



Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

SIXTH ASSEMBLY

15 FEBRUARY 2006

www.hansard.act.gov.au

Wednesday, 15 February 2006

Sustainable transport plan and ACTION Buses	91
Multiculturalism	102
Private members' business	117
Belconnen to Civic busway	118
Questions without notice:	
Budget—government expenditure.....	122
Self-government act—amendment	125
Universities admission index.....	128
Budget—unencumbered cash	129
Budget—capital works projects.....	132
Budget.....	133
Budget—midyear review	136
Productivity Commission report on government services.....	137
Budget—superannuation liabilities	138
Budget—midyear review	139
Education—policy	142
Supplementary answers to questions without notice:	
Budget.....	144
Quamby Youth Centre.....	144
Emergency Services Authority—internal audit.....	145
Belconnen to Civic busway	145
Koomarri.....	161
Bushfires—threat to urban edge	169
Adjournment:	
Community consultation	179
Canberra Capitals	180
Prison reform—Alexander Maconochie.....	181
Abortion.....	182
Industrial relations	183
Arts awards	185

Wednesday, 15 February 2006

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.

Sustainable transport plan and ACTION Buses

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (10.33): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) recognises the demonstrated commitment of the ACT Government to the Sustainable Transport Plan;
- (2) acknowledges the continuing growth in adult patronage, resulting from initiatives developed and implemented by the ACT Government; and
- (3) congratulates drivers and employees of ACTION buses for their commitment to the provision of efficient and sustainable transport in the ACT.

In recent months Canberra's commuters have been enjoying the results of this government's commitment to sustainable transport. In fact, Wednesday, 8 February saw yet another record for adult patronage on the ACTION bus network—23,148 passengers in one day! This is an absolutely remarkable achievement and can be attributed almost exclusively to two particular reasons. The first is the drastic increase in petrol prices in recent times. The second is the ACT government's absolute dedication to developing economic, practical and viable transport alternatives to the car.

This government has introduced many initiatives, but initially I will concentrate on increased petrol prices as a contributing factor to increased patronage. As members will no doubt be aware, the demand for global oil consistently outstrips the supply of oil. If we compare the reserves in global oilfields with estimates of future oil consumption, we see that demand will outstrip supply in the future. Even people with limited economic knowledge understand that this means we will continue to pay more for our petrol. But the global situation is not the only reason the consumer price we are currently experiencing has risen to such a harsh level. The added burden of a 38c per litre petrol excise unfairly adds to the increasing difficulty of running a car for private purposes.

Last year, in response to rising petrol prices, the NRMA organised a summit to discuss measures to reduce the financial burden on Australian motorists. This forum was arranged to discuss a variety of proposals, but the Howard government became concerned that they were being pressured into giving up their revenue raiser, fuel excise, and declined to attend the summit. I accept that international market forces predominantly determine petrol prices and that there is not a great deal individual policymakers can do to affect their levels. But when a government are provided with an opportunity to at least discuss options for relief, I believe they have a responsibility to do so. The Howard government has shied away from this responsibility, and I think members would agree that that is not unusual behaviour.

For industries whose cores are fuel and transportation costs, this is a disappointing outcome and one that only a Howard government reversal can address. But the ACT government has introduced measures to reduce the personal economic burden on the constituents we represent. These measures are most thoroughly articulated in the sustainable transport plan for the ACT released in 2004.

The intention of this document was to establish the strategic framework for a number of government initiatives that would provide very real alternatives to the normal, everyday car travel that a lot of commuters undertake in the ACT. These programs, as we have heard from Mr Corbell in this place on many occasions, have since combined to demonstrate the ACT government's strong commitment not only to easing the burden on consumers' hip pockets, but also to easing the burden on Canberra's natural environment. May I also say that it would be assisting to control our greenhouse gas emissions.

It seems that in this current climate of Liberal Party politics I might be listened to more closely if I spoke in numbers, rather than words. I know these probably are not the numbers you are most interested in now, Mr Smyth, but listen closely. ACTION's adult patronage continues to grow with weekday adult passenger boardings averaging well over 22,000 on working days. In fact, adult boardings broke all records last week, with 23,000 seated on both Wednesday and Thursday. This equates to over 23,000 fewer car trips a day on Canberra roads.

How have we managed to get such a vast number of people to support our services? On this side we call it progress. Consider the development and progress that this government has undertaken in ACTION alone. We have implemented the one fare anywhere ticketing strategy and a single zone bus fare across the Canberra bus network that replaces the Liberal's prohibitive multi-zone fare structure. This has allowed improved interconnection of services, resulting in easier cross-territory travel.

We have developed and implemented a range of Xpresso services that allow those with travel deadlines, for example, people going to work or to university, to consider the public transport alternative without sacrificing their mornings. We have invested heavily in the purchase of new state-of-the-art buses so that commuters are not forced to concede comfort when they make the choice of public transport over private driving. We are providing accessible transport for people with disabilities, and bike racks for the bike-riding commuter.

We have begun the consultation and assessment phase of a busway project designed to deliver rapid transit options for commuters between Belconnen and the city, when appropriate. We have introduced flexibus evening bus services that allow ACTION to tailor the provision of services in a manner more efficient and responsive to commuters' needs. We have established greater ease of access to bus timetable information with a newly implemented capability to have an SMS sent directly to your mobile phone with information on the next available service. We have appropriated the money for the construction of LCD timetable displays at bus interchanges around Canberra enabling real-time information on buses and their expected arrival. The cumulative effect is better transport options for Canberrans. Canberrans are being encouraged to get out of their cars and into the buses. They are being encouraged to ride their bikes to work and to use

the bike racks on our ACTION buses, and these bike racks are proving to be extremely popular.

After all, this is what this place is all about. I know that some of those opposite are knee-deep in leadership considerations, but what we need to remember is that government is about delivering services. Government is about the community. I can proudly say that those on this side have never lost sight of this and that is why we are in a position to implement programs such as the successful ACTION bus programs that I have been referring to and the sustainable transport plan. The programs are resonating with the travelling public. Recent customer surveys have shown that 88 per cent of respondents believe ACTION is providing a valuable community service and 86 per cent believe it is doing a good job.

Petrol prices and the state of the global oil market quite evidently are not the only reason Canberrans are turning to public transport. The credit goes to this government, its sustainable transport plan and its effective service delivery, delivered through ACTION. I would like to place on the record my thanks to ACTION staff, those that work behind the scenes and those literally in the front seat—the bus drivers. One could have the best plan in the world, but one also needs those who know how to deliver. Certainly ACTION has the most wonderful reputation for delivering. This government knows how to deliver, and does deliver.

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (10.41): Mr Speaker, the motion moved today by Ms Porter to recognise the demonstrated commitment of the ACT government to the sustainable transport plan leaves much to be desired. The government's sustainable transport plan, while a document full of information, is a document that shows off the government's over-zealous attempts to convince the ACT population that transport solutions and improvements are being adequately provided by the Stanhope government.

The commitment the government has demonstrated to this plan is half-hearted. Unfortunately, this government has lost sight of the bigger picture for transport in the ACT, that is to say, improving the efficiency, convenience and, most importantly, the safety of transport for all ACT residents.

One of the main weaknesses in the sustainable transport plan is the absence of set dates by which many of the government's objectives might be achieved. In that sense it is not really a plan; it is simply a wish list. What the opposition and the public are really concerned about is what the government is actually doing now in terms of providing the day-to-day resources and commitment to improving the services we already have in place.

While the government boasts about the increase in patronage numbers—which, I might add, is probably more to do with the fact that the government is closing down so many car parks around the place than to do with people really wanting to catch the bus—the comfort and safety of our passengers are being compromised. Recently we heard that bus drivers are being assaulted on a regular basis. We also know that security cameras are not installed on many buses. Last year in budget estimates hearings I asked the minister, Mr Corbell, about this very issue and what measures his government was taking to implement safety management measures. The minister confirmed that all new buses

purchased by the government have surveillance cameras in them. He said it was considering cameras for the older part of the fleet, but there were no guarantees. He said:

We are able with the bus fleet replacement program at very minimal extra cost to have the new buses that we purchase installed with a camera. The issue is to what extent we can afford to retrofit the existing fleet. That is not something the government has been able to find the resources to do this coming financial year, but we will consider it in future years.

If the government can plan to fork out hundreds of millions of dollars on a new busway, then it should also be able to find the funding to ensure that security cameras for older ACTION buses is a priority among the budget bids taken to cabinet. It is no wonder the government cannot find the funding for security cameras anyway. As we know, they are unable to properly manage the economy. So it appears that not only will we have no security cameras, but also we will not have a multi-million dollar busway. If the government is serious about boosting bus patronage, this sort of security measure is a must, otherwise some patrons may decide it is just simply not safe enough for them to travel on buses, particularly at night. Safety must be a priority for government funding, and the safety of our bus drivers is paramount.

While this is not the only safety measure that can be implemented, I think it is probably the most urgent starting point. The government should look at improving the current system so that patrons feel safe and secure when travelling. One of the most common complaints I hear is that people do not want to catch buses because they do not feel safe, either on the bus or at the interchanges. Bus stop interchange safety needs to be drastically improved, as a recent violent attack on a young Sudanese man at Mawson shows.

Let us look in a little bit more detail at some of the other shortcomings of this government's commitment to the sustainable transport plan. One of the key issues listed in the sustainable transport plan is:

The need to provide: mobility and access to work, home, shops, business, recreation, services and activities across the whole of Canberra.

Under the heading "Regional transport links", the plan states:

Supporting the role of the Canberra International Airport as an economic generator for Canberra and the region.

How can the government be demonstrating its commitment to the sustainable transport plan when an ACTION bus service is still not provided to the airport? Many people may now need access to the airport. It is the entranceway to Canberra, yet this government does not believe it should provide an ACTION service to such an important hub. If the minister is reconsidering that or if his position has been updated, perhaps we can hear from him here today. I would be very happy to hear about that.

The suburb of Hall is actually within the ACT. According to the sustainable transport plan, the government needs to provide access to work and home, but the people who live in Hall have no means of transport other than their private means. No bus service has been extended to Hall residents. This government is not providing access across the

whole of Canberra as they stated they would in their sustainable transport plan.

Mr Corbell: That is not true. Haven't you heard of the Transborder service?

MR PRATT: If you have got an update on that, minister, we would like to hear about it.

Another of the key goals and strategies of the sustainable transport plan is:

Price transport and parking to make them efficient and equitable and to make costs transparent.

The two strategies listed to achieve these goals are, firstly, pay parking in town centres and, secondly, investigating road pricing in future. I find it interesting that road pricing is an issue. It is one that Ms Porter obviously feels the government has demonstrated its commitment to. If she could enlighten us on the progress of road pricing in the ACT—perhaps the minister can do so later—I am sure that both the opposition and citizens of the ACT would be most interested. If neither Ms Porter nor the minister himself wish to enlighten us on the potential for road pricing for the ACT, I would like her to justify moving a motion, which the minister is supporting, that incorrectly recognises the commitment of the ACT government to the sustainable transport plan.

If we look at the huge hike in costs, from \$42 million originally to a predicted \$120 million-plus associated with the Gungahlin Drive extension, that does not show much of a commitment by this government to road pricing. Within the plan there is a section covering how the government plans to fund investment and public transport. It states:

Other sources of funds include further charges for parking, although such measures need to be balanced against other objectives such as the encouragement of business and development in the town centres in Civic. Priority for car parking charges is for long-stay, not short-stay parking.

It is hard to understand how the Stanhope government is supportive of the sustainable transport plan when just recently several car parks—members might be interested to know that they are close to the Assembly—were converted to short-stay from long-stay car parks. That does not seem like a commitment to long-stay car parks, as the plan suggests, does it? The parking costs in the territory keep escalating under this current government. That seems to be the main reason why more people are being forced into public transport under this government. What the increase in patronage numbers really shows is that people cannot afford to use their cars, despite the fact that they should have the freedom of choice and convenience to do so, at least within reason.

I will now turn in more detail to the growth of adult patronage on ACTION buses. Last year ACTION's annual report in fact showed a small decrease in adult passengers. Weekly figures from more recent data show that there has been some moderate increases on last years figures, but it remains to be seen at the end of the next financial year if those trends continue. Some of those increases are obviously due to an increase in the cost of fuel.

We are yet to see clearly how much of the government's initiatives are responsible for that increase in patronage. So while the government boasts about increased daily patronage numbers, it is not necessarily a long-term snapshot of ongoing increases. In

fact, due to the slow population growth in the ACT, patronage numbers can only increase to a certain number before the public transport market is saturated. There will always be a point at which public transport is not an option for the majority of the population. Not everyone wants to travel from A to B; nor can they if they have children to pick up, meetings to attend, dry cleaning to carry and shopping to do, all in a normal day's cycle of work, travelling and school.

I join with the government and Ms Porter in congratulating ACTION drivers and employees on their tireless commitment and hard work in providing an important community service. I also congratulate drivers on the sterling work they continue to do, in spite of not necessarily deterioration but a downslide in safety for our bus drivers. We can only call upon the government to find the heart and the means to put more resources into bus security. Perhaps, instead of pumping money into the real-time bus information system, that sort of money could be used to ensure that our buses are safer for our bus drivers and our patrons.

Those are the sorts of essential service tasks that need to be carried out by this government. This government is big on plans, on glossy brochures and on magnificent statements, but it never seems to get the priorities right. It never seems to be able to reliably deliver essential services and to ensure that standards are in place. Safety is always a paramount concern when you are considering expenditure priorities. My only wish is that, rather than continuing to spend money on their grand visionary projects, the government give ACTION bus drivers the support they need to carry out their jobs in a safe and secure environment. We have talked about busways. The government's commitment to public transport should be to prioritise the safety and quality of the current bus system.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (10.53): Mr Speaker, I will be supporting Ms Porter's motion because, in itself, it is a statement of the obvious. Obviously the ACT government is committed to its sustainable transport plan, and there is no doubt that there is been increasing growth in adult patronage of the ACTION bus service. Drivers and employees of ACTION buses are committed and, within the terms of the government's policy and resources, they do provide efficient and sustainable transport in the ACT.

I put it to members, though, that the concern is that the government does not set itself high enough benchmarks in its sustainable transport plan, and I will go on to explain that today. Although there have been positive targets and actions for some modes of transport through the government's sustainable transport plan, particularly cycling and walking, the Greens believe that the plan just does not go far enough.

Transport planning is not well enough integrated into general urban planning through the sustainable transport plan or the Canberra spatial plan. While sustainable transport is treated as an afterthought in urban planning progress on this front in Canberra will always be slow. There is no mention in the sustainable transport plan of the need for planning to concentrate residential densities and key facilities along main nodes of public transport transit lines, although I do believe that is a government objective.

Although there has been considerable urban consolidation over the past decade in Canberra, disappointingly there has not been a related decrease in the number of car trips. This raises many questions about the current nature of integrated planning and

transport in the ACT. There are still suburbs being built in Canberra with streets that are too narrow for a bus to travel on and, for that matter, too narrow for a garbage truck to turn around. Such things would not be happening if urban planning and transport planning were integrated.

Walter Burley Griffin's plan for light rail was not given a mention, despite the pre-existence of planned light rail spaces along Canberra's major arterial routes, although busway plans talk about the potential to convert to light rail. This is ironic as many other cities that do implement light rail have additional large expenses that we do not have, including the resumption of land and the building of extra infrastructure such as tunnels to avoid built-up areas. It would seem we have a natural advantage in this respect thanks to Walter Burley Griffin.

If the government were truly committed to public transport, they would look at what forms of transport attract the highest numbers of users and reduce most greenhouse gas emissions and put more effort into looking at the options for light rail. They might do a feasibility study into the broader effects of light rail on Canberra's society, community, economy and environment, rather than just looking at the financial costs. Many of the costs of implementation of the busway, including real-time information, lane reconstructions, bus stops and so on could be redirected towards the beginnings of light rail in the ACT. In terms of the further integration of transport and planning, the government has spoken of having an office of transport, which would bring the transport functions of the Department of Urban Services and ACTPLA together into one office, and we hope this happens soon.

The targets in the sustainable transport plan for replacing car usage with cycling, walking and public transport use are really too low to be called sustainable. Given how fast things can change in the world when necessity calls, higher targets could be set, and in fact should be set because necessity calls now. We could accompany the targets with stronger strategies and incentives to shift to less car use.

The recent hike in petrol prices, which looks as though it is going to go on and on, was enough to almost bring us to the first target of public transport use—the ACT target for 2011. I note that the recent figures, very fortuitously released just before Ms Porter moved her motion, indicate that there is an increased use of ACTION buses, and that is a very good thing. In fact, one of the paragraphs in Ms Porter's motion commends the high patronage of ACTION buses. Although commendable, it goes to show that the targets could have been set higher, rather than at the usual growth rate. We should not just sit here comfortably because 23,000 people took the bus last week. Passenger usage for 2004-05 already exceeds the target for this year, which is fantastic, but the Greens support monitoring and increasing these targets regularly.

I want to talk about car/road dependency. Another question must be asked about the government's commitment to sustainable transport. Why are we building more roads while attempting to implement the sustainable rapid plan? If we were serious about reducing car usage, we would increase busway space and reduce the number of car lanes. If we reduced the number of roads, the numbers of cars on the roads would decrease and more people would use mass rapid transport nodes. We cannot expect people to get out of their cars and into buses while the car is so clearly the most convenient way to travel.

Instead, the government is committed to projects like Gungahlin Drive extension—sacrificing nature parks to encourage car use. If the government were committed to sustainable transport, it would have built light rail from Gungahlin to the city at the time of building most of Gungahlin. I remember the debates from those days. This would have allowed many new homeowners to decide not to purchase a car from the outset.

The test of the success of the sustainable transport plan is how many Assembly members and their staff actually use alternative means of transport to get to work. If people like us who work in Civic do not find our cycle lanes and public bus system convenient, then I do not know why we expect other workers in Civic and town centres to do so.

Again we join Ms Porter in congratulating ACTION and its drivers on their fantastic work and the increase in patronage. Any fault with the bus service is not the fault of the drivers and ACTION staff. They are working within resource constraints and policy constraints set by the government.

The peak bus service for commuters still ends too early in the evening as, unfortunately, many workers work until 7 o'clock, yet by that time buses to many suburbs have already been reduced to one an hour. Sadly, this is enough of an inconvenience to many commuters, tired from work and dying to get home, to make them want to drive their cars instead.

I note that students who have to travel out of Gungahlin to go to college do not have dedicated school bus services, and that is something that I believe the government should remedy. We look forward to the outcomes of the bike racks on buses trial. We note that it has had a couple of hitches, which are being overcome. We expect that as people get used to this we will see an increase in the use of combined cycle and bus use.

If we were really serious, though, about reducing greenhouse gas emissions, there are a number of options that have not been mentioned in the government's sustainable plan. One is encouraging the use of scooters and motorbikes as an alternative to cars. This is very popular in Europe and Asia, but I do believe there is some confusion about the rules that apply, especially to scooters. Another tool is the control the government has over vehicle registration fees, stamp duty, driver licence fees and fuel franchise tax. We could reduce these costs for scooters and motorbikes and increase them for high petrol consuming cars and so on. We should be offering incentives for car pooling and sharing and, as happens in some cities, the group ownership of cars.

Reactive sensor-based traffic lights would be one simple step to help car fuel usage become more efficient. In Europe there are real-time systems that show drivers how long the wait will be at traffic lights and signs that ask drivers to turn off their engines. In the meantime, of course, energy efficient cars turn themselves off. With the rise in petrol prices, it must be getting cheaper to take an ACTION bus to get to work. We need to point out to consumers the indirect costs they pay through their car ownership.

The practical reality is that Canberra is planned to be a car city at present. We need to ensure that all planning is done with public transport accessibility in mind. There are still suburbs, like East O'Malley, being built with very poor public transport access, or none, and no local shops or facilities. Therefore, people will drive their cars to the shops. We

should not be letting local centres die. We should be encouraging people to walk and cycle. Why is this kind of planning still occurring in Canberra?

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Minister for Health and Minister for Planning) (11.03): I welcome Ms Porter's motion today about sustainable transport in Canberra. Both the government and the community recognise that, for Canberra to be a great place to live, to work, to invest in and to visit, our transport systems need to enhance the city's accessibility and be based on greater use of more sustainable nodes. This government is the first government to set out a comprehensive transport plan for the cities since self-government. It was released in April 2004 and sets out our commitment to a more sustainable transport system for Canberra. No other government had done this, and I am proud of our commitment to put a concrete plan into action.

The plan shows how we can make transport more sustainable, with a stronger role for public transport, walking and cycling. Replacing some of our car travel with walking, cycling and public transport trips will have major benefits for our environment. It will help us as a city to tackle greenhouse gas emissions and climate change and will make Canberra a more liveable place.

Planning for transport is a great challenge because it impacts in a complex way on so many aspects of our community, economy and environment. To plan effectively for our future transport needs, we need clear goals to help us achieve the outcomes that we are seeking. That is why we put the transport plan together.

The plan identifies these goals, targets and actions and provides a strategic framework for more sustainable transport in the ACT. The range of measures outlined in the transport plan include: busways and bus priority measures; real-time information; improved public transport interchanges; improved cycling and walking facilities; the use of TravelSmart programs and the use of integrated land use, in particular, the achievement of the contained urban form through the implementation of the Canberra spatial plan. A major thrust of the plan is the progressive improvement of the public transport system so that it becomes a more attractive and viable alternative for many people and for many trips. As congestion on our roads increases, the improved public transport system will be able to accommodate more of the demand with a lowering of greenhouse gas emissions, less air pollution, fewer accidents and, therefore, overall less health cost for our community.

A major initiative now under way to plan for the improvement of the public transport system is the planning for busways on trunk routes throughout the city. Busway, or transitway, projects currently include routes between Belconnen and the city and Gungahlin and the city, with the long-term goal of having a transitway across the whole of Canberra. These transitways will be a combination of exclusive bus roadways, bus lanes, transit lanes and buses sharing with cars, along with bus priority measures at traffic signals and intersections. We have already allocated \$5.5 million to undertake the detailed planning and design of the Belconnen to city transitway link. This has the potential to redefine the nature of Canberra's public transport system.

In her comments Dr Foskey said that we should be doing light rail. Go back and look at the studies that looked at the feasibility of light rail for Canberra. We have not ignored this issue; we have not walked away from this issue. We have a detailed and

comprehensive analysis that indicates that we need to stage our development of light rail in Canberra. The first stage is to build the dedicated trunk corridors which can be used by existing public transport modes, such as buses, with the ability to convert them to light rail in the future. That is what the feasibility study says, and that is what we are doing.

It is interesting that the Greens, who are always critical of technological determinism, in this instance decide, "Use the technology and you get the outcome." There is no evidence to support that. There are cities around the world that have highly effective, responsive and flexible public transport systems based entirely on buses. There are cities around the world that also have highly effective transport systems based on light rail, heavy rail or a range of other public transport modes.

To suggest that one technology will deliver the result and another will not is simply flawed. It is a classic case of technological determinism. It is not an approach that stands up to any sort of rigorous analysis. Cities around the world have effective, responsive and flexible public transport systems based entirely on buses, and that is both in the developing world and in the developed world. There is no reason why it cannot work here in Canberra. It is not about the vehicle we use. It is about the service you provide. That is the issue that the government is seeking to address.

The work that we are doing in relation to public transport and busways around the city has been developed based on extensive consultation and analysis. A decision on the final preferred routes for the Belconnen to city service is currently under consideration and should be announced shortly. That route selection will consider the needs of commuters wanting fast access to major destinations and to the city. These destinations include the AIS, Canberra Stadium, MOREANU, CIT, Calvary hospital, the Childers Street precinct in City West, CSIRO Black Mountain, Radford College and the University of Canberra. These are all areas where we can achieve significant increases in public transport usage by providing dedicated right-of-way services throughout those precincts.

This is all, of course, about reducing door-to-door travel time. In a city designed for the car, the best thing we can do is make public transport as competitive with the car as possible. So reducing door-to-door travel times and reducing the cost to commuters are the two key issues.

Faster travel times will be achieved by the development of dedicated transit or busways because it is only buses that will use these services. They will have priority. There is the opportunity for consistent trip times. Each journey will always be the same. Services are not influenced by external factors such as traffic lights or build-up of other traffic. In comparison with bus services on local roads, there will be greater frequency of bus services and more express, non-stop services can be used on dedicated transitways. We will improve journey times to the Belconnen Town Centre with an almost straight journey from the western to the eastern side of the Belconnen Town Centre with no waiting at the interchange.

The government's proposal—I will be making announcements on this later this year—is that the Belconnen interchange will be demolished altogether and replaced by bus stations adjacent to major shopping and employment centres. A planning study for these improvements was initiated late last year and agreement in principle has already been given to the LDA for the concept design for an integrated transport and retail facility

adjacent to the Belconnen Mall. This is all part of the work we are doing to improve public transport in Canberra.

Mr Pratt made some comments in the debate about the availability of other services. He mentioned Hall, and I want to address Hall very quickly. First of all, Hall does have a bus service. If Mr Pratt were on the game, he would know that. Hall does have a bus service provided under contract by Transborder. I can tell you what the patronage is of that service. It is less than one person a day from Hall. There is a regular service there already used by fewer than one person a day. I cannot justify putting in place a public transport service to Hall that would be used by fewer than one person a day. I just cannot justify that, and I will not. We will continue to work with the Hall community to improve public transport, wherever possible, but with demand at less than one person a day, I cannot justify running a bus service from that location.

Dr Foskey also commented in her speech that the sustainable transport plan does not mention transit-oriented development. In fact, it does. It goes into quite some detail about it. She also criticised the targets. She said that 16 per cent of all journeys by public transport by 2026 is unachievable or too low a target. An “unreasonable target” I think were her words.

These are the highest targets in Australia. As a city we have set ourselves high targets for modal split. In fact, we aim by 2026 to have 30 per cent of all journeys to work in Canberra not by car. In a city designed for the car, that is a very high target. Of course, if we see ourselves heading in a direction where we are going to exceed targets, it is only an incentive to do more and to lift the target. But give credit where credit is due. No other government has set itself a target, is prepared to hold to that target and to invest in public transport. We are getting the results. We will continue to focus on getting those results and building a more sustainable transport system for our community.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (11.13): Let us reflect on the fact that, while some in this place who travelled to work by car this morning were stuck in traffic jams because of accidents, Mr Corbell was travelling smoothly, without stress, without wasted time, without hassle and without concern because he was travelling to work this morning on an ACTION bus.

Mr Pratt’s assertion that there is nothing efficient or convenient about the ACTION bus service is a very offensive thing for him to say. It is also incredible. I travel by ACTION bus from time to time myself. Mr Pratt’s assertion could not be further from the truth. I find it very convenient. I come out of my house and get on a bus. I travel without hassle, without concern and without stress. I arrive outside the Assembly. I walk across the road and I am at work.

Many commuters are literally voting with their feet and doing the same. Last Wednesday and Thursday, 23,000 adult passengers used the service. Mr Pratt is playing the fear card again. He obviously rushes up to the house on the hill and takes lessons from his friends up there on the hill—our Prime Minister, for instance. Mr Howard daily plays the fear card. He plays it because he knows it is the only one he has to keep him in government. It appears that Mr Pratt, having taken the requisite lessons from his erstwhile colleagues on the hill, is hoping that by playing the fear card he will get into government.

