



Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

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Thursday, 15 March 2007

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.

Minister for Police and Emergency Services
Motion of no confidence

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (10.31): I seek leave to move a motion of no confidence in the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

Leave granted.

MR PRATT: I move:

That this Assembly expresses a lack of confidence in the Minister for Police and Emergency Services for his mismanagement of, and failure to consult with, the Emergency Services.

Mr Speaker, today on the back of a couple of tumultuous weeks of ministerial embuissance we have seen the volunteer bushfire association, the brigades, the SES units, a number of professional officers, turn out en masse to demonstrate outside the ACT Legislative Assembly. Why have they done this? It is because they are disgusted with the decisions that were taken in this place last week and, frankly, by the commissioner himself, the Commissioner for Emergency Services, to restructure the ESA to have impact on organisational aspects and the way the services are to operate.

After all sorts of claims having been made that the government and the bureaucrats had consulted with our volunteers and consulted with our professional officers, what we have seen today in fact is the lie being put to all of those claims. The lie has been put to those claims by the mere fact of the demonstration that we have seen out here today blockading the Legislative Assembly.

What this demonstrates is that these very professional volunteers, men and women of many years experience and some of them new and keen, along with many of our professional officers in the fire brigade and the ambulance service, are dismayed at the changes that have been rent upon the emergency services. They are dismayed at what have been simply retrograde steps taken. And why have those steps been taken? For bureaucratic reasons only; they have nothing to do with operational efficiency or refining the ability of our emergency services to respond quickly to protect our community.

Today we see out here in this square a square parked out with emergency services vehicles. Today we saw a massive turnout of volunteers and we are told that the great majority of the units, the brigades, their men and women, have turned out to demonstrate their concern and their calm but rightful anger at this government for the decisions it has taken.

It was very, very instructive. Pat Barling, with his association, gave the minister a chance this morning to reverse that decision. He gave the minister a chance to stand up there on a truck and do that—and all power to the minister, by the way, for being out there, finally turning up to listen. Pat Barling and the volunteers gave this minister a chance today to reverse the decisions which have damaged the services. They were prepared to jump back in their trucks, drive off and carry out their service if the minister had done that. But what we saw instead was a minister tied to very poor decisions—of course with the vulture of the Chief Minister standing in the background making sure that Mr Corbell did not go weak at the knees. That chance was given to the minister to change his decision, and he did not do that.

Mr Barr: I didn't see you stand up in front of the crowd, Steve. I did not see you stand up. Where were you, Steve?

MR PRATT: Well, you must have been out the back. He did not do that. So what have we seen today, on the basis that the minister was not prepared to reverse that decision? The captains of the brigades and the SES units stepped forward and put their car keys and their truck keys into a bucket. Many of the captains stepped forward and pulled from their pockets prewritten resignations—but only after the minister failed to come to his senses did they sign on the spot and present their letters of resignation.

Of course, in the spirit of volunteerism and their love for community, this does not mean that those volunteers are not going to put out a fire if a fire starts today. But they were resigning from the ESA as we now know it. They were resigning from the emergency services as we now know them—the emergency services that have been restructured and ruined by this minister. A brand-new commissioner should have been ministerially oversighted by this minister, but he was not.

Mr Stanhope: You want ministerial interference—when it suits you?

MR PRATT: Mr Stanhope and Mr Corbell should now be rightly proud of themselves because they are now the owners of an elephants graveyard. Out here in this square we have a bunch of trucks and vehicles which should be back in their sheds and on standby to respond to protect this community. This minister and this Chief Minister should now be proud of this elephants graveyard. It is yours, Jon—look after them, look after them! This is the outcome of your boneheaded decision making, based on bureaucracy, bean counters, bureaucratic jealousies—and no consultation with your volunteers. You are a bloody disgrace; you are a disgrace. This is the outcome.

Mr Stanhope: So who do you want to run the authority? Who do you want to run the authority? The minister?

MR SPEAKER: Order, Chief Minister!

MR PRATT: I will get to that, Chief Minister. I will answer that in chapter and verse in about three or four minutes.

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

Mr Stanhope: Well, your time is almost up.

MR PRATT: I have got plenty of time, mate—

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Pratt!

MR PRATT: to cook you lot slowly.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Pratt, you will not have much time in here unless you direct your comments through the chair. Chief Minister, cease interjecting please.

MR PRATT: Mr Speaker, this demonstration today by these volunteers and the professional officers—

Mr Gentleman: Did you talk to them, Steve? Did you address them?

MR PRATT: Mate, I had plenty of talking. This demonstration today puts a lie to the claim that the volunteers were consulted by this government before the decision was taken to restructure. It puts a lie to the claim—and this minister does not deserve to serve a minute longer, because this minister has been saying in this place in question time, in speeches and on radio for about 14 days that the government had adequately consulted with the volunteers and the professional officers and that by and large the men and women understood the decision that was being taken and had been taken along with that decision. And that is just a load of garbage. We now know, from the turnout we have seen today, the strength of their concern, which puts a lie to your claim, minister, which puts a lie to your claim, Chief Minister, that you have bothered to consult with these people.

On ABC radio this morning at about 8.45 am, in response to a very good question as to why these decisions were taken and was the minister proud of or happy with the decision taken to restructure, the minister said, “Well, you know, the commissioner made those types of decisions; these are operational matters.” He said to Ross Sully, “These are operational matters and I don’t wish to interfere. This was a decision made by the commissioner.”

Getting back to your interjection, Chief Minister, this is exactly the time when a minister must step in. When a commissioner or a senior bureaucrat makes a very poor decision—and, with all due respect to Commissioner Manson, this has been a very poor decision—the minister must step in and exercise ministerial oversight. That is the problem with this minister: he is not prepared to accept his responsibility. With the \$150,000-odd—I think I have undervalued that—that a minister is paid, he is not prepared to step in and accept the responsibility that he is paid for.

This is a reflection, a repeat, of what we saw in January 2003 when this Chief Minister and his emergency services minister, in the period leading up to the conflagration that we had in January, were prepared to leave it to the experts. And we saw this attitude reflected in question time yesterday. They abrogate their

responsibility, and we have seen it again today: “These are operational matters—none of my responsibility. Oh my God! If the volunteers are in uproar, well, that’s an operational matter. I’ll just stand back from it.”

This Chief Minister and his ministers exercise a culture of no ministerial oversight. And not only that; the decision to restructure has moved this minister for emergency services five to six steps away from ministerial oversight of his chief officers. He is five or six steps removed from ministerial oversight of his chief officers. And why? Because the government can exercise plausible deniability: “We did not know that the commissioner was going to make that restructure. That was an operational matter. What do we care?”

Well, you are paid, minister, to care. You are paid to protect your community. You are paid to exercise duty of care over your community. You are paid to look after your men and women in the emergency services. You are paid to scrutinise decisions taken by your bureaucrats. In this case you failed to do that and that is why we are moving a motion of no confidence, and that is why the men and women were out there today exercising their vote of no confidence, and that is why you are now the owner of an elephants graveyard.

Mr Speaker, what we have seen in the last little while is this minister also demonstrating his disdain for and lack of interest in the opinions of the experts in the field of bushfire fighting and emergency management. He has stood in this place and he has said on radio: “Well, you know, we don’t want to listen to the opinion of Mr Val Jeffery on this matter of organisational restructure. That’s not really his area of concern, so we don’t really want to listen to his opinion. We will just listen to our bureaucrats, some of whom have only been in Canberra five minutes. We won’t listen to Val Jeffery or Pat Barling. We won’t listen to Pat Barling, who was the president of the association and who represents the captains in discussions with the minister and with the commissioner. We won’t listen to the Michael Lonergans.” What are they? Perhaps they are landed gentry; I do not know. “We will not listen to these people who generationally have been here for a very long time and understand fire on the southern tablelands. We won’t listen to what they think we should do to better organise our emergency management system or to better organise our services to respond to protect the community.”

The minister has demonstrated his disdain and his disrespect for these people and he has demonstrated that he is simply tugging his forelock to bean counters. We now know that the rather workable and rather successful ESA that Bill Wood put on the table in this place, headed up by Peter Dunn, was beginning to work well. It was a light year ahead of the failed ESB of 2003, but we now know that the bean counters were jealous of Peter Dunn’s authority and Peter Dunn’s independence. We now know that the bean counters did not like the fact that Peter Dunn was a stand-alone independent authority who managed his own resources. And why did he have to manage his own resources? Why did he have to manage his own administration? So that he could ensure that the Emergency Services Authority and the four emergency services could respond when the balloon went up. That is what McLeod recommended; that is what Doogan has signed off on—the need for a stand-alone statutory authority, the need for four independent chief officers with their own independent headquarters, not unified command, not the unification.

The paramount recommendation made in the McLeod inquiry was for an independent authority and for the services to be independently responsive. That is the benchmark—and you have failed that. The services have voted that that is not going to work. What they have made very clear is that the independence of the services is paramount. The rural fire service and the fire brigade are distinctly different organisations, with distinctly different cultures, with distinctly different tasks to carry out, and they must be allowed to carry those tasks out unencumbered by bureaucracy.

You have failed the organisation. You have failed the men and women of the services, and by doing that you have failed the ACT community to deliver emergency management and therefore you are doomed as a minister. You deserve not to be there. No confidence is voted in you.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for Planning) (10.47): Mr Speaker, the government will obviously not be supporting this motion today and I reject absolutely the claims made by those opposite about the management of the Emergency Services Agency.

