person destroy this motor sport facility, which is the only one left here.

I would like to see what the status of the Ridgeway Residents Action Group is and whether they have standing to actually do anything with ACTPLA, given that they have a post office address in the ACT. I think they might have gone through the Environmental Defender's Office, but they are a New South Wales organisation. They formed a Ridgeway group probably 15 to 20 years ago when there was some considerable movement at Fairbairn Park. Since the early 1990s I think it is only Mr Murmain who is the remaining active member. I wonder whether they have any standing in the ACT to affect an activity in the ACT that ACTPLA is undertaking.

I am not querying their right in relation to noise complaints, although they are largely spurious too. They seem to have diminished a lot. There is a cross-border thing there but, in terms of ACTPLA, I wonder whether they have standing; and, if so, the notice that ACTPLA has given to the Fairbairn Park Control Council and the Canberra Motor Sports Council, it would seem to me, would be null and void.

I urge the government to ensure that this lease goes through and to take whatever steps are necessary to secure motor sport there. I will take this up privately with the minister in relation to a possible conflict of interest that someone in the department might have.

Youth Week and Youth InterACT

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support, Minister for Women and Minister for Industrial Relations) (6.20): I would like to make a short speech about some of Canberra's active young people and the great work they do. As minister for youth, I enjoy being involved with the annual Youth Week celebrations, which have once again proven to be a great way to involve Canberra's young people in a variety of activities and programs. As part of Youth Week, it is a pleasure to be involved in two major events—the awarding of young Canberra citizen of the year and the announcement of the recipients of the Youth InterACT grants.

The young Canberran of the year award was awarded to Michael Sheather who has worked tirelessly as a volunteer, whilst holding down full-time work. He is 25 years old and has made a great contribution to the community already, providing his services to the St Vincent de Paul youth program. Michael's volunteering has already totalled more than 1,000 hours and supported over 300 young people. Michael fundraises and manages the program and also dedicates his time to managing local soccer teams within that program. It was fantastic to be able to recognise his contribution, and I look forward to working with Michael in his role this year as young Canberran of the year.

Also recognised for their contribution as young Canberra citizens were Paul Nicholson and Nick Henderson who were recognised for their work in a group called Bit Bent, supporting young gay and lesbian Canberrans to overcome disadvantage and discrimination. They have done a lot of work to break down some barriers for young people around sexuality and have been real activists for social change in the youth movement.

In relation to the Youth InterACT grants, 14 grants and nine scholarships were presented on the day. They covered a broad range of projects, including the Charny crew from

Charnwood. This grant enabled motorcycle riders to pursue their activities through recreational licences. A Koori art project enabled young indigenous kids with substance abuse issues to work creatively through art. A young people's landcare group will work with existing landcare groups to introduce young people to issues around sustainability and conservation. A business skills program for year 10 students through Stromlo High was recognised. Some musical interests were catered for, with the battle of the bands, supported through grants. Fusion promises to break down barriers in different music styles. There was a whole range of really good programs.

We got a lot of interest in the grants this year—more than we could fund. But I would urge those people who might not have gained a grant this year to continue their work and apply for the grants in the next round this year.

Film industry Ambassador of Argentina

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (6.25): I would like to touch on two matters today relating to two quite different themes.

The first relates to the frustration and barriers makers of short films face when in the field producing films in the ACT. My office recently arranged a meeting with an active but frustrated individual involved in the production of short films who was a recipient of four of the 10 awards in the recent lights, camera, action awards. Arising from those discussions, there were two main challenges in the short film industry identified in the ACT.

The first relates to obtaining equipment for professional production, particularly cameras, microphones and the like, which are expensive items for young, emerging filmmakers. And the second issue was obtaining an appropriate cast and crew for films, that is, obtaining actors who are available and fit to play the roles, and obtaining a complete production crew who are available and have the relevant experience.

Whilst the first challenge is something that most film industries are confronted with, especially the short film industry, the second challenge is something that the ACT, in particular, is faced with. Lack of funding is the primary factor that prohibits the ACT short filmmakers from being able to tackle the problem. And we are exploring avenues where we might be able to guide them in that respect.

Presently, groups involved in this small industry are working on the preliminary stages of an initiative to overcome the second challenge of obtaining an experienced production crew. A gap has been identified in the market, allowing for the formation of an ACT actors film guild. This would involve, essentially, local actors and film crew who could register their details so that film groups would have greater access to people who were willing to assist in films. And there is potential for this group to expand to include the music industry, where local bands and groups can supply demonstration work for use in film soundtracks.