They played the fear card before elections and it did not work then. Vote like your life depends on it! Yesterday Mr Pratt was playing the fear card about emergency service workers. He often does it about the police. Today he is giving our wonderful ACTION bus drivers a lesson on how to be afraid. He is telling them, “You have every reason to be fearful, every reason to be alarmed.” Mr Pratt not only wants to scare our wonderful bus drivers; he also wants to scare passengers off the buses as well. “Do not travel at night,” he says, “It is dangerous.” The flexibus service was introduced to allow people to get a bus home in the evening with confidence and with convenience.

As Mr Corbell said, Canberra is a great place to live, work and visit. It was designed initially as a car-centred city. Mr Corbell has spoken about how this government has been the only government that has tackled the problem of a population that has relied on the car to commute—to work, to education, to access entertainment and recreation and to shop. They have relied on the car because until now there have not been viable alternatives. This government has delivered viable, economic, practical alternatives in the form of public transport. It has got people out there using their bikes again and catching buses to work—with 23,000 adult patrons last Wednesday and Thursday.

We all know that habits are very hard to change. That is why Mr Pratt cannot change his habit of trying to make us all afraid. Habits are hard to change, so it is not easy. But by offering viable and flexible alternatives and by providing information to the public about how easy it is to use our ACTION bus service and how easy it is to ride a bicycle in conjunction with the ACTION bus service we are getting people back on the buses.

Instead of bagging this government’s plan and its effective implementation, Dr Foskey and Mr Pratt, do what many Canberrans do every day—actually, it is thousands of Canberrans, including people in this place. Why don’t you just get out there and get on the bus?

Motion agreed to.

Multiculturalism

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (11.18): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) affirms its belief in a society which is built on respect for human rights, and which places a high value on its cultural diversity;
- (2) notes that:
 - (a) there are now two different community councils representing Canberra’s ethnic community groups; and
 - (b) the ACT Government’s own Ministerial Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs has been disbanded;
- (3) recognises the ACT Government’s avowed commitment to:

- (a) promoting cultural diversity through its ongoing implementation of the Framework for a Multicultural ACT; and
 - (b) building a strong cohesive relationship with all Canberrans through effective community engagement; and
- (4) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) develop a coherent ongoing strategy to engage Canberra's diverse ethnic and cultural communities;
 - (b) ensure women and young people are separately consulted, recognising their views will make the strategy more inclusive; and
 - (c) present that strategy to the Assembly by the last sitting day in June 2006.

This motion, which was placed on the notice paper last December, was inspired by three things: the expiry of the ACT government's multicultural framework at the end of 2005, the shutting down of the ACT government's Ministerial Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs and the well-publicised governance and communication problems in the ACT Multicultural Council.

Since the motion was put on the notice paper last year, a new, alternative multicultural council has been formed. Now we have two groups purporting to represent the ethnic communities in Canberra. I have had contact with representatives of both groups. My early observations are that the new group is well supported, inclusive and aiming to be transparent and accountable. The risk is that we will have two separate organisations dividing the ethnic communities of Canberra; so some reconciliation might need to be part of the government's agenda.

Something else that has occurred since I put this motion on the notice paper is the racially inspired riots in Cronulla. I believe that, while we do not have any indication that there is a likelihood of such activity in Canberra, we should be well aware that these things can happen out of the blue. We have to make sure that they do not.

The point of a multicultural framework for the ACT is, clearly, to provide inclusive principles for policy development for internal and external operations. The existing framework was built on widely shared and strongly held social commitments to respect and value the continuing diverse cultures of Canberra people and to find a unifying positive strength in that diversity. The Canberra National Multicultural Festival, which continues in Canberra this week, is a celebration of that idea. And we congratulate them.

It is important to acknowledge that multiculturalism in Australia is both a project never fully completed and, at the same time, a reality. We have many cultures in this land. There have always been people in our community who are not comfortable with cultural diversity as it is and who have opposed the project to better appreciate and profit from it. There are many people who see multiculturalism as a threat to their status and who label opposition to discrimination and exclusion as political correctness. This, of course, is partly because the notion of a multicultural Australia has been championed by political leaders, that is, it now is seen as belonging to one particular side of politics.

Along with the gradual slide into contempt for politics and politicians, which over the past 15 years has become a feature of Australia's popular culture, has come a discourse of ideas which leans on that contempt with political correctness and is now becoming a key derogatory term. Connected to that, in the past few years the questions about what is multiculturalism and what our commitment to it is have once again come to the fore. In Australia, Pauline Hanson articulated a reactionary resentment felt by many who saw themselves left behind or excluded from some of the social and economic changes in Australia still playing themselves out in the 1990s. Many of her views and policies have, sadly, now been appropriated by the Australian government and various state governments.

Other aspects of a reinvigorated social conservatism over this time can be seen in different ways—gender relations, indigenous affairs, industrial relations and the rights and obligations of the poor and ill. The notion of a society which values and profits from cultural diversity has also been, and continues to be, challenged by divisions and tensions across the world, most notably the rise of a violent Islamic fundamentalism which is projected as an attack on the US cultural and economic global supremacy.

Closer to home perhaps, the racially inspired riots at Cronulla are evidence of a continuing fracture of the multicultural agreement across Australia, and we should be particularly concerned that so many young people made up that fracas and continuing conflict at Cronulla. Therefore it is something that will remain in the future unless we address it now. It is the view of the Greens that, in this context, the ACT's mixed and inclusive community is a very precious and fragile thing. There should be no argument, I would have thought, with strengthening our shared commitment to such a community.

The recent comments by National Party MP Danna Vale that Australia could become an Islamic state within 50 years and that Australians are aborting themselves out of existence show that even some of our leaders are ill informed and are spreading the virus of racial stereotyping. On the one hand, Mrs Vale has shown an extraordinary ignorance of the number of Australians who are Muslim, which is 1.5 per cent; of the proportion of our immigrants, a tiny fraction; or of the number of children that they have, which is no more or less than the rest of us.

Of course it is usual to be fearful of things you know nothing about. In this context of heightened community division, Mrs Vale's ignorant comments are worse than irresponsible. The fundamental problem with Mrs Vale's perspective, however, is that she has created our Australia as white people having abortions and Australian Muslims as the other. In that way, blindly or carelessly, she is strongly reinforcing the divisions, alienation, prejudice and racism in our community.

Finally, I was very disturbed to read last week of research that shows that more than half of Australia's schoolchildren view Muslims as terrorists and that two out of five believe that Muslims are unclean. I am not sure how many ACT schoolchildren were included in that study but, in a global world, or at least a national world, let us not be complacent.

Chris Flynn, a community integration lawyer from New South Wales who now practises international law in London, wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 24 December that the perceived crisis in Australian multiculturalism is also an opportunity. He wrote:

... by definition, a “crisis” can also be a turning point or a decisive moment rather than merely a danger or an extreme difficulty. It is up to our leaders, our commentators and the community to ensure it is the former.

That is why it is so important that the ACT government develop a comprehensive strategy to create a new, strong and pertinent framework for a multicultural ACT and that is why it is so crucial that young people are engaged as an age group and across ethnic groups.

The purpose of this motion is to ask the government to commit to a strategy which engages broadly with as many as possible of the different parties to our multicultural community. We need to do this sooner rather than later to counter fears about the application of the terror laws and pronouncements by racist and ill-informed politicians. I believe, too, that we need to reconsider the approach of our multicultural strategy, to move beyond respect for diversity to a connectedness within communities. That is the underlying theme of this motion, and I am very disappointed that the government plans to reject it out of hand.

Much of the multicultural activity in Canberra has been led by ethnic community associations. The various peak bodies, such as the ACT Multicultural Council, consist of representatives from these groups. In the past few years, some new groups have been formed, such as the Association of Migrant Women, which have a slightly broader remit, but the more institutionalised and established ethnic associations have maintained a strong presence.

The internal problems that the ACT Multicultural Council has suffered in recent years might be seen as stemming, at least in part, from the fairly unchanging nature of the structure, and it appears to have been difficult for individuals and groups outside the central core to find a voice at the council. The new group is a response to that. At the recent meeting I attended, it would seem that everyone was welcome, the constitution was on the table and up for discussion, and optimism was high. I imagine this new group will have the confidence of the minister. I imagine, indeed, that the minister was very pleased that it set itself up. I would argue, however, that, given the need for the ACT government to get smarter in supporting our continued commitment to a multicultural community, a new representative council, while it may go part of the way there, is not a sufficient base for the development of the next steps.

I want to quote from Mr Flynn, whom I earlier quoted, who quoted from a speech by the British High Commissioner for Racial Equality, Trevor Phillips—yes, a High Commissioner for Racial Equality—in response to the 7 July London bombings:

As an Australian living in London, I was lucky to listen, in September, to a speech given by the British Commissioner for Racial Equality, Trevor Phillips, in response to the July 7 London Bombings. Phillips made an impassioned and eloquent speech about moving beyond multiculturalism. In essence, he seemed to be suggesting that while multiculturalism had served Britain well in welcoming and accommodating millions of immigrants from all over the world ... it was time that for the good of all Britons, British society took the next step.

He calls this next step progressive integration. I prefer to call it community connectedness, because it is a term with less baggage. I would love to read the whole quote, but I am going to run out of time if I do that. He wrote:

Fundamentally, progressive integration—

or community connectedness—

is about creating the single cohesive community where racial, ideological and religious diversity flourishes yet is supported by a common set of cultural principles taken both from the home society and valuable immigrant contributions. It's not about homogeneity, but it is about a single shared feeling of community.

Australia, after Cronulla, we know, could be in the same situation. We are a young and diverse country and a wealthy and well-educated one. We have got a lot going for us. He continued:

Let's move away from the condescending, gratuitous and self-serving lectures by wealthy celebrities ...

I am not going to finish that sentence. What it boils down to is that there is diversity in diversity, and the government needs to pay heed to its community engagement guidelines and explore a range of ways of connecting with the various communities. In the same department as the minister for multicultural affairs heads is the community engagement unit. I am sure that they would be very happy to help develop a strategy for this.

Our motion calls for women and young people to be separately consulted, as well as consulted in their communities. The reason is that women in multicultural communities often do not have leadership. We do not often see them heading up their communities, organisations, but they do have a voice. And they must be heard. Often they need to be consulted separately.

Anybody who works in development overseas knows that you talk to the women separately if you want to hear about households and children. You also talk to young people separately. We need a project that mixes our young people up so that we do not find half of Canberra's schoolchildren saying that Muslims are terrorists. We really need to make sure we nip that in the bud.

The motion asks the ACT government to come back to the Assembly with a strategy that we can employ to develop the next framework. This project is so important that the government needs to demonstrate how it will engage our diverse communities in the project. It is also important that our strategy highlights our commitment in the ACT to a society built on respect for human rights.

In the current worldwide political climate, the rights to free speech and political association are under attack; so we need to champion a diverse and pluralist society. A cohesive, connected society will not just happen. It needs a supportive community development approach to engage people within and across their cultural and ethnic groups. I see this as a policy of community connectedness and I believe that that was where our policies of multiculturalism were always intended to end up.

I commend my motion to the house. I am very disappointed that the government will be opposing it. I believe that the government must have missed out on the spirit of that motion to be opposing it, because I believe that my motion encapsulates everything that the government intends to achieve with its new multicultural strategy.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (11.33): The government will be supporting most of Dr Foskey’s motion today. We have concerns about some minor inaccuracies in the motion and will be proposing some amendments, which I have circulated. Mr Speaker, I seek leave to move these amendments together.

Leave granted.

MR HARGREAVES: I move:

- (1) paragraph 2 (a), omit all words after “Canberra’s ethnic community groups;”;
- (2) paragraph 2 (b), omit all words after “has been”, substitute “replaced by an ongoing series of Ministerial multicultural forums;”;
- (3) insert new paragraphs 2 (c) and (d):
 - “(c) the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre was opened on 8 December 2005;
and
 - (d) the 2006 National Multicultural Festival has broken attendance and participation records;”;
- (4) insert new paragraph 3 (c):
 - “(c) involving the community in the development of a new multicultural strategy to be handed down by mid-2006.”; and
- (5) omit paragraph (4).

I will, for the sake of consistency, address both the substantive motion and my amendments. I am pleased to support those aspects of the motion that seek to highlight the value placed on human rights and cultural diversity in the ACT. I firmly believe that the citizens of Canberra enjoy the highest level of equality, diversity and inclusiveness this great nation of ours has to offer. I am very proud to be part of a government that had the foresight, commitment and compassion to be the first jurisdiction in Australia to introduce a bill of rights. Each and every one of our citizens has their fundamental civil and political rights enshrined and protected under the Human Rights Act. While there is no national bill of rights in Australia, we, as a community in Canberra, enjoy similar kinds of rights as those in developed countries across the world experience, thanks to this brave and bold legislation.

As a result, all Canberrans have the right to equality before the law and equal protection of the law; the right to life; the right not to be tortured or treated in a cruel, inhuman or

degrading way; the right to protection of our families and children. We also have the right to privacy; the right to personal freedoms and movement, thought and religion; the right to participation in public life; the right not to be arbitrarily arrested and detained; the right to a fair trial; the right to be free from forced work; and the right for minority groups to freely enjoy their culture and practice and to profess their own religion and use their own language. With our city's flourishing and vibrant multicultural community, this last right in the Human Rights Act is particularly important.

I, as minister responsible for multicultural affairs and as a member of this government, recognise, value and am committed to furthering our cultural diversity. To achieve this, I place myself on the frontline with the community—an open and accountable approach I much prefer. By communicating directly I can observe for myself the wonderful contributions and, very importantly, concerns those in our multicultural community make and have. Since taking over this portfolio, I have set out to meet as many members of the multicultural groups as possible. I wanted to hear from the widest possible range of views, not just from a small advisory council.

Every person from every cultural and religious persuasion has a right to be heard and a right to communicate ideas and ideals to their government. This is exactly what has happened at the series of multicultural forums that I held last year. The six forums provided a wonderful insight for me. What I also found was that, for many members of the multicultural community, it was the first opportunity they had ever had to meet face to face with any minister responsible for multicultural affairs. As a result of this and many other factors, I am committed to continuing my direct contact with the multicultural community.

This goes to paragraph 2 (b) in amendment 2. The advisory council has been replaced by multicultural forums. It is a better engagement policy. The engaging nature of this contact and the understanding that comes with it are of immense benefit to me as minister and, I deeply believe, to the members of the multicultural community.

Also during the forums, it was especially heartening to be able to meet with many of the smaller emerging communities who had experienced some of the barriers that come with not representing a large group. In particular, I had a wonderful exchange of ideas with members of the South Pacific Islander communities. Members whom I met with represented the interests of individuals of Fijian, New Zealander, Maori, Samoan, Solomon Islands and Tongan descent.

The issues we discussed included the incidence of drug and alcohol problems for their youth as well as unemployment. By being face to face with these members, we were able to talk openly about these issues and start the ball moving towards finding solutions or ways through the problems. In relation to the issue of unemployment, I was pleased to be able to convey to the group the possibility of promoting the government's successful work experience and support program, WESP, within the South Pacific Islander communities as a problem met with a possible solution. When at these forums I also met with members of the Asian, African, Latin American, Spanish-speaking, subcontinent and European communities.

Then, on 10 December, I had the great privilege of opening the multicultural summit, one of the initiatives that I implemented in order to widen my circle of advice and

therefore develop more representative policies on multiculturalism. At the summit, attended by around 400 members and leaders of our city's multicultural communities, we discussed the future of multiculturalism in Canberra. We discussed how we could continue the harmonious community we live in and what the community saw as the way forward. It resulted in a dynamic exchange of ideas that is now forming the basis of a new multicultural strategy to be handed down by midyear.

The creation of this strategy is not in response to a motion from the Greens. It was in fact a response from the multicultural communities which was determined on 10 December. I believe this particular part of the motion from the Greens is grossly unnecessary because we had undertaken to do it last December. I know Dr Foskey was there. She would have been there at the time. Furthermore, I have undertaken to hold another summit in 2008 to evaluate how we went forward on that strategy. It was a fantastic turnout at the summit and another indication that multiculturalism is strongly supported in the ACT because of the genuine sincerity of people in organisations and also because of the partnership that it developed between the government and the multicultural communities.

We, as a government, see our role as a partner with the multicultural community. We want the community to feel empowered to engage us on all matters that are of concern to them. The development of a new multicultural strategy is an example of this partnership. It will be a thoughtful document, incorporating the contributions of the community provided at the forums and the summit. The community will have the opportunity for further input and comment into the process. Indeed, we left a couple of months for people who could not attend the summit to put their views forward. A similar process will apply with the housing summit.

While I have met many people and seen many new faces in the multicultural community since becoming the minister responsible for multicultural affairs more than 12 months ago, there is still a way to go. I plan to continue attending as many events organised by multicultural communities as I can. I want to keep getting out there. Being out there creates a wonderful opportunity to engage with members of multicultural groups and gives them a less formal opportunity in which to approach a member with concerns or ideas in a more relaxed environment. Also, this face-to-face, grassroots interaction is one of the more enjoyable aspects of my role. The feedback I have received is informative and important. I believe that this year will go down as an important milestone in multicultural affairs in the ACT as it will see the work and communication undertaken with the local multicultural community last year come to fruition in the form of the new multicultural strategy.

Paragraph 2 (a) in amendment (1) is mechanical. Paragraph 2 (b) in amendment (2) refers to the need for me to get closer to the community. I did not proceed with the Chief Minister's advisory council on multicultural affairs. People need to understand it was not a ministerial one at all; it was a Chief Minister's one. I do not need that kind of advice; I need to talk to people directly.

I also propose that the Assembly note that the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre was opened on 8 December 2005. It is important that we realise the extent to which non-Anglo-Celtic people made a contribution to the creation and the sustaining of the city of Canberra over all of these years. Theo Notaras and, indeed, the whole Notaras

family have been significant in their contribution over the years. It was most appropriate that the Chief Minister opened the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre which, incidentally, is the only one of its kind in the country—another thing that this government has done to push multiculturalism.

I also want the Assembly to note that the multicultural festival has broken attendance and participation records. On preliminary figures of last Saturday's attendance, it looks like 60,000 people attended. The previous year was only 50,000. This is a 20 per cent increase. That is just phenomenal.

We will be involving the community in the development of a new multicultural strategy to be handed down in mid-2006. There is no need for me to be directed by a motion in the Assembly to table such a thing. Let me put it on the record that, when that strategy has been developed, it will be a strategy which is owned by the community and will not be a ministerial edict from on high. It will be a way forward. You can bet your life, Mr Speaker, that there will be plenty of copies of that flying around.

I cannot let an issue on multicultural affairs go by without referring to those insane remarks by Danna Vale. They were insulting in the extreme. They were divisive and bordered, in my view, on incitement. I have never heard such an insult of the Islamic community from a so-called responsible person like that. I hope I never do again. I thought that was such a shameful exercise that it put her in the same realm as some of the hysterics of Pauline Hanson. I want to say, from this government's perspective and this community's perspective, that we reject those sentiments entirely.

The other thing I want to do very briefly is to reflect, as I have done repeatedly recently, on the ethnic-based troubles interstate and the possibility of them happening here. We need to understand that there are people who are hell-bent on violent acts and who wander about the place looking for a reason for it. At the moment ethnicity is the reason. These people have a chip on their shoulder from something. But it is not born from the root of ethnicity; it is whipped up; it is hysteria whipped up; it is violence for violence sake.

Fortunately in the ACT, we do not have little blocks of ethnic cultures in given suburbs. We cannot say, "This is where the Italians live; this is where the Croats live; this is where the Greeks live; this is where the Asians live." We do not. As a consequence, the young people in fact associate predominately with all manner of different cultures in their schooling and in their recreational activities—much more so, I believe—than in any other state in this country and, indeed, any other city overseas. We have an inclusive society which starts with the kids and works its way upwards.

As a result, this abhorrence that played itself out at Cronulla can be seen for what it is. It has its roots in violent behaviour and in people finding an excuse to be violent. When you mix that inherent need that these animals, in my belief, have with alcohol and testosterone, you are going to get an explosion. We notice that it has not happened in Perth; it has not happened in Darwin; it has not happened in Adelaide; and it certainly has not happened here. I do not believe that it will.

I wish also to affirm here, in the context of multiculturalism, one of the things I have observed in this town, which has been fantastic, and that is the way in which other

cultural communities have got behind the Islamic community and rejected the vilification that that community has experienced in recent times.

With respect to the changes in the multicultural council and other representative bodies in the ACT, I can only say that representation is in the hands of the community itself. The community has its own destiny. However, the government will be determining what the taxpayer expects for its dollar and will be expressing that in future funding arrangements for whatever representative body that can prove, through the satisfaction criteria, that it can provide the services to the community. The ACT has the most inclusive multicultural community in the whole of the country. The people who think that multiculturalism is dead need come here and find out how wrong they are. I recommend the amendments and therefore the amended motion to the Assembly.

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (11.48): I stand to generally support Dr Foskey's motion, although I cannot entirely agree with her point (3), which states:

(3) recognises the government's avowed commitment to:

- (a) promoting cultural diversity ... and
- (b) building a strong cohesive relationship ...

I believe the government has stated that objective. They mean to have that objective in place, but an avowed commitment does imply concrete actions and results. I do not believe that we have seen all of those results in place. Certainly some sections of the multicultural community would not say that they have seen that.

Certainly the government has made some progress in multiculturalism over the last few years. There is no question about that. We have this strange paradox where there is clearly a lot of trouble in some sections of the multicultural community but at the same time the multicultural community looks quite healthy. We see some good performances as a consequence.

I support the government's notion and Dr Foskey's notion that multiculturalism is a very important part of our landscape. We hear so often lately, on the back of the Cronulla riots and other issues that have bedevilled Sydney's society particularly in the last couple of years—not just the riots but other events too—that perhaps multiculturalism is an outdated notion and all we need to ever talk about is so-called assimilation and so-called integration as the means to ensure that we have social harmony.

I do not entirely agree with those views. Some of those views are far too simplistic. If you do not take care of multiculturalism and ensure that it stands alone as a component of your landscape, then there will be a lot of problems. You simply cannot say, "Do away with the so-called multicultural bureaucracy and everything will fall into place."

On the other hand, what you do not want to have is multiculturalism institutionalised to such an extent that it becomes, in its own right, a bureaucracy and a bottomless pit for spending money and for perhaps causing the integrations to not generally occur. Integration will occur in time—over generations—and you do not want a multicultural bureaucracy which impedes that natural development in an emerging society.

The opposition is critical of the way that the government has handled some aspects of multicultural affairs; of course we are. We see the success of the Multicultural Festival growing each year, but that is not the area that we are concerned about. The Multicultural Festival is a very, very good example of how the multicultural community is going from strength to strength yearly. Certainly the food and dance spectacular we saw on Saturday—and anybody who was there for four or five hours would have been impressed—is getting better and better. To see Canberra city so alive was quite impressive.

Unfortunately I would have to say that the success of the community in running those events, regrettably, is despite the fact that some aspects of the way that the government is managing multicultural affairs are simply not well handled. There are a couple of examples that I would like to point out. The problems that I see lie in the government's lack of ability to ensure that, at the ministerial level or on an official bureaucratic level, there is, for example, a broad enough, vibrant advisory council. This basically means that there is not an official direct line of communication between the multicultural community and the government, and that is a failing.

The government's scrapping of MACMA has not served the multicultural community well at all. You need to have the leadership of the broader multicultural community in close contact with the minister and, sitting side by side, an advisory RMA on the day-to-day running of multicultural affairs. That capability has been diminished.

The serious repercussion of this is that the government has absolved its direct responsibility for multicultural affairs, in my view. Therefore, the management of multicultural affairs cannot be readily held accountable by the public or, for that matter, the opposition for any failings that occur in the multicultural portfolio. The fact that the ACT's own ministerial advisory council was abolished shows that the Stanhope government would rather wash their hands of some of those harder aspects of ensuring the multicultural portfolio is well handled.

While they seek accolades for the positive multicultural achievements such as the festival, they do not, on the other side of the coin, want to accept responsibility for the more difficult aspects of multicultural affairs management, for example, accountability for the expenditure of funds. The Stanhope government wants its rights but not its responsibilities.

The government has claimed that the council was not working effectively due to internal tensions. That was extremely unfair. A lot more could have been done to ensure that MACMA was working effectively. I did not see evidence that MACMA had been sliding downhill over a couple of years and that the government had done everything it possibly could have done to reverse the concerns that MACMA was experiencing. If we had seen that, then I would agree with the government abolishing MACMA. But there is no evidence to suggest that that was the case.

The Stanhope government took the easy way out by disbanding the council altogether rather than working to resolve its problems. Mr Stanhope and his multicultural affairs minister, Mr Hargreaves, do not seem to have been able to deal with the tensions. There

certainly were tensions there. It is sad that they then went ahead and, instead, disbanded the body.

Mr Hargreaves told the Assembly in October 2003 that MACMA was established because:

... the ACT government values feedback from the multicultural community in any of its forms. That is why the Chief Minister has the advisory council.

The role and mission of that council were clearly stated, and we entirely agree with that. As I have said before, how are you now going to get the quick and uncluttered advice that you always need to get if you do not have that council in place?

Clearly those words stated in October 2003 were simply rhetoric. The government is happy to let them float about of their own accord without any proper direction, or official advisory capacity, to ensure a proper and coordinated two-way exchange between the multicultural community and the government.

There is a failure of leadership, and this is a failure of leadership on the part of government. Governments have to govern by example. Even if they do not have their fingers in all the pies, they have to be able to set the example and set the conditions to allow looser organisations, which are an important part of the ACT community, to function properly. So there are questions about that.

I wonder now whether the government will favour the views or the input of one of the two multicultural bodies over the other. I do not think they will. I get the impression that the minister would prefer to see both the ACT Multicultural Council, despite the fact that it is in disarray—and the minister believes that, RMA believes that, and I believe that—and the new multicultural community forum operate alongside each other. We support that; we agree with that.

Clearly, if the broader ACT community feels better if they have got a council in place and a forum in place, and they can both represent the diverging views of the broader community, fine. But the challenge will be now with you, Minister, as to whether you can maintain your links with both of those bodies, get that advice and assist the community to undertake its functions, without there being other tensions. The minister is right to say, “Let us leave it to the community to allow one of those bodies, or both of those bodies, to perform properly.” But the minister will still have the leadership responsibility to ensure that matters of expenditure and funding are carried out properly and are held well accountable.

I do not criticise the formation of the multicultural community forum, and I certainly do not call for the disbandment of the Multicultural Council even though it has reached the point where it is dysfunctional. It will be interesting to see where things go. It will be a challenge for you, Minister.

Dr Foskey raised the point that, while we do not have the conditions here in the ACT for the race-based riots that we have seen in Cronulla, the ACT community needs to remain on its guard. That is entirely right. By the way, I do not want Dr Foskey to be called a scaremongerer for having raised that, as the government is sometimes wont to do. It

will always be important that we maintain a watch on those things. Let us see how the government's management of multicultural affairs goes this year.

MR SPEAKER: The member's time has expired.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (11.58): I am pleased to endorse the sentiments expressed by the minister responsible for multicultural affairs, John Hargreaves, in highlighting the value placed on human rights and cultural diversity in the ACT. I am, as are all of my government colleagues, very proud to stand alongside the minister in his mission to further engage the multicultural community while embracing the wonderful diversity it creates.

That diversity was on display this month when Canberra underwent a stunning transformation of swirling colour and culture as the National Multicultural Festival swept across the city. From children munching on souvlakis at the Greek Glendi to adults taking in the stunning beauty of the Beijing Modern Dance Company, the festival has once again drawn our community together. In fact, I attended the festival on Saturday night and again on Sunday, and it was absolutely packed. This festival, I believe, is a living testament to the fact that multiculturalism is flourishing in Canberra. As a Canberran, if you were not in the festival, you were probably enjoying the sights and sounds of it.