Mr Speaker, the opposition cannot have it both ways. They say: “We demand that the Emergency Services Agency become a statutory authority to prevent bureaucratic interference. We demand that it be independent. We demand that the commissioner make decisions about how the organisation is run, without interference.” But then the one time that the commissioner says, “This is how I want to structure the organisation,” they say: “Minister, you must step in and intervene. You must interfere with the management of the ESA. You must tell the commissioner what to do.” They cannot have it both ways. They cannot say, “Make the ESA independent; guarantee its capacity to operate independently,” and then when they are unhappy with a decision say, “Minister, interfere.”

The commissioner, in putting together the restructure of the ESA, did consult with me. He did say to me, “This is what I am proposing,” and I said to him, “I support your approach and I will support your implementation.” And do you know why I did that, Mr Speaker? Because the territory employs the commissioner to do a job. We employ the commissioner to run the emergency services. That is his job. That is what he is paid for and that is the experience that he has.

I am not an expert in the organisation of emergency services. I am not an expert in how the administration of these organisations should work. I am responsible to the taxpayer for ensuring that the organisation is run appropriately, efficiently, within its budget and in a way, most importantly, that meets the needs of the community, to protect it in times of emergency. That is my job.

I have no reason to doubt the capacity of Commissioner Manson. He comes with extensive experience in the management of emergency services, including extensive fire management experience. Commissioner Manson has been responsible for the response to large-scale fires in the Blue Mountains and large-scale fires in Kosciusko National Park, working with land managers, rural fire services and urban fire services. He has extensive experience in the management of other emergency situations, particularly his most recent experience in a maritime environment. He has the

capacity and the understanding to make decisions about how emergency services should operate and how they should be organised. That is why he is employed. That is his job, and I will stand by him when he makes decisions which he is responsible for about how the organisation should be administered. That is his job and that is my job.

Now let us turn to the issue of the restructure. The restructure is designed to remove layers of senior management and to focus resources at the sharp end. I have already dealt with the specious argument from those opposite about the commissioner not being able to communicate with me. I have already dealt with that because I have demonstrated that the facts show otherwise. The facts show very clearly that the commissioner meets with me regularly, advises me directly, and has done so since I have been minister. So any suggestion that the commissioner and the chief officers cannot talk to me is nonsense. It is garbage, and it is not backed up by the facts. I have dealt with that and I have provided all of that information in question times over the past couple of weeks.

What this restructure does is ensure that more money is available to be spent on those things that are important to protect our community. It means more money for training. At the moment we have an organisation with a budget of close to \$80 million a year. It spends less than one per cent of that on training, which is absurd and should not be happening. It needs to spend much more money on training to make sure that its volunteers and its paid staff have the skills and the refreshing of the skills they need to do their job. That is something that this restructure achieves.

This restructure also directs money away from senior layers of management and into better risk management and risk analysis. As a community we need to know where the risks are and how to prepare for them. It is about predicting, anticipating, planning, being ready. And that is where the money gets spent. Is Mr Pratt saying he does not want that? It sounds like he is, because if he were to trash this restructure that would be the outcome. So I reject that claim as well.

Let us deal with some of the myths about how great the ESA was. Let us talk about some of the issues about how great the ESA was under the previous structure. Ask the urban firefighters, the ACT Fire Brigade, ask the rural fire service, whether they got the money they needed for equipment or for training. When I became minister I was amazed when I went around and spoke to the union that represented the ACT Fire Brigade. I spoke to the RFS, and they said to me, "Look, you've done all these changes but we still can't get replacement PPE." The fire brigade said, "You've done all these changes, but we still haven't got the equipment we need to extract people out of motor vehicle accidents." Mr Speaker, that was the situation under the authority model.

So what was going on? Where was the money being spent? I will tell you where the money was being spent? The money was being spent in layers and layers of back office administration to support a stand-alone authority. That is where the money was being spent, and that is why the government changed it, because we could not justify in all good conscience spending more and more money on the back office functions of it, a stand-alone authority, when that money should have been spent on the front line, should have been spent in equipping our firefighters, equipping our SES officers,

equipping our ambulance officers. That is where it should be spent, that is what our commitment is, and that is what we are now setting about trying to achieve.

Let us talk about some of the other issues that are dealt with in the restructure. One of the biggest complaints in terms of the management of this organisation is how units are dispatched to fires. You talk to any volunteer and they will say very clearly, “We are frustrated by the fact that we are stood up at a shed, ready to go to a fire and we see some other unit being dispatched ahead of us to the fire, even though we know we are the closest. Why is this happening?”

This is a serious problem and the restructure proposes changes to that. It proposes reducing the costs of staffing the Comcen with paid firefighters and it proposes a civilianisation of the Comcen in the same way as has been achieved in relation to the ambulance service, so that the best unit gets sent to the fire—not, “Well, it’s this service” or “It’s that service.”

These are the issues that the government is focused on addressing. But, unfortunately, it is this level of detail which those opposite refuse to engage in because they are welded on to the simplistic answer. The simplistic answer is a statutory authority and the world will be full of lollipops and roses. But it is simply not the case. And if they want to seriously suggest that they have a better idea about managing emergency services, they need to do better than simply suggest that it is a statutory authority or it is nothing. They need to spell out in detail how they will improve issues around training, risk management and analysis, coordination between the various services, the operation of the Comcen and all those matters. Mr Pratt has had nearly three years as the shadow minister and he has provided answers on none of that except to say, “Make it a statutory authority; that’ll fix it.” Well, Mr Speaker, I am sorry, but it just does not cut it. It just does not cut it.

Mr Pratt: You will see the detail.

MR CORBELL: We will?

Mr Pratt: Yes, you will.

MR CORBELL: We have been waiting nearly three years, Mr Pratt. But it is coming Mr Pratt says.

Mr Pratt: Time of my bloody choosing—not yours, son.

MR CORBELL: I know that Mr Pratt needs a bit of time, you know, to work through these issues, but I would have thought if he had such strong opinions on this matter he would have dealt with these before now.

I want to conclude with the action that we saw this morning. I understand that volunteers are angry. I understand that change is a difficult thing and it can be a very confronting thing. What I have said to volunteers this morning is that I will continue to sit down with them, and the commissioner will continue to sit down with them, and talk to them about the detail of the proposals so that they can better understand what the objectives are.

Last week we had Mr Pratt saying, “You know, we’ve got to give it a bit of time to work.” But Mr Pratt gave it no time to work. He just jumped in and has trashed the idea from day one, because it is easier to do that politically.

The actions of the volunteers this morning are of deep regret to me. But my responsibilities as minister are to make sure that we have an organisation that works effectively, responsibly, in a coordinated way and with regard to making sure taxpayers’ money is spent as effectively as possible. Those are my responsibilities. The decisions volunteers have taken today are of deep regret to me. I am hopeful that once they have had the opportunity to sit down and talk about these issues a bit more they will see the benefits that exist.

My door has always been open to volunteers. I have never refused a meeting. I have always sat down and talked to them. I have met with the VBA on numerous occasions. I have met with the fire controllers group on numerous occasions. I have met with the chief officers regularly. I have met with the commissioner regularly. I will go and talk anywhere, any time to anyone about these matters. That has always been my approach.

It was interesting that this morning the shadow minister did not stand up in front of everyone and put the opposition’s position. He was knocked down in the rush by Mr Smyth. Mr Smyth said: “Get out of the way, Steve. Get out of the way; I want to do it.” Where was the shadow minister this morning?

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR CORBELL: Yes, he was in the crowd, but did he stand up in front of everyone and say, “This is our position”? No, Mr Speaker. It was left to Mr Smyth to do that.

The government believes that the restructure will achieve better outcomes for the Canberra community, a better focus on the sharp end, less money in back office administration, more money for training, more money for risk assessment and management, more money for those things that actually count in terms of protecting our community. And I will continue to talk with volunteers and talk with everyone with an interest in this subject to make sure we achieve that outcome on behalf of the Canberra community.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (11.02): Mr Speaker, when I walked in here this morning I found out there was a no-confidence motion in the minister, and when I mentioned to Mrs Burke that it would have been really handy to have been told about that she said I must have had rocks in my head if I did not know that was happening. I just said to her, “Well, you know, I’m not actually in your party, Mrs Burke.” Thank you, Mr Smyth, for coming up to me and apologising. As the whip I suppose he did have that job of letting me know that the decision was made late last night. However, I think several hours have already elapsed this morning. I do not have rocks in my head, but I do have ears on my head—and my ears are open.

All I can assume is that this is not a serious motion—because there was no attempt to explain why it was being put—but another chance for Mr P and his colleagues to grandstand. But it is not a solution to what are clearly deep-rooted problems which, it seems, have been exacerbated by the most recent restructure.

Mr Pratt wasted a good opportunity yesterday to put some relevant information before the Assembly. He moved a motion yesterday, but I have to say I listened to that very, very carefully and I do not believe he represented his constituents very well in putting their case. Perhaps that is why he had to come back with a no-confidence motion today—because he did not do the job very well yesterday.

I believe there is a real problem here, and it is not at all helped by the party-political divided approach to it. Pat Barling and Val Jeffery are the names I hear mentioned all the time. There may be others, but they are the names that get thrown around in this place. I believe they are very good sources of firefighting expertise. I have talked to Val Jeffery; I really enjoy talking to him. He is a bush expert. But I believe also that because they talk to the Liberals and the Liberals talk for them it does not help in this place, which is so divided along party lines. The more they are quoted by the Liberals the less inclined the government will be to listen to them. That is an observation; it is not a statement of fact, but it is what I have observed here today and many days in the recent weeks.

I said yesterday that I could only speak on Mr Pratt's motion from information that was on the public record because that was the information that I had access to. I did not at that time have access to the thoughts and the opinions of the rural fire brigade, not to mention the state emergency services, the urban fire brigade and the ambulance. Well, this morning I had an opportunity to talk to officers of the rural fire brigade. I might say that none of them have ever approached me or sought to give me their point of view and I think that, given the way this has become a bipartisan issue, it would do those services well to talk to other people. In this case there is only one other person, and that is me. So this morning I began that conversation with the representative of the rural fire brigade and I arranged a further briefing. Still, I have got a long way to go before I feel well enough informed to support this motion.