The action, light, sound presentation at the National Museum of Australia some weeks ago was a spectacular evening. I know Mr Gentleman was in attendance, representing the

territory government, and it was a great incentive for young people involved in and having an interest in film.

The new guild is something worthy of support. But even with identified, well-intentioned ideas with great potential, many barriers are in place which block young filmmakers being able to pursue this initiative, there being very few avenues through which they can actually apply for funding. This is an area, Mr Speaker, that I would urge the government to look at more closely to assist in this industry, and I would hope that the private sector would in fact come into the equation here and provide some support.

The second matter I wish to speak to today involves a special farewell for and acknowledgment of the Ambassador of Argentina, Nestor Stancanelli, who is also dean of the diplomatic corps and is known to many of us here. The ambassador and his wife, Martha, have served Canberrans and Australians alike as Ambassador of Argentina for seven years. Throughout this period, as many would know, a lot of things have been achieved. He has served in Canberra throughout the life of two governments, and the ambassador has dealt regularly with both private and public organisations and other embassies in Buenos Aires and Canberra.

What stands out, I guess, in my capacity as the opposition spokesman on arts is that amongst various projects that Ambassador Stancanelli has been involved with are the cultural aspects and influences that Argentina has been able to exert in the ACT, and his support for activities here has been abundant. Indeed, there has been quite a marked increase in these events over the past seven years, allowing the Australian and Argentine communities to learn much more about each other.

There are many events promoted by the embassy, and they will remain a testimony to the strength and cultural relationship between Australia and Argentina. I cite, for example, the presentation of Borges's manuscript, *The Dream of Coleridge*, and his phrase "To read in the libraries of dreams" that opened the *Treasures of the World's Great Libraries* exhibition.

They have supported literary evenings, concerts and performances by many talented artists and have even supported the funding of sculptures such as the Arc of the Sun, which is exhibited in the sculpture park at the Australian National University; the scale model of Caminito, a neighbourhood of Buenos Aires that is at Cockington Green; and the monument in the Latin America Square in Sydney to General Jose de San Martin who liberated Argentina, Chile and Peru.

In concluding my remarks, I would like to express on the record my great thanks to the ambassador and his wife for their contributions to cultural activities in Canberra. They have been inspirations to many here and they have played an outstanding role on behalf of their country, as contributors to the diplomatic community. I am sure I speak for many in wishing him well in his future endeavours back in his own country.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.29 pm.

Incorporated document

Attachment 1: Document incorporated by the Leader of the Opposition

For those of you accustomed to sleeping through homilies and after dinner speeches - go right ahead. You can read quite a bit of what I'm about to say at page 6 of the current issue of Catholic Voice.

I am blessed with a great wife, Berna. But she is always complaining that I am running late or that we shall be late for something because I'm too slow. But, in truth, I am rarely late though in most cases I am just on time. I must confess, however, that I was late for Benedict Lynch's ordination almost 60 years ago.

Fr Lynch was ordained priest in Dublin on 24 June 1945. I did not arrive in Dublin until 10 days later. It didn't matter much because I had not been invited to the ceremony: indeed, I didn't then know that a person named Benedict Lynch even existed.

I spent virtually the whole of July, August and September of 1945 in Ireland where I had uncles, aunts and cousins galore in different parts of the country. That summer must have been one of the best that Ireland has had in living memory. Certainly it rained from time to time but, on average, less than once a week. In Cork and I believe in most other parts the hay was brought in right on time on - 15 August - the feast of the Assumption and VJ Day. The war in Europe had ended on my 21st birthday, 7 May 1945. And for a young fellow, far from his immediate family, but in the heart of his extended family and amongst new friends, this time in Ireland was 90 days approaching sheer bliss.

I'm sure Fr Lynch will remember that summer. Perhaps, he was with me and about 30,000 others at Croke Park for the all Ireland hurling final between, I think, Kilkenny and Tipperary. At all events, he was in Dublin that September studying at the UCD to complete a Degree in Arts and a Diploma of Education; and he was also a hurling player.

Fr Lynch was born on 11 April 1921 at the family farm "Deerpark" in Doora Co Clare. The Ireland of that time was far different from what it has since become. Between 1921 and 1945, there had been vast political changes - the Black & Tans, the Treaty and the birth of the Irish Republic, the Civil War, the Depression and World War 2. But by 1945, the economic situation of the country people had changed but little. For the small and medium farmers there was little or no money; theirs was a subsistence economy. Life was tough. The food monotonous -potatoes with a bit of yellow fat that they called bacon and cabbage every day except Friday. No bathroom; no toilet; no water to the house; no gas or electricity; at night, a turf fire and a candle, except on Sundays when the kerosene lamp would be lit. But the talk and stories around the fire provided entertainment that far surpassed the radio, the cinema and television all put together. I guess that it was in an environment something like this that Benedict Lynch grew up.