However, while the festival is an important and spectacular annual event, its public face only lasts for a short time. On the other hand, many multicultural community groups are intensely involved for months leading up to the festival in preparing for their participation in it. This is why the work Mr Hargreaves undertakes in engaging directly with the multicultural community throughout the rest of the year is so important and so valued.

The minister's series of multicultural forums, which began in June last year and ultimately led to the multicultural summit in December last year, have to be commended. Never before have we seen such a dynamic, direct and innovative way of consulting with the multicultural community. Being able to provide individuals with the opportunity to have their say and provide us, as a government, with feedback directly through the minister is a very liberating notion. As we have already heard, much was learned through the forums and the summit.

The ACT government is proud of the multicultural centre, which serves as a hub of interactions and opportunities for community development. The multicultural centre provides ease of access to resources, advice and support for members of the multicultural and broader communities. These aspects are vital in ensuring that small and emerging communities can be sustained.

While it is widely acknowledged that Canberra is a very successful, open and harmonious community that embraces and respects people from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, there still exist some barriers for certain communities to enjoy full participation in our society. Some of those barriers include education and employment. I am happy to report that the current work experience and support program, WESP, mentioned earlier by the minister, goes from strength to strength in providing opportunities for migrants who are finding it difficult to gain employment. Another

concern that was raised was the fact that many communities had difficulties in flagging concerns to their peak organisations. These are issues that as a result of the forums and summit can now be taken up in a coordinated approach.

While the forums and summit are complete, and we eagerly await the release of the new multicultural strategy, the work of the minister has not stopped in terms of engaging directly with the multicultural community. On a weekly and sometimes even daily basis he is out there at events organised by the multicultural community—sometimes as a guest speaker, other times simply as a guest. But, either way, the minister shows a direct and active interest in these affairs, in stark contrast to the shadow minister's attempt with a fleeting visit to a bazaar last year.

I have personally witnessed that the minister, whenever he attends these kinds of events, makes an effort to speak with as many individuals as he can, to seek direct feedback from the community, which he is then able to share with us, his government colleagues. Canberra's size lends itself to an accessible and personal consultation with the community. As legislators, this kind of direct community feedback, combined with other sources of information and data, is of the utmost importance, and particularly so when this government is seeking to improve legislation in the future and implement new policies, such as in 2004 with the Human Rights Act. This is one very important piece of legislation that I, as a member of this government, am proud to have been involved in, particularly as it offers inclusiveness for all members of our community.

By having a Human Rights Act, which enshrines our citizens' fundamental political and civil rights, we are all free to go about our lives in the national capital, safe in that knowledge. We have a right to personal freedoms of movement, thought and religion without restrictions. As we have already heard, the rights of minority groups are also covered so that they are free to enjoy their culture, practise and profess their own religion and use their own language. These rights help make our city a better place, a fairer place, in which multiculturalism is not only adopted but cherished.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (12.04): I suppose we are very used to these government amendments to motions, which basically just turn the motions into some sort of self-congratulation. I think it is really disappointing because it indicates a closed-mindedness to, in this case, a very constructive approach. I have to say that I have been trying to get to talk to the government about these sorts of ideas ever since the summit. I have put them to a number of people and—

Mr Hargreaves: You haven't approached my office yet.

DR FOSKEY: I spoke to some people in your office at the summit, actually.

Mr Hargreaves: You haven't spoken to me about it yet. You haven't approached me yet.

DR FOSKEY: I am certainly happy to talk to you about it later, minister. Anyway, I listened respectfully to you, minister.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

DR FOSKEY: I think the government amendments avoid the issue. I hoped that the ACT government would take on the challenge of building a transparent strategy to engage Canberra's diverse communities in developing the framework to succeed the existing framework for a multicultural ACT. I can see no reason for the removal of paragraph 4, unless it is a way to avoid accountability. Paragraph 4 is, I believe, inoffensive, and I believe it just restates what the government says. It spells out in more detail and puts more detail into the government's own community engagement policy.

Don't the minister or the government want to consult with young people or women on this project? I do not believe that. I had thought that the ACT Labor Party would appreciate the importance of running such a process well and would accept the guidance implicit in its own community engagement manual to ensure that the diversity of people that the framework is meant to support really are part of its development. We could have emerged with a document with really strong support from all parts of the community, leading to more connectedness.

The minister spoke about multicultural forums at some length. That is, of course, one part of community consultation. He especially talks about the fact that the forum allowed groups to meet their minister, and of course him to meet the groups. But another really important part of any grouping of people is that they meet each other. That's really where the sort of interconnectedness and strength develops. Also, they don't just mix with each other; they mix with the so-called broader English-speaking-background people. We would expect our government to recognise the importance and value of meeting face to face with constituents. But consultation by summit is not community engagement.

Community development workers—there are many people working in those areas in the ACT—know that to hear what young people think requires young people to talk to young people. I am sorry, but we just do not cut it with them. We do not necessarily know the language that people use. We do not know young people's concerns, and we do not know the questions to ask. We need to acknowledge that; that is okay. I am sorry that the government does not acknowledge that.

This is also true of women's concerns. Can we honestly say that we know the diverse opinions and concerns of Canberra's linguistically diverse women? Let us ensure that women are heard and that we understand that in many of our cultural communities women do not talk comfortably to men, for instance. We know they often prefer having women doctors, and often they need to speak to women from their own cultural groups. So let us acknowledge that. We want to hear what they say, so we need to use the mechanisms that will allow them to speak. I also talked to people at the summit. It was a great summit, and I congratulate your department, minister, on having the summit. I am not playing us and them, and that is reflected in the motion.

Women from a number of communities told me that they were concerned that the issues that they had in common were not always reflected by the things that the leaders of the ethnic communities talk about in their meetings and with the government. It is the leaders that the government speak to about concerns. But many women were concerned that the things that they worry about—their families, this and that; I do not know because we did not get to that level—are not being heard. These women also said that they would

like more connectedness between communities and that that was something that they felt that the existing council had not been encouraging. They also wanted more activities and structures to bring their concerns into what we sometimes smugly call mainstream society.

I can only assume that the government's rejection of the substantive part of my motion is a knee-jerk rejection of some constructive strategies for listening to and connecting our diverse communities. Is the government, with its amendments, saying it will not do that? Let us hope, for the future of the delicate balance of relationships that make up our society, that, while rejecting my motion, the government will in fact quietly go about doing proper community engagement anyway.

Amendments agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Private members' business

MRS BURKE (Molonglo) (12.12): I seek leave to move a motion that private members' business Nos 3 and 4 be postponed to a later hour this day.

Leave granted.

MRS BURKE: I move:

That notices Nos 3 and 4, private members' business, relating to the bushfire threat to the urban edge and the contribution of Koomarri to the ACT, be postponed until a later hour this day.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Minister for Health and Minister for Planning) (12.13): The government would be interested to understand why the opposition want to do this. Clearly, there is a range of important items on the notice paper today. They all are of interest to members. But, given that the administration and procedure committee has already determined the order, before we are in a position to support this request we would like to understand the reason why the opposition wish to do that. In particular, of course, we are concerned that the proposal is to defer an item of business that is being proposed by a government member. I would be interested to understand the reasons; otherwise the government may not be able to support the motion.

MRS BURKE (Molonglo) (12.14), in reply: There is nothing sinister about what happened. I have to say that it would appear that either the government whip or the manager of government business is trying to have a bit of fun with this. But, quite simply, it was no more and no less than human error, and I do apologise for that. I apologise that I got the order wrong in the admin and procedure committee, as I have explained to your good self as chair of the committee and also to the government whip. It was one of those things—human error. Hands up in this place anybody who has not made a mistake. It must be very good to have never made a mistake. I do thank the manager of government business and other members for their understanding, and I look forward to a lively debate on the Belconnen to Civic busway.

Motion agreed to.

Belconnen to Civic busway

MR SESELJA (Molonglo) (12.15): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the recent comments of both the Chief Minister and the Treasurer which cast doubt over the future of the Belconnen to Civic busway;
- (2) expresses its concern at the expenditure of millions of dollars on planning work for the Belconnen to Civic busway which has included entering into a contract for marketing of the busway; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
 - (a) inform the community of whether or not the busway will go ahead, and if so, the proposed timeframe for the project; and
 - (b) abandon the busway project.

The rationale for this motion today is simple, and it is essentially twofold. Firstly, the ACT opposition has had a consistent position on the Belconnen to Civic busway as proposed by Simon Corbell, and that is that it is a bad idea and it should not go ahead. I will come back to that later. Secondly, public statements recently by Mr Corbell's ministerial colleagues have suggested that they also share our concerns about the busway and may be backing away from the government's commitment to the busway. The confusion does need to be resolved, and that is part of the reason for bringing this motion today.

I will speak about the merits of the busway, as that is the first question we need to address. The question is: is spending \$150 million on a busway between Belconnen town centre and Civic a good idea? I submit that the answer is no. We have heard that the busway will reduce the journey from the Belconnen interchange to Civic by around three minutes. I do not think anyone would suggest or believe that a saving of three minutes between town centres will get thousands of Canberrans onto buses; nor would such a saving justify an outlay of around \$150 million.

The minister has occasionally tried to claim a 15-minute saving. Let us go into that a little bit. The minister has said that people in West Belconnen will save 15 minutes. But the busway only goes between Belconnen town centre and Civic, and what we heard in question time when I have quizzed the minister on this is that the busway will save people about three minutes on current projections. So let us not get confused about how people in West Belconnen under all sorts of other arrangements may or may not save time. Those changes may well have a lot of merit. But what we are talking about here is whether spending \$150 million on a busway between two of our major town centres that will save three minutes is justified. And, once again, the opposition and many others believe that it is not.

Do not just take my word that this busway is not a good idea. We have had a number of high-profile opponents, and in fact very few supporters, that I can identify. Certainly, groups such as the property council, the chamber of commerce and the business council have spoken very strongly against the need for a busway. Of course, groups like the business council and the property council are not necessarily or as a general rule against the spending of lots of taxpayers' money on big projects; often businesses benefit. But even they can see that this is a project that does not have sufficient merit, it does not justify the kind of outlay that is proposed, and they have spoken out very strongly against it.

I will quote from a couple of the opponents. The property council is deeply concerned about proposals for a "hugely expensive Belconnen to Civic busway, which cannot hope to ever be sustainable". In the *Canberra Times* late last year, the former chair of the Trade Practices Commission, Ron Gilbert, put his position, which I think sums up the opposition to the busway fairly well:

... the cost involved in spending \$100-150 million on a road used only by a relatively small volume of bus traffic, and simply "sitting there" unused for most of the time is a shocking waste of resources.

That does sum up fairly well some of the opposition to the busway and why it is actually not a good idea. In the estimates processes and in the annual reports hearings, I have been trying to get some sort of justification—other than a three-minute saving—for this kind of outlay, and to see what kind of patronage figures and things the government has to justify this project. And I have got to say there has been very little forthcoming. So we are talking about \$150 million for a three-minute saving.

I have used the term \$150 million, but it is always difficult with the government's proposed expenditure on capital works to estimate what figure we are talking about. I think it is actually a conservative figure, and I will say why. When the busway was announced, it was said that it would cost somewhere between \$85 million and \$150 million. When officials from ACTPLA were quizzed about this, they talked about it depending on the style of busway, and it does seem that what Mr Corbell would want is the kind of busway that would be closer to the \$150 million. But, even if we were to take the lower figure, what we saw in Sydney with the Parramatta to Liverpool busway was a blow-out by about \$150 million. We have seen the GDE blow out by, I think, something like 200 per cent.

If a project is announced as costing between \$85 million and \$150 million and looks unlikely to go ahead for a couple of years at least, I think it is fair to say that, if this project were to go ahead, the ACT taxpayer would be looking at shelling out at least \$150 million. What cannot be determined, and is hard to factor in, is how this project might be delayed. We saw the GDE delayed by the Save the Ridge group, and there may well be similar sort of challenges that would, of course, add significantly to the costs, as we have seen with the GDE.

The other reason for moving this motion today is some of the divisions on this issue that are becoming apparent. The minister announced plans for a busway, which he said could

commence as early as 2006 and was to become a crucial part of the sustainable transport plan. I will just quote from a few of the press releases. One on 18 December 2004 stated:

The Belconnen to Civic Busway is probably the most significant infrastructure investment being made by the ACT Government ...

On 20 April 2004:

This project will significantly reduce travel time.

On 16 June 2004:

These improvements will link with the Belconnen to city busway proposed in the sustainable transport plan.

And on 14 January 2005:

The busway will make a significant contribution to our stated purpose ...

Those are reasonably unequivocal. There has been a lot of talk from the minister, but it is clear from the money that has been outlaid at the moment in preparation that the plan is to go ahead with the busway some time probably in the not too distant future. As Mr Corbell said initially, he expected or hoped that construction could commence some time in 2006.

Recently, after sustained criticism of the proposal from the opposition and various other groups, we have started to hear different noises being made by members of the government. The Treasurer was the first to sound a note of caution. The Treasurer emphasised last year that a majority of cabinet would decide the issue. We all know that that is sort of code for: "Hold your horses, Simon. We're not sure about this project. The majority of cabinet will decide, so don't go out and say too much." I do not think there is much doubt how the Treasurer would vote if this were to come before cabinet prior to his departure.

Then we come to the Chief Minister. In the Assembly and in the media he has repeatedly emphasised that no decision had been taken on the busway. But then he went one step further and on 23 December last year he said on radio:

In terms of planning it is not about today or tomorrow it's about the long term. The planning that we're currently doing in relation to a Belconnen to Civic busway is at this stage design, to ensure that we identify a possible route should the decision ever be taken to build one, and I need re-emphasize that, should the decision ever be taken to build it, that there will be land reserved for the purpose.

That does seem to represent a significant policy shift—from a busway that was likely to go ahead in 2006 to an exercise in the reservation of land for a project some time in the distant future. That does represent a significant shift, and I will come back to that, but the concern that that raises is the kind of expenditure that we have seen to date if this is really just to reserve land. Let me make it clear that that was not the initial purpose. That was not how it was sold. It was about a busway probably going ahead fairly soon, and there does seem to have been a shift.

The Treasurer has gone one step further. In an interview on 2CC in January 2006 he said:

Let's get one thing straight on the busway. It is very far sighted on the part of the Government to do planning to ensure that in the future, there is a corridor for a busway or light rail to run on. So that even if we don't build it now, we have ensured the route for a busway or light rail won't be built over and the whole thing won't become impossible. However, the decision to actually build it is a secondary decision.

That seems to go even further. What we heard from the minister before was that the busway would go ahead and it would allow for future light rail if that were ever to come down the track. But, after the Chief Minister said, "Well, this is really just about reserving land," we have the Treasurer now saying, "Well, it's really about reserving land, maybe for a busway, maybe for light rail—we don't know—some time in the future. We'll just make sure."

The question then becomes: is the project still for a busway, or is it simply to reserve some land? If it is just to reserve some land, we have got to question some of the expenditure that we have seen to date on this issue. Why sign a marketing contract on a project to reserve land? Why spend \$6 million simply to reserve land? Why do detailed design work? They are all the questions.

This goes to the heart of the problem. It started out as an idea of the planning minister. There was not a lot of thought given to it by cabinet but he was allowed to go out with planning stuff. As they have seen more and more opposition, and as this proposed project has been analysed more, the colleagues of Mr Corbell, his cabinet colleagues, have seen that this is not a good idea. In the current economic and budgetary climate, they just do not think that it is a good idea. So what we have seen is a gradual backing away.

But, in the meantime, we have seen marketing contracts signed. Why a marketing contract if all you are doing is reserving land? I do not think you need to market that process. People would understand that that is just future planning and that, if we ever want to built a busway or light rail, those are the corridors reserved for it. I do not think that there is much danger that the kind of corridors that we are talking about are likely to be built on either, to be fair, so it is not a sort of exercise in rocket science. This is not a difficult process if that was all that it was about.

But of course it was not about that. It was about building a busway, and what we need to know now, and what we need the minister to answer, is whether the busway is still going to go ahead or whether it has now simply just become an exercise in reserving land. It is fine if they are going to put it off for years. But why are they spending \$6 million on things such as detailed design work and marketing if this is really just a bit of sensible long-term planning, if we are to believe the Treasurer and the Chief Minister on this issue?

An amendment has been flagged by Mr Corbell, and I note that it does not actually say anything about the busway, or, if it does, I have sort of missed it. It talks about a sustainable transport plan. I am not going to speak to the amendment now, but I hope that some time in the debate someone from the government will stand up and say, "We think spending \$150 million on a busway that saves three minutes from Belconnen to

Civic is a good idea.” I look forward to someone from the government clarifying that—that they support this project, that they think it is a good idea. But I do not think that we will hear that. I think what we are likely to hear in this debate are broad statements about the sustainable transport plan, and of course that has been flagged by the amendment that is coming.

To conclude, the opposition continue to oppose this project. We are calling on the government to scrap it. We are also calling for them, if they refuse to scrap it, to come out and tell the community, if it is going ahead, when it will go ahead, how much it will cost and what kind of community benefit there will be. We have heard the Treasurer say he does not think it will happen in this term; that is a significant shift. We have heard the shift between “it’s likely to go ahead in 2006” and “it’s just reserving land”.

We also need answers about this policy shift. When did this policy shift occur, and why in the midst of this has \$6 million—certainly \$2 million to date, or thereabouts, and another \$4 million to come—been spent on the kind of things that appear way too detailed for simply a project to reserve land for possible future use for some form of public transport? We need answers on this, the people of the territory deserve answers on this, and the government need to say what they are going to do on this project and let us in on their thinking.

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 12.29 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice

Budget—government expenditure

MR SMYTH: My question is directed to the Chief Minister. Recently on the Chief Minister’s talkback program you stated that the ACT was “living beyond its means”. Over the past three budgets, ACT government expenditure has increased by an average of 6.5 per cent. Why has the ACT government lived beyond its means by increasing spending by 6.5 per cent a year over the past three budgets?

MR STANHOPE: It is fair to say that the main reason for the increase in expenditure by ACT governments over the last four years was to catch up in a whole range of areas that were grievously neglected by the Liberal government in the previous seven years.

We can immediately go to an area that I know is very embarrassing for the Leader of the Opposition—that is, the previous government’s expenditure on mental health. Each of us in this place knows the implications, the effect and the impact of the traditional levels of funding of mental health by the Liberal Party in government. When we came to government four years ago, the ACT, the wealthiest community on a per capita basis, expended on mental health by far the least of any jurisdiction in Australia. If there were one area of government service delivery that you would expect any government of any political persuasion or colour to give priority to, it would be mental health.

We are now suffering the consequences nationally as a result of under-funding and a lack of commitment, in both a policy and resourcing sense, by governments in a whole range

of areas, but most specifically in mental health. What was the level of expenditure by the Liberal government?

Mr Corbell: He wants to increase it even more.

MR STANHOPE: Yes. What was the level of expenditure by the previous government? Why was the level of expenditure by the previous government the worst in Australia? Over the last four years we have increased expenditure on mental health by a lot more than 6.5 per cent a year. I would have to defer to the Minister for Health in relation to the extent or the level of the increase in expenditure on mental health, but it is massive. Even then, it has not brought us up to the top of pile in Australia.

Mr Smyth: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The question was not about the previous Liberal government's expenditure; it is about this government's expenditure, and why they have lived beyond their means.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, I heard. The question was: why are you living beyond your means? I think the expenditure that the Chief Minister is mentioning goes to that issue.

MR STANHOPE: I am giving you a historical explanation as to why we have been spending at the levels we have. It goes very much to what we inherited four years ago. You cannot ask me questions—"Why are you spending this much money? Why has your expenditure increased by this much?"—without expecting me to provide some explanation of the base that we inherited after seven years of government by you.

We can go through them, as you have invited me to do—and I will. You have asked me specifically why we spend these amounts and why we spent at this level. We now spend, in say mental health, at a level we do because you underfunded mental health so grievously over a full seven years. We now know the extent to which you underfunded, for instance, emergency services. In the last three years we have increased expenditure on emergency services, particularly around bushfire preparation and in relation to the capacity of the Emergency Services Authority, by \$134 million.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister, resume your seat for a moment. The question has been asked; the minister is attempting to answer it. I am not going to put up with continuous interjections.

MR STANHOPE: You cannot possibly sit there, and accept that we have spent an additional \$134 million on emergency services, and claim that, when we took over government, took over emergency services, it was all hunky dory; that the \$134 million was excess to requirements; that it was not needed. You cannot sit there and pretend that the additional \$70 to \$80 million we invested in disability services as a result of the Gallop report was additional to requirement. It was a need that we inherited from you.

Go through it. What did we inherit? We inherited a situation where we have had to invest \$134 million in emergency services because of your neglect; \$70 million to \$80 million in relation to disability services because of your neglect; because of your neglect we have had to significantly increase expenditure in mental health to get us at least on par

with the rest of the nation, and not coming last; we have invested from \$75 million to \$80 million of additional funding in child protection.

You cannot sit there and tell us that the additional money we invest in child protection is over and above that which would have been necessary had you done your job in government and not left us the basket case in these areas that you left us.

MR SMYTH: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Since forecast revenue growth is approximately 1½ per cent per year, what are you going to do to ensure that spending does not grow by more than that amount?

MR STANHOPE: One thing we will not do is another of the things that you did in government, Mr Smyth. The enormous fraud we inherited, and the fraud in which the previous government operated, is best illustrated by what we discovered on taking government in relation to budget allocations for EBAs.

Mrs Burke: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Chief Minister makes an assertion of fraud. I ask him to withdraw that word in relation to the former government.

MR SPEAKER: I do not think it is unparliamentary in the context of—

Mrs Burke: It is an imputation.

MR SPEAKER: It did not refer to individuals; he was talking about the previous government and the policies of the previous government. I cannot rule that out of order.

MR STANHOPE: It always needs to be kept in mind in relation to any discussion or any issue raised by the Liberal Party in relation to government expenditures and the delivery of government services. Reflect on, for instance, the allocation that we discovered only when we took government, when the Treasurer had his first briefing from Treasury, to be advised, “Oh well, in relation to the underlying position of the budget, Treasurer this is what you find”. The Treasurer asked, “What allocation is there in the forward estimates for pay rises for the ACT public service? What is the percentage allocation into the outyears?”, noting that the previous government had, before losing government, offered the nurses a 14 per cent pay rise.

Of course, we, having relied on the then government’s assertions in relation to the state of the budget, having relied on the fact that it had—and knowing that it had—offered a 14 or 14½ per cent pay rise to the nurses before losing government—negotiations incomplete—assumed that any responsible government would have made some provision to cover a 14 per cent pay offer. What did we find when we opened the books? What response did the Treasurer receive when he told Treasury he assumed that this 14 per cent was covered in the budget, in the forecasts? What was the budget allocation for that 14 per cent offer that you made to the nurses? The allocation in the outyears was one per cent.

Mr Smyth: What are you going to do?

MR SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister, come back to the point of the question. It was in relation to expenditure levels and how you would—

MR STANHOPE: We will not be doing that. We will not be making offers for pay that we cannot fund. We will not be negotiating 14 per cent pay rises without a single cent allocated in the outyears to cover it.

Mr Smyth: So what are you going to do? You don't know.

MR STANHOPE: Yes we do. This of course is the sign of government that is in control, that is determined to govern for the benefit of the territory—and we have.

Mr Smyth: What—four deficits coming?

MR STANHOPE: Let us put those in perspective. We budgeted for \$91 million.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, I warn you.

MR STANHOPE: We budgeted \$91.5 million. I was disappointed that the shadow Treasurer did not have the grace to congratulate the significant improvement in that particular position. We have improved it by \$56 million. At this stage we have a budget deficit for this year of \$36 million or \$37 million. What is that on a budget of around \$3 billion? It is .01 per cent. Let us put this in some perspective. Let us understand what we are talking about here: a budget deficit for this year of .01 of a per cent of our budget—\$30 million of a \$3 billion budget. Let us not get carried away. Let us not go wobbly at the knees, as the others are wont to do.

Let us simply acknowledge it, as this government has—as reflected in its last budget, as will be reflected in the next budget, and as is given some credence through the appointment by the government of a high level functional and strategic review to look at the way in which we deliver services to ensure that we can maintain our budgetary priorities of balanced budgets over the cycle. And we will do it. At this stage, since being in government we have accumulated surpluses of around \$230 million. I repeat: \$230 million.

Mr Mulcahy: Read your own report.

MR STANHOPE: That is what it says: accumulated services over the cycle in four years of \$230 million—the first deficit of \$30-something million—.01 of a per cent. And we are working on it. The rest, in terms of the outyears, is receiving the very direct attention of the government.

Self-government act—amendment

MS PORTER: Mr Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, I understand that you wrote recently to the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Greens proposing a joint approach to the commonwealth seeking an amendment to the self-government act that would allow the Assembly to determine for itself issues about the number of MLAs and the size of the executive. I note that the *Canberra Times* reports today that Mr Smyth has declined to be associated with the move to extend the ACT's self-determination. Chief Minister, can you say what reasons the opposition leader offered for this decision?

Mr Stefaniak: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I do not see how the Chief Minister could possibly be expected to answer a question on what anyone in the opposition was thinking or reasons for the opposition doing something. That is hypothetical.

Mr Corbell: On the point of order, the question was: what reasons were provided by Mr Smyth to Mr Stanhope? Mr Stanhope is aware of those and can answer the question.

MR SPEAKER: I understand, from the reports in the paper, there was an exchange of letters.

Mr Stefaniak: I would ask Ms Porter to read the last part of the question again. Quite clearly, she is asking for an opinion that only the Leader of the Opposition can give.

MR SPEAKER: I do not know. I am happy to have the member ask the question again. It seemed to me she was asking about the specific reasons. Ms Porter, would you like to read that again?

MS PORTER: Chief Minister, can you say what reasons the opposition leader offered for this decision?

MR STANHOPE: The question is reasonable. The reasons given, of course, are entirely unreasonable, if not petulant. I have some difficulties providing the explanation which the member requires because the letter is short, terse, rude and amazingly petulant. The letter concludes—and this really gives some insight into the dreadful position the Leader of the Opposition is in—“I have no difficulty in discussing ACT matters with the Prime Minister and his office at any time and have no need to use your office to gain his attention.”

That is the reason why the Leader of the Opposition has abandoned his commitment to self-government and to self-determination and why the Leader of the Opposition is not prepared to stand up and ensure that his constituents, the people of Canberra, are not treated in this derisory, second-class way, which is reflected in any attitude which says to the world at large, which says to the Prime Minister and the federal parliament and which says, in fact, to the people of Canberra, “You do not and should not have the right to determine for yourself issues as simple and as basic as how many ministers should sit in a government.”

The Leader of the Opposition and the Liberal Party in the ACT do not believe that the people of the ACT, through their elected representatives, should be able to take this most profound decision on how many ministers shall we have, how many elected representatives shall we have and how many politicians should there be in the ACT Legislative Assembly to represent the people of the ACT. This is far too difficult; this is too complex for the people of the ACT or for this particular parliament. Let us ask the Prime Minister and the federal parliament to decide these weighty issues for us. No other parliament in Australia does!

The Northern Territory Chief Minister does not have to run cap in hand to the Prime Minister of the nation, to the federal parliament, and say, “Prime Minister, I have 220,000 people; I have 25 elected representatives; I have 200 local government

councillors; I would like to increase my ministry. Would you agree to me increasing my ministry? Prime Minister, please, please, please, can I appoint another minister?" Mr Smyth and the Liberal Party in the ACT think that is quite a reasonable request.