Nonetheless, I will reiterate some of the points I have made in several speeches on this issue. First of all, remember that this issue really goes back a lot further than last week when the ESA was reorganised, and it goes back further than 2003 when we suffered those terrible fires. It goes back to prior to self-government. There are deep cultural issues here. The question is: how do we change the culture? It is fairly clear that we do not just change it with a restructure, because it has not changed. I do not believe it has changed. I have got a lot more work to do before I find out. And, believe me, I will do it, and I will do it deeply—I will not do it superficially and I will not play politics with it, because that is just not going to solve this problem.

There are basic questions that I want answered, and I want them answered on the public record. There is too much innuendo and rumour about this. There is too much in this town anyway, but about this issue it is rumour and innuendo. So let us get it on the public record: what went wrong with the Emergency Services Authority? What went wrong there? Was it just budget? Were there other issues? Were there

personality issues? Did the services all come together and work as one? What went wrong? Why was McLeod's recommendation, which was so enthusiastically taken up, dropped? How can we know that this restructure was a good idea when we do not know what was wrong with the ESB in the first place and the ESA?

I was told this morning that we are back where we were in 2003 when it was the Emergency Services Bureau, and there is nothing out there on the public record to tell me that is not the case. So that is a really important question that needs to be answered before I am going to feel that I really know what is going on here. We need a thoroughgoing review and an analysis to build from because these problems have been going on too long. They will always give the opposition ammunition. They will always have grounds, they believe, for a no-confidence motion and they will throw us off the rails time and time again until we get some proper answers.

Mr Corbell says he is not the expert, and I agree. None of us here is the expert. In fact no one person is. The expertise on fire control is broadly spread across our community, particularly amongst our firefighting services. I have not met the commissioner and I must meet him if I am going to speak about him; nonetheless, some comments can possibly be made just from what is on the public record. He is apparently a relative newcomer to the territory and to the services, but he is Mr Corbell's expert. That is not really good enough, because the expertise is spread very broadly and there is a lot of expertise there because people have been here a long time and involved. If those officers really have thrown their keys into the hat in a serious way, we have got a real problem and it has got to be solved.

It is not a good idea in terms of organisational dynamics to give someone who is new to an organisation, even if they are in charge of it, *carte blanche* to change the restructure, to put out what I believe looks like a pretty good business plan but may have only been written by one person. That is not the way you get acceptance for something that is as important and deep ranging as this. So there are problems. The knowledge, the frustration, of experienced firefighters, many of whom do their work for nothing, has to be seen in this context. What we are seeing here is a familiar sight: a failure of consultation with the people on the ground who are most concerned.

The minister might have done the consultation and come out with exactly the same result; I do not know. We do not know because it was not done. But not involving people is the part of the problem that the minister is facing today—and it cannot be a good feeling to stand out there, with your volunteer RFB clothes on and with the blokes and say, "I am one of you guys," when you are in fact the minister for those guys. I know this must be so hard for Mr Corbell, because he does feel, I am sure, like one of those guys. And he is one of those guys; but he is also the minister and the person that those guys are blaming. It is not a good position. I do not know what to do about it, but I am not going to suggest he resign from either of those positions. Okay? I am not agreeing with you guys on this side today.

We have been told that the minister trusts the commissioner and therefore we must trust the minister. But it is pretty clear the people do not trust the minister, and this recent reorganisation has not helped. If we are going to be stuck—(*Time expired.*)

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra—Leader of the Opposition) (11.12): Mr Corbell said a number of things which I will come to, but one of his statements was that he deeply regrets the action of volunteers today. So he should. I have lived in Canberra all my life apart from three short years, and I have seen a few demonstrations. But I have never seen 150 to 200 volunteers turn up with all their vehicles; seen people like drivers and group captains throw the keys in a bin; or seen experienced people like Val Jeffery, Pat Barling and other area captains hand in letters of resignation, leave their vehicles and go off.

These are people at the front line, who give of their own spare time to defend this community from emergencies—in the case of most of the ladies and gentlemen who turned up today, from bushfires: bushfires that in recent times have ravaged this territory. I find that quite an extraordinary action. I can understand it. Yes, I think the minister should regret it: it is a damning indictment of his administration and, at the end of the day, it is a damning indictment of the minister.

Mr Corbell said a number of things which I should touch on. He spoke about not wanting to be involved. Well, Mr Corbell, you are. You are the minister. We do not want bean counters being involved and being the ones who determine how something as important as the ESA should operate. Yes, we want it to be efficient. Yes, it can be efficient. It can be efficient as a stand-alone organisation. But we want some control and some oversight by the minister.

It is interesting to see what the minister himself actually said on that. He basically contradicted some of his statements. He said that his role is to ensure that the ESA is run appropriately, effectively and within its budget and that it meets the needs of the community in times of emergency. That is what he said he has to do—appropriately and efficiently meet the needs of the community in times of emergency.

How can the ESA meet the needs of the community in times of emergency, and how can it do that efficiently and appropriately, when all the volunteers have no confidence in the structure they have? Today they have shown that lack of confidence in the most extreme way available to them, by senior people resigning and by people leaving their vehicles out there. That is a demonstration of their confidence in this minister's ability to conduct his role to efficiently and appropriately meet the needs of the community in times of emergency. That is simply something that is not going to happen. It is simply something that the minister cannot do. No-one has any confidence in him doing so.

Yes, that should be his role. I accept that that should be his role. He cannot just adopt a completely hands-off approach. He cannot just wipe his hands of it. Clearly what he has put in place is of great concern to these people—in many cases people who have been involved for 15, 20, 30, 40 or, in some cases, 50 years; people who should be listened to, not just consulted. I hear him say, "Yes, I have met with the commissioner 15 times. I have met with some of these people. I meet with volunteers." He is a volunteer himself. That is fine; that is a start.

But there is not much point in meeting people if you do not listen and if you ignore the advice of people who are experts in the field—people who have served on things

like bushfire councils for many years: people who may not be bureaucrats, thank god, but who are practical people out there on the ground who know their structures, who have run brigades, who have faced danger and who have saved places, as Val Jeffery saved Tharwa through quick thinking and quick, proactive action on his part. If he had listened to the bureaucrats, if he had listened to the people above him, nothing would have happened there.

You need to listen to people like that. It is because of people like that—because of people like these volunteers and the people who have 10, 20, 30 or 40 years of experience—that Canberra has been saved on a number of occasions. Houses have been saved because of their ability. I was emergency services minister once, albeit briefly. In the time I was minister, the comments that were made to me by Val Jeffery always made immense sense.

Is this Stanhope government a bit like the British general staff in World War I, with Jon Stanhope as Field Marshal Haig sitting in a chateau sipping champagne and having nothing to do with the troops at the front, having absolutely no idea what is happening, poring over maps, relying on bureaucrats to tell him what is happening and never having a look himself? Is Mr Corbell like General Rawlinson, who was so surprised when he went up to see the battle of Ypres and the couple of feet of mud the troops had to work in that he made the comment “My God, do we send our troops to fight in conditions like this?” He did not have the brains to get up there and have a look for himself; he was removed from the situation.

Are you going to be like that—with no consultation; sitting back looking at maps; sitting back perhaps taking advice from bureaucrats who, however well meaning, do not have the same expertise as people who are out there doing it and do not have the same expertise as the people you really should be listening to—who, in many instances have been doing it and running these organisations for many years?

Today we see people who have served this territory very well take the extreme step of bringing all these vehicles in, leaving them, putting the keys in the bucket, putting in their resignations and walking away. That is the most serious thing I have seen since this Assembly started. And since this Assembly started—interestingly, it was a Labor government too—probably the next most serious thing I saw was a truck blockade. The mob at the time had really annoyed the transport workers and they blockaded Civic. But at least they drove their trucks away. At least that was just a normal demonstration.

Of course we have had other demonstrations. We had the dragway demonstrations; we had the Christian lobby demonstration fairly recently. But all of those demonstrations pale into insignificance compared with the action taken today by these volunteers who are just fed up with this government, fed up with the fact that it does not listen to them, and fed up that the government shows so much contempt for them that it has gone into this restructure without listening to them.

It was all very well for Mr Corbell to say today, “I will have a chat. I will have a think about this. I will see what happens.” It is a bit late for that. In answer to some questions today, these volunteers said that they have no confidence in the reforms,

they have no confidence in the commissioner and, tellingly, they have no confidence in this minister.

It is entirely appropriate that this side of the house brings this motion. I am delighted that Dr Foskey is actually now going to get a briefing. Better late than never, Dr Foskey! It is nice that you are starting to show an interest. It is a little bit late. Talk about catch-up there. Maybe the Greens could take a bit of responsibility for a few other things as well—like fuel loads in forests. Maybe it is about time that you started listening as well. You are big on consultation. We will see what Dr Foskey does with this motion, though it does not appear that she is going to support it.

The opposition certainly have a duty to move this motion. We would be failing in our duty were we not to keep this government accountable, and we will keep this government accountable. This government has now been in for six years or more; it is in its second term. It was probably always a reasonably arrogant government; it has now become the most arrogant government since self-government. It does not listen. It does not take people into its confidence. It ignores perfectly reasonable, sensible suggestions and ideas of ordinary men and women in this city. In this case, it is ignoring the very sensible suggestions and the expertise of many ordinary men and women of our city. I should not say ordinary men and women; I call them extraordinary men and women. They are volunteers; they put their lives on the line to defend this community in times of crisis. They are extraordinary people.