Fr Lynch's parents were Michael and Ellen Lynch (nee Cahill). There were 4 children, 3 boys and 1 girl, in the family. The oldest, Kevin, died in 1943 in Papua New Guinea; the daughter was to become Sr M. Eugene Lynch. She remained in Ireland. Next, Paddy, whom many of you will have met either in Doonbeg or whilst he was on one of his rare trips to Australia. Paddy entered the seminary of All Hallows in Dublin with Benedict; and like Benedict, he was originally destined for the Australian Mission. In God's providence, however, he remained in Ireland as a

fine priest (ultimately the Parish Priest of Doonbeg on the west coast of Co Clare) and a great support to his widowed mother. And Ellen Cahill as Mrs Lynch had need of support from her family. She was not a native of Doora when she married Michael Lynch. She came from some 40 miles away and, in Doora, she was always treated as a stranger. When I first heard that story, I was inclined to take it with, at least, a grain of salt. But later I was to hear a similar tale from my own family. I was visiting my uncle Tom on his farm near Mitchelstown Co Cork. Tom's son in law Seamus Goggin drove Tom and myself into town. We went into one of the better looking bars and each was served a pint of Guinness. After a few minutes Tom said "What are we doing here amongst strangers?" Seanrus explained to me that the people who owned the bar had been in Mitchelstown for only about 40 years. (At the time Tom would have been well over 70. He had been to Dublin once and to Cork city - about 40 miles from home twice).

Fr Lynch arrived in Australia in 1947. I wonder whether any in the Irish church appreciated what a valuable export they were making to Australia and for no material reward whatsoever. I'm sure that few in Australia realised what a treasure we had received. Fr Lynch brought with him a variety of resources -spiritual, ecclesiastical, practical, social - and others too, none of which had then been fully developed. But years of hard work and dedication to the tasks to which he put his hand honed those resources to a fine pitch.

Fr Lynch began his priestly life here as assistant priest in Goulburn where the then Bishop, Terrence McGuire, resided. In 1948, he was transferred to Crookwell. His PP there was Fr., later Mons. Alexander McGilvray, a man who, in my judgment, would have made an excellent "boss" for any young curate. Fr Lynch claims that it was in Crookwell that he learned, amongst other things, the game of hockey. It is perhaps debateable whether he ever learned the rules of hockey but he developed a great enthusiasm for the game, an enthusiasm that lasted long after he left Crookwell. In 1949, when he was only 28, the Bishop appointed Fr Lynch to be Inspector of Catholic schools in the Diocese.

In the latter part of 1952, I came to Canberra from Melbourne to "try it out for a few months". In 1953, Bema and I were married in Melbourne but came back to Canberra, again for a few months.

When Fr Lynch came to Canberra in 1954, we were already here - not settled here but here. By this time, the former diocese of Goulburn had been made an Archdiocese - the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn. In 1953, Fr Eris O'Brien, was appointed our Archbishop. Initially, he lived with all the priests in Canberra in what was and still is, the Archbishop's House. I think it is right to say that there were then only 3 Catholic Churches in Canberra - St Christopher's, St Mary's (then called St Patricks I think) and a somewhat make-shift Church in the Causeway. Most Masses were celebrated in halls wherever arrangements could be made for them. The development of Canberra was then starting to gain some real momentum; when tiny old settlements like Yarralumla, Deakin and O'Connor were expanding 20-fold to become full blown new suburbs and lose their grazing sheep in the process.

It was into this developing church and city that the young Fr Lynch, still only 33, came to exercise whatever talents he might have had and to make his contribution.

He was quickly aware that there were in the Canberra Hostels hundreds of young people many of them Catholics and all of them far from home, family and friends.

He immediately set to work to try to improve their lot, both spiritually and socially and in the sporting field.

On the spiritual front, he established the first praesidium of the Legion of Mary, partly as a welcoming group for young people and partly to encourage prayer as part of their lives.