I have no doubt that when I approached Mr Smyth and presented him with the letter he had every intention of signing this letter. Then he asked his colleagues in the party room. Because of the dynamic in the party room, this, of course, was another opportunity for the takeover faction, the coat tuggers. Richard Mulcahy, the putative leader, the puppet, loaded the gun, as he always does, ducked behind Mrs Dunne's skirt, as he always does, and asked Mrs Dunne to flash off a few shots around the room, around the territory, as she is wont to do, shooting herself in the foot on those occasions when her foot is not in her mouth.

We have this dreadful picture of Mr Mulcahy tugging away, if not at Peter Costello's coat, behind Mrs Dunne as he ducks backwards and forwards, trying to keep out of range so that nobody will see him and nobody will know that it was this great hero, the green team, Richard Mulcahy and Mrs Dunne, the next leader and deputy leader of the opposition. That is what it is all about. We are to be denied the opportunity or the capacity to determine the size of our own Assembly and the size of our own ministry because Richard Mulcahy wants to be leader of the Liberal Party.

MR SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

MS PORTER: Chief Minister, did the opposition leader offer any support for the notion that, if self-government is to be genuine, the Assembly should be able to determine its own affairs?

MR STANHOPE: No. In my letter to Mr Smyth I went to great pains to ensure that he understood—and one needs to go to great pains to ensure Mr Smyth understands—that this was an issue about the principle of whether or not we are, indeed, a self-governing territory, whether we are, indeed, an Assembly which has some sovereignty and some control over our own affairs or whether or not we are an Assembly that is content, on behalf of the people of the ACT, to sit back and accept our second-class status. It is as simple as that.

On what basis can one justify the fact that I cannot increase the size of my ministry from five to six without the Prime Minister's approval? How patronising is that? How derisory is it that I cannot increase the size of my ministry from five to six? I cannot appoint a parliamentary secretary; I cannot fill a vacancy unless the Prime Minister personally approves. How derisory is that? The Liberal Party in this place is comfortable with that.

One of the explanations provided to me by the Leader of the Opposition was that the Liberal Party is happy for the size of the Assembly to remain at 17 members. This is a new position. A year or so ago, it was not happy for the Assembly to remain at 17. In fact, we had a negotiated position with the previous Leader of the Opposition in this place, the leader of the Liberal Party, in which we were negotiating with the Liberal Party on the basis of an increase to either 21 or 23 members. This is a new position.

That highlights the point that this is not and was not about how many members we should have; this was always about how do we gain control over own destiny, our own

rights and privileges of this place. The Liberal Party, of course, have completely abandoned them. We know why they have abandoned them.

My timing was unfortunate in that it precipitated this revolt which we have now seen and which essentially is terminal. We saw the results of that for Mrs Dunne and the unedifying spectacle of Mr Mulcahy scuttling around in the dust in the wake of Mrs Dunne's skirts, to ensure that he, somehow, appears to be fresh, clean and untouched in this most unseemly undermining of his leader. That is what it is of course. I have to say, Mr Smyth, that I acknowledge, on your behalf, that it is perhaps the most brutal episode or example of disloyalty and undermining of a leader that I have experienced in my time in politics.

I have never, I do not think, experienced such an overtly brutal destruction of a leader and, indeed, of a party, to the point where we have Mr Stefaniak expressing shock and amazement that he is the only alternative and the only option for the party. Mr Stefaniak, I remember with great fondness those days when you and I were in the same firm at the Australian National University, Stefaniak and Stanhope. I look forward to going head to head with you in the future.

Mr Mulcahy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: this trip down memory lane bears no relevance to the matter that was raised in the question. I ask you to ask the Chief Minister to return to the subject matter and complete his answer.

MR SPEAKER: I think the Chief Minister has finished.

Universities admission index

DR FOSKEY: My question is to the minister for education and is in regard to the universities admission index—UAI—scores awarded to ACT students. The minister would know well that, on average, kids from families with high incomes and good education usually do very well at getting into university and that Canberra people, compared to New South Wales as a whole, have significantly higher incomes and education. So you would expect that year 12 kids from right across Canberra would be getting university entrance scores much higher than the New South Wales-wide average, but it seems that Canberra kids who do not go to grammar, Narrabundah or Radford are actually getting fewer scores in the high 90s, which is the cut-off point for many scholarships and select university courses, than the New South Wales average and considerably less than students from Sydney's North Shore, which is the area of New South Wales with the demographic closest to ours. Could the minister please advise the Assembly whether students going to the other colleges or senior high schools in Canberra are not taught as well as they would be in New South Wales or whether they are disadvantaged by the existing UAI scheme?

MS GALLAGHER: I think that the question has a bit of an historical basis in that a lot of correspondence has been going around the place from a person who is concerned about the way the current university index is working in the territory and has asked for further information. I understand that the Chief Minister, as acting minister whilst I was on leave, has written to the Board of Senior Secondary Studies seeking further information on some of the concerns which have been raised with us and which I think formed the basis of Dr Foskey's question.

From the information that I have seen and from the assurances that the board has given me on the rather complex way that scores are determined, I am confident at this stage that there does not seem to be any issue with the way scores are provided across the colleges, although it is a complex area. As I said, the Chief Minister has asked for further information about it. We do see within the school system some colleges doing well and performing very strongly and other colleges not doing so well. Independent advice has been sought about that over the history of the system in the ACT and all the advice to us at this stage has been that the system is fair and delivers results that are equally measured across the system for all students who participate in it.

As I said, we are seeking further advice on some of the concerns that have been raised recently, advice which I believe would answer your question more fully once we have it, but at this stage I have no reason to doubt the system in place, in that it is delivering the scores that students are achieving through their year 12 and year 11 performance at college.

DR FOSKEY: I have a supplementary question. Will you make the scaling committee table which links the ACT to New South Wales schools available to the Assembly?

MS GALLAGHER: I believe that the table that Dr Foskey is talking about is not publicly available. It is a New South Wales table and it is not publicly available in New South Wales. I just would not be in a position to table that document in the Assembly. It is a New South Wales table which is not publicly available. As I said, extensive concerns have been raised by a person about the system, and that person has sought to obtain the table. We are currently working on getting some external advice through the board so as to look at that person's concerns and see whether there is anything legitimate about them, in which case we would need to respond. At this stage, all the advice to me is that the concerns are not valid, but we will look at it further. As to the table, it is not publicly available.

Budget—unencumbered cash

MR MULCAHY: My question is to the Treasurer. The *Mid year review* shows that the territory's unencumbered cash will fall next year to less than \$1 million. From a level of around \$500 million earlier this decade, that is a dramatic collapse. How much of that rundown in unencumbered cash has been used to fund current expenditure? Now that the unencumbered cash is all but gone, how will operating losses and capital works be funded in future years?

MR QUINLAN: I have requested the figures, because I anticipated questions such as this, to look back at previous years so that we have a view. Of course the cash situation is obviously going to go with the cycle that you are in. I can certainly tell you that the 2001 budget that Mr Stanhope referred to shows the unencumbered cash in the outyears dropping to virtually nothing. I think it was \$9 million for the year 2005.

That was your budgeting. That was the supposedly wonderful financial position that we took over from you guys. I think it is implied in the question that you have asked, Mr Mulcahy, that somehow in the previous decade the \$500 million unencumbered cash

happened to come from the previous government. That would be a very erroneous assumption to make.

There is not a table of unencumbered cash in your 2001 budget, but there certainly is a cash flow statement. I refer you to the bottom line of that. It will show that cash is going to be run down by close to \$9 million. That, of course, is within the context of the very large omissions from that budget, some of which Mr Stanhope referred to. For example, there was the nurses' EBA and other EBAs. In fact, even though salaries were depressed, I think you had factored in an annual salary incrementation of about 1.25 per cent. Not only were salaries depressed, but it was quite clear that the commonwealth service was increasing salaries at a fairly significant rate, and they were virtually setting the benchmark within which the ACT would have to operate.

If the point of your question is: have we frittered away a legacy that was left to us in the beginning, the answer is certainly no. In fact, the legacy that we got was a budget that did not, for example, include the \$111 million you had at that stage as the estimate for the jail. That was not in the budget. Therefore, one presumes, it was not in the cash flow statement. If you factor in a couple of the things that I have just pointed out, you will realise that the unencumbered cash, with an adjusted budget for reality, would have well and truly been getting into the negative.

Mr Mulcahy: An adjusted budget for reality!

MR QUINLAN: Go to one page of the 2001 budget, the cash flow statement, and have a look.

Mr Mulcahy: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have sat patiently now for three minutes waiting for the Treasurer to actually answer two very explicit questions. Like his colleague the Chief Minister, he seems to be in reflective mode. I would like an answer to the question about unencumbered cash. Has it been used to fund current expenditure? Now that it has all gone, how will future losses be funded?

MR SPEAKER: He is talking about unencumbered cash. He has been ever since he got to his feet.

MR QUINLAN: You have tossed some pretty snide remarks—

Mr Mulcahy: Just answer the question. If you cannot answer it, take it on notice.

MR QUINLAN: across the table and tried to imply, with your description of yourself as asking searching questions and all that sort of thing and having a shot at the Chief Minister about—

Mr Mulcahy: When did I ask you that?

MR QUINLAN: All you have to do is go and read. You have capital budgets, you have capital expenditure, you have operating statements and you have cash flow statements. You could do it on an envelope. If it was not that easy—

Mr Mulcahy: Why don't you want to answer it?

MR QUINLAN: What do you want me to do—give you exact numbers down to the cent?

Mr Mulcahy: We will settle for that down to the odd million.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR QUINLAN: About time. If you know so much, go and get the back of an envelope. Work out the surpluses, work out the capital expenditure, have a look at the cash and you will see where it is going. It is a process of cash, operating expenditure and capital expenditure. Very difficult for you! Just go do that.

MR MULCAHY: I ask a supplementary question. With a forecast GFS operating deficit of \$332.6 million in 2008-09, where will the funds come from to increase unencumbered cash from \$8.2 million to \$79.4 million?

MR QUINLAN: Let us start with land sales. Underlying this question is Mr Mulcahy's desire to use absolute GFS to say, "This is the real position. If I say it often enough, somebody might believe me." I refer you to page 23 of the *Mid year review*, which actually gets closer to reconciling GFS with reality. The absolute application of GFS, if you understand it, is that you are not allowed to include land sales because that is sale of assets. You have not earned that income. That is just sale of assets. But you are required to include the operation of, say, the Land Development Authority. So you have to charge yourself \$34 million but do not include \$170 million worth of land sales—doom and disaster! Let us get on the radio: "The territory is going to hell in a handcart because you are not allowed to count land sales."

The fact is that the ACT is different from most states and territories. The land is out there. It is not on our books as an asset. It is brought in by that process on an annual cyclic basis and it is turned off and sold. That has happened in the past and that will happen in the future.

Standard & Poor's and Moody's are prepared to accept that. We have had those discussions with them. They understand that, because in most states in Australia the land is freehold and somebody has it and there is a little bit of Crown land. It is even the case that, where Crown land is developed in other states, they have a different accounting process. They set up their land development agencies as completely separate businesses that pay dividends to government, and those dividends are counted.

Our dividend happens to be the value of the land minus the cost of the LDA. They both go into our accounts. I know you want to spread the worst news you can.

Mr Mulcahy: I am just telling people the facts.

MR QUINLAN: You would be better off saying, "We have a \$100 million deficit and that is a problem." You would be better off saying that because you would have some credibility. But if you are saying, "You are not allowed to count all your land revenue because we do not want to count it—"

Mr Stanhope: No, it is inconvenient.

MR QUINLAN: Yes, “We don’t want that because—”

Mr Stanhope: It is inconvenient.

MR QUINLAN: “But we do want you to count the cost of the LDA. We want you to cost all of your accumulating superannuation liabilities, but we don’t want you to cost in there the earnings that you make on the investments you put aside.”

This government has put aside substantial funds to support previously unfunded superannuation liabilities. The previous government put away money, but the only money they put away was money they got from robbing Peter to pay Paul. They took out of Actew and put into the superannuation funds. Actew then had to go and borrow, and that was supporting superannuation. Really good stuff!

This government has put away on a regular basis funds to support, to grow a fund to back previously unfunded superannuation liabilities. We are earning interest on it. The value is there. We have to account for the increases in liability. Members opposite say, “Where is our net worth going? Our net worth under GFS has gone down. Where has it gone?”

The only decrement in our GFS figure for net worth is the latest superannuation actuarial report. While I am on that figure—and I think it is relevant to the question—Mr Mulcahy as much as called me a liar this morning on radio. He said that, in estimates on 26 October, I knew about the actuarial figures.

Mr Mulcahy: I said I—

MR QUINLAN: I have the dates here, Mr Mulcahy, if you are interested in the facts before you get on radio. It is a big wheel; it does not come round.

Budget—capital works projects

MR SESELJA: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, your government is now aware that it cannot continue to manage its financial affairs as it has been and that hard decisions now need to be made to rein in government spending. What capital works projects is your government going to defer or abandon to reduce the pressure on the territory’s declining cash position?

MR STANHOPE: Of capital works projects that have been approved by cabinet and funded, I do not believe any.

MR SESELJA: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. Chief Minister, are you actively considering borrowing to fund the capital works projects to which you are committed?

MR STANHOPE: No, we are not actively considering that.

Budget

MR STEFANIAK: My question without notice is directed to the Chief Minister. Incidentally, Chief Minister, the third member of our little firm, Mr Martin Sikes of Campbelltown District Court, was in town at the weekend and asked me to pass on his regards. Chief Minister, your Labor government is currently trying to extricate itself from commitments that have been made on numerous occasions to maintain a balanced budget over the economic cycle. However, the midyear budget review, tabled yesterday, forecasts an operating deficit in three years time of almost \$17 million and a whopping aggregate deficit over this year and the next three years of \$220 million. Chief Minister, why has your government abandoned its commitment to maintaining a balanced budget over the forecast period?

MR STANHOPE: We have not, Mr Stefaniak. Once again it is very similar to the position that Mr Mulcahy puts in relation to retreating instantly to GFS rather than the accounting standard that we utilise and have always utilised and that previous Liberal governments utilised. It is quite interesting really to say, “We operate under a particular accounting standard. There is another standard that makes things look far more dramatic in the nature of the numbers it produces. So let us just concentrate on that. Let us ask questions around a set of numbers that have never been the basis of budget reporting in the ACT under this government or any other government.”

As the Treasurer just said, let us, through that device, basically paint a picture of a worst-case scenario that really is not based on fact or truth. Similarly, in relation to the point that the shadow Attorney-General made in his question, over the term of this government we have accumulated surpluses of well over \$200 million. I do not know the exact figure, as I have not memorised it, but I think it is \$230 million or \$234 million. Since coming into office four years ago we have accumulated surpluses of about \$230 million. The deficits that have been predicted in the *Mid year review* are precisely that—predictions.

This is not a passive government. It is not a government that looks at those numbers and thinks, “Deary me, there are deficits predicted into the outyears. We are not in charge of our destiny. We do not have the capacity, the officials, the wherewithal or the commitment to work hard at our budget, at our expenditure, at our governance, at our public service or at the way in which we deliver services. We are just going to sit as if frozen in place and simply allow this to roll along.” That is nonsense. Over the years we, as a government, have produced accumulated surpluses of \$234 million.

In a year in which the news is good we have now been told that the predicted published deficit of \$91.5 million has been reduced to \$37 million. That is what we achieved this year. Since predicting a deficit of \$91 million this year we have presented a midyear review that presents or paints a much better picture; namely, a deficit of only \$36 million or \$37 million—a major achievement in the context of this year.

Mr Mulcahy: How was that achieved?

MR STANHOPE: It was achieved as expressed by the *Mid year review*, as a result of issues almost completely or exclusively beyond our control.

Mr Mulcahy: Read how it was achieved: equity markets and revaluing the convention centre.

MR STANHOPE: It is not as a result—

Mr Mulcahy: Of anything you have done.

MR STANHOPE: At this stage of the budget cycle it would not be, would it? The bare facts remain, the facts that opposition members resent, particularly in the circumstances or environment that I have seen over the last few months. This does interest me, Mr Mulcahy. This economic genius that we have in our midst is an embarrassment. All year Mr Mulcahy has been predicting a blow-out of \$91 million to \$200 million. Everyone knows that. Last night I was intrigued when I watched WIN news on television and heard Mr Mulcahy stating, “The deficit is \$160 million; I predicted it to be \$160 million.” Half an hour later on ABC news it was \$200 million. It went from \$160 million on WIN news to \$200 million on ABC news.

I have worked it out. It increased at the rate of \$1.5 million a minute. That is reflective of the grasp Mr Mulcahy has of the issues. His prediction for this year’s budget was a deficit of \$160 million. That is what he is predicting on the basis of the published figure of \$91.5 million. Mr Mulcahy said that that figure would increase to \$160 million but he changed that figure to \$200 million. Yesterday we published a figure of a \$236 million surplus, but he is out there sticking steadfastly to his prediction of a \$200 million deficit.

Mr Mulcahy: Because you are relying on an upgrade and superannuation.

MR STANHOPE: The facts are that it is \$36 million. As at 7.00 pm last night Mr Mulcahy was still out there predicting a \$200 million deficit. He is a goose. He has no credibility in this area.

MR SPEAKER: Order! I ask the Chief Minister to withdraw that statement.

Mrs Burke: On a point of order: under standing order 58 the Chief Minister must confine himself to the subject matter.

MR STANHOPE: I withdraw the statement that Mr Mulcahy is a goose.

Mrs Burke: Mr Speaker, I ask you to ask the Chief Minister to confine himself to the subject matter. Under standing order 58 he is continually digressing. The question was: Chief Minister, why has your government abandoned its commitment to maintaining a balanced budget over the forecast period?

MR SPEAKER: Order! This has been all about expenditure and savings by government. I could hardly draw the conclusion that the Chief Minister was not dealing with the subject matter.

MR STEFANIAK: I ask a supplementary question. Chief Minister, how does your government propose to turn around the financial performance of the general government sector?

MR STANHOPE: I was leading up to answering that question but I allowed myself to be distracted and I digressed a little from the path. But I was setting the picture. Four years ago this government inherited a very crook budget, a budget that really represented a fraud. Over the past four years we, as a government, increased our investment in the delivery of services of fundamental importance to the people of this community—in health, education, aged care services and in government services across the board.

This government has dramatically increased services in relation to the safety and protection of this community—an additional \$134 million in emergency services and tens of millions of additional dollars in relation to disability services. Just yesterday I saw the increase in the number of childcare protection workers that this government has employed over the last year, from 46 to 115 in the space of 18 months. Opposition members should dwell on that. What did we inherit from the former government in relation to child protection, nothing more fundamental than the welfare and safety of our children?

We increased the number of child protection workers within the ACT from 46 to 115. That represents something of the investment that this government has made in this community. We did that while delivering accumulated surpluses of \$230 million. This is a good government, a government that recognises the priorities of this community and has the courage to invest in those priorities while returning a surplus budget. We are now faced essentially with things outside our control, such as an actuary who adjusts his predictions in relation to our superannuation liability by \$200 million over the cycle. That is what he has done.

Twelve months ago we relied on his actuarial advice. He has now adjusted it to the tune of \$200 million over four years, which comes as something of a shock to a government that had budgeted for a certain bottom line. Within six months of that budget we were advised by our actuary that he had adjusted his numbers up by \$200 million or thereabouts over the space of four years. We all know that there are issues outside our control, issues relating to land sales, revenue from stamp duty, conveyancing and everything that is associated with the sale of land upon which we and every ACT government has relied. That was reflected in the position the Treasurer put relating to the GFS and why land and land sales have to be taken into account in the ACT if we want a proper or true picture of the underlying position. We will respond; we will not sit passively.

Mr Mulcahy: We are all waiting.

MR STANHOPE: The member can wait. He will be waiting for a long time; we have three more budgets in this cycle. We will respond. In the first instance, as of November last year, I appointed a significant functional and strategic review—which is what it is—to look at the way in which we do business, the structure of our government and the way in which we can best meet our priorities. That review will inform the decisions we take in the budget that we have begun to put together and through which we will address and attack the deficits that the *Mid year review* indicates we face.

Mr Mulcahy: It is fascinating.

MR STANHOPE: We will stare down the deficit and produce over the term a budget cycle surplus, as we have always predicted. In fact, we are well on the way towards doing that. In relation to the hard decisions that need to be taken, this is the government that will take them. There are hard decisions that need to be taken in relation to our structures and the way in which we deliver services. That is reflected perhaps by the most important information revealed in the Productivity Commission's review of governance released two weeks ago.

If one reads and carries out a detailed analysis across the board in relation to service delivery—an issue that stares this community and this government in the face and that has stared every other government in the face—one finds that the cost of service delivery within the territory runs somewhere between 16 per cent and 20 per cent above the national average. The most significant issue facing this community is that we, in delivering the services that we deliver in the ACT, do it at a cost of between 15 per cent and 20 per cent more than the national average, and it is unsustainable.

Budget—midyear review

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Treasurer. On page 28 of the *Mid year review* there is an analysis of the balance sheet for the general government sector and this analysis shows that there will be a reduction in current investments during 2005-06 of \$240 million, or about a third of the total current investments from the close of last year's budget. Treasurer, where did the \$240 million of current investments go?

MR QUINLAN: I will have to have a look at that, because it is facile to look at current investments by themselves. Most people, and anybody who would stand to ask a question like that, would understand that a balance sheet, particularly the balance sheet of an enterprise, a government, like this, has to look at both current and non-current investment to look at the wealth position.

If you have a situation where you have declining cash—we have already discussed that here—you would probably have a reduction in current investments, because current investments are the short-term stuff, the stuff that is going to be realised within the space of 12 months; that is by the definition. As such, you would think that we probably would not have at balance day as much money on the short-term money market or in short-term investments, because that is our liquidity.

To be looking behind that question to how we are going overall, you really have to look at the whole balance sheet, at current investments and non-current investments, and then look at the bottom line. Mr Mulcahy loves the GFS. If you look elsewhere in the report, although I cannot remember exactly where, it looks at our net worth under GFS and shows an immediate decline this year of about \$300 million. That is the quantum of the superannuation liability change, the increase, and therefore it changes the equation. On page 21 you find that over the space of the next few years our net worth returns to \$9.3 million. From 2005-06 to 2008-09 net worth shifts from \$9.3 million to \$9.3 million. I am sure that has not escaped your notice, Mr Mulcahy, your being an assiduous fan of the GFS system, that being—what would you think—probably a key indicator. It says it is a key indicator in here; that is our claim. It is a net worth from

2005-06 of \$9.3 million to a net worth in 2008-09 of \$9.3 million. That is a disaster really, isn't it?

Productivity Commission report on government services

MR GENTLEMAN: My question is to the minister for emergency services. Can the minister inform the Assembly of the results of the recently released Productivity Commission report on government services in regard to emergency services in the ACT?

MR HARGREAVES: I thank Mr Gentleman for the question. The Productivity Commission's report on government services 2007, known as ROGS, which compares government services delivered across the country, revealed the ACT's emergency services to be among the best in the country when it comes to a range of emergency management indicators such as recruitment of volunteers, response times and customer satisfaction.

I am pleased to inform the Assembly that ROGS 2006 reveals the ACT Ambulance Service to be the best in the country, on two fronts. The report shows our ambulance response times are the fastest in Australia, meaning that Canberrans are receiving emergency medical assistance, overall, more quickly than people in other states and territories. In addition, community satisfaction with our ambulance service is at 98 per cent, jointly leading the country with South Australia.

This is a great result for the people of the ACT who also benefit from an ambulance service that includes an intensive care paramedic in every ambulance. This high standard of service is also achieved with a great deal of efficiency for the taxpayer, with the ACT expending the second lowest amount per 1,000 people on ambulance services in the country.

The opposition's reaction to this news is interesting. True to form, Mr Pratt has found one figure in the ROGS report that he thinks he can seize on and has gone about trying to scare the community yet again without justification.

Mr Corbell: He is good at that.

MR HARGREAVES: He is good at that. I think he is a lecturer in that. He has taken figures from one table and used them again to accuse the government of reducing funding levels. To quote his release:

While the population of the ACT has increased, the level of funding we see now is back to 2000-01 levels.

Had Mr Pratt bothered to read a little further into the report and thought about the subject matter in question, he would have in fact observed figures that show a marked increase in the level of spending per thousand people since 2000-01. For the record, the report highlights a spending increase from \$10.4 million, or \$33,009 per one thousand people in 2000-01, to a total expenditure of \$19.4 million, or \$59,811 per one thousand people in 2004-05. Hardly the reduction that Mr Pratt has incorrectly deduced and publicised! Yet again, Mr Pratt is encouraged to read and think more widely before making accusations.

Continuing on with the good news for the people of the ACT: the ACT's fire services are also setting an example for the rest of the country. Our Fire Brigade response times are the second fastest in the country, and we lead the country in containing fires in their room of origin, at 78 per cent of the time, meaning that damage to property is minimised overall. This result can be attributed to excellent response times but also to the community informing the ESA of fires in a responsible and timely manner that enables quick dispatch to occur.

I was pleased to see the ACT leading the country in the recruitment of volunteers, with a large increase in the amount of volunteers in emergency services since 2002-03. We addressed this issue yesterday in Ms Porter's MPI, but I take this opportunity to again sing the praises of our volunteers. In the ACT, we have volunteers in our fire services, both through the Fire Brigade and the Rural Fire Service, and in our State Emergency Service.

Since 2002-03, we have seen a significant overall increase in volunteers, from 830 to 1,266, the highest rise in the country and bucking the national trend, which has seen an overall decrease. I applaud the Canberra community for the commitment they have shown in helping our emergency services protect life, property and the environment in the ACT. The opposition might choose to also encourage young Canberrans to become volunteers in the ESA.

I congratulate the ESA and its four services on the excellent results they have achieved in protecting the Canberra community and urge the opposition to demonstrate constructive support for the ESA rather than continue to undermine the public perception of what is, clearly, a national benchmark in providing excellent work in the community.

Budget—superannuation liabilities

MRS BURKE: Treasurer, the report on the midyear review of the ACT budget that you tabled yesterday details a number of factors that were identified in the annual actuarial review of the territory's superannuation liabilities. As an accountant, you would, of course, appreciate the nature of the advice prepared by the actuary. Treasurer, when was the first occasion on which your government was advised by the actuary of potential issues relating to a change in the pattern of benefits taken, the level of personal superannuation contributions and the impact of changes in wage indexation and the discount rate?

MR QUINLAN: That is a very good question, Mrs Dunne! Did you do it all yourself? Occasionally, we stand in this place at question time and say, "I thank the honourable member for the question." We do not really mean it, quite often, but I mean it this time. On radio this morning, as I referred to in the previous answer, Mr Mulcahy virtually stated that he thought that in the estimates hearings of 26 October I had information on the actuarial review in my possession. Despite his assiduous questioning—he usually tells people that he asks searching questions—I do not recall that in the estimates hearing, but one man's "assiduous" is another man's "quite superficial".

Just to be sure, I asked my department to give me some record of the gestation of the actuarial review and the material that we got. Remember that it was 26 October that the

hearing took place at which Mr Mulcahy claimed on radio that I had this information. I am advised by Treasury that the first part of the discussion was on 29 November. There were discussions by Treasury officials with the actuary. At that discussion, the actuary indicated that estimated liabilities were likely to increase due to changes in the actuarial experiences, et cetera. The concern was coming together.

Superannuation was identified as a risk in the most general of terms by Treasury in discussions before that, I think maybe late October, but certainly the discussions that had any body to them at all took place between Treasury and the actuary on 29 November and then the actuary went away and did his or her work—I do not know which gender—and the date that the actuary first provided liability estimates to Treasury was 12 December 2005.