Those people are not being listened to by this government. Very few of those people out there today had confidence in the reforms, the commissioner or the minister. That is absolutely telling. You need to listen to them and you need to take into account what they are doing.

I do not know if it is too late. Obviously, this motion will be carried on the numbers. Of course, Mr Corbell will survive. But if Mr Corbell and the government—if Mr Corbell and you opposite—want to even remotely gain the respect of any of these people, you will not go through sham consultations and you will not put your head in the sand, keep it in the sand and refuse to talk to these people; you will listen to them.

I do not know if you are capable of doing that. I do not know if you are just so pigheaded that you are going to try to ride this out because you have got the numbers. But it is about time you started listening to people. It is about time you listened to people on the ground rather than listening to people in an ivory tower, keeping your heads in the clouds and refusing to accept what is happening down there on the ground and acting accordingly. That is your duty. You are failing in that duty. This minister has failed in his duty. (*Time expired.*)

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts) (11.22): Mr Speaker, here we have it—another day, another no-confidence motion. It is about all those opposite have got, isn't it? Another day, another no-confidence motion. We have one a week—one a week! Another day, another no-confidence motion.

That is how serious this is. It is confetti—a confetti motion. Another working day. “What can we do today to not do any work?” the Liberal party say. We know that they do not like that; they do not like the real stuff. They do not like work. They do not like making policy.

We have seen it this week. We have seen it again this week. Here we are in the middle of March, and there has been not a single question from the shadow minister for health about health—not a single question! Here we are halfway through March, and there has been not a single question on education by the shadow minister for education. What did she say yesterday when she was gently chided about not asking questions about education as the shadow minister? She said:

I would not waste my time asking questions ... about education.

That is what she said yesterday.

Mr Pratt: Point of order! Mr Speaker, my point of order goes to relevance.

MR SPEAKER: The Chief Minister has criticised—

Mr Pratt: This is a vote of no confidence in Mr Corbell, not a vote of confidence in somebody else about education policy.

MR SPEAKER: The Chief Minister is being critical of the opposition for bringing this forward. He is putting that into context in the light of the opposition’s contribution. That is perfectly relevant.

MR STANHOPE: Absolutely, and quite rightly so. We need to go to why this motion was moved today. This motion was moved today—

Mr Pratt: Because you are incompetent.

MR STANHOPE: It is the second no-confidence motion in two weeks. It is a confetti motion—a motion moved by an opposition which has no substance, which has no policies and which has no commitment to any of its portfolio responsibilities. We have a shadow minister for health who is yet to ask a question on health. We have a shadow minister for education who is yet to ask a question on education—to the point where yesterday she interjected that she would not waste her time asking questions about education. That is how significant and serious the issue of education is for the opposition.

Yesterday we had the embarrassing spectacle of the shadow minister for emergency services trying to ask a question about the budget. The shadow treasurer asked a question about health because the shadow treasurer was concerned that the shadow minister for health was not asking any questions about health; he thought that at least he would go to an issue of some substance. The shadow treasurer asked a question of the minister for health about health. He actually necked the shadow minister for health—actually relegated him to the backbench, with the support of all of his colleagues. Then we saw the shadow minister for emergency services stumbling

through a question on the Emergency Services Authority's budget—and what a stumble it was. I would comment, too, on Mrs Burke. Quite frankly, I have no idea what Mrs Burke does in this place.

There we have it. Today we have the most succinct explanation of the Liberal Party's angst with me around the bushfire. We have today, and I quote directly, "that the Chief Minister's failing on 18 January 2003 was that he refused to overrule his firefighting experts". We have it now in *Hansard*, from the shadow minister for emergency services: my failing on 18 January 2003 was, in the words of Mr Pratt, that I refused to overrule the experts.

My sin, my crime—the matter for which I am to be criticised in relation to the fire—is that I would not overrule the experts! As somebody who knows absolutely nothing about firefighting, I would not. Mr Pratt accuses me as somebody with no experience in firefighting. He says it again now. He repeats it: as a person with absolutely no experience in emergency services or in firefighting, I should have overruled those that were employed by the territory to fight fires, to deal with emergencies.

This is a remarkable proposition. The shadow minister for emergency services has just repeated it. He uses the fact that I refused to intervene—I refused to give directions to the head of the Emergency Services Authority—as a reason for why the minister for emergency services today should be asked to resign.

We need to go to the nub of this motion. We call it a no-confidence motion. What the Liberal Party has done today, in this place, is say that, because the minister for emergency services refuses to overrule the head of the Emergency Services Authority, he should resign. Today you have moved a motion asking the minister for emergency services to resign his portfolio responsibilities because he has refused to overrule the expert employed to manage emergency services within the territory.

This is a remarkable proposition. To what extent will shadow ministers, if elected—to what extent will members of the Liberal Party, if elected to government—pursue this particular philosophy in each of their portfolios? What role will Mr Pratt, as minister for emergency services, adopt in relation to the emergency services? Will he be out there at the fire front? Will he be directing volunteer firefighters—"This way", "Run down this gully", "Fire up that road", "Put that fire out"? Will Mr Pratt grab the radio and direct the helicopters? Is that what he is suggesting?

Mr Pratt: That's pathetic.

MR STANHOPE: This is pathetic, he says now, when he realises the logical conclusion of the position he has just put—that my failing on 18 January was that I refused to direct how to fight the fire. If that is your position, then what you are saying, Mr Pratt, is that if you were the minister for emergency services you would insist on retaining the right to direct firefighters how to fight fires. That is what you are saying.

Mr Pratt: I didn't say that.

MR STANHOPE: You just criticised me for refusing to overrule Peter Lucas-Smith and Mike Castle on 18 January. You have stood here today and said that I must accept

responsibility for not overruling them. If that is your position, then you are accepting that your role as the minister for emergency services will be to accept full responsibility for all operational decisions in relation to emergency services.

If that is the philosophy underpinning this particular motion of no confidence—asking the minister for emergency services to resign because he will not intervene in an operational decision—then you have to ask, “How will other ministers engage with this philosophy?” Will the minister for education in a Liberal government stand in front of the class or determine absolutely what the curriculum shall be? Will the minister for health actually stand in the operating theatre? Will the minister for health actually assist in brain surgery? Where do you draw the line? You want interference in relation to operational matters involving the Emergency Services Authority.

Mr Pratt: Point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR STANHOPE: What is your attitude then to the role of a minister for health?

Mr Pratt: Mr Speaker, I have a point of order.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister, there is a point of order.

Mr Pratt: My point of order is on relevance, Mr Speaker. When will he defend the minister?

MR SPEAKER: Order! He is being relevant because he is drawing attention to the subject by referring to the motion of no confidence.

MR STANHOPE: It is an absolute nonsense. As I said before, it is another day, another no-confidence motion—two no-confidence motions in two weeks. We are now into March. Not a single question from the opposition on an issue of substance and concern to the Canberra community like education, health or the budget. None!

We have all forgotten what Bill Stefaniak stands for, who he represents or what his shadow portfolios are. Nobody has got a clue. Nor with Mrs Burke. Just rabbit on around inconsequencia. The shadow minister for health and the shadow minister for education have not asked a question all year on either of their portfolios. The two biggest areas of responsibility within the territory—the most significant, the ones of most importance and relevance to the people of Canberra—health and education: not a single question. We have this stunt today. It is a stunt, and it will be seen for what it is—a stunt.

Fancy seeking credibility with the community and standing up in this place today and asking the minister for emergency services to resign because he will not intervene in an operational matter! You have parroted on and pontificated now for months about the need for operational independence. When the minister stands up on the principle of operational independence and says, “I respect the need for operational independence”—what you pretend you are calling for—you ask him to resign. He has an expert, and he wants the expert to do his job. He is going to support him in doing that job, just as I will and just as I will support him. (*Time expired.*)

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (11.33): It took the Chief Minister until the last 27 seconds of his speech to say anything of relevance in this debate.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Smyth! The point of order about relevance has been raised, and I have ruled on it.

MR SMYTH: I am using context here, Mr Speaker, to quote you. The Chief Minister said, “The opposition has not asked questions about the two biggest of areas of responsibility in the ACT since the start of this year.” Well, here we are in the second week; we will get to them. But it is interesting. The minister was removed from the two biggest areas of responsibility in the ACT because he could not cut it as a minister. He was removed from education, and we all know the debacle that he left for Ms Gallagher, who had to clean up the child advocate issue.

Mr Stanhope: Point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SMYTH: What standing order?

Mrs Burke: Yes, what standing order, Jon?

MR SPEAKER: Resume your seat, Mr Smyth. What is the point of order?

Mr Stanhope: It is the standard of behaviour that we expect from that particular member these days.

MR SPEAKER: What is the point of order?

Mr Stanhope: The point of order, Mr Speaker, is this: whilst I understand that this is a substantive motion and the debate might be broad ranging, the suggestion just made—or the allegation or claim—is simply untrue.

MR SMYTH: That is not a point of order.

Mr Stanhope: It is not true. We know of the propensity for not telling the truth but it is simply not true.

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, resume your seat. That is not a point of order.

MR SMYTH: The Chief Minister raised the two biggest areas of responsibility. I am surely entitled to respond. And then what happened in health? This is the minister who was removed from health after the health waiting list got to 5,099—the largest one. The elective surgery waiting list went to 5,099. What happened? He was removed from health as well. This minister has got form.

Mr Stanhope: Mr Speaker—

MR SMYTH: He has failed in planning—

Mr Stanhope: —that is not true.

MR SMYTH: He has failed in the land release policy—

Mr Stanhope: It is not appropriate—

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Stanhope: I note—

MR SMYTH: He has failed on City Hill.