On the social front, he established the Marian Club, a social club for young Catholics though members' friends who were not Catholic were also admitted to membership. Fr Lynch knew that a social club that met in some presbytery or church hall or even some place like the Albert Hall would not get off the ground. But he also knew that everyone in Canberra liked to go to the Hotel Canberra, the swankiest social venue in Canberra. It was then managed by a Mr Thorley Thorpe who was not a Catholic. By means that, as far as I know, have never been explained, Mr Thorpe was persuaded to make rooms at the hotel available for the monthly meetings of the Marian Club at some nominal fee. The Club was an instant success and continued to thrive long after Fr Lynch had handed on the reins of the Club to others.

In the Ireland that Fr Lynch left, the idea of a Catholic sporting club was almost unheard of. Church of Ireland sporting clubs - tennis or hockey or soccer or cricket - were common enough in the bigger cities. But these were organised by the small minority religious groups. In Australia, where Catholics were in the minority, there was a long tradition of Catholic sporting groups or clubs. The CLTA for tennis; the CYMS and the YCW for football and cricket and billiards and snooker. Hockey being Fr Lynch's sport, he immediately set about organising the St Patrick's Hockey Club. For a number of years, he and some other Canberra priests played in the team in its formative years. St Patrick's remains one of the premier hockey clubs in Canberra today. Members and former members of that club have turned out in numbers tonight to celebrate its founder's 60th anniversary of ordination.

In all these organisations, Fr Lynch remained a significant force until he was formally transferred as Assistant Priest to Fr Morgan O'Connor at Yarralumla when it was established as a parish in 1959.

With Fr Pat Cusack, however, he had worked mainly in Yarralumla for 1 or 2 years prior to 1959. He had acquired 2 houses close to the Church and school in one of which the PP still lives.

Yarralumla was to be my Parish. It was new; the foundation stone for the school (which was to serve as our church for a number of years) was laid by the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Carboni in September 1956. The school had been built without any government assistance and there was much to be done in and around the building. Fr Lynch and Fr Cusack led the work by example. Yarralumla is much indebted to both priests.

Whilst he was at Yarralumla, Fr Lynch introduced the Cursillo movement to Canberra. He started mainly with young people from Yarralumla but it soon spread. Like so much else of his work, the Cursillo movement continues to thrive.

In 1965, Fr Lynch was appointed the founding PP of Holy Trinity Parish, Curtin. He quickly acquired, on behalf of the Archdiocese, a house in Dawson Street close to the land that had been set aside for Church and school. The lounge room he turned into a chapel where he celebrated Mass every day except Sunday. On Sundays, Mass was said in the Hughes Community school hall.

With time on his hands when he first went to Curtin, Fr Lynch had an important role in planning extensions to the school at St Peter Chanel's, the building of which he, in fact, supervised during the absence of the PP on a visit to Ireland.

At about this time, Government assistance for the construction of independent schools in Canberra was introduced and Fr Lynch was quick to take advantage of it - probably the first to do so. Someone has said "Plan big, small plans generate no enthusiasm". Fr Lynch did plan big and his plans did generate enthusiasm. Holy Trinity school was commenced in 1966. On completion of the school, the celebration of Mass and the sacraments was transferred to the school hall. But the PP was not content to continue without a Church. In 1971, with a mixture of support and opposition from the Parishioners, the decision was taken to build a church. How that decision was taken has never been clear to me. Kevin Curtin and Associates of Sydney were commissioned to produce the original designs with Ernst Munns as their man on the spot. As one would expect, they received careful and precise instructions from their client. The result is that Curtin has one of the most beautiful churches in Canberra - the building with all its furnishings and art work - its sanctuary, its stations, statues and stained glass make a well integrated whole. Its accompanying presbytery provides a comfortable and functional home for the parish clergy. I believe that the church and school complex in Curtin were very nearly paid for by the time Fr Lynch left Curtin in 1987. Some of the means used to raise the funds were innovative - and included re-cycling paper collection and the car raffle. All this, of course, required enthusiastic support from lots of people. And that has been one of Fr Lynch's great qualities - he has always been able to recruit people to assist generously and enthusiastically in the execution of his plans.

If one looks at all the other enterprises in which Fr Lynch was actively engaged during his years in Curtin, one might be excused for thinking that the building and fund raising projects must have been managed by someone else. Fr Lynch with Pat Pentony and one or two others laid the foundations for Catholic Marriage Guidance and Social Welfare. He looked after the local Conference of the St Vincent de Paul society. And he carried out his priestly and ministerial functions with both enthusiasm and reverence. Many here will know that the Mass on Sundays took an hour - it didn't matter how short the readings happened to be or if the Eucharistic Prayer was the shortest available - short readings demanded a long homily.

Left to himself, I suspect that Fr Lynch would have been happy to remain PP at Curtin for the rest of his days.