MRS BURKE: I have a supplementary question. I thank the minister for that answer. Therefore, minister, can you assure the Assembly that neither you nor any of your officials were aware of these changes when you appeared before PAC on 26 October?

MR QUINLAN: I do not know what the standing orders are, Mr Speaker, but I am not going to dignify that question with an answer unless I have to.

Budget—midyear review

MR PRATT: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, on a GFS basis the *Mid year review* shows that operating—

Ms MacDonald: What does that mean, Steve?

MR PRATT: That is government financial statistics; would you advise the Chief Minister of that definition, please? On a GFS basis, the *Mid year review* shows that operating deficits for the general government sector over the period 2004-05 to 2008-09 are expected to aggregate to a massive \$1.744 billion. That amounts to a debt burden of \$5,365 for every man, woman and child in the ACT. Chief Minister, how do you expect that debt to be paid off?

MR STANHOPE: I thank the member for the question. The question is identical to a question asked of the Treasurer, essentially; it has just been rephrased. I think the question was asked by Mr Mulcahy of the Treasurer earlier today, and the Treasurer went to some significant effort to explain the basis of GFS accounting, the adjustments that Standard & Poor's, Moody's and others have accepted are entirely reasonable and why it is that organisations like Standard & Poor's and Moody's accept that adjustments in relation to land sales revenue and superannuation revenue should be accounted for in any reading of the GFS.

It is the case that, over the five-year period as reported in the *Mid year review*, the GFS net operating balance goes from minus 356 in five years time to minus 332. But, as also reported in the *Mid year review*, over that same period land sales revenue should be adjusted to the tune of \$174 million, \$159.5 million, \$165.5 million, \$177.2 million and \$194.2 million. The *Mid year review* then goes on to reveal that an adjustment should also be made to the GFS or superannuation revenue—a capital gains component of overall 7.5 per cent return on superannuation assets of \$85.8 million, \$85.8 million,

\$108.9 million, \$120 million and \$131.8 million, leaving, of course, a GFS net operating balance, adjusted for land sales revenue and superannuation—

Mr Pratt: You've proved you can read. Tell us what it means.

MR STANHOPE: Mr Pratt, the Treasurer has explained in detail why it is appropriate in the ACT that we, and any other government within the ACT, would have adjusted, and would have insisted on adjusting, for land sales revenue and superannuation revenue, which produces a bottom line GFS net operating balance, as so adjusted—and appropriately adjusted. It is accepted by everybody—by Standard & Poor's, by Moody's, by our rating agencies—as appropriate that we would adjust in this way, and you achieve a bottom line that moves from a high of \$148 million to a low of \$6 million in 2008-09. In fact, the GFS net operating balance, as adjusted for land sales and superannuation, produces in that configuration a better outyear result than the Australian accounting bottom line. It actually reduces to 6.6 as against 16, so there are ups and downs, ins and outs, in relation to any system that we might use.

The GFS, as appropriately adjusted for land sales revenue and for superannuation revenue, in the initial or forward years produces a slightly worse result, but only slightly worse, but in the outyears it produces a better result. This enormous interest that the shadow Treasurer exhibits now in the GFS is something that I am sure he will embrace when it brings us earlier into a surplus than if we maintained, for instance, the Australian accounting standard as the basis on which we will budget into the future.

So you are quite right, Mr Pratt, on the raw figures, not adjusted. And no government would utilise GFS without adjustment. No government, of this persuasion or your persuasion or of the Greens' persuasion—no government in this place, whether it be you or us—would utilise GFS without adjusting for land sales revenue or superannuation revenue, because it would be a nonsense. So you can talk about GFS until the cows come home, because the figures in this year are more dramatic. You want to play this pea and thimble trick, this smoke and mirrors trick, on the electorate by saying that all of a sudden we no longer utilise the Australian accounting standard.

In 17 years of self-government, we have never stood in this place and debated our books against GFS. Magically, from last year to this year, all of a sudden the debate is now not around the Australian accounting standard; it is now around the GFS. Why is that? Why is it that the shadow Treasurer is so determined to now debate the ACT's books on the basis of GFS? It is because the figures are more dramatic if one distorts them.

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

MR PRATT: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. Chief Minister, now that the ACT is up there with New South Wales as the highest taxing jurisdiction in Australia, can Canberra citizens expect super taxes, charges and fees to pay off the government's debt, GFS or otherwise?

MR STANHOPE: I think what Mr Pratt is asking, if I might paraphrase the question, is: will we be putting up any rates and taxes? Is that the question?

Mr Pratt: Yes, to pay for your debt.

MR STANHOPE: Right; that's the question. So I will answer the question on the basis of: are taxes and rates going up? We have begun the process of developing the budget. It will be a long and tough process, as it always is; it is one of the hardest things that any government does. Always seeking to meet government priorities and determining or deciding between priorities is tough. It is a tough business. It is one of the hardest things that anybody does in government—it has been for us, it was for you and will always be thus.

We went through a tough process last year. Across the board we insisted on an efficiency dividend. From some agencies and organisations it was five per cent, from others it was two per cent, and others were protected from any dividend at all. Any government—not just one that is faced with a tough budget but any government that is serious about the business of government—looks always at the way in which it spends money and the way in which it raises money. The equation, as we all know—as anybody who has sat in the cabinet and sought to make decisions around the meeting of priorities and how to meet them would know—requires a range of tough decisions to be made around priorities, projects, expenditure and rates, and we will be going through that process this year.

As every other government has always done and as every government will do into the future, we will be looking at our priorities, we will be looking at levels of expenditure, we will be looking at the way in which we deliver our services and the structural and strategic issues around delivery of services. We will be looking, as we have in every single budget we have ever delivered, at revenues in place and opportunities for adjustment—whether up or down or whether through abolition, in which we are currently engaged. We are in the process of abolishing a range of taxes and duties as part of the negotiations of treasurers in relation to the tax regime across the board.

We have made no decisions, Mr Pratt, as you would not expect. It has not yet been discussed as an issue, but as we get into the hard toil of putting a budget together we will be looking at programs, we will be looking at all expenditures, we will be looking at determining and deciding on priorities, we will be looking at governmental structures and we will be looking at revenue sources. We will be making decisions on all of those areas, and we will deliver a good, solid budget that delivers on our commitment to this community and our commitment to the delivery of the best possible government services that can be delivered by this government. We currently lead the nation in service delivery. We have across the board the best services of any jurisdictional government in Australia bar none—everybody knows that—and we have enhanced the level of service.

Mrs Burke: Are you sure, in every area?

MR STANHOPE: Everybody knows it. We have the best outcomes in education, we have the best outcomes in health, we have the safest community in Australia, we have the greatest place in which to live. This is the greatest place in Australia. Many of you would wish to dispute that, but it is. This is the greatest place in Australia, and we in government have ensured that we have retained that reputation and will continue to do so into the future. We will do it through good, responsible, tough budgeting. This is a government that will take the hard, tough decisions. We will not allow the level of government service delivery to wither. We will maintain it and at the end of the day we will deliver a budget that is appropriate to our bottom-line position. You can rest assured

of that. It will be a good budget that will meet all of our needs, including the need to maintain a good, solid budgetary position that will deliver surpluses over the term. That is our undertaking and that is what we deliver.

And that, of course, is what you are so frightened of. You have absolutely nothing else going for you. You think here by some pea and thimble stuff, some smoke and mirrors stuff, that you might have an advantage. But at the end of the day you are going to be so sorry on what you think is the one little issue that you might have but you will not have.

Education—policy

MS MacDONALD: My question, through you, Mr Speaker, is to Ms Gallagher in her capacity as minister for education. Minister, can you inform the Assembly of the resolution of recent discussions with the commonwealth on student reporting in the ACT?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Ms MacDonald for the question. Over the past year or so the negotiations that have been going on between the commonwealth and the states and territories over the requirements that the commonwealth is placing on education funding have been well publicised. Members will recall that last year the federal government threatened to hold back around \$552 million worth of funding to ACT schools unless the ACT agreed to many of their harsh conditions on school reporting and school performance. In fact the former federal education minister, Dr Nelson, was a particularly strong advocate for reporting in schools. He believed that parents should be informed of how their child performed in relation to the rest of the class—whether they were in the top, second, third or bottom quartile.

The ACT government, along with experts in several other jurisdictions, had many concerns with Dr Nelson's requirements. We have, over a number of months, been in consultation and negotiation with the commonwealth over their requirements for school reporting. From the ACT government's point of view, it was about how we protect, keep and ensure the current student reporting that we have, whilst acknowledging that we could not say goodbye to \$552 million worth of funding and looking at how we could accommodate the commonwealth's requirement without endangering student performance to any great degree.

There have been many critics of Dr Nelson's agenda for the educational basis for the requirements that were being placed on the states and territories and, in fact, for the requirements from a funding partner that provides only 9 per cent or 10 per cent of the funding to ACT government schools having such a say about how the schools reported to parents and school communities about how students were performing.

We were successful in winning a number of concessions on the issues of reporting. Firstly, a considerable win was that students in kindergarten will not be subject to quartile reporting and will not be subject to the "a" to "e" reporting of grades. You have to wait until year 1 before you get an "e" for reading. You are six years old before you get your first bad report. Kindergarten parents will receive information on the assessment that the ACT government currently does for all students, which is called PIPS testing.

We would like to exempt all students from the requirements of the commonwealth but, at the moment, it is just kindergarten students. The data will be provided in a summary report issued to parents twice yearly, which schools will use in addition to their current reporting. Parents can remove their children from the requirement to report “a” to “e” grades by request in writing. We will keep an eye on how this student reporting goes for students with special needs. How “a” to “e” reporting will work for them has still to be examined.

At the same time, we have been looking at ways to continue to improve the image of government schooling. Last year I wrote to all school boards about the issues of school uniforms, specifically about whether or not we should make school uniforms mandatory in ACT government schools. At the moment, school uniforms are not compulsory in all schools, although some schools adopt policies which encourage students to wear school uniforms. I have been written to by a number of parents on the issue of school uniforms, the image of schools, the cost of keeping pace with current fashions and the stress that puts on many families and the peer pressure put on many children to compete with the latest fashions.

The fact that we may move to make school uniforms compulsory in ACT government schools is something the government is considering. This would be a big change, particularly for high school students. There are very strong arguments why this would be a good move. It is something that I have written to school boards about. I will hear back from them and consider it before making a final decision on the issue of school uniforms.

MS MacDONALD: I have a supplementary question. I thank the minister for that answer. Minister, what processes, if any, are there for consultation with school communities on these changes?

MS GALLAGHER: In relation to school reporting, there was quite extensive consultation with school communities in term 4 of last year. A package of materials, including the new policy, has been developed for schools and will be issued during the week commencing 20 February. Schools will then have to develop their own reporting policy, which incorporates the department’s policy, in consultation with their school communities, and copies of the school policies need to be provided to parents by the end of June 2006.

We did win several concessions in relation to the agenda of the federal government. I think that it was ridiculous to ask teachers to rank and grade kindergarten students. It was a really backward step in education policy, and we are really pleased to have been able to ensure that we can protect ACT students as much as possible from what we see as a very regressive educational agenda.

In relation to the school uniforms issue, I have asked that school boards respond to my letter by the end of term 1. That will give us time to consider the feedback before making a final decision and before implementation at the beginning of the school year next year. I think that the image of schools is a very important issue. Many schools which do have strong uniform policies report that student morale goes up and that many instances of bullying are addressed because students are no longer competing with the latest fashions.

Inappropriate attire is removed from schools. Some very short skirts and short tops seem to make their way into school grounds.

We would like to see some of that addressed through, if possible, the implementation of a more rigorous school uniform policy. I think that it could take pressure off parents and I think that it could take pressure off students. At the same time, it may have a benefit in improving the image and morale of schools. If that will be the case, I think that it is a good step. However, school communities always have very diverse views on these things. We do have a number of schools and, no doubt, the feedback we will get will be as diverse as those school communities. We will take into consideration all of that feedback when it comes before making a final decision. If we do move to a mandatory school uniform policy, we would be looking at doing that at the beginning of term 1 in 2007.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Budget

MR QUINLAN: Mr Speaker, I took a question from Mrs Dunne and said that I would get back to her. I think that it might be sufficient to refer to the page she referred to in relation to current investments and the line for non-current investments, which goes quite dramatically. It really depends on when they mature, are realised or are wanted to be used as to whether they become current or non-current investments. But that in itself is not the whole answer. You have to be concerned, again, about how much of that is encumbered by various liabilities, et cetera, but I think it is sufficient to say that a decline in the line for current investments should not ring alarm bells in itself.

Quamby Youth Centre

MS GALLAGHER: Yesterday, in question time, Mrs Burke asked me a number of questions, probably three, in relation to Quamby. The first two parts of the question, I am advised, relate to the same incident, which occurred on the afternoon of 14 January 2006. I am informed that two residents at the Quamby Youth Detention Centre gained access, through a fire hose locker, to the roof cavity of the six-bed unit and caused property damage to fixtures and equipment fittings. The federal police were advised and attended the centre. The two youths were transported to the city police station and charged. The older youth was transferred to the adult correction system and the younger youth remains at Quamby.

Staff were provided with a debriefing following the incident. Additionally, a critical incident review meeting was held to review security arrangements. As members are aware, the facility does have significant limitations which can result in security problems and which are managed as best as possible considering these limitations. The new youth detention centre project team is working closely with Quamby staff and management to inform the design process of the new facility to address any issues. In the meantime, changes are being actioned to prevent access to the right roofline of the centre.

In relation to the third part of Mrs Burke's question, there are not 15 staff members at Quamby currently under review for any reason but, like any ACT government

workplace, Quamby manages staff performance in accordance with appropriate public sector management practice when appropriate.

Emergency Services Authority—internal audit

MR SESELJA: On 15 December 2005, I asked the Chief Minister a question without notice in relation to requirements for ACT government agencies to have internal audit committees and internal audit units. The minister took the question on notice. I believe that the answer to it was due on 14 January. I seek an explanation under standing order 118A.

MR CORBELL: On behalf of the Chief Minister, I will seek an explanation for Mr Seselja and provide an answer as soon as possible.

Belconnen to Civic busway

Debate resumed.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Minister for Health and Minister for Planning) (3.56): Mr Speaker, the government will not be supporting this motion. The reason for that is that this motion highlights the lack of a coherent, dedicated and committed policy agenda from those opposite when it comes to improving public transport in Canberra. The Liberal Party have been in opposition for over four years and, during that time, what proposals, initiatives or concepts have they put forward to improve public transport in Canberra? The answer to that in terms of commitments to spend money, to improve public transport and to put in place new initiatives is a big, fat zero—a big, fat zero. I challenged the Liberal Party during the term of the last Assembly to come forward with some policy proposals when it comes to public transport in Canberra, but they failed then and they are still failing the community.

I welcome this debate today because it allows me to clear up some quite deliberate misconceptions that the opposition is putting about as to the work that the government is undertaking in relation to planning for future public transport in Canberra. We had a debate this morning about the importance of setting targets to improve public transport provision in Canberra and to shift the number of journeys that are undertaken by private motor vehicle into other modes—into public transport, into walking and into cycling. This government is the first and only government that has put in place measures to set targets to ensure that we try to achieve that. If, as a city, we do not achieve that, we will be continuing to increase our greenhouse gas emissions, we will be continuing to make a disproportionate impact per head of population given the very high rates of vehicle usage that occur in our city to date, and we will not be undertaking the commitment we should be to addressing the very significant and dramatic issues and consequences of climate change.

Mr Speaker, this busway project fits into the government's sustainable transport plan. I draw members' attention to the findings of the sustainable transport plan, which concluded and recommended that a dedicated corridor system, such as a bus or transit way, with public transport services operating on a fully or partly dedicated right of way was justified for Canberra. That is what the busway is; it is a dedicated right of way. The government endorsed the findings of the sustainable transport plan. We endorsed the

plan, we agreed with its conclusions and we have now moved to implement funding for the plan. We have done that in a whole range of areas, but I want to address the issue of the busway itself.

We committed funding to investigate the feasibility and to look at the design issues associated with the development of such a dedicated corridor. We identified two corridors of particular importance, one from Belconnen to the city and one from Gungahlin to the city. Those two corridors are having work done on them right now. In fact, in relation to the one from Gungahlin to the city, a \$1 million project to upgrade bus priority on Flemington Road was recently completed. In relation to Belconnen, the government has set aside funding to look at the planning issues, the environmental issues, the land use considerations and the engineering considerations that are all part of determining the most appropriate route. If we want to improve priority, travel time and the consistency of public transport along that corridor, relying on an on-road reservation where you still have to go through all the other sets of traffic lights, and there are over 16 individual sets of traffic lights that you have to negotiate between the city and Belconnen, you have to look at having a dedicated right of way. That is what this busway project is all about.

That does not mean, and the government has never said that it does, that the project will proceed to construction. I am, of course, advocating such construction. I believe that it is the right policy. I believe that it is a policy that will meet the outcomes we have set ourselves in terms of modal shift. But, as with all projects that are put forward by government ministers, this one must be considered through the budget process, and that is what we will do in relation to this project as well.

Let us look at some of the general benefits of having this sort of dedicated right of way. The first point I would like to focus on relates to the opportunities for patronage gain. Patronage gain grew significantly when projects similar to the proposed Belconnen to city busway were put in places such as Brisbane. In fact, the patronage gain was considerable in those locations. But it is not just patronage gain that comes about from the reliability of the service, knowing that you have a constant journey time, knowing that you are going to be look after in comfortable stations, not bunged into a little concrete shelter in the middle of nowhere. Those sorts of changes are not the only benefits. There are many other benefits.

For example, one that perhaps people in the property industry should give good consideration to is the improvement in property values. Public transport infrastructure actually leads to improved property value. The most obvious experience of that was with the Brisbane south-east busway, where property values grew by 20 per cent, attributed largely to the busway construction in Brisbane. The positive impact of the busway appeared almost immediately. Median property values for suburbs adjacent to the busway increased by between 3.9 and 20.86 per cent within a few months of the opening compared with a decrease of 4.35 to 6.63 per cent for adjacent non-busway suburbs. One to two years after the opening, the same suburbs adjacent to the busway experienced growth in median housing prices of between 12.5 and 63.5 per cent compared with minus one per cent to 33 per cent for suburbs further from the busway. So, in terms of the opportunities that come at an economic level from investing in public transport infrastructure, the experience is quite clear. This type of public transport infrastructure has those sorts of benefits.

Of the other opportunities and issues that are worth addressing are the potential for this type of public transport infrastructure to work well and how it is working in other places round the country and overseas. In particular, I want to address the issues that are frequently raised in this debate about how you should not be doing that but you should be building light rail, which seems to be the catch-all resort that we hear about from a number of members in this place. The first point I would make is that it is not about what vehicle you use. It is about how good the service is, how frequently it is delivered, and what the infrastructure does in terms of supporting access to and from it.

Light rail and buses can deliver exactly the same level of service. We argue, and the government's studies back this up, that buses provide a greater level of flexibility. For example, they avoid the need for interchanging. With light rail, you are predominantly required to interchange. Light rail cannot service suburban Canberra. Light rail can only service trunk routes. So, as soon as you put in place light rail, you are requiring everyone who comes out of a suburb to interchange. You must interchange to get onto light rail. You must get off a bus and get onto the light rail.

With a busway, you can get on your bus in your suburb, your bus can service the suburban area and then it can use the trunk route straight into the city centre, with all of the advantages that that offers. There is no need to interchange, no need for that delay in terms of time, hassle, additional fare and whatever the other issues may be. That is one of the issues that the proponents of light rail have to address.

Another issue that the proponents of light rail will have to address, of course, is this fixation which I would really regard as technological determinism: have this vehicle and we get this good result. It is almost a "build it and they will come" attitude. It is not backed up by the facts. Take a look at the experience of bus rapid transit projects that have been put in place in other cities in Australia and overseas. There is a range of projects that are worth citing.

One is the Adelaide north-east busway, a dedicated busway corridor of 12 kilometres, using guided rail technology, which was opened in 1989 and built at a cost of \$97 million. Another is the Sydney to Liverpool-Parramatta T-way, a combination of on-street bus lanes and dedicated lanes for 31 kilometres, opened in 2003 at a cost of \$315 million. There were significant land acquisition issues in Sydney. Another is the Brisbane south-east busway, a dedicated busway of 16.5 kilometres, opened in 2000-01 at a cost of \$400 million and yet another is the Brisbane inner-north busway, stage 1, a dedicated busway of 2.8 kilometres, opened in 2004 at a cost of \$135 million. Other cities are also considering busway projects. In particular, more projects are planned and on the drawing board for Sydney, Brisbane and Auckland. It is also well worth highlighting the international experience of this type of public transport infrastructure. This type of public transport infrastructure is well used internationally, particularly in Canada and in a number of countries in South America.

Mr Mulcahy: South America!

MR CORBELL: The best example of that is the one in Curitiba in Brazil, which is recognised internationally as a leader in terms of the way it delivers public transport and integrates it with urban development. It is interesting that the experience in that Brazilian

city is the same as we are proposing through the spatial plan in Canberra, that is, high densities along public transport corridors and around centres, supported by dedicated public transport right-of-way corridors that service those employment nodes. As soon as you move away from the city centre you see low density.

Of course, Mr Mulcahy's immediate predilection here is to say that, if they are in South America, they must be inferior to us. Mr Speaker, I would encourage him to read the planning literature. I would encourage him to talk to people in areas such as Portland in the United States. Portland draws on the experience of that city in Brazil as a very good example of how you can make public transport work effectively and well and integrate it with urban developed. If we could remove some of the wonderful snobbishness from this debate, we might actually have a rational debate about how public transport can work better in Canberra.

Mr Speaker, the government's position on this matter is quite clear. The government is undertaking detailed feasibility and planning work to look into what is the best possible corridor, what are the engineering issues, what are the planning issues, and what are the land use issues associated with putting in place this type of dedicated right of way. The government has never said that the funding is there to proceed with this project. To suggest otherwise is mischievous at the very least. Of course, as Minister for Planning, I want to see this project proceed. I think it would be a good project for Canberra. I know that it would improve public transport infrastructure in Canberra, I know that it would improve public transport patronage in Canberra and I know that it would fundamentally change the way Canberrans view public transport, and change it for the better.

That is the government's agenda. At least we have one. At least we have a proposal that we want to move forward with, that we want to advocate, that we want to dedicate our time to, to explore and to work out whether it is actually going to work. In comparison, we have from those opposite no agenda, no philosophy, no commitment, no ideas, no initiatives, no concept, no policy. That is what we have from those opposite. It is a disgrace that the opposition in this place has no alternative point of view when it comes to how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in this city for the second most significant generator of those gases, the private motor vehicle.

They have been in opposition for over four years and have made no commitment whatsoever to address the issues of modal shift, of getting people to choose not to use private motor vehicles for every single journey and to choose to walk, to cycle or to catch a bus. They have no policy. They have no alternative. Their only approach in this place is to say, "What the government is doing is rotten, hopeless, bah, humbug." That is all we hear from Mr Seselja and those opposite. That is not good enough. Come out and engage us on what the alternatives are, come out and tell us what you would do instead, and then we would have a good debate, then we would have a positive debate. Mr Speaker, I wish to move the circulated in my name to address Mr Seselja's motion.

Mrs Dunne: I take a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your ruling on whether the amendment proposed is compatible with the motion. The motion is about the busway and Mr Corbell's amendment seems to be avoiding mention of the busway in any substantive way. This issue comes up regularly in this place, Mr Speaker, as the government attempts, essentially, to gut motions that it finds inconvenient. Today, we have an amendment that is almost contrary to the views expressed in the original motion.

MR SPEAKER: All that the standing orders require of an amendment is that it be relevant, Mrs Dunne.

MR CORBELL: I move:

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

“noting the ACT Government’s commitment to tackle Greenhouse gas emissions by increasing the number of journeys to work by public transport, walking and cycling:

- (1) endorses the targets set out in the Sustainable Transport Plan to increase the number of journeys to work by public transport to 9% by 2011 and 16% by 2026;
- (2) notes that the Sustainable Transport Plan concludes and recommends that a dedicated corridor system (such as a bus or transit way) with public transport services operating on a fully or partly dedicated right of way is justified for Canberra;
- (3) endorses the Government’s decision to undertake forward planning and design work to further investigate and plan for dedicated transit corridors between the City and Belconnen and the City and Gungahlin; and
- (4) notes that any future funding for the development and construction of these corridors will be considered by the ACT Government in the budget context.”.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (4.12): I thank Mr Seselja for providing this opportunity to debate the ways that we can improve Canberra’s transport services. We are traversing familiar territory here and Mr Corbell had a good go at trying to predict what the Greens would say. Since we have been saying these things for 10 years or so, he is likely to have it fairly right.

I acknowledge Mr Seselja’s assertion that there does appear to be some government doubt about the future of the Belconnen to Civic busway and that the public would like to know whether this project will go ahead, when it will go ahead and whether the large sums spent on marketing it have been justified. However, I feel that both Mr Seselja’s motion and Mr Corbell’s amendment are missing the bigger point when it comes to the discussion of transit corridors and sustainable transport.

I listened to what Mr Corbell had to say and I do feel that he is becoming very well informed about the issues concerning dedicated bus corridors. When I heard him mention Curitaba, and we know that he has been to Portland, I felt that he was coming into territory that the Greens have been in for quite a while, but we are still finding that the ACT government is just playing around at the edges of the actions that need to be taken with its spending on real-time technology when we keep hearing that people want an increase in the frequency of bus services and bus services that allow them to come home from work in reasonable time if they find themselves staying that extra half hour into the time when buses move into the evening timetable. Sitting around on a bench, where there is one, in Civic, Belconnen or Woden is not something that people will choose to do if

they know that the next bus is going to be 55 minutes away. What do you do in a city like Canberra where it is so easy to drive? You take your car.

Also, I feel that the government is having it both ways by saying that it will put in this special bus road—let's call it a road, because that is what it is, another road—that can be converted to light rail. To me, it is having it both ways. I believe that if Canberra is to survive as an inland city—first of all, if it is going to become a sustainable city—in an era of oil shortages, which are now an accepted fact, and enforced greenhouse gas reductions, which will come, it will need a successful public transport system that is a mix of bus and light rail. We have at the moment a federal government that will not commit to greenhouse gas reductions, but I believe that the situation will make it absolutely incontrovertible that we will be accepting them. That may come as a big shock to people if we do not get to it now. We need the responsiveness and the flexibility of buses and the reliability and the cleanliness of light rail on those higher transit routes. So why do we not go there now? I believe that we will be connected to the rest of Australia by fast trains.

Paragraph (3) of Mr Corbell's amendment touches on that by highlighting the government's plan to further investigate transit corridors between Civic and Belconnen and Civic and Gungahlin. I hope that this project will lead to an eventual integration of transport planning and general urban planning. But transport is, it seems to me, still treated as an afterthought in urban planning. For that reason, as I mentioned this morning, we support the opening of an office of transport which combines the transport functions of the Department of Urban Services and ACTPLA.

I hope that the ACT government will take a triple bottom line approach when considering whether to go forward with light rail over busways. Mr Corbell's question about where the power will come from is one that requires answering. I am sure that it can be answered. The information is already out there in the literature. I suspect that it is really up to his minions to find the answer to that for us.