Mr Stanhope: Mr Speaker, on the point of order: I know it is broad ranging but the motion does not go to Mr Corbell's performance in relation to health. To suggest that he was removed from health as a result of the CFR is simply not true. I do not believe it is appropriate—

MR SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order; it is a debating point.

Mr Stanhope: Why is it not a point of order?

MR SPEAKER: Order! It is a debating point. Mr Smyth raises these issues in the context of the debate. He says that, because Mr Corbell exited other portfolios, that is a justification for him exiting this portfolio—I think. That is relevant. I do not know how much weight it carries, but—

MR SMYTH: Then we can look at what has happened in ESA since this minister took up the portfolio, having been removed from education and then removed from health. What has he done in the last eight or 10 months in emergency services? We have got a reform process that has been comprehensively rejected by everyone involved except the minister and the commissioner. We have got a consultation process. The commissioner says that one of his key objectives is to “engage and value our people through careful and considered consultation, acknowledging a work-life balance and acting in an ethical way to all”. What did the volunteers say this morning? They said, “We weren't listened to; we weren't heard; we weren't asked.”

Under the minister, we have the continuing headquarters debacle; we are paying rent on empty buildings. Three out of four of the buildings are empty. Another debacle. We have the loss of senior staff. Since the minister came to the control of ESA, seven senior staff have left the Emergency Services Authority—the former commissioner, the former deputy commissioner, a former commissioner of the fire brigade, the head of the fire brigade and his deputy CO. We have seen the head and deputy head of the rural fire service go. They are voting with their feet. We have seen a lack of equipment. We have seen a fleet not ready for the fire season, where half the heavy capacity of the rural fire brigade was off the road as fires were burning on the perimeter of the ACT. We have seen a lack of training funds and opportunity for training. A group of volunteers was to go to Sydney for training and the funds were withdrawn at the last moment. Who paid for it? The New South Wales Rural Fire Service is subsidising it.

We have seen this minister fail to deliver on projects. We have seen budget difficulties. It is interesting that it is the budget difficulties that drive this. Admittedly, the minister has inherited this from some of the former ministers. It is the budget—

Mr Stanhope: Budget difficulties?

MR SMYTH: Yes, this is what it is all about, Chief Minister. Did you not listen to your minister? I notice you took 9½ minutes not to talk about the minister. There was 9½ minutes, for five minutes of which you defended yourself. You did not defend your minister. Here is the justification: the reasons to maintain the ESA within the justice portfolio are very clear; they are ensuring that the organisation works within its budget and ensuring that the taxpayer does not have to pay for duplicated services.

What about greater efficiency? What about more effectiveness? What about more troops on the ground? What about more equipment? What about more planning? None of that. This is about the budget process. Did the ESA have budget difficulties? Yes, it did. For two years in a row it overran its budget by a total of \$5 million a year.

Mr Stanhope: Did you vote for Bill?

Mrs Burke: Jon, you're such a sad man.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister and Mrs Burke! I know you like to talk to each other, but not now, please.

MR SMYTH: Some \$10 million worth of a Treasurer's advance had to be forwarded to the ESA because the ministers were not overlooking it. Ministerial responsibility went out the window. The ministers are responsible for the money that their departments and their organisations spend, but we had a succession of Labor ministers who did not have the oversight. What have we got? This is the "amputate the leg because you've got an ingrown toenail" solution to controlling the ESA. Why did you not fix the budget problems? If the budget was the problem, why did you not fix that?

Mr Corbell said, "I understand change is a difficult thing." It can be. But when you moved from the old system into the statutory authority, did the volunteers object? No, they did not. They accepted it, they applauded it and they worked with it to make it work. They had hope and confidence that it would deliver a better outcome. What are they saying about your solution? What did they say this morning? When asked to vote in favour of the reform, they unanimously voted against the reform. When asked to vote in favour of the commissioner, they voted unanimously against the commissioner. When asked to vote in favour of the minister, they voted unanimously against the minister.

We have only to look at the last 10 months and at the minister's five years as a minister to know that he has failed in everything he has touched. Even in his attacks on those who voiced opposition to him he said, "There are a few noisy people out there." That is what he said: "There are a few noisy people out there."

I did not get a count, but I assume that there were something like 120 or 150 volunteers out there this morning. We are probably talking about a third to a half of the operational members—the active members—of both the SES and the RFS who were out there this morning. They actually were not noisy. They were very dignified and they were very calm. They did not pull a stunt like wearing a uniform to pretend to be one of the boys. They actually wanted the minister to talk to them, but he said, “I am here as a volunteer.”

The problem is that it is not a few noisy people out there. The minister and the commissioner are the lone voices in the wilderness saying that these reforms are good. He is the one who is not listening to people. It is interesting. The excuse is, “We’re not going to control units; we’re not going to be operational”. He says, “They are the commissioner’s reforms and I back the commissioner.”

But who is letting the commissioner insert the ESA back into JACS? The commissioner cannot do that. The commissioner cannot say, “I am jumping back into the fold; I want to be there.” One person gives the permission for that, and that is the minister. The minister is responsible for these reforms. One person only has endorsed these reforms, and that is the minister. One person only has done this.

When his attack failed, the minister raised the issue that volunteers are concerned about which unit gets responded first. Because of which unit responded first, we are going to drag the ESA back into JACS? First it was budget; then people were concerned about Comcen and how it responds. Well, fix Comcen. Again, this is cutting off the leg—amputating a leg—to fix an ingrown toenail. The minister does not have the ability, the wherewithal or the courage to control his organisations as he should.

That is the failing here. The minister does not have the ability, the wherewithal or the courage to take command, to take control of his ministerial portfolio. That is the problem here. He can say, “I’ve been sold a pup by the commissioner.” He can say, “I’ve been sold a pup.” That is his problem, because he accepted what the commissioner said. He stood next to the commissioner when they launched this and he said, “I am behind this. I am fully supportive of this.” They are the two lone voices in the entire population who are saying that this is a good thing.

This motion should get up, because of the minister’s failings. The minister’s failings since he has become the minister for emergency services include a reform process that will not improve the situation and that has been comprehensively rejected by all those who will be affected by it; his failure to consult; the continuing debacle on the headquarters for emergency services, where we now pay rent on three empty buildings out of four buildings; the loss of senior staff and the hundreds of years of experience that went begging there this morning; the fact that he allowed the fleet not to be ready for the fire season and seemed totally unaware of or unconcerned by it; the lack of equipment for volunteers and lack of equipment replacement; and the lack of training funds and opportunities—chaps for chainsaws and chainsaw training, with New South Wales paying for our training.

There is the failure to deliver projects, which has happened before, and budget difficulties that he has done nothing to control. That is why this morning the volunteers voted no confidence in the reform, in the commissioner and in the minister. This minister should go.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for the Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Housing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (11.42): I want to address a couple of things that Mr Smyth said. He was talking about Mr Corbell's transition from minister for health to the position of being the first law officer of the territory. I find that a very interesting backward slide—to go from being the minister for health to being the first law officer of the territory, being responsible for policing, for community safety generally, for emergency services and for corrections. I find that an interesting one.

When those opposite say that Mr Corbell has had a transition, I also find it interesting to note that he is still the Minister for Planning. If my recollection serves me correctly, Mr Corbell was the Minister for Planning after the 2001 election. That is a long time ago. Mr Speaker, it may very well be that Mr Corbell—having enjoyed the confidence of two sets of government, thank you very much—may be the longest serving planning minister in Australia. In my view, that does not sound like a lack of confidence—quite the contrary.

I will observe this, Mr Speaker: Mr Corbell has never once lost the leadership of his parliamentary party. He has never lost an election. What was the result in 1996—in the federal election of 1996? Oh dear, there was a 20 something per cent swing against somebody. I wonder who that was. Perhaps it was the member for backbench activity up the back there, Mr Smyth. Perhaps it was. Mr Speaker, let us talk about confidence. Mr Smyth has lost the confidence of his colleagues, yet he has the temerity to talk about lack of confidence in Mr Corbell.

I believe that going from the poison chalice of health to the poison chalice of AG's is an upward mark, thank you very much.

Ms Gallagher: John!

MR HARGREAVES: Sorry about that, DCM. But you will get to be the attorney-general one day, Deputy Chief Minister, when your stars are on the ascendancy. I just think this is silly. If you come forward with a silly argument, you are going to get a silly argument back. The reason is that he is a silly, argumentative little man.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Withdraw that.

MR HARGREAVES: I withdraw most of that, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Withdraw all of it.

MR HARGREAVES: All right, I withdraw all of it then, Mr Speaker, if it pleases you. Mr Speaker, this whole issue goes to operational management. These people here are saying, "Minister, you've got a couple of thousand people in your department;

however, we want you to micro-manage it. We would like you, please, to make sure that we buy the right type of photocopier and the right type of fasteners to go on the hoses.” We want him to micro-manage his departments? How stupid is that.

I would like to ask this, by way of comparison. When the Liberal government were micro-managing emergency services in 2001, were they micro-managing the clearing of bushfire fuel loadings out there in the national park? I do not think so. Were they micro-managing such things as the creation of community fire units? I do not think so. The fact is that they were not micro-managing; they were not doing any management of those particular services.

When we came to government in 2001, it was because there was an expression of confidence in the Labor government’s ability to manage these things. We had an awful battle to recover from the debacle that was left to us in 2001, particularly around bushfire safety. It was not the Liberals who did the original bushfire management plan; it was not them at all.

We talk about confidence in Mr Corbell. Correct me if I am wrong, but Mr Corbell actually lived in one of the suburbs very badly affected by the 2003 bushfires. Mr Corbell’s vote at the local polling booth increased in the 2004 election, as it did in the surrounding polling booths. To me, that is an expression of confidence from the community in Mr Corbell.