In 1987, however, the Archbishop asked if he would relinquish Curtin and accept appointment as the first priest for priests in the archdiocese. Not without misgivings, he accepted that appointment. His official title was, I think, the Director of the Ministry to Priests. He moved to one of the houses in Yarralumla - 55 Hopetoun Circuit - that he had acquired on behalf of the Archdiocese in the mid 1950's. For the next two years, he laid solid foundations for this new Ministry which I think continues to this day.

In 1989, Fr Lynch was appointed Parish Priest of Cobargo with the much larger seaside town of Bermagui as part of the parish. He was now 68 and it might have been thought that his enthusiasm for new developments would have waned. But not so! First, he looked to the church at Bermagui. I suspect that his full vision for that church has not been realised. But much has been done there. A new entrance, designed to serve as an extension to the church accommodation and a meeting room with kitchen facilities has been built. When that was done, he turned his attention to

the furnishing of the sanctuary. When I first saw the Bermagui church in about 1990 or 91, I was immediately struck by the make up of the sanctuary. The altar, the pulpit, the baptismal font and much else seemed to be made for the most part of a collection of laminex and three ply. That may be to the taste of some. But not to Fr Lynch's. He had his old architect friend Ernst Munns, who had worked with him on the Curtin church and who was by this time a dying man draw plans for the refurbishment of the sanctuary. Ernst did these in pencil sketches, but he died before he could complete the plans. Fr Lynch, however, pressed on and completed the refurbishment in exquisite air dried native timbers. The sanctuary is now one of great beauty.

In the last 5 years, he has not been idle. He has bought himself a house in Bermagui opposite the church in what I think is not the best street in the town but the second best. He has also commissioned the re-leading of the stained glass windows of the church at Cobargo. He will tell you himself whether they are yet completed.

In addition to all the activities and enterprises to which I have adverted, Fr Lynch was also a gardener, a pastoralist and cattle dealer. In every parish to which he was attached, he always found time to keep a vegetable garden. The other two occupations he engaged in only when he visited his old home in Doora. On arrival there he would buy a few young cattle, pasture them on the property and sell them as he was about to leave. I never heard that he suffered a loss on any of these enterprises but surely he must have. No one can be universally successful!

In his relations with the motor car he has not been universally successful. He has been involved in two serious accidents, either one of which could have sent him home - to his eternal home. I believe that in the first he had a passenger, a fellow priest, who maybe thought he was in heaven. The car was on its roof. Both driver and passenger were hanging by their seat belts when the passenger said "Where are we Barney?"

All these activities to which I have adverted were undertaken not as objects in themselves but as adjuncts to his primary vocation which has been to bring the Mass, the sacraments and pastoral guidance and support to all people in the communities of which he became a part.

Fr Lynch has told me that he had never really contemplated retiring and thought he would go out in a box. But last year, the Archbishop raised with him the question of retirement. As he pondered the matter overnight, he realised that he was tired and that it was time to relinquish the responsibilities of a parish. He says that he really didn't know how to go about asking leave to retire and that, in the end, he was most grateful to the Archbishop for having relieved him of the need to make that decision. His retirement will be fully effective when parishes on the south coast are amalgamated on 1 July. By that time I expect he will be in Ireland for a well earned holiday after celebrating, with others who were ordained with him the actual 60th anniversary of ordination.

I believe that we have all profited from knowing Fr Lynch and being exposed to his influence. I do not mean that we have profited financially. My experience is quite to the contrary. When I recall his life in the years that I have known him, I cannot but think of the parable of the talents. He was given many talents by his maker. He did not hide them under a bushell or bury them in the ground. He put them all to work to the glory of God and to the true well-being of all those who came in contact with him. I am, and I expect all of you here tonight are, the better for having known him and worked with him and enjoyed his company.

Fr Lynch built fine buildings, but not just for the sake of land development. He established sporting and social clubs - but not just for community development. He was active in Marriage Guidance and Social work - but not just to give a helping hand to people in distress. The primary object of almost everything he turned his hand to was evangelisation. That, of course, was his obligation as it is the obligation of each one of us. But he did it so much better than most people I know.

Fr Lynch is, I believe, a great priest upon any standard both in himself and in the effect produced upon his people by his life work.

Looking to his future, let us pray for him

May the road rise to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rain fall soft upon your fields.
Until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.

Let us all rise and offer a toast in thanks for his 60 years as priest and his 58 years of labour in Australia and in hope that he will be spared to us for many fruitful years to come.