The government's January 2004 report *Canberra public transport futures feasibility study: economic and financial implications of transport options*, not surprisingly, found that improving busways was cheaper than having light rail. The findings that the ACT government extracted from this report, not surprisingly, were focused more on the short-term dollars than on the long-term social and environmental arguments. But, if you take the time to read the feasibility study, you will find that the ACT government extracted the wrong information, or perhaps for the government it was the right information for the outcome that it wanted. The best way for me to illustrate that is to read out parts of the report's final chapter. It states:

This study has identified the future capital costs of the stage 1 (54 kilometres) corridor transit system as either \$890 million—

that is a lot of money—

for a light rail or \$670 million—

that is a lot of money, too—

for an equivalent bus based system. Despite these high costs, the study has identified significant net economic benefit to the future community of Canberra from a corridor transit system with a benefit to cost ratio of 3.28:1 ... (light rail) and 4.22:1 (busway).

those are the figures of the feasibility study that the government commissioned for the short term—

Although a bus based inter-town corridor transit system would be approximately 25% cheaper to construct than the equivalent light rail system, it would have significantly higher annual operating costs and energy usage, and the longer term durability of the vehicles would be generally lower, leading to higher replacement costs in future years ...

A critical factor in comparing the future attractiveness of alternative bus and light rail systems to the travelling public in Canberra is the improved ride quality which occurs with light rail. Light rail vehicles are also more inherently suitable for carriage of larger objects such as bicycles, which is an important consideration for many potential users of public transport in Canberra.

Additionally, the highly visible investment in rail track signifies a degree of permanency for the future system which will lead to land value capture benefits for numerous government owned sites in the vicinity of rail stations where increased levels of development would occur.

A light rail system would generally provide the type of spark necessary to improve the image of public transport in Canberra ...

So the findings in the government's own report are compelling. It may cost more in the outlay, but it will pay for itself.

It is a lot of money. This is where I think the federal government comes in. The federal government's sustainable cities report says that there was a lot of support out there for light rail and for rail of other kinds, so I am going to propose that the ACT government and the federal government get together and, as a centennial project for the ACT, work on a light rail system that connects those offices and institutions in the parliamentary triangle with the rest of Canberra. I am not sure whether the airport would come in on this as well. What is needed is a body that is going to drive this project. I think that the ACT government, with its commitment to sustainability and the need to do something about meeting greenhouse gas reduction targets, is the right one to lead this project. I am very confident that we will hear some more about that in the near future.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (4.22): I thank Mr Seselja for bringing this important matter to us today because we have been able to witness the confusion of the transport minister, who has failed his own tests, who has failed to bring forward a busway project for the ACT. The death knell that rung out for the busway over the holiday period should have caused a sigh of relief for the people of the ACT for a variety of reasons: firstly, because of the cost and, secondly, because it was the wrong policy at the wrong time.

Mr Corbell made a valiant effort to justify his position. How do we have a motion about the Belconnen busway without mentioning the Belconnen busway? I have to compliment

him on his valiant efforts. He talked about the value of dedicated, separated busways; he talked about Brisbane; he talked about Adelaide; he talked about Curitiba; and he talked about Portland. He moved from Brisbane to Brazil and Portland, all round the world, but he would not talk about Belconnen because that would be slightly embarrassing.

What Mr Seselja has done in his motion is to highlight the policy failures of this government and what Dr Foskey has done in her presentation is to highlight further the policy failures of this government. Mr Corbell likes to put down all those who would gainsay him by saying, "Show us what you would do." I will restate for Mr Corbell what we said at the last election we would do.

Mr Gentleman: You said that you would build a dam.

MRS DUNNE: In addition to the splendid policy of building a dam, which would be an important piece of infrastructure for the economic future of this territory, we said in relation to public transport in general that the first thing that we would do would be to integrate the planning of transport and urban planning in this place. Mr Corbell talks about it, but Mr Corbell has not delivered on his office of planning. Mr Corbell has not done any of the things that he said he would do. He is the person who has the power and he is the person who pulls the levers of government. The first and most important commitment that we made was to fully integrate the planning for public transport and planning for transport generally with urban planning.

Mr Corbell says that he will do it, but he has been going to do it for four years and has not done so. Mr Corbell has talked about many of the things that we talk about. There is a great deal of commonality here and we must recognise that. Both the opposition and the government, and to a lesser extent the Greens, have talked about the integration of town planning and how you create the critical mass necessary to make public transport work effectively, that is, by creating certainty for your public transport and by increasing densities in appropriate places, which is why in the run-up to the last election and constantly the Liberal opposition talks about increased densities around public transport routes, about transport routes generally, and about the importance of that in creating the policies that will bring about effective public transport.

Mr Corbell talks about his sustainable transport plan and he talks about the great steps forward that they have in mind for modal shift. Quite honestly, the projections for modal shift, that is, moving from one means of transport to another, are pretty meagre; they are pretty meagre indeed. Mr Corbell will come in here from time to time and say, "We are making progress, perhaps are even ahead of time, in our move towards modal shift." At the same time, you will see that there has been no increase in bus patronage. There has been no significant increase in bus patronage over the last two budgets; nor has it been anticipated.

Mr Seselja: In fact, there has been a decline.

MRS DUNNE: In fact, there has been a decline. In the budget before last the only reason that there was going to be an increase in passenger boardings was the rise in population. In fact, the increase in overall boardings was less than the growth in the population. Again, this is a failure of this minister. The other thing that we said before the last

election that we would do in relation to dedicated public transport was, quite simply, that we would get our money in order.

Mr Corbell: They are all there: adult journeys to work, concessions, schools.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Mr Corbell, be a bit quieter. I cannot hear Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: The really important thing, if you are going to do anything about improving public transport in this territory, is to get your money in order. Mr Corbell went out and shot his bolt that he was going to do all sorts of things, but he had not actually worked out where the money was coming from. He said that he is talking about engineering, what colour the buses would be and all of that, but he has not talked about where the money would come from.

What this opposition committed to do at the last election was to investigate the best way of building integrated public transport in this town, to find the money to do it; not to commit to do it and then say, “Oh, gosh, where are we going to get the money for that? We won’t do it”—actually put the horse before the cart and find the thing that would drive the public transport, that is, the money. That is the thing that Mr Corbell has failed to do. He asked us to say what we would do. I have said what we would do. We would make the whole system an integrated one and we would find the money to do it before we committed to building it.

Mr Corbell: You would do another study. That is all you would do, another study.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Corbell refers to doing another study. Mr Corbell has had an exceedingly large study. He has had the public transport feasibility study. He has had all of the studies related to the integrated transport plan. We had demand responsiveness and those sorts of things. It was about how to integrate. But one of the things he forgot to do was to find out how much money was in the piggy bank. He did not find out and now he is embarrassed.

Mr Corbell: Why do you want to do another one? Why do you want to do another study?

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Corbell, you are being repetitious. Keep it down.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Corbell has also said that he and the government of which he is a member are committed to greenhouse gas reductions, unlike members on this side of the place. Let us do a little mental exercise, Mr Deputy Speaker. Who abandoned the greenhouse targets quite recently? Was it the Smyth opposition? No, it was the Stanhope Labor government. They abandoned greenhouse targets because they said it was too difficult. They have been softening up the territory for well over a year and they have lost all credibility on greenhouse. The greenhouse baby has gone out with the bath water.

Public transport is a very important means of reducing emissions by one of the most prolific causes of greenhouse gases. It is good to see Mr Corbell is really across all these figures that he is able to quote them. The real figure he is not across is where the money will come from. The thing is that if you are really going to address the greenhouse issue

through public transport you have to get patronage. You have to get lots of people out of their cars, which are little personal greenhouse gas burners, and put them into bigger vehicles which, generally speaking, burn less greenhouse gas per person travelling on them.

Mr Seselja: If it is full.

MRS DUNNE: That is, if there are people on the buses. At the moment, with the sorts of patronage that we see on some of these buses, we have really big personal greenhouse gas burners, because we have great big buses with only a few patrons on them. In terms of tonnes of CO₂ per passenger per year, we are not seeing an improvement from this government, which has abandoned all pretence of being concerned about greenhouse gases.

Mr Corbell: There were 23,000 boardings yesterday.

MRS DUNNE: There were 23,000 adult boardings, yes, but you have admitted over and over again that the overall boardings are down. The overall boardings are down.

Mr Seselja: Total numbers are down. That is what the annual report showed: more money and fewer people.

MRS DUNNE: More greenhouse gases are being expended, but there are no more people on the buses.

Mr Corbell: A record level of boardings, the highest ever level of boardings.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Mr Corbell, you have been a serial offender this afternoon. Both sides are turning the debate into a tennis match but, Mr Corbell, you are leading the pack.

MRS DUNNE: In summary, Mr Deputy Speaker, we have been challenged here to say what we would do better than Mr Corbell. First of all, we would get our bank accounts in order so that when we make commitments they are the right commitments, they are the best commitments for the future of the territory, and they can be funded. The thing to be concerned about is that if this government commits to sustainable transport, the proposal will not be junked.

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (4.32): I would add a few words in relation to Mr Seselja's motion on this matter. The enthusiasm with which Mr Corbell continues to defend this undertaking has fascinated me, despite the pronouncements of his shortly-to-depart colleague Mr Quinlan. It seems to me that who has lost this round is an interesting exercise. Obviously Mr Quinlan came off second best. But he did succeed in the process of putting the brakes on Mr Corbell's ambitions to proceed with this busway. Certainly from the tenor of comment today, Mr Corbell shows no relenting in his determination to spend this money.

What is at stake here, I suggest to you, Madam Temporary Deputy Speaker, is, as much as anything, pride. He went and stuck his neck out on something, which, from the best reports we can glean, does not have the support of cabinet. Given the parlous state of the

territory's finances and despite all the huffing and puffing and claims by the Chief Minister that all is wonderful, the fact of the matter is that the territory cannot afford these ideas. The territory cannot afford ministerial memorials and indulgent expenditure.

Mr Corbell: It can't afford light rail either.

MR MULCAHY: Mr Corbell says, "It cannot afford light rail." I do not recall being an advocate of the light rail network, but I certainly know that Mr Corbell, amongst his grand spending plan, has such ambitions. We see him saying here, and when he appeared before estimates earlier in the year saying, that the government has put together in its policy work the development of busways as the first stage towards an ultimate light rail network for Canberra. He goes on and on about the role of busways. You have to give him 11 out of 10; he is very determined.

You have got the Treasurer, who of course is now departing and is leaving the scene after he delivered that bombshell of mid-term financial figures yesterday showing that we are heading towards an abyss, saying on 2CC:

Let us get one thing straight on a busway. It is very far-sighted on the part of the government to do planning to ensure that in the future, there is a corridor for a busway or light rail to run on. So that even if we do not build it now, we have ensured the route for a busway or light rail will not be built over, and the whole thing will not become impossible. However, the decision to actually build it is a secondary decision.

Of course what he is saying there—and I recall hearing it in another interview which I do not have the transcript for; and I know his sensitivity at being quoted by me—is something to the effect that it was unlikely this would be constructed within the current term. And of course he is correct. Capital works, first of all, should only be undertaken if there is a very demonstrated business case. That does not necessarily mean all public capital investments have to run at a profit but, if they do not, there must be a well-explained public benefit. The government is already delaying capital works.

It was extraordinary today to hear the Chief Minister talk about the unencumbered cash for this year. He said, "We are doing all right; we have got this money here." I do not think he reads these documents in great depth. If you read page 6 of the *Mid year review*, it is all there, even for those who are not economic geniuses, to see. It says:

The Territory's unencumbered cash balance ... is now forecast to be \$234.9m at 30 June 2006, an increase of \$80.6m from the 2005-06 Budget estimate of \$153.4m.

You might assume we have won the lottery or those people whom this government are so fond of up on the hill have thrown some more money our way. But, no, that is not really the case. What it says, however, is:

... this movement mainly relates to delays in capital works expenditure to the forward years, rather than an underlying improvement in cash flows.

Mr Corbell: On a point of order: I do not see anywhere in Mr Seselja's motion, Madam Temporary Deputy Speaker, issues to do with the government's cash position, as it

relates to capital works generally. I would ask you to draw Mr Mulcahy to order in terms of relevance.

MR MULCAHY: Madam Temporary Deputy Speaker, the purpose of what I am illustrating is to underline the point of the demonstrated business case for this capital works and our capacity, therefore, to proceed with any such project. It is very relevant, I suggest, to look at the capital costs involved in Mr Corbell's ideas.

MADAM TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Dunne): Mr Corbell, part (2) of the motion expresses concern about the expenditure of millions of dollars on planning for the busway; so I would have thought that reflections upon the capacity to fund that were entirely relevant. I am sure that Mr Mulcahy will keep the terms of the motion and the terms of the amendment in mind when he speaks, as he is speaking to both.

MR MULCAHY: We are looking here at the financial issues involved in this idea, which, as Mr Seselja has rightly pointed out, are matters of grave concern and we need to say, "In the context of what this territory is capable of now doing, are these investments of millions of dollars on this busway something that this territory can sustain?" If we are delaying other major capital works such as the prison, the refurbishment of the convention centre and the like because we cannot afford to proceed as previously planned, then it begs the question that we cannot afford to embrace this monument—and that is what it is; it is a ministerial monument—that has been advanced out there with great gusto and enthusiasm.

I also pick up the point about South America. What Mr Smyth and I were interjecting was not a reflection on South America. It is a great part of the world, and I enjoy a very good relationship with the representatives of those countries in Canberra. I wish the minister the best of British luck if he is paving the way for a trip there. Given the minister's propensity to embark on these taxpayer-funded exercises, it gave us the sense that there may be another one in the wings. If he can learn something from travelling to the four corners of the world, then so be it.

Mr Corbell: How were drinkies in Melbourne the other night, Mr Mulcahy?

MR MULCAHY: If Mr Corbell wants to reflect on my attendance, unlike his arts minister, alongside a Canberra nominee who was nationally recognised—

MADAM TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Mulcahy, do that in the adjournment debate. That would be the best place to do it.

MR MULCAHY: All right. I will move back to that.

Mr Corbell: Your travel is all right but mine is not.

MADAM TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Corbell, cease interjecting.

MR MULCAHY: I am happy to defend mine. I wish we could get you to table your expenditure. The question must be, as Mr Seselja has rightly pointed out, about expressing concern at the expenditure of millions of dollars—

Mr Corbell: I have already answered the question.

MR MULCAHY: I am finding it very hard to hear myself think. How can the government contemplate spending hundreds of millions of dollars on a busway when it is making such massive losses on operations and on other areas of government activity?

I know the sensitivity of the minister on this. It is a dream. I understand the minister wants to be remembered for something worth while. The health and planning system would not be something that you would gloat about in this town, given the amount of letters I receive from constituents over the way those areas are handled. So I can understand a need to have some sort of legacy. The busway for the people of Belconnen sounds great, except that the changes in time that will be accomplished are relatively insignificant.

Mr Gentleman: That is why it has worked so well in other cities, I guess.

MADAM TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Gentleman, cease interjecting.

MR MULCAHY: Let me also set the record straight on matters of greenhouse gases. The opposition is very committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We have had a long commitment on that. It extends back to the Carnell government. But to simply treat with contempt and dismiss the fact that we raise questions about the wisdom of this particular capital undertaking at this time in the territory's financial cycle hardly condemns us as philistines in terms of the environmental debate.

I have worked quite aggressively over the years on greenhouse challenge matters. I was responsible for ensuring the largest industry sector sign-up to greenhouse challenge agreements in this country—more than the coal industry, more than the steel industry. Along with my colleague Mrs Dunne, who has been very active in her pursuit of environmental issues, I feel quite strongly about the importance of preserving the environment for future generations of Canberrans. But that does not extend to indulging the minister's wish to build this monument, which the territory cannot afford, which clearly the outgoing Treasurer knows we cannot afford and which simply is unrequired in the current transport mix of the ACT.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo) (4.42): I now speak to the amendment before later coming back and closing the debate. It is becoming, unfortunately, the standard amendment, which is not really an amendment; it is a re-writing completely, which completely misses the point, and praises the government. We have become pretty used to that. It does not do much for the standard of debate in this place, but we are becoming used to it. I will address some of the details of the amendment. I am particularly interested in No (2) which states:

notes that the Sustainable Transport Plan concludes and recommends that a dedicated corridor system (such as a bus or transitway) with public transport services operating on a fully or partly dedicated right of way is justified for Canberra;

What Mr Corbell is essentially saying, and what he said in his speech, is that because the sustainable transport plan that he put together says that these busways or these priority lanes are justified, therefore, it is a good idea. He puts together a plan and it justifies everything he goes and then does later. Rather than arguing the merits of whether a busway is a good idea for Canberra and looking at some of the detail, what he is essentially saying, with this amendment and through his speech, is: "My sustainable transport plan says it is a good idea to do these types of things, so it is a good idea." It is ridiculous to have that as the basis of what you are saying.

Madam Temporary Deputy Speaker, as you pointed out in your speech, nowhere else does it deal with the issue of whether a busway is a good idea or not or whether spending \$150 million for a three-minute saving is a good idea. It talks about broad targets. It talks about greenhouse gas in a broad context. But essentially the argument behind this is: "My sustainable transport plan says it is okay; therefore, it is a good idea." If that is the level of debate we are going to have, that is disappointing. What I called for in my earlier speech was a passionate defence of the busway. I have to say I was surprised that we got at least some defence of the busway from Mr Corbell when he was speaking to this. He seems to be the only person left who will stand up and defend the \$150 million Belconnen to Civic busway.

I would have thought that on a matter like this ordinarily we would see some of his colleagues here to back him up. I was expecting maybe the Treasurer to come out and tell us what he thinks of the busway and what a good idea it is. I was expecting perhaps the Chief Minister to tell us what he thinks of it. He could not even pull out a backbencher to come in and tell us what a great idea it is. So Mr Corbell is out on his own on this. This busway will not go ahead. As much as the planning minister still wants it to—and I am surprised that he is holding to that view—there is no support for it. It is interesting that the latter part of the amendment states:

... notes that any future funding for the development and construction of these corridors will be considered by the ACT Government in the budget context.

We have seen a bit of a precursor to that consideration in the media. We have seen the Treasurer saying what he thinks will happen in the budget considerations. He thinks it certainly is not going to get funding this term; and it will be a corridor for maybe light rail, or maybe a busway or something else. We have seen what the Chief Minister thinks about it. That is two. I guess we have to wait and see what Mr Hargreaves and Ms Gallagher think of this as to whether Mr Corbell has the numbers. I suspect that he will not.

I suspect that this will not get off the ground. I suspect that much of that \$6 million that has been spent to date will have been wasted. I am sure that the Chief Minister and the Treasurer must have formed views fairly early as to whether they thought it was a good idea or not, why this kind of level of detail was gone into and why \$6 million needed to be spent ahead of time. This is a disappointing amendment. As I say, it does not address the issue.

One of the other things it talks about, as I mentioned before, is greenhouse gas. It talks about it in a fairly generalised way. Mr Corbell refers to the ACT government's

commitment to tackle greenhouse gas emissions by increasing the number of journeys. The only way you are going to reduce emissions through public transport on a busway is if you get lots of people to travel on it. The first thing I would say about that is that a three-minute saving is very unlikely to entice anyone to get on the bus.

What the government's own figures in the budget papers, the forward figures, show is that, looking ahead and giving consideration to the sustainable transport plan, at around 2007-08, the number of adult journeys flatten off. I imagine that was around the time that it was expected that this busway might come online. The projection is that they will flatten. So I do not quite see how this is going to tackle the greenhouse gas emissions.

I note that there is a degree of embarrassment in relation to greenhouse on the part of this government at the moment, given that they have gone ahead and thrown out a greenhouse strategy. In fact we hear quite often from the planning minister about greenhouse and how the government is tackling it through all sorts of strategies. But they go and throw out a progressive strategy, and what we see is general words about greenhouse gas emissions. If your patronage figures do not increase, how are you cutting the emissions? You will not.

Before I finish on this amendment, you need to be careful. Of course we have been hearing how patronage has been going up. For a long time the planning minister was telling us that, with a straight face. Of course now he specifies adult patronage. Some time ago, last year, I raised this issue of the busway and of patronage figures. I criticised the lack of specific figures demonstrating what effect the busway would have on patronage. The response in the *Canberra Times* from a spokeswoman for Mr Corbell was that extensive cost-benefit analysis and patronage forecasts had been undertaken before the preparation of the sustainable transport plan. That was their answer: we have done it. Yet in answer to question on notice 813 Simon Corbell said that the \$4.2 million to be expended on preparatory work for the busway includes funds for patronage forecasting.

On the one hand, the spokeswoman is saying, "No, that is a silly thing to say, because it has all been done." Then we get an answer to the question on notice that we are still going to be spending more on it because it has not been done, and it has not been done specifically on the busway. That has been the significant criticism of this: the business case has not been made; the three-minute saving is not enough to justify \$150 million. This amendment does not tackle any of these issues and therefore I will not be supporting the amendment.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 7

Mr Berry	Ms MacDonald	Mrs Burke	Mr Pratt
Mr Corbell	Ms Porter	Mrs Dunne	Mr Seselja
Mr Gentleman	Mr Quinlan	Dr Foskey	Mr Stefaniak
Mr Hargreaves	Mr Stanhope	Mr Mulcahy	

Question so resolved in the affirmative

Amendment agreed to.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo) (4.55): I am not surprised that my original motion will not be getting up. Of course it is not based on the merits, because we did not hear any arguments on the merits. All we heard was broad concepts; keep it vague; keep it general; do not deal with the issue of whether or not spending \$150 million for a three-minute saving is a good idea. We have not heard any arguments against; all we have seen is an amendment from Mr Corbell that essentially praises the government and says that, because his sustainable transport plan says that it might be a good idea, the busway is a good idea. I can guarantee that the only way this busway will go ahead any time in the near future is if Mr Corbell becomes the next Treasurer. This busway will not go ahead in any other circumstance.

If the current Treasurer, Ted Quinlan, were to stay beyond March, I am sure it would not go ahead. If the Chief Minister gets the Treasury job, it is pretty unlikely. But if the planning minister were to get this through, the best option and the most likely option would be for the planning minister to take on the treasury portfolio. We look forward to the decision on that.

This project will not go ahead, in all seriousness. It is very unlikely now that it will go ahead. That is a good thing for the people of Canberra. That is \$150 million that would have been wasted. As I said earlier, it is \$150 million, conservatively speaking. We have seen the blow-outs in other busways. We have seen the blow-out on the Gungahlin Drive extension. So this is at least \$150 million that the people of the ACT will, hopefully, be spared if Simon Corbell does not get his way. What it essentially would have been is a \$150 million monument. No-one else seems to support this busway. We have not heard any of Mr Corbell's colleagues in this place today get up and defend him and defend it, and say, "This is a good idea; this will get lots more people on buses. It really will be good for Canberra." No-one will speak to it.

Mr Gentleman: We voted for it.

MR SESELJA: Mr Gentleman says, "We voted for it." But no-one would actually get up and say, "This is a good idea." We didn't hear it from his cabinet colleagues or his backbench colleagues. That speaks volumes about the fact that he is out on a limb on this. The fact is that he went out expecting it to go ahead soon. What we have seen is back-peddalling from his colleagues, back-peddalling from his Treasurer and back-peddalling from the Chief Minister on this.

The people of Canberra will be grateful for that back-peddalling, because this was a bad idea. This was an idea that would not take the future of transport in Canberra forward. This was not an idea that would have got lots of people using public transport. This was simply an idea that would have become a white elephant, a monument to Simon Corbell. Instead of a \$150 million monument, we have got a \$6 million monument, a \$6 million waste of money on the planning for a project that is not going to go ahead.

The Chief Minister says now this was really about just reserving land. But that is not what we have seen. Nothing in the detail of what has been spent or in what the planning minister has had to say on this matter would bear that out. You do not go and sign a marketing contract for a project to reserve a piece of land. You do not need to market that. People understand that you do not need to market it. What we have had in the end is a \$6 million waste of money. What we have had is a proposal for a monument that is not going to go ahead.

As I said, barring Mr Corbell somehow getting the numbers in cabinet, this project will not go ahead. That is good for the people of Canberra, but it is time for Mr Corbell to go back to the drawing board and come up with actual plans that will get more people onto public transport, using public transport, and doing some of the things that he speaks about doing in this amendment that will attack all greenhouse gas emissions, because this will not. This would not have if it had gone ahead. It certainly will not if it does go ahead. This would be a monumental waste of money for the people of the territory.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Koomarri

MS MacDONALD (Brindabella) (5.01): I move:

That this Assembly acknowledges:

- (1) the valuable service Koomarri has provided to thousands of Canberrans and their families since its initial establishment in 1952;
- (2) that through its various programs and initiatives such as Pathways and the Community Access Program, Koomarri has ensured people with a disability lead full and abundant lives; and
- (3) that despite the adversity the association has faced recently in regards to its new building, Koomarri has continued to provide invaluable support to its clients.

Living with a disability can be extremely isolating and, with around 19 per cent of the Australian population, or nearly one in five people, having some form of disability, it is important to recognise that people with disabilities can and do make substantial contributions to and participate in their communities if given opportunities.

For 54 years Koomarri has been giving people with disabilities that opportunity, and it has proven itself to be the leading service provider for people with a disability and their families. Koomarri supports and encourages people with a disability to lead full and abundant lives through achieving and maintaining employment, and by living and participating in their communities. Koomarri provides community support and employment services for more than 350 people with moderate to severe disabilities and their families in the ACT and surrounding districts.

While the association has consistently featured in the news, not many people would be aware of its history and how it came to be Canberra's leading disability support service. It all started in 1952 when Mrs Muriel Pike, a social worker with the Department of

Education, approached Mrs Gwen Moore, whose intellectually disabled daughter had attended the Ainslie school, for assistance in conducting a survey of intellectually disabled people in Canberra. Mrs Moore introduced Mrs Pike to several families with disabled children and together they discovered the names of others through hospitals, clergymen and mothercraft centres.

A meeting for parents was held and the Sub-Normal and Incapacitated Children's Association was formed. The aims of the association were to work for the welfare of disabled children, to act as an advisory body for their parents and to develop an informed opinion by wiping out the notion that there is a stigma attached to any form of physical or intellectual disability. The erection of a school was approved and the Koomarri school opened in 1955. The name "Koomarri" was chosen because it is an Aboriginal term meaning "shield" or "shelter". In 1956, the official name became the Handicapped Children's Association.

From there, the organisation grew rapidly, expanding the school and opening an occupational centre, Koomarri House. By the mid-1960s, the association's activities, now boasting preschool, school and workshops, had outgrown their resources. Koomarri House was remodelled as a hostel, and new facilities were opened around Canberra. The Koomarri school became a wholly government run school in 1963.

By 1969, placements of Koomarri employees into the work force were being made through the Commonwealth Employment Service. The retail chain also commenced operation, with large rag collection activities organised. The organisation became the Koomarri Association in 1987, and commenced a transition in the late eighties, with a belief that all clients would either move to open employment or remain within the business services. Over the next years the association went about identifying and developing for clients options that provided non-segregated settings, reasonable wage outcomes and, ultimately, a better quality of life for them.

The association continued to go from strength to strength and in 2000 it became a provider of community housing, with the implementation of a unique model utilising tenancy agreements for people with disabilities as well as separating the tenancy from the provision of support. Another advance for the association was the acquisition of the long-stay caravan park in Narrabundah. The park, along with the retail branch, provides revenue so that the association can fund some of its own services.

By 2002, the association had fully established itself as a leader in the provision of services for people with disabilities and their families in the ACT and surrounding districts. To continue its vital growth, Koomarri established a certified agreement with employees with a disability. The agreement addresses the inconsistency in conditions for employees with a disability; provides a mechanism for individual productivity and competency assessment with a coinciding pay rate; and achieves employment conditions for employees with a disability that are leading edge nationally.