Mrs Burke: Was—past tense.

MR HARGREAVES: Was—yes, right? I believe you! The voters in the 2004 election did not believe you, and they will not believe you again. They did not believe you in 2001, they did not believe you in 2004 and they will not believe you in 2008.

What Mr Smyth is trying to do is this. He is pretty clever at it—I will pay the credit—because he is a real wordsmith, this fellow: a really good wordsmith. He is saying that we have management changes and we have operational changes. The management change concerns the structure of the management of the Emergency Services Agency as opposed to the authority. That is about senior officer level and upwards. Then we have got operational changes. For example, the putting together of the fire services is an operational matter. Mr Smyth—quite cleverly, with his wordage—tried to weave some intricacies through all of this and mix the two up. He tried to make sure that the two actually functioned.

He would remember when there were significant changes in the RFS and he would remember when there were significant changes in the SES. We had an enormous groundswell of discontent at that time. Some of those people packed their bags and left. Mr Speaker, the thing is that they did that under the Liberals’ watch. What did the Labor party do? The Labor party said, “This is a management issue. We will watch it and see what happens.” Did we bring a no-confidence motion on it? No.

But do you know what those opposite did, Mr Speaker? They went around and stoked them. They went around to their little mates—their leakers in the service—to keep feeding all this nonsense to Mr Smyth. They stoked them. The honourable member of

the RFS and the honourable member of the SES are being stoked by the fifth columnists under the direction of Mr Smyth.

We saw it this morning. Did you see the puppeteer out there this morning—the orchestrator? Did you see the orchestra conductor out there with his arms waving in the air saying, “What do we want? Justice. When do we want it?” Says Mr Smyth. Mate, you would do well in front of a Labor party industrial rally. When you get kicked out of parliament, come and see me and I will see if I can get you a volunteer job. I will get you a volunteer job because of the old orchestration. You think, “Oh, where’s my biro?” I know where your biro was.

Mr Speaker, this man has temerity. He is the one guy that has lost a federal election. This guy led those opposite in the leadership team that lost the 2001 election. This guy led them so that they were such a disorganised rabble that they were a laughing stock out there. Then everybody in the Liberal Party said, “Whoops, we do not have enough confidence in you any more. Enough is enough. We’d better put him on the backbench where he can do no harm.” What was the problem with that, Mr Speaker? The problem with that is that he has got too much time on his hands. What does he do? He thinks, “I can just sit here and foment mischief.”

Mr Stefaniak would do well to check out some of his activities, to investigate him fully. If I was you, I would get your bullet-proof vest and turn it around the other way. He is after your job. He is after your job, and if he has to get your job on the way he will do it. Don’t you think he is your mate, because he is not? If anybody should have a no-confidence motion in them passed in this place, it is that person on the backbench, Mr Smyth.

Mr Stefaniak: Say something nice about someone.

MR HARGREAVES: I will say something nice about you. You are really a nice bloke, Bill. Now you have heard it. You have heard it; you have asked for it. I have given it to you. But you are sitting in front of the sneakiest person this place has ever seen.

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

That the question be now put.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 6

| | | | |
|--------------|---------------|------------|--------------|
| Mr Barr | Mr Gentleman | Mrs Burke | Mr Stefaniak |
| Mr Berry | Mr Hargreaves | Mrs Dunne | |
| Mr Corbell | Ms Porter | Mr Mulcahy | |
| Dr Foskey | Mr Stanhope | Mr Pratt | |
| Ms Gallagher | | Mr Smyth | |

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Question put:

That **Mr Pratt's** motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 6

Noes 9

| | | | |
|------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Mrs Burke | Mr Stefaniak | Mr Barr | Mr Gentleman |
| Mrs Dunne | | Mr Berry | Mr Hargreaves |
| Mr Mulcahy | | Mr Corbell | Ms Porter |
| Mr Pratt | | Dr Foskey | Mr Stanhope |
| Mr Smyth | | Ms Gallagher | |

Question so resolved in the negative.

Utilities (Energy Industry Levy) Amendment Bill 2007

Mr Stanhope, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts) (11.57): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Over the last two years the ACT has been an active participant in a series of national energy market reforms aimed at streamlining the regulation of the generation and supply of electricity and gas. In doing so, the ACT government has worked to ensure that the provision of electricity and gas services to the ACT remains of a high quality and that the long-term interests of ACT consumers are protected.

Without a secure supply of electricity and gas, Canberra could not maintain its excellent standard of living. The Utilities (Energy Industry Levy) Amendment Bill I am presenting to the Assembly today is an example of the government's responsible approach to the reform on behalf of the people of Canberra.

As part of the national reform process, the commonwealth and all states and territories agreed in June 2004 to the Australian energy market agreement. This agreement defines the objectives and key structure and timing of the reforms. Earlier this year, COAG supported an amendment to the agreement to formalise state and territory funding obligations to the national energy market rule-making body, the Australian Energy Market Commission. This rule-making body and its functions are necessary for the reform to be successful, as the ACT alone does not have the power or resources to undertake the duties this body performs. The commission is also vital in ensuring that jurisdictional concerns are treated in an even-handed and equitable manner.

The agreement schedules the transfer of most state and territory energy market regulation functions to a national regime and the phasing out of associated jurisdictional licensing regimes from 2007. In the ACT, these functions are currently undertaken by the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission, the ICRC. In the amended agreement, states and territories agreed to fully fund the commission on the basis of the cost-sharing arrangements agreed to by jurisdictions and embodied in the commission's funding agreement. The ACT contribution averages 1.78 per cent of total estimated AEMC costs.

The ICRC currently collects fees from industry to fund their regulatory activities and those of the Office of the Technical Regulator and the Essential Services Consumer Council. The latter two bodies deliver safety regulation and consumer protection functions to ACT consumers. These critical functions will remain under ACT regulation. The phasing out of licence fees removes the base funding for these activities. It is important to all Canberrans that these organisations are adequately funded.

The bill I am presenting to the Assembly today is intended to replace the licence fee regime and establish a new equitable legislative framework allowing for the collection of funds from energy utilities for meeting the costs of national and local energy regulation. This is not a government revenue-raising opportunity. The new levy will progressively replace, and is not additional to, the fees already collected through the licensing regime that is scheduled for removal. I intend to appoint the ICRC as the initial administrator of the levy to ensure a smooth transition from the existing licence fee regime to the new energy levy regime.

This legislative approach has been endorsed by both the commonwealth and industry. Similar legislation has already been adopted in New South Wales, with South Australia and Tasmania also developing similar legislation.

The new legislation will ensure that the national and local regulation costs will continue to be shared between electricity and gas utilities in an equitable and transparent manner and that ACT consumer interests continue to be served. It is anticipated that the impost of the new levy on industry will not exceed the fees previously collected. With the administrative efficiencies offered by the national regime, industry should now also be able to remove many of the additional compliance costs which were previously incurred.

Accordingly, I commend the Utilities (Energy Industry Levy) Amendment Bill 2007 to the Assembly.

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

Electricity (Greenhouse Gas Emissions) Amendment Bill 2007

Mr Hargreaves, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for the Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Housing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12.02):
I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The Electricity (Greenhouse Gas Emissions) Amendment Bill I am presenting to the Assembly today is an example of the government's responsible approach to addressing climate change on behalf of the people of Canberra. Rising greenhouse emissions pose a significant threat to the social, environmental and economic welfare of ACT citizens, present and future.

The greenhouse gas abatement scheme, GGAS, was established under the Electricity (Greenhouse Gas Emissions) Act 2004 and commenced on 1 January 2005. The scheme is designed to reduce or offset greenhouse gas emissions associated with the production of electricity.

The scheme requires retailers of electricity in the ACT to procure an increasing component of their product each year from cleaner and/or greener sources, thereby effecting large reductions in associated greenhouse gas emissions. In the ACT, electricity use accounts for over 60 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. Targeting electricity production and consumption is a key step to achieving meaningful greenhouse gas reductions in the ACT. In its first full year of operation, 2005, the scheme reduced ACT greenhouse gas emissions by 316,362 tonnes. This is the equivalent of the annual emissions produced by around 73,570 cars.

The greenhouse gas abatement scheme is the single most effective greenhouse gas abatement measure currently available to the territory and demonstrates how an interjurisdictional emissions trading scheme can work, which can form the model for a national emissions trading scheme in the future. The ACT scheme operates in tandem with New South Wales. It was originally envisaged that both schemes would be interim measures until a national greenhouse emissions trading market was established.

The ACT participates in the interjurisdictional working group, developing a national emissions trading scheme. It has become increasingly clear that early progress on a national emissions trading market is not likely. New South Wales, who also chair the interjurisdictional committee, have accepted that their scheme needs to be continued past 2012. They have recently amended their legislation to extend its effect to 2020, with a provision that the scheme will be terminated once an effective national market is established.

For operational consistency and maintained industry investment certainty, the ACT should also extend its relevant legislation. All ACT electricity retailers also operate in New South Wales and have already adjusted their reporting and purchasing policies to reflect the new time line. This scheme allows the ACT to enjoy sustained greenhouse gas reduction outcomes at minimal cost.

Accordingly, I commend the Electricity (Greenhouse Gas Emissions) Amendment Bill 2007 to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Dr Foskey**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Planning and Environment—Standing Committee Reference

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (12.06): I move:

That:

- (1) the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment inquire into and investigate public transport in the ACT specifically:
 - (a) the operation of ACTION buses and whether they meet the needs of the public and consider factors such as:
 - (i) governance;
 - (ii) administrative function;
 - (iii) budget; and
 - (iv) timetabling;
 - (b) the sustainable transport plan including:
 - (i) the appropriateness of the plan especially targets;
 - (ii) progress towards implementation; and
 - (iii) measures needed to ensure targets are met;
 - (c) issues that assist or impede the establishment and maintenance of effective public transport; and
 - (d) any other issues; and
- (2) the Committee report by 25 September 2007.