The association has also established a quality project, which is "identifying, articulating and communicating the association's commitment to quality in all it does, as well as strengthening the organisation's practical approach to providing quality service". In 2005, the association altered its corporate structure and is now referred to only as

Koomarri and has a large number of core services and businesses that benefit hundreds of Canberrans and their families in the wider community.

The ACT government—whatever the flavour of the government of the day—has always been a strong supporter of Koomarri. The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, through Disability ACT, currently provides funding of more than \$2.1 million per annum to Koomarri. ACT Health also provides more than \$175,000 per annum to Koomarri to provide a community links service which comprises social support and case planning. Through Disability ACT funding, Koomarri is able to offer a wide range of services to its clients and their families.

The Koomarri work to retirement program has been very successful in providing transitional support to people entering retirement or semi-retirement. It provides community access and support services, which facilitate meaningful and age-appropriate experiences. The mature carers program, for carers aged over 65 who care for a person with a disability, has been another successful service that enables people with a disability to remain in the family home. Planning and case management is conducted to ensure that future options are considered, and implemented if required, for when a carer is unable to continue in this role and the person with the disability requires alternative accommodation. The pathways program is a subprogram funded under the mature carers program and delivers respite and maintains and develops life skills for people with a disability.

Koomarri pathways program works with mature carers and their sons and daughters to develop and put in place the kind of supports needed to achieve and sustain their chosen lifestyle. There is a strong focus on assisting the person with a disability to remain within their home and community environments when the carer is no longer able to carry out their role.

Koomarri also runs a number of business services that provide paid employment for people with a disability. These services benefit not only Koomarri's clients and their families but also the wider community and business sector. Fifteen per cent of Australians of working age have a disability. This represents over one million people, yet only half of these are working despite the fact that people with disabilities often make better employees. Research has found that 98 per cent of employees with disabilities rate average or better in work safety, 90 per cent of people with disabilities rate average or better on job performance, and 86 per cent of people with disabilities rate average or better on attendance. Staff retention rates for employees with disabilities have been found to be 72 per cent higher, saving businesses millions of dollars each year in recruitment and training costs.

Employing a person with a disability can have a very positive flow-on effect for businesses and it has been found that staff members with disabilities can improve the efficiency of a workplace. When making adjustments in the workplace for a person with a disability, businesses are most likely to make it safer and more comfortable for all staff, customers and the general community. For example, providing clear, simple signage for a staff member with an intellectual disability will also mean that the business is able to get its message across to customers and staff with low English literacy skills.

Analysts have found that one in 10 people in Australia have a family member with a disability, so being seen as a business that is disability friendly can lead to increased sales. For example, Pizza Hut recorded measurable sales increases after hiring over 14,000 people with disabilities. Unfortunately, analysts have also estimated that the underutilisation of people with a disability in the work force is Australia's greatest social problem, costing the community \$18.8 billion, or \$5,000 for each taxpayer.

Services like Koomarri's are helping to change this problem. Its JobMatch employment service has been extremely successful in placing people into work and ensuring them better wages. Koomarri also employs a large number of people through its business services such as Ezi Iron, the Cut Cloth Shop, Pack 'n' Post, and Contract Solutions. These services have a dual focus: to provide supported employment for the disabled employees and to operate a commercially viable business. This dual focus demands that there is an effective balance between competing requirements to achieve success.

Koomarri has played an integral part in many people's lives since its inception, but it was not until the destruction of its new building last year that the service realised how much it meant to the wider Canberra community. On 27 August 2004, the Chief Minister turned the first sod on the Koomarri Centre in Phillip. The centre aimed to give Koomarri clients and their families the confidence that Koomarri would be there with them for the long haul.

Expected to open on December 16 last year, the new centre was extensively damaged by a deliberately lit fire on 9 November 2005. The fire caused more than \$1 million worth of damage to the \$1.7 million building. The fire was extremely disheartening, not only for the people of Koomarri but also for the builders and the many contributors who had donated materials and money to build the centre.

But from the fire came the recognition that Koomarri meant a lot to many people in Canberra, not just those directly associated with the service. The association received phone calls, letters and donations for weeks after the fire, telling them how sad people were to hear about what had happened. Donations as a direct result of the fire have already raised over \$200,000. It is a wonderful testimony to the generosity of the Canberra community. I would also add that I believe that it is a testimony to the fact that I and, I think, most people in the community were just totally stunned that anybody could do this to an organisation that provides such a wonderful service.

During the strong storms Canberra suffered in early December last year, the building was damaged again, but work is now well under way and the new centre is expected to open in late March to early April. The centre will provide an extensive range of services, including a specialist counselling service for people with disabilities and their families; a location to provide information about specific disabilities and how to access available services; a place to hold information forums; a drop-in centre for people with disabilities; a small prevocational facility for people preparing to enter the work force through Koomarri businesses or JobMatch; a training and development facility and an administration office.

Despite the adversity it has faced, Koomarri has continued to provide Canberrans with a high standard of support services. I offer my congratulations to Margaret Spalding and

her staff and all those involved with Koomarri for their dedication to people with disabilities in the ACT and region. It is through their work that people with disabilities are recognised for the contribution they make to the community and are given the respect and dignity that they deserve.

While I doubt that this motion will have people speaking against it, because of the nature of the motion, I do believe that it is important to put on the record the valuable services that an organisation such as Koomarri provides. We are very fortunate in this town to have a large number of organisations that have a community focus. That is wonderful and I think they should be applauded. It is nice to talk about the good things every so often rather than continuously sniping at each other across the chamber. So I commend the motion, Mr Speaker.

MRS BURKE (Molonglo) (5.15): I thank Ms MacDonald for putting this on the notice paper today. It is, as she says, a good opportunity to really promote and elevate the work of organisations such as Koomarri. I must join in the chorus of highlighting the ongoing and persistent efforts of all the volunteers and staff, particularly of Margaret Spalding, a lady for whom I have much admiration and respect and who over a number of years has ensured that Koomarri has remained a highly successful organisation in the area of encouraging and nurturing people, particularly those with an intellectual disability.

During recent times, this organisation, and in particular Margaret Spalding, has shown its resilience to setbacks in more than one instance. As we have heard from Ms MacDonald, first fire and then a storm damaged the new building in Woden. It is important to highlight that we are so fortunate in Canberra to also have such tremendous support from businesses, clubs and organisations that are prepared to show the generosity that exists in our community—no more so than when they came to Koomarri's aid in recent times. Setbacks can be overcome as a society. We can display that we can rise above adversity and antisocial behaviour and continue to indicate by action that priority must be given to supporting people with a disability.

I must say that resilience, belief and faith in what it does as an organisation is how I would describe Koomarri. Since its inception in 1952 the aims and objectives appear to have remained constant. The association still proudly displays a strong and demonstrated ability to work for the welfare of disabled children in the ACT, to act as an advocate body for their families and to continue work towards a society in which the stigma that previously attached to people with a physical or intellectual disability is removed.

It is also imperative that we all continue to recognise the standing that this association and its employees have within our community. I would naturally expect that any government of the day will continue, wherever pertinent, to provide financial support and resources to assist with workshops, services and ongoing costs. Koomarri fulfils a concept that disabled people have abilities and can contribute just like anyone else in our society, without segregation. Quality of life, which we all expect, should be afforded to all; Koomarri has more than achieved this ideal.

Koomarri has campaigned, and into the future will most likely continue to campaign, for the rights of people with a disability. I will not list the achievements now, but I will say that the people who choose to become involved with the work of Koomarri are indeed some of the most valued members of our society. Commitment to the ideals and values

of this wonderful organisation can teach us all that involvement and inclusion will reduce the likelihood of barriers in all areas of our society.

Being long established in the Canberra region signifies that Koomarri is the leading service provider for people with disabilities and their families, and is one of the largest non-government employers. Its work to provide over 300 jobs in the Canberra marketplace, with the majority of these positions being for people with a disability, implies to me that this commitment will continue for a long time to come.

Koomarri has identified the need to embrace change and to tackle this challenge in a proactive way. I understand that it is undertaking ongoing internal reviews of its services, business and systems, proving that as an organisation it must identify how it can best assist people with a disability to lead, as it puts it, full and abundant lives.

This association has always reached out to the broader community, playing not only the role of ambassador for, but encouraging people to learn more about, the association and its people. To my mind, such a proactive approach has ensured its ongoing success as one of the leading organisations in the sector. Ultimately, the standards that have been set by Koomarri will naturally ensure that the support for people with disabilities and their families will continue.

I commend the good work of this association and all that it does, and it is surely noted by all members in the Assembly. In closing, again I just wanted to highlight that all of us, each one of us, can look at Koomarri and its staff and the way that they handled adversity. It just shows how tough human nature can be, and it was really heartening in difficult times to see the resilience of the organisation and its staff, and the support of the business community and the community at large. We have gone through rough times, but we have proven to be a tough community and we can come through. I commend Ms MacDonald for the motion and I commend the work of Koomarri and wish it every continuing success.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (5.20): I thank Ms MacDonald for raising this topic in the Assembly today, and I wholeheartedly support her motion.

The Stanhope government supports the vision that all people with disabilities achieve what they want to achieve, live how they choose to live and are valued as full and equal members of the ACT community. We believe it is important that all Canberrans are supported to make the most of their talents and abilities. We are committed to supporting people with a disability to participate in our community, and I acknowledge the significant contribution Koomarri has made, and continues to make, in assisting those with disabilities to achieve their goals.

As has been noted, Koomarri, under one name or another, has provided services in Canberra since 1952. In that time it has become one of Canberra's prominent service providers for people with a disability and their families. Koomarri has become a well-known name around Canberra and one that is held in high regard throughout the community. It has, through the years, touched many people's lives and I am sure will continue to do so.

The respect and high regard felt by the Canberra community had never been more evident than in the aftermath of the recent fire that left the partially-completed Koomarri Centre in ruins. With true community spirit, Canberrans rallied around to support Koomarri through moral support and through many generous donations to assist with the rebuilding. The ACT government supports the Koomarri Association in its ventures by providing over \$2 million a year in funding. This funding is used to provide support to people with disabilities in the ACT in many different ways. Koomarri also financially supports itself by its various business enterprises.

Koomarri is one of the public sector organisations the government teams with to help implement our policy directions. It is very supportive of the work that the department, in particular Disability ACT, is doing in the area of policy direction, in particular the future directions framework for the ACT 2004-08, which identifies four strategic directions to support people with disabilities to achieve their vision and values.

Koomarri's chief executive, Margaret Spalding, was a member of the Disability Reform Group, which was set up by the Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, in 2002, to work with Disability ACT, formerly the Office of Disability, to provide advice to government on the findings and recommendations of the Gallop inquiry into disability services in the ACT. This group also developed the visions and values for people with disabilities that underpins all the work done by Disability ACT.

Ms Spalding has been co-chair and a member of the Disability Advisory Council for a number of years. She is actively involved in the development and implementation of future directions, and she is currently the community co-chair of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services' oversight group, overseeing the work done by the four future directions reference groups established to progress future directions. The oversight group provides advice on strategic approaches for the implementation of future directions.

One of the major barriers to full participation in our community by people with a disability is lack of access to employment. The Stanhope government last year announced that one-third of the recruits for the 2006 ACT public service graduate program have a disability—a move that has been implemented in an effort to break down these employment barriers and provide equal access to public sector employment for people with a disability. We encourage non-government organisations and businesses to also consider what employment opportunities they have for Canberrans with disabilities.

Last year for the first time the ACT government and business leaders in the ACT got together for BLITS—business leaders: innovation, thoughts, solutions—a roundtable to discuss new and practical avenues to address some of the many barriers that prevent Canberrans with a disability from accessing employment and other quality of life foundations that we often take for granted. The roundtable was well attended, with 21 business leaders from across Canberra participating. Feedback has suggested that many were unaware of some of the barriers that existed, and I was left inspired that businesses in Canberra are beginning to identify and implement employment opportunities and strategies for people with a disability.

The ACT government also has the Chief Minister's inclusion awards. Last December, seven awards were presented to Canberra businesses that had demonstrated their commitment to include people with a disability into their workplace, business or community. Last year we had a record number of entries for the awards. I commend the business community in Canberra for beginning to embrace inclusion for people with a disability in their workplaces.

I also acknowledge that Koomarri provides community support and employment services for over 350 people with moderate to severe disabilities in the ACT and has been doing so for some time. I commend Koomarri for leading the way in employing people with a disability and for its commitment to assist people with a disability to reach their full potential. I also encourage other Canberra businesses to continue to follow Koomarri's lead in providing employment opportunities to Canberrans with disabilities.

In conclusion, I would like to again thank Ms MacDonald for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. There are many organisations and businesses in Canberra that are doing great things for our community, but I am pleased to acknowledge today the special place Koomarri has in our city and our history. It is truly an integral part of our community.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (5.26): One would need to be churlish, ignorant or just plain silly to disagree with this motion, because there is no doubt that Koomarri does provide a valuable service to our community, and I believe it is a name that everybody would know. In terms of raising the profile of issues related to people with a disability and of increasing the awareness of Canberra people of the needs of people with a disability, Koomarri has done a valuable service just in that.

Koomarri has changed considerably since it was established in 1952, undoubtedly reflecting our changing understanding of what it is like to live with a disability, what people who live with a disability need and want, and a growing commitment as a society to support people who live with a disability to have full and meaningful lives.

One of the key challenges that face young people with a disability and their families is what to do after school finishes for them. Expectations have changed appreciably for people over the years. It is no longer satisfactory to give people just busy work—for instance, having them do work that is not valuable to society just so that they are occupied—or to pay them less than their productivity warrants, as the sheltered workshops of the past used to do. I note that operations such as Ezi Iron and Garden Maintenance provide paid and meaningful work.

The best outcomes are often shaped for individuals, and the least satisfactory arrangements are those that deal with people in bulk without taking into account their individual needs. I am confident that Koomarri is doing its best to provide individual opportunities for the young people in its care, although I note that it is, of course, a question of identifying sufficient resources in the years leading up to the end of school. I have no doubt that Koomarri is well aware of these challenges and I presume it is doing its best to address them.

Another area in which Koomarri has been doing good work is in supported accommodation. I understand that Koomarri has been prepared to try new ideas to

integrate and support people to live in the community. This is absolutely vital to the development of an inclusive society that welcomes and values the contribution of people living with a disability and accepts them amongst its own. I think we should also acknowledge the good work that Koomarri does in raising the profile of people with a disability, in presenting them and allowing them to present themselves as positive contributors to our community.

Koomarri is really the big kid on the block of disability services. It has admirable relations with a number of businesses and clubs, in addition to government support and conventional fundraising. The disability sector is not well resourced when you consider the level of need, so any operations that can attract additional funds from outside the public funding loop are valuable indeed. Furthermore, that process in effect engages people who are otherwise disinterested in the sector.

It is true, however, that the day-to-day situation for smaller organisations is quite different from that of Koomarri, and one of the challenges we face is to give those smaller organisations similar cause for optimism. This is not to denigrate Koomarri, but it is important to see where Koomarri fits into the sector as a whole. Perhaps the next 50 years or so will see Koomarri working with other community groups to help establish supportive communities that are about work and creativity for all members, whatever their ability.

MS MacDONALD (Brindabella) (5.30), in reply: I would like to thank Mrs Burke, Mr Hargreaves as minister, and Dr Foskey, for placing their support on this motion. As I said in my opening speech, I did not think it would be one that would cause a great deal of division. But, as I also said, I thought it was worth while highlighting the work that Koomarri does, and that is what I hope we are doing here today.

I note the comments that Dr Foskey made in terms of trying to design work specifically for the individual, and I believe that that is what Koomarri does to the best of its ability. It is certainly the case that the work that Koomarri does is a long way from the old sheltered workshops, where there was not meaningful work being performed. So it is good to see places like Ezi Iron in operation, and the other organisations that Koomarri operates that I mentioned.

I confess to every so often taking my clothes down to Ezi Iron to get them ironed. I have to say that I do not really enjoy ironing very much, so it is nice to have Koomarri and Ezi Iron there to perform that function. I am sure there are a few other members in this place who have utilised the services of Ezi Iron. Maybe Koomarri should set up a service called “Ezi Cook”, because I think there are a few members in this place who would take up that service if there were some nutritious meals that could be taken home. That would not be too hard a one, and I might suggest it to Margaret. But, seriously, I thank members for their support of this motion and I commend the motion to the chamber.

Motion agreed to.

Bushfires—threat to urban edge

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (17.33): I move:

That this Assembly, in light of the Yarralumla Brickworks grass fire of December 2005 and the state of the grass bushfire fuel threat that exists along the urban edge and in Canberra nature parks adjacent to the urban edge:

(1) notes:

- (a) and congratulates the Emergency Services and Police in their quick response and good work to save further property from loss during the Yarralumla bushfire; and
- (b) the Government's preparations against bushfire threat but notes those preparations are still far from adequate leaving many suburbs at increased vulnerability to bushfire threat; and

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

- (a) rectify the existing neglected areas and ensure the firebreak along the residential edge in all suburbs with vulnerable bushfire approaches is a minimum of 40 metres wide, including vulnerable inner suburbs;
- (b) ensure that additional firebreaks are prepared in ACT Canberra Nature Parks in areas close to the urban edge on vulnerable bushfire approaches; and
- (c) strengthen the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan and prepare bushfire operational plans for each vulnerable suburb, village and urban asset.

MR PRATT: Mr Speaker, I reject the government's amendments to my motion. In one of the amendments the minister talks about investing an additional \$130 million—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Pratt, I don't want to spoil the thrust of your speech but the amendments have not been moved yet.

MR PRATT: Yes, the momentum has been blunted.

MR SPEAKER: I can see that you are very keen to get on to it but you will have to wait until the amendments are moved.

MR PRATT: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The motion that I have just moved highlights an important issue that is of major concern to the majority of the ACT community. It is a call for the Stanhope government to reduce fire risks by urgently addressing dangerous pockets of long grass in areas close to suburban homes and in urban and environmental parklands. While some areas have been slashed, burnt or mowed, this activity is not happening often enough to alleviate the concerns of many Canberrans who have written to me about danger areas close to where they live.

I remind you, Mr Speaker, of the greater danger posed by prairie wildfires in the USA and Australian grassland and plain fires when good rains have allowed substantial grass growth, as is the case this year in the ACT. I am told that it is the worst grass growth that we have seen for five to six years. Research has shown how even treeless plains can foster wild and devastatingly fast fires if there is a substantial grass bushfire fuel risk,

and that is the case at the moment in the southern tablelands and across the whole of south-east Australia.

There are some limited stretches of urban landscape that this government has either failed to maintain regularly or, in some cases, failed to maintain at all. I recently spent two full days travelling around Canberra documenting areas where long grass potentially poses a fire risk and needs to be eradicated as a matter of urgency. I was inspired to do that in the wake of the Yarralumla fire, and more about that later. While the maintenance of long grass across Canberra and general preventative preparations appear to have improved somewhat on what has happened in previous years—in fact, I would say that the effort by the government and Urban Services is quite substantial compared to what we have seen in previous years—I am deeply concerned that a number of pockets of long grass close to suburbs with dangerous westerly bushfire approaches have not been eradicated with enough immediacy. This can be seen in three photographs that I now seek leave to table.

Leave granted.

MR PRATT: I table the following papers:

Long grass in Canberra region—photographs (3).

These photographs show the problem in very clear detail. The first of these photographs was taken in Kambah and it illustrates an access trail that is directly behind the homes on the western edge of Meredith Circuit. There is chest high grass on either side of the track, continuing down to the homes only metres away, and this is a westerly and a south-westerly approach. The firebreak gap on that track is only five metres.

The second photo that I have tabled was taken in Gordon. It is looking at the north-western approach to that suburb, behind houses in Staunton Place. The long grass can again be seen and no effort has been made to reduce the hazards in this vulnerable area. The gap along the service track between deep grass and back fences is at best 10 metres and in some cases only five metres.

The last photo I have tabled is taken from the Glenloch interchange, Belconnen. It is looking directly up to Black Mountain tower, and the grass on the roadside runs uninterrupted up to the top of that feature. In most of those areas the grass is at least waist high.

Emergency services units are working tirelessly during this hot, dry period but I fear they are not being supported by government with maximum preventive planning on government land. We have seen in recent years lessons about bushfire fuel load coming out of the Christmas 2001 fires and the 2003 bushfire disaster—lessons that should have seen this Labor government ensuring that there is not a repeat of such events.

Mr Speaker, the Yarralumla brickworks fire in late December was yet another wake-up call as to the ferocious nature of bush and grass fires. Residents affected by this fire had been complaining for years to the government, either directly or through their body corporate. From September 2003 until November 2005, barely a month before the fire took place, residents expressed their concern and demanded that action be taken to

reduce the fire threat. I quote from a letter sent to the Chief Minister on 23 September 2002:

The members of this corporation request the areas be given some attention to make them respectable and eliminate the fire risk they now pose.

I again quote from a letter sent to the Chief Minister on 17 August 2003:

It is just a matter of time before some thoughtless person sets a fire in this overgrown mess.

I quote from a letter sent to the Chief Minister on 19 October 2004:

We again bring to your attention the growth of blackberries in the old brickyards. This again is out of hand. Please arrange to have the area cleaned up, the blackberries removed, to reduce the fire hazard in this area.

I quote from a letter sent to Urban Services dated 17 November 2005:

Please arrange to have the overgrowth of vegetation cut back and controlled to reduce the fire hazard which now exists.

I finally quote from a letter dated 13 January 2006 sent to the Chief Minister some two weeks after the Yarralumla fire took place:

For some time we have addressed you and the Department of Urban Services on this topic to no avail. The mowing carried out by the contractors under instructions of your subordinates leaves a lot to be desired ... What was done? Mow a strip a few feet wide between the poisoned blackberry bushes, dead trees, high grass and the residents.

From my observations I would say that that strip was more than a few metres wide—it was probably 10 to 20 metres wide. But the problem is that at the back of that there was untouched long grass and blackberries. That minimal action was taken to maintain the urban edge around the brickworks after more than three years of correspondence just astounds me. But it does not astound me nearly as much as it astounds the residents of Yarralumla. This was another fire just waiting to happen thanks to the neglect of this government.

Emergency services personnel and police did an excellent job in responding to this emergency and should certainly be praised for their quick and comprehensive response. It is not the efforts of the response teams that we are concerned about or criticising. They did a magnificent job. What I am concerned about here is the lack of comprehensive prevention measures and the fact that this government has not done all it can to prevent such fires from occurring. The government's lack of preventive planning makes it that much more dangerous and difficult for our emergency services personnel, who already have a hard enough and dangerous enough job to do. There are many sites that contain dangerous levels of long grass and scrubby fuel. Much of the grass across the ACT has "cured", making it highly flammable. In fact, so neglected are some of these areas that I have received numerous complaints and I will cite some examples later.

I am also seriously concerned about the size of some firebreaks across Canberra. Many firebreaks against urban fringes should have been much broader and I would urge the government to revisit current policy on the requirements and standards for such firebreaks. I believe that firebreaks, particularly those along the western fringe on westerly approaches to some of these suburbs, are woefully inadequate. Mr Speaker, I remind you that recommendation No 2 from the McLeod inquiry states:

The Victorian Code of Practice for Fire Management on Public Land should be used as a “best-practice” guide when revising the ACT Bushfire Fuel Management Plan and a similar set of priorities should be developed in relation to zones identified in the Plan.

When we take a look at the Victorian code of practice for fire management on public land we see that the section on fuel breaks, point 186, states:

Fire Protection Plans must indicate the strategy and standards that are used within the planning area to determine fuel break placement, width and condition in order for them to provide significant fire protection benefits. The principles should take account of research and knowledge on fuel break effectiveness and address the impact of fuel breaks on suppression effectiveness and loss potential for likely wildfire scenarios, or on the control of prescribed burns.

I do not think McLeod’s concerns have been met in terms of what we have seen down the urban edge in these last four weeks.

Again, if this point recommended by McLeod were taken on board, would we still see the uncanny state of affairs that occurs across the ACT? In some parts of Bonython, Gordon and Kambah there are at most 10-metre wide breaks on western approaches facing kilometres of deep uninterrupted grasslands, yet in other areas across the city there are very good 30 to 100-metre breaks. These inconsistencies are of significant concern. Small breaks such as those in Bonython, Gordon and Kambah are simply inadequate. With continuing forecasts, as we speak today, of high temperatures with strong north-westerly winds, we would normally expect this fire risk weather pattern to continue for a few more weeks yet.

Let me point out that I cannot see even a single blade of grass that has been cut or burnt in Canberra nature parks—not even within half a kilometre of the urban edge. I have walked out from the urban edge through Canberra nature parks in a number of places and I have not seen any effort by Environment ACT to reduce the bushfire fuel load risk on the land that they manage. Is Environment ACT policy consistent with the need for sensible bushfire prevention planning? I do not know about that. It does not appear to be.

Some other areas that have been identified which require immediate attention include Chifley, O’Malley, Swinger Hill, Greenway, the Glenloch interchange, along with Coulter, Bindubi and Caswell drives, Calwell and Chapman. If the Stanhope government is serious about doing all it can to protect local residents this bushfire season it will immediately deploy resources to eradicate long grasses in these areas. But this is only one aspect of the problem. The government and the emergency services minister also need to do much more for community safety against a bushfire threat by ensuring that the

strategic bushfire management plan (SBMP) provides much more comprehensive evacuation and fire management plans for individual suburban risk areas.

This government is simply not prepared for the bushfire threat. Whilst they have put in much more effort in mowing than we have seen in recent years—including what happened under the previous government, and I take that on board—they simply have not done enough in respect of the post-spring rain bushfire fuel. You have got to get off those mowers. You need to have more people slashing in areas that cannot be reached by mowers.

So what is the solution? What the opposition is saying is this: I believe that there is a need for a minimum standard of 40-metre firebreaks on residential fence lines on vulnerable approaches, and by “vulnerable approaches” I mean the traditional south-west, west-north-west, and perhaps even southerly approaches as well. I must say that Val Jeffery of the Tharwa Rural Fire Service supports that view. I have spoken to him and the minister may speak to him if he wishes to confirm that. I believe this is something that must be done and can be done, provided this government implements an effective strategy and targeted program backed up by sufficient resources providing for these activities to be undertaken instead of what I believe to be a haphazard approach to date. McLeod recommendation No 1 states:

The ACT Bushfire Fuel Management Plan should be reviewed in the light of changed circumstances since the January 2003 fires. Increased emphasis should be given to controlled burning as a fuel-reduction strategy.

Phil Cheney, arguably Australia’s leading expert on bushfire prevention, states:

Prescribed burning for fuel reduction is conducted during the autumn and winter months, it’s not something you do the day before the fire or even the year before. There has to be a program and culture that addresses a planned and systematic approach to fuel reduction.

As he says, it is not something you do the day before or the year before. So why do we see late bushfire fuel reduction activities in the summer? I know that during the spring rains a lot of plans might have been thrown out of order. Perhaps there should have been more mowing and slashing during the summer period if it was not safe to burn.

In January this year I contacted the Chief Minister and the emergency services minister regarding the concerns I had with fire hazards. I detailed vulnerable areas that needed urgent attention to reduce the risks that were present. While some action was taken, I am not satisfied with the lukewarm response to the concerns raised. Many areas were cut well after 4 January but some areas, including some of those that I have photographed, have not been touched.