This is an important issue, and it is timely that it comes after a brief discussion on greenhouse gases and how they relate to the electricity industry, because the next single-biggest producer of greenhouse gas emissions in the ACT is transport, at 27 per cent. We see the importance of public transport in the whole equation in relation to greenhouse gas emissions. Mr Hargreaves used important words about the social, environmental and economic future of our territory being influenced by greenhouse gas emissions. So having a discussion at any stage on the future of our public transport system is important. It is also the case that in the current climate it is time that we had a thorough investigation into the operation of our public transport system in the ACT.

The appropriate place for that, where there can be input from the community and that input from the community can be passed on to the Assembly in an undoctored way, is through the planning and environment committee which has been set up to have responsibility for oversight of the public transport system and the accompanying issues in relation to the environment. Therefore, this motion attempts to refer to the planning and environment committee an investigation into the operation of public transport in the ACT.

It is a long time since, and there probably never has been, a full examination of the public transport system by a committee of this Assembly. In the last Assembly there was an inquiry into the operation of the taxi industry, and it had some concomitant terms of reference in relation to sustainable transport. But there has not been a proper investigation of the operation of public transport by any committee of this place for a very long time, if at all.

It has now become very important that we look at the operation of public transport, in particular in relation to the operation of ACTION buses, because there is now a very live debate in the community that ACTION buses, the principal mode of public transport in this territory, are failing to meet the needs of the public. There are a number of issues that underpin that.

Since the changes that were introduced in relation to ACTION buses in the last budget, when it was decorporatised, I have expressed my concern at the inappropriately long chain of command between the people running ACTION buses and the minister responsible. The fact that ACTION buses is now in a silo inside the Department of Territory and Municipal Services, rather than a freestanding authority, means that we have lost a lot of expertise, and people have resigned from the service, as I predicted they might, as we have seen in other areas where the organisation has been decorporatised and subsumed into intertwined departments.

There is a matter of grave concern that people feel that they are no longer operating a bus company and that they are operating a bureaucracy. There are issues of governance and the administrative functions of how ACTION buses operate which have a real impact on the provision of services in the ACT.

Then we have the desire of the government to cut back expenditure on buses, which has resulted in a new and very unfortunate timetable. Part way through last week in the Assembly, we started a motion on the operation of the timetable. Although that matter has not been concluded, the minister signalled his intention not to take any notice of the desire of many in the community by circulating an amendment, which was the usual Labor Party stunt: "We will take out all words after 'that' and replace them with our own"—which basically praised the operation of ACTION buses—"Because we are the government and we have the numbers, we can."

But we have to take into account that public transport is a vital community service. It is a vital community service because, as I have said in this place before, more than 50 per cent of Canberrans do not have direct access to private transport; they do not drive. Because of their age, they are too young or, as Mr Mulcahy talked about, as people get older they wean themselves out of their cars and they need a proper public

transport system to allow them to get around this territory. In addition, there are people who are infirm or who choose not to drive, for a variety of reasons.

Fifty per cent of Canberrans at any one time do not drive. Many of those people do not have family members who drive or who have access to a car, and they rely upon the public transport system. Many families rely on the public transport system to get their children to school, to get their children to their weekend or after-school jobs and a range of other things. Students who have finished school and who are at university and colleges rely upon public transport to get them to lectures and to get them from their lectures to their job that keeps the bread on the table, the clothes on their back or buys the books. They rely on a service that gets them around town.

Shift workers are particularly reliant upon a reliable bus service. We have at the moment a bus service which is really good if you work in a nine to five office job, and particularly good if you work in Civic, Woden, Belconnen or Russell. If you want to get to work in the morning and home in the afternoon, that is fine. But, beyond that, there is a real problem.

Everywhere I go and in every area of Canberra people come to me to complain about the problems of the bus service. Some of them bring specific complaints about failure to arrive at a particular time or how the service has changed so much that they cannot get around any more or as efficiently as they used to, which I and other members on this side have raised directly with the minister for transport. He cannot diminish the number of criticisms and complaints that have come through my office and, I know, Mr Mulcahy's office and, I presume, other member's offices in relation to public transport.

In addition, if you go to every public meeting, every public event, someone will bail you up to talk about how bad the public transport system is in the ACT. I will give you a few examples: in relation to schools, the children at Alfred Deakin High were hauled off the buses and told the buses were too full: "Make your own way home."

When the students at Tuggeranong College, for which there are no dedicated school buses—the only college in the territory for which there are no dedicated school buses because, fair enough, the bus interchange is not very far away—go with their school bags and their school books to get on a route bus, because there are no school buses, they are told by drivers that they should not be using route buses, they should be using dedicated school buses and they should be using school buses to get home. However, the government does not provide buses for them. This is not a complaint that there should be buses for Lake Tuggeranong College; it is a complaint about the fact that the students at Lake Tuggeranong College are badly treated when they use the route buses.

The students at St Eddie's find that the bus leaves St Edmund's two minutes after the bell; so they do not have time to get out of their classroom, go to their locker, pick up their books and catch the bus before the bus leaves. The buses to St Edmund's, St Clare's, and some of the Belconnen high schools, like my own daughter's high school, Canberra High, and Belconnen High, are overcrowded. These are the complaints that come to me.

Nurses at the hospital now take two hours to get home after working a shift. They work a long shift; they do hard work; and because of the changes to the buses it now takes nurses who finish work at about 3 o'clock and who live in Tuggeranong two hours to get home, when it once took them an hour. The taking of two hours to get places where it once took them 40 minutes or an hour is the real problem for people in Canberra.

A girl came to me recently when I was out in the community. She lives in the Tuggeranong Valley and works in Kingston. She works on Saturday in Kingston. She is supposed to start work at quarter to 9 in the morning. She had been, for some time, able to get to work from the Tuggeranong Valley to Kingston and start work by quarter to 9. With the changes to the bus service, she now cannot get to work until quarter to 10. Her indulgent employer has said, "That is all right. We will let you start at quarter to 10 rather than quarter to 9." But if something goes wrong with those connections, she does not get to work until quarter to 11. I fear that people like that will not be able to keep their jobs because of the poor services provided by the bus system.

I was discussing this particular issue at home with my children. My daughter, who works in Kingston, pointed out that she, coming from Belconnen, has to leave home at quarter past 8 on Saturday morning if she is to start work at 11 o'clock in Kingston.

Mr Mulcahy: You could drive to Sydney in that time.

MRS DUNNE: So if there is not a car available in our household for my daughter to drive to work—and she is quite happy to take the bus; it gives her time to read a book on the way, do some uni reading and that sort of thing—

Mr Mulcahy: She could read the Bible on that journey.

MRS DUNNE: She could drive to Sydney; she could read large slabs of the Bible—

Mr Seselja: Or *War and Peace*.

MRS DUNNE: She probably has got through most of *War and Peace*, which I think is on the reading list. It is an unreasonable time when you know that, on a good day, it probably takes you about—tops—half an hour to drive from Evatt to Kingston. This is what will happen. We will see people discouraged from using the buses.

We know that the minister is not prepared to take my advice and is not prepared to take the advice of the Transport Workers Union. We know that there are considerable problems in the bus service and that there are issues of safety which this minister does not seem to have addressed. There has been a stabbing and an assault of bus personnel in just over a week. There is an outrageous amount of danger on the buses. People complain to me—and I have written to the minister about people's concerns—about the level of safety at the Woden interchange. No sooner had I written to the minister about patrons' concerns about it than we had an incident where a supervisor was stabbed.

What did the minister do or say about that? So far as I can see, nothing. He had nothing to say; he declined to comment; and, to this day, I do not know whether he has agreed with the Transport Workers Union that there should be a safety audit of the Woden interchange. While we are about it, there should be a safety audit of the other interchanges.

The ACTION bus service is only part of our public transport system. Just over two years ago, the then minister for transport introduced his sustainable transport plan, which set some targets and had some good things about it and some not-so-good things about it. It was a bit of a curate's egg. I have been critical of the sustainable transport plan because I do not think that the targets are hard enough and that if we have easy targets we are almost certain to meet them.

While we are in the process of inquiring into the operation of the bus service, we should be looking also at the entirety of the sustainable transport plan, to make sure that the targets that we have are appropriate, that we are on track to meet them and that they are reasonable and are doing what we set out to do, which was to increase the modal mix in favour of public transport so that we will have a substantial reduction in the proportion of greenhouse gases which are emitted by public transport. My concern is that, while we have a sustainable transport plan, it is on the shelf gathering dust, while this minister for transport is undermining the sustainable transport plan by undermining the ACTION bus service.

This is why this Assembly should be taking advice from the planning and environment committee. The planning and environment committee's job is to advise us on matters in relation to transport and environment. The minister will not take advice from the Transport Workers Union. The minister will not take advice from members of the public who are inconvenienced and are saying, "You have to have a better system." Perhaps the planning and environment committee will take on board that advice and come up with some recommendations that this Assembly can do something with. Perhaps we can force this minister to do something to improve the quality of our public transport.

At the moment, our public transport is a disgrace. The changes that we have seen since December last year are an absolute disgrace. The litany of complaints, which other members, I am sure, will take the opportunity to discuss, shows how poorly we are served in this territory. This is why we must have a proper inquiry, with real recommendations that this Assembly will take on board so that we can see a better public transport future soon.

Debate interrupted in accordance with standing order 24 and the resumption of the debate made an order of the day for a later hour.