As part of the solution to this problem, it is therefore of vital importance that the government takes immediate action to, firstly, rectify the existing neglected areas and ensure that the firebreak along the residential edge in all suburbs with vulnerable bushfire approaches is a minimum of 40 metres wide, including vulnerable inner suburbs. Secondly, the government needs to ensure that additional firebreaks are prepared in Canberra nature parks in areas close to the urban edge on vulnerable approaches. Thirdly, we call on the government to strengthen the strategic bushfire

management plan, prepare bushfire operational plans for each vulnerable suburb and introduce a policy in respect of grazing.

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

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (5.48): Mr Speaker, I seek leave to move the two amendments circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

MR HARGREAVES: I move:

- (1) paragraph 1 (b), omit all words after “the Government’s preparations against bushfire threat”, substitute “have left us better prepared for bushfires than we have ever been; and”;
- (2) insert new paragraph 1 (c):
 - “(c) that the Stanhope Government has invested an additional \$130.775m over five years in emergency services since the January 2003 bushfires;”;
- (3) omit paragraph (2).

I will speak to the amendments and the substantive motion all in one hit and see if we cannot knock the motion over tonight. I have moved amendments to Mr Pratt's motion to put a stop to his scaremongering on this issue. I know I should not be surprised at the extent to which he will go to gain political relevance but Mr Pratt's propensity to use the people of Canberra as pawns in his game is disturbing.

That said, I would like to support the first part of Mr Pratt's motion in acknowledging the fast response to the Yarralumla fire by our emergency services workers and the police. I am more than willing to draw attention to the fantastic work that is done on a regular basis by our dedicated professionals and volunteers and I am happy to see on this occasion Mr Pratt supporting them rather than criticising them. However, I am afraid this is where the agreement with Mr Pratt ends.

What we see here in this motion is Ms Pratt, with no expertise or experience in these areas, trying to raise fear in our community. As you are aware, Mr Speaker, the Stanhope government has provided a greater level of coordinated preparedness against bushfires in the ACT than has ever existed previously. Under the strategic bushfire management plan a comprehensive range of strategies have been developed to manage bushfire fuel levels across all tenures and better prepare both the community and the emergency services.

Unlike Mr Pratt's approach, a researched, scientific approach to the principles of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery is embedded in the bushfire management framework. The ACT government has translated these strategies into action through clear outcomes on the ground. Prevention activities such as fuel management and fire trail works are targeted to effectively address pre-identified bushfire risk in

strategic areas and to ensure that the works undertaken provide the most effective means to reduce this risk.

A critical component of this work is to ensure that across the territory there are strategic areas surrounding properties and assets from which firefighters and residents can protect their homes. To achieve this, 2,300 hectares in over 250 separate locations in the ACT have been slashed this season to manage grassland fuels. This work has been undertaken around the urban interface adjacent to critical assets and back fences of properties, as well as along rural and arterial roads. In many of these areas grass has been cut many times over the spring and summer.

It is a totally unrealistic expectation that every blade of grass behind every ACT fence will be slashed on a continuing basis through the summer. This is simply impractical. However, the strategic bushfire management plan and bushfire operational plans ensure that all urban edge areas of the territory that are vulnerable to bushfire are identified and treated according to their level of risk and vulnerability. A total of 550 kilometres of urban interface is managed in this way.

It is also inevitable that there will be areas where the long grass or other bushfire hazards cannot be fully cleared due to rocky or steep slopes that prevent the safe use of mechanical slashers. The land managers, either by reshaping the land or using hand tools or burning, are systematically reducing hazards in these difficult areas. This critical slashing work has been complemented by the prescribed burning of grassland areas and roadsides to provide strategic breaks across the landscape. This is the first time in many years that this burning has been undertaken in the ACT and it not only provides increased protection but is a critical means of training our firefighters.

Over 130 kilometres of fire trails have been maintained or upgraded in the last six months. Most of this work has occurred in the more remote forested areas in the ACT and is critical to providing the best opportunity to suppress fires. Large fires such as those in January 2003 start in these areas and it is imperative that resources are spread effectively, to manage not just the current bushfire season but those seasons that are to come. The government takes a long-term strategic and landscape level view of the bushfire threat based on a sound historical understanding of fire behaviour. There is far more to bushfire management than just managing grass at the back fence.

Given that a huge percentage of homes in the 2003 fires were lost to ember attack from fires that were hundreds of metres away, Mr Pratt's preoccupation with grass behind the back fence displays little, if any, understanding of bushfires and bushfire behaviour. The loss of the Yarralumla townhouses was a consequence of brush fencing catching alight and spreading. The grass behind those brush fences had been slashed two weeks prior.

I want to make one point very strongly. In his simplistic way, Mr Pratt has written to members of the public informing them, based on no expertise, that he thinks their homes are at risk. What is appalling is that he is suggesting that if long grass were cut then fires would not come through. What Mr Pratt fails to acknowledge is that the grass behind residences in Yarralumla had very recently been cut when a fire came through and damaged properties. What he is doing is creating an expectation in the community that if the government pours more and more money into slashing and mowing there will be no fires.

So tell me, Mr Pratt, do you also think that declaring a total fire ban means no fires will start and that the bushfire abatement zone means that fires know when to stop? Of course not, and it is irresponsible to be raising fear in our community by suggesting to people that if the grass were shorter their homes would not be in danger. What would have been more responsible, Mr Pratt, if you were committed to sending a letter to all residents, was to give them some helpful advice on what they could be doing to protect their homes. In a letter headed “Letter to residents in Bushfire Vulnerable Suburbs”—the one I have is to Kambah residents—he says that he is writing:

... to inform you that I believe that the grassland bushfire threat in your suburb is quite serious and I am concerned that this problem is replicated in many places right along the urban/bush interface.

He acknowledges that “this year we are better prepared for bushfire than we have been for some years”. He goes on to say:

... but I believe there are also many dangerous pockets of long grass in areas vulnerable to bushfire and regrettably, I believe, your suburban/bush edge is one of these.

That is an incredible state of scaremongering. On the Canberra Liberals website he says:

I have letterboxed a number of suburbs across Canberra about fire fuel load and many have written back or contacted me expressing similar concerns and have even suggested how the situation can be improved.

He does not say that he actually put fear into their heads in the first place through this letter. Mr Speaker, I seek leave to table these two pieces of paper.

Leave granted.

MR HARGREAVES: I table the following papers:

Long grass in Canberra region—

Extract from Canberra Liberals webpage—News, 15 February 2006.

Letter from Mr Pratt to residents in bushfire vulnerable suburbs.

Mr Pratt: That’s rubbish.

MR HARGREAVES: I did not write them. You wrote them. So if it is rubbish, you can take responsibility for the rubbish.

Ensuring the safety of communities from the threat of bushfire is a complex task and there is no single, simple solution to it. It is critical to ensure that the community is educated and resilient to bushfires and that people know what to do when bushfires occur. The government has put in place a range of strategies to ensure that homeowners are more aware and more resilient to the impact of fires. The government has instituted the all hazards warning system that provides a staged process to warn the public of

impending threat from bushfire and, indeed, other hazards. At the same time, advice was provided on how householders can prepare for bushfires and make their homes more capable of withstanding bushfires.

There is a saying in the business that “people protect houses and houses protect people”. The government has acted to ensure that these concepts are understood and applied. The ESA has been applying these guidelines to evacuation strategies and they have been published in the publications *Bushfires and the Bush Capital* and the *All Hazards Guide*. Our bushfire management experts provide advice to other government agencies in the ACT—for example, the recent forum on fences and bushfires presented by the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre. Such forums provide invaluable advice to residents, emergency services personnel and, importantly, our town planners.

Finally, our emergency service response agencies are better equipped and prepared than ever before, with additional tankers using the most advanced firefighting technology available. Three rural CAFS tankers are operational in the ACT, providing the ability to rapidly lay down foam to protect assets. Two helicopters are deployed to the ACT over the critical period of the fire season. Training of bushfire fighters has elevated significantly in recent years, with the adoption of national standards for firefighters. The ACT has led an AFAC project to develop best practice for training in AIIMS and has high levels of training in incident management as well as frontline response.

When you combine all the on-ground work, the community education and the extra state-of-the-art resources provided to firefighters, the ACT is better prepared this bushfire season than ever before. The government treats bushfire management very seriously and approaches it as a multifaceted and complex program, as opposed to the simple one-off solutions that have been suggested.

So what are these neglected areas to which Mr Pratt refers? Such a call shows little understanding of the concept and implementation of the strategic bushfire management plan. Based on the bushfire risk assessment across the ACT, there are areas of higher priority than others. Additionally, there are “difficult” areas such as steep slopes and rocky ground, requiring considerable effort by the land managers and the ESA to find safe, effective and achievable solutions to the risk. It is not an issue that can be solved immediately, and significant expenditure and time may be required to alter the interface to meet the full requirements of the strategic bushfire management plan. In some instances, alternative solutions such as building design might have to be employed.

This will be a long-term project. The government has, however, already made funds available for seasonal firefighters, who are currently undertaking slashing in difficult areas, and plans are being developed to manage the areas in the long term. The call to apply a 40-metre wide buffer is a simplistic solution to the perceived concerns of bushfire risk in the ACT and shows little, if any, understanding of fire behaviour.

Bushfire management in the ACT is management by objective, not by simple prescriptive measures such as have been suggested, which are not only cost prohibitive but also lack any strategic approach to the overall bushfire risk. Clear objectives are set for the protection of assets in the ACT based on a range of factors, such as the length and direction of fire runs to the interface, the slope and aspect of the land, the type and flammability of vegetation, the land management objectives and the adjacent land use.

From a sound understanding of these issues a flexible approach to asset protection is achieved. As clearly stated in the strategic bushfire management plan, asset protection zones are defined. This can be found in the appendices. There are three zones: the house asset protection zone, the inner asset protection zone and the outer asset protection zone. Based on the modelling of fire paths and past history, the urban interface has been classified into three classes that reflect the level of exposure to bushfires. For example, bushfire threat to a north-west facing property on the interface is significantly greater than a south-east facing property in inner Canberra. These exposure classes, not guesswork, determine the width of fuel management within a zone and their priority in the overall territory context.

Homeowners, too, must do their part to ensure their yards and buildings are defensible. This is vital in the house protection zone, and extensive advice has been provided to the community to assist in achieving effective outcomes. This is where shared responsibility comes in. Bushfire protection is the responsibility of all, not just that of government agencies. The inner asset protection zone, which can be up to 30 metres wide, is intensively managed for fuel reduction. This zone provides firefighters and homeowners with an effective and defensible space in which they can fight a fire safely and effectively by reducing the flame height and intensity.

At 6.00 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted and the resumption of the debate made an order of the day for the next sitting, and the motion for the adjournment of the Assembly was put.

Adjournment

Community consultation

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (6.01): One thing that I talk about a lot in this place is community consultation. It came up just this morning in relation to multicultural issues. So, when I come across a good example of community engagement, I think it is incumbent upon me to acknowledge it, as praise is the best form of encouragement.

Last night I attended the Hackett Community Association meeting in St Margaret's church, and there a very goodly crowd was gathered to hear about two topics. The first of them was a presentation by a couple of ACTPLA representatives on the urban design guideline for the Hackett central area. I do not know if people have followed the neighbourhood planning process. It, sadly, appears to have been dropped by the Planning and Land Authority, but Hackett is probably one of the best examples of where it seems to have had a reasonable amount of success.

People will probably be aware that a community values exercise is the first stage of the process, and then a plan is presented to the community, based on that. The Hackett central area is another of those local areas that are suffering very hugely from people bypassing that shopping centre and going to larger centres to do their shopping. People are very, very concerned about that, and they want it to survive. Yesterday an employee of ACTPLA took us through the urban design guideline very clearly, with very good slides. She had 50 copies of it, but there were so many people there that there were not enough for each person, so I have taken it off the web site. She also took questions as we went and the questions were answered, so at the end of that discussion people felt that

the job had been done properly and that what was going to come out of this whole exercise was something that they not only could live with but also could be quite excited about. In fact, ACTPLA had even taken it upon themselves to extend the open space because they identified some significant trees that ought to be protected.

I sound like someone speaking for the government, but I am just speaking here as a citizen who is very concerned that too often when the government says it consults fully what it means is that it has followed the statutory guidelines set down for consultation, and very often that does not satisfy communities. For instance, the third generation Telstra towers followed the statutory guidelines, letters were sent to schools, usually arriving after schools had closed for the year, and by the time people went back and could be informed about it the period for comment had closed. So the statutory guidelines for consultation in ACTPLA were followed but people were not really consulted.

Another issue that came up at the Hackett meeting last night was the dragway. Hackett people are waiting with bated breath to hear how the Chief Minister's advisory committee has advised the Chief Minister. They have been informed that there will be a full planning process. My concern is that that will, again, just follow the statutory guidelines and in that case it will not be community engagement as such but just a token effort at community consultation. But hats off to ACTPLA for the Hackett neighbourhood planning process and for the way that the urban design guideline was presented to the community last night.

Canberra Capitals

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra) (6.06): I rise to congratulate one of the best sporting teams in Canberra's history, and certainly one of the best sporting teams currently in the nation, the Canberra Capitals, and to wish them all the best of luck for the grand final.

A few of us were there to see a fantastic semi-final—the Chief Minister, me, Mr Smyth, a couple of others and Senator Lundy. We saw a rather sore Lauren Jackson, coming back from injury, nevertheless playing her usual dominant role and putting a stamp on the thrilling game to win by five points. Last week, of course, they were in the preliminary final and it was a fantastic come-from-behind effort at 83-81. They now go into the grand final against Dandenong. They would have to be the underdogs but, if they win it, it will be their fourth premiership.

This year has been marked by a really gutsy effort by the team, and you cannot underestimate the effect Carrie Graf has as their coach. She really is quite inspirational. I have seen quite a few coaches and done a bit of coaching in various sports myself, but I love to watch how she operates. She is just so enthusiastic, so intense and so effective, and you see how the players respond to her when she talks to them. So it was a fantastic effort by the coach. Often people forget about the coach when the team is doing well. The coach is the first one to be blamed when the team does not go well, but when the team goes well often the coach does not get the credit where that is due, and Carrie is an excellent coach.

Of course, the game also marks a couple of sad points. It may well be the last game for Lauren Jackson, who is obviously the best female basketball player in the world. We are

very proud to have her as one of our own here in Canberra. She may not be playing next year for the Capitals. One of the players who certainly will not be—but she has been with the team since 1997—is the captain Eleanor Sharp, and for Sharpy’s sake I certainly hope they win. She has done so much and shared so many joys and frustrations over the time she has been with the Capitals. It would be a fantastic farewell for the captain if the team in fact went out with a win in this grand final. So all the very best to the Canberra Capitals. They are fantastic ambassadors for Canberra.

They are also fantastic ambassadors and role models, for young women especially. I can remember going to a number of games with my youngest daughter, Lucy. I think Kristen Veal used to be her favourite player, and even Lucille Bailie when she was playing, but certainly it encouraged my daughter to play some sport. Those girls are fantastic role models, for young women and girls especially, to get involved in the fantastic activity that sport is, and basketball is certainly one of my favourite sports.

So to all the girls in the Capitals team, especially to Sharpy, to Lauren and to Carrie Graf, I wish them all the very best. You have done Canberra proud—win, lose or draw—but I think you will probably pull off a big one again, and that would be a fantastic farewell for Sharpy and for Lauren if she is going. Go the Capitals!

Prison reform—Alexander Maconochie

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (6.09): The Centre has been in the news a lot lately. Last year, I was fortunate to be able to visit Norfolk Island, a place rich in its social and political life as well as history. I took the opportunity to learn as much as I could about the successive settlements of Norfolk.

The Polynesians settled possibly as early as 1750 AD, the two penal colonies followed, and finally it became the home of the descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers. The history of the two separate convict settlements was harsh, and until recently one that many would prefer to forget, as it demonstrates the worst of what human beings can do to one another under the guise of discipline.

Until my visit to Norfolk Island, the name Maconochie had only been known to me as the name of the new correctional centre to be built by the Stanhope Labor government, a centre that will be managed under human rights principles, as we know. The centre is already attracting worldwide interest because of the far-sighted operational philosophy that will underpin its day-to-day management and has informed the project since its inception.

I now realise that, like me, Mr Stanhope learnt about Alexander Maconochie, a retired naval commander, while he was at Norfolk Island. In the four years from 1840 to 1844 that Alexander Maconochie spent as the commandant of the island’s second penal colony, he was able to transform this brutal regime through the use of an innovative “marks” system which rewarded good behaviour by prisoners whilst also sanctioning the reverse.

Alexander Maconochie was indeed a man before his time. It is little wonder then that Mr Stanhope proposed that the ACT correctional facility bear the name of this innovative prison reformer. Alexander Maconochie was no bleeding heart prison reformer, nor an

academic who was seeking to carry out some sort of sociological experiment. In the same way that this government shows strength of leadership and the courage of its convictions, he set about instituting reforms that he knew would transform the then prison system.

Maconochie learnt about prison life at first hand as a consequence of being a prisoner of war of the French from late 1811 until the abdication of Napoleon early in 1814. He knew at first hand what it was like to be a prisoner and it is a fair assumption that it was this experience that influenced his approach when he arrived at the penal settlement of Van Diemen's Land in 1837.

The basis for Maconochie's fundamental belief was that brutality and cruelty debased not only the person subjected to them but also the society that deliberately uses or tolerates the use of such brutality for the purposes of control. Further, prison should be designed to make a person fit to return to society, purged of the tendencies that led to his or her offence and strengthened in their ability to withstand temptation in the future. These are the kinds of principles upon which the proposed ACT correctional facility will be managed, as you know, Mr Speaker. I shall conclude with a quote from Alexander Maconochie, and excuse the reference to only "man" here and not to women:

My experience leads me to say there is no man utterly incorrigible. Treat him as a man, and not as a dog. You cannot recover a man except by doing justice to the manly qualities, which he may have about him, and giving him an interest in developing them. I conceive that none are incorrigible where there is sanity; there may be some proportion, but very small.

I am immensely proud to be a member of a government that is led by a Chief Minister who supports such a vision.

Abortion

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (6.13): As we speak here, the House of Representatives are debating the arrangements for considering applications to market the abortifacient drug RU486. I do not say that they are debating who should "approve" RU486, because I suspect this is a debate between those who think nobody should approve it and those who think that it does not matter who approves it so long as somebody does. But on the general question of who should decide such issues, we have to consider what RU486 is for. I am happy for technical experts to make decisions on the efficacy and safety of medicines. But RU486 is clearly not intended principally as a medicine. The vast majority of women who take it in countries where it is approved do not do so to cure any disease or to ease any symptoms. Pregnancy, as my obstetricians have loved to tell me, is not a disease.

Whether or not you are convinced by the arguments for allowing RU486 onto the market—and I am not one of those—it is clear that those arguments are not about health. The arguments, like those for abortion in general, are social and moral, and the process of weighing up these arguments against the social arguments, along with some health arguments on the other side, is emphatically not a process for technocrats and scientific analysis. In fact, the whole argument that the TGA should make this decision because they are the best at this kind of technical analysis is in my view an attempt to imply what

no-one has actually been foolish enough to claim—that the scientific arguments are the only arguments to be considered in this debate

Finally, I note that a number of my female federal colleagues on both sides of politics have been running the argument that men do not have a right to have a view on this question. Apart from the fact that this is the only area of public policy where we hear this argument—do we ever hear the argument that adults cannot make laws affecting children, that white Australians cannot make laws affecting Aborigines or that white-collar types cannot regulate plumbers?—there are other strong objections.

First, this of course assumes that it is only the woman who has an interest in such issues. Again, this is a claim that is easier to assume than assert. The question of whether there is another party to consider is as central as it is contested in this debate, and begging this question is inexcusable. Second, on this question of standing, it occurs to me that men are not the only group who will not have recourse to RU486. In the *Australian* yesterday, Reverend Dr John Fleming reported on recent research and noted that, when presented with arguments for and against RU486, women in the child-bearing years were much more likely to favour delaying its introduction, compared with women in my age group. He said in his article that the study showed that, before arguments for or against were rehearsed, young women aged 18 to 34 were most in favour of making RU486 available, but that, after exposure to the for and against arguments, younger women changed their mind and became the group most supportive of delaying the introduction of RU486 or not introducing it at all.

Dr Fleming also noted in his article that 23 of the 26 female senators voted for the bill. He did not join the dots—he was probably too polite to do so—but I am not that polite. Women are under-represented in most legislatures, and women of childbearing age, let alone those with young children—with a few exceptions, such as our own Ms Gallagher—are very rare, and this is for understandable reasons. Most women legislators are of my generation or older, and many of them still approach this issue on the basis of the fashionable slogans of their impressionable years. I wonder if it has ever struck my female fellow legislators that the charge of making an ideological decision on issues that will affect the health of others, not their own, applies just as strongly to them as it does to their male colleagues.

Industrial relations

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (6.17): Yesterday in this Assembly I raised my concerns about the industrial relations practices of the opposition. Just in the way of an update, Mrs Dunne has not yet approached me regarding the CPSU membership—and, to my surprise, nor has Mr Mulcahy. I would have thought the title of “workplace leader”, as it is the title of some union delegates, would have had him running at the opportunity. Maybe he is just waiting for the right time. But I must admit that I found the workplace disputes of the opposition somewhat amusing. Maybe it is my belief in poetic justice.

What I have found unamusing, though, is the treatment of a constituent of mine, Ms Astrid Bloxham. Astrid and her husband, Bill, have lived in Canberra for over 30 years, and she has worked for her employer, the security company Group 4, for 10 years. Last year, on Christmas Day, Astrid was working out at the Canberra International

Airport. She was marshalling passengers on the tarmac on a very hot summer's day—hot summer's day, hot tarmac and no break. After six hours on the job, despite repeated requests, Astrid could not leave her station to get water, to go to the toilet or to take a meal break. When relief finally came, Astrid expressed her own relief.

What was the response from her supervisor? Essentially: “Tough luck. We are short-staffed. Deal with it.” Astrid, like most of us, was distressed by his attitude. More so, she was concerned with the practices of her employer. Astrid made a complaint. Did she receive a response to this serious complaint? No, she heard nothing. Concerned by the lack of response, Astrid contacted her boss directly. And what was her supervisor's response? Astrid was accused of lying, of refusing an offered break and of exaggerating the whole issue. When she refuted these claims, Astrid was informed that the matter would be discussed at a later date. But, when she returned to work, instead of a discussion with her supervisor as promised, Astrid was called into the office and informed that a number of allegations had been made about her behaviour and that she was required to answer a number of questions.

I just want to make three points before I continue. One, Astrid's employer did not provide her with her legally entitled break, on a day when the temperature was probably above 30 degrees. Two, Astrid followed the contract disputes procedure and raised the matter formally. Three, Astrid, before any inquiry that included her had taken place about her issues, was accused of lying. So here is a woman who has done the right thing by her employer by reporting an unlawful act, who is accused of lying and, on returning to work, is marched into the supervisor's office and faced with a series of allegations. Astrid, within her rights, asked that she be informed of the allegations. She also asked that a witness be present. When this was refused, Astrid informed her supervisor she would not be answering any questions and started to leave the room. How did her supervisor respond? She said that, if Astrid left the room, she would be sacked.

Again Astrid informed her employer that she would not answer any questions until a witness was present. Again she was informed of her potential sacking. Finally, a compromise was met. Astrid contacted her husband, and Astrid, with her husband, Bill, present acting as a witness, heard the allegations. Astrid, as she had previously done when accused of lying, refuted the claims. But, despite this, and despite no evidence to support these allegations, her employer saw fit to transfer Astrid to a different section of the organisation.

Due to health reasons—reasons known to her supervisor—it would be very difficult for Astrid to work in this new section. So Astrid made a decision. She decided that she was not going to be bullied any more and she resigned. I say “decision”, though in truth Astrid had little choice: she could choose to stay with an employer that refuses to acknowledge fundamental rights to breaks; she could choose to stay with an employer who, instead of acknowledging these problems, fabricated allegations to stop her pursuing them; or she could stay at a place where she felt threatened. What choice did Astrid have?

I raise this horrible story because I believe it is my responsibility to continually point out to the opposition the fact that there are bad employers out there who place profit before the health and safety of workers. And I believe it is also my responsibility to point out

repeatedly that it is practices such as these that force good employers into compromising positions. They themselves are forced to compete on unsafe practices.

Arts awards

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (6.22): Earlier today the Minister for Planning, Mr Corbell, made a derisive remark about my participation in and support for the Australian Writers Guild Awards, which I was very proud to attend towards the end of last year and on which I filed a report that was approved. It is tragic that for something as important as that and where we had a national candidate for recognition, our own arts minister was too busy to bother going. Instead of belittling the event, the government ought to be saying to themselves, “Let’s do a bit more for the arts.” On that occasion, with the support of the awards committee managing it, I was seated with the Canberra nominee, one Dr Peter Copeman. He was there with his daughter and he was one of the proudest people you would ever meet when he in fact won the award for best community and youth theatre for his play, *Backburning*.

Dr Copeman, despite the derision that Mr Corbell has about this event, was in fact able to travel to Melbourne thanks to a generous grant from the ACT government. I have no issue with that; I have always said that cultural activities in this city cannot be subjected to the same economic constraints as are appropriate in other areas of activity, because I think they are a measure of the civilised standard of our society, and I will always be an enthusiastic supporter of funds towards the arts.

But it does raise an issue that I have had raised repeatedly with me over the 15 months or so I have been in the Assembly, and that is the lack of presence by one who calls himself the arts minister at a host of different events in Canberra. I see the Leader of the Opposition at many of these events. I try and attend as many as possible. In fairness, I see Ms Porter at many of these events, and frequently Dr Foskey. But the phantom is the minister for arts, Mr Stanhope. I hear from organisation after organisation their absolute frustration at his non-participation in this important aspect of our city. I have looked through event after event and attended event after event and I have failed to see his presence there. I think it is unfair to the arts community for the Chief Minister to assume that role and simply not attend to it. He relies on the public sector officials to handle the portfolio. He should be taking an active interest or he ought to hand over the portfolio to one of his ministerial colleagues who is willing to give them the fair hearing that they deserve.

The opposition spokesman for the arts was willing to make the effort and go down to this event, and it was attended, I might say, by people such as Bob Sercombe who, until he gets possibly knocked off his perch, is still the federal Labor shadow minister, and by leaders of the Australian Democrats, so all the major parties were represented. But about our participating in this important event the derisive comment of the minister was “that is rubbish”—belittlement.

I have said repeatedly that Canberra ought to be trying to attract areas such as the motion picture industry. There were major players at this function. There were people involved in the motion picture industry. I talked to them. I engaged in discussion. They are the subject of a report that I have written. I encouraged these people to come to Canberra. We have a magnificent climate here for the film industry. We are close to Sydney, where

there are a lot of resources, but we do not have the traffic and congestion issues that confront film producers in the major cities of Australia.

I make no secret of the fact that some of the strongest financial backers for my election to the Assembly came out of the motion picture industry. I am proud of that. I am hoping to use those links one day in government to bring productions to Canberra. I know we have someone on secondment in the ACT government helping work on New South Wales productions. But we are not seeing in the ACT itself the productions that we ought to be having. We have had a few commercials, but I think there are opportunities—and the opportunities will come when this government starts networking with the people who make those decisions both here and overseas.

I am proud that I went to Melbourne, I am proud that I sat alongside Dr Copeman and witnessed the thrill that he had in winning this award, and I would implore the government to, instead of belittling these sorts of events, give credit to people who have done well. I have no issue with you funding artists who would turn up to those events, but I would urge you not to make a foolish issue about the fact that the opposition are willing to go to these events and support our local talent when the government are not willing to send anybody to these events.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.26 pm.