Sitting suspended from 12.21 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice Bushfires—briefings

MR STEFANIAK: My question is to the Chief Minister. Over the past few weeks, you have consistently stated that cabinet was not warned of a potential serious impact

on urban Canberra from the bushfires of January 2003, despite the clear evidence that it was. Will you table by close of business today the briefing paper to cabinet prepared by Mike Castle and Tim Keady warning of a “potential serious impact” to the urban area and listing the “urban edge” as an asset under threat?

Will you also table by close of business today the other documents created for and resulting from the briefing? Finally, will you also table cabinet minute decision 0516 noting arrangements for the declaration of a state of emergency and the need to recall cabinet if decisions had to be made about the future of assets?

MR STANHOPE: As members are aware, these matters were all matters dealt with extensively by the coroner through her four-year and \$10 million inquest. Those documents I believe were all provided to the coroner. I do not intend to now expend government resources again on a matter that has been concluded by the coroner, presumably to her satisfaction. So the answer is no.

MR STEFANIAK: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Given that parts of those documents were referred to by the coroner but are not otherwise available, why will you not table them? Why are you hiding, given that you will not table the information that will allow the community to judge for itself what the cabinet was told?

MR STANHOPE: As I said, I believe all of those documents were made available to the coroner. I presume they are available through the court. I refer the Leader of the Opposition to the transcript and documents available from the court.

Government services

MS MacDONALD: My question is to Mr Stanhope in his capacity as Chief Minister and Treasurer. Can the Treasurer inform the Assembly of the value of the ACT economy in ensuring continued provision of quality services to the people of the ACT?

MR STANHOPE: I am very happy to do that, Mr Speaker. As people—at least the community at large—are aware, the government continues to provide a very high-quality service to all the people of the ACT. I thank Ms MacDonald for the question in relation to issues around service delivery and matters of importance to the people of the ACT. As we know, and as we saw revealed again today, we are halfway through March of 2007 and we are yet to receive from the opposition spokesperson on health a single question on health. We are halfway through March and we are yet to hear from the shadow minister for education a question on education. The shadow minister for education is out there waving the flag on education and the importance of this particular issue to the people of the ACT—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister, come to the subject matter of the question, please.

MR STANHOPE: I think it is relevant that the ACT government is committed to and focused on service delivery. But, unfortunately, these are not issues of concern to the opposition. We saw it again today at the start of question time. The government, of

course—indeed, I think this is why the opposition are so reluctant to raise issues of policy in this place—has such an excellent record at addressing the priority needs of the people of Canberra.

Let us start with mental health and the response of this government to issues around the delivery of services to people suffering a mental health issue. In the five years that we have been in government we have increased funding for mental health by 92 per cent—admittedly from a very low base; when we came to government in 2001, to the eternal shame of the Liberal Party the ACT funded mental health at a lower per capita rate than any other place in Australia. Can you believe that? Can you believe that in 2001 the ACT had the lowest per capita level of funding for mental health in Australia? We have increased that by 92 per cent and we have rectified that wrong that we inherited from the Liberal Party.

Similarly in relation to disability services: who can forget the swan song of Michael Moore and the Liberal Party in relation to disability services, the Gallop royal commission of inquiry? Who can forget that—Michael Moore swanning out of this place as the Liberal Party minister for health, resigning ahead of the release of the Justice Gallop inquiry into disability services in the ACT? Who can forget the scarifying indictment of the Liberal Party's lack of commitment to disability services in the ACT?

Mr Smyth: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. Standing order 118B says that the minister shall not debate. Will you bring him back to the question? It is his own dixer; he should at least be able to answer it.

MR SPEAKER: Come back to the subject matter of the question, Chief Minister.

MR STANHOPE: The subject matter is the continued provision of quality services to the people of the ACT. We are providing quality services in mental health and it is appropriate as a benchmark to illustrate the extent to which we are providing quality services. I refer to the change in the provision of those services over the last five years, and of course the Liberal Party are very uncomfortable with this and they will move their points of order in relation to this: a 92 per cent increase in expenditure on mental health; a 60 per cent, I think, or \$60 million in toto increase in disability services following on the tabling of the scarifying Gallop commission of inquiry into disability services in the ACT; a 174 per cent increase in funding for care and protection of children. Since coming to government, we have increased funding for the care and protection of children in the Australian Capital Territory by 174 per cent, from \$15 million to \$43 million in recurrent expenditure a year.

That is the improvement in delivery of services that this government has delivered over the last five years. That is just a summary through mental health, and are there more important issues than this: the provision of mental health services for the people of Canberra, the provision of disability services for the people of Canberra, the provision of protection to the most vulnerable members of our community, our children? There has been a 174 per cent increase. This is what this government has delivered along, of course, with the provision of much overdue new services such as the Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre and the Gungahlin Child and Family Centre; this is of course consistent with that 174 per cent increase.

There is a new 14-bed medical assessment planning unit; the new 60-bed sub-acute and non-acute service at Calvary Hospital, which the minister opened just recently; the 900 new aged care beds currently under construction or in the planning pipeline—900 new aged care beds, as opposed to the Liberal Party's 14! (*Time expired.*)

MS MacDONALD: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. What would be the impact on the delivery of these services you talk about if the government was to abandon significant revenue measures such as the fire and emergency services levy, the water abstraction charge, the utilities network facilities charge and the land tax regime?

Mrs Dunne: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. That is a hypothetical question and it is out of order.

MR SPEAKER: That is a hypothetical question.

Ms MacDonald: On the point of order, Mr Speaker: I have just asked the Chief Minister and Treasurer to outline what services are provided. There is very real talk about abolishing, for example, the land tax regime, so there would be an impact.

MR SPEAKER: Notwithstanding, it was a hypothetical question and they are out of order.

Mr Stanhope: On the point of order, Mr Speaker: the question was, and I think you need to look to the wording: can the Treasurer inform the Assembly of the value of the ACT economy in ensuring continued provision of quality services to the people of the ACT? I outlined that. The supplementary question is: what would be the impact on the delivery of those services if the government was to abandon these particular taxes?

MR SPEAKER: It is a hypothetical question and it is out of order.

Sustainability

DR FOSKEY: My question is to the Chief Minister in his role as the minister in charge of sustainability policy and it is in relation to sustainability issues. Since the splitting of sustainability between the Chief Minister and the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, I note with concern, sustainability legislation has been put on hold and there is still no sign of a discussion paper. It has been more than a year since the greenhouse and energy discussion papers were released, yet there is no sign of the strategy papers. A state of the environment report is due this year, yet the position of Commissioner for the Environment has been vacant for three months. Could you please advise the Assembly when your office intends to action these important areas of sustainability?

MR STANHOPE: Dr Foskey, there is a separation of responsibility between me and the minister for the environment and sustainability in relation to policy issues around the environment, but it is not correct to say that I am the minister responsible for sustainability. I am the minister with responsibility for water and energy policy. Mr Hargreaves is the minister with responsibility for sustainability. There is a

crossover here, and I acknowledge that and I acknowledge some confusion in understanding in relation to that that I will address when next I look to our administrative arrangements. I think I need to make that point in clarification.

I accept the frustration of some within the community in relation to the time that the government has taken to develop a new climate change strategy or paper. The work has been done. As you have acknowledged, Dr Foskey, a detailed discussion paper was released for consultation and engagement. There was indeed significant engagement, including by the Greens. I do not think that the Liberal Party bothered to engage, but at least the Greens and others within the community did in relation to the development of a new approach to climate change, which is something we take very seriously. We want to get it right. In the interim, of course, we will continue with a raft of programs in relation to climate change and greenhouse gas emission reduction. It is a very serious issue.

I have said, and I repeat, that I do not believe that there is a more pressing issue facing the world—not just the Canberra community, but the Australian community and the world community—than the need to accept climate change as a reality and the need for all communities to address those issues. We are committed to that absolutely. We are 100 per cent committed as a jurisdiction to dealing with the issue of climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, and we have done much. It is easy to stand and ask, “Where is your latest strategy?” and then ignore the raft of policy initiatives which are being pursued and are in place, the very significant work that has been done in relation to the environment and sustainability across the board. There is nothing in relation to water, for instance, as one aspect of that debate, in relation to which the ACT government does not actually pursue world’s best practice.

Dr Foskey, you are wrong about me being the minister responsible for sustainability. You are wrong in saying that the office of Commissioner for the Environment is vacant; it is not. It has in recent times been filled.

Mrs Dunne: I take a point of order, Mr Speaker. First of all, I draw your attention to the fact that the Chief Minister never addresses the chair, otherwise he might notice when someone is taking a point of order. If the question has been incorrectly directed to him, it should be redirected to Mr Hargreaves. The Chief Minister has the capacity to redirect it to Mr Hargreaves, rather than berating Dr Foskey.

MR SPEAKER: The Chief Minister is also entitled to answer it, but he should direct his comments through the chair.

MR STANHOPE: I am, Mr Speaker.

Mrs Dunne: You are turning your back on him all the time.

MR STANHOPE: I am not turning my back. That is a puerile point of order which Mrs Dunne takes from time to time. I am, in speaking now, addressing the chair. I do not need to face the chair to address the chair. That is just nonsense. That is puerile, kindergarten nonsense. The notion of addressing the chair is actually not to engage in debate or conversation directly with others in the house. The notion or requirement to address the chair is actually to address remarks through the chair. We are asked to

address remarks through the chair. Do we stand behind it and speak through the back of the chair? We do not. I am now addressing the chair. It is just that I am not facing the chair. I am not required to face the chair. I am required to address the chair. It is kindergarten, childish nonsense which you go on with in this perpetual, repeated point of order that to address the chair you must face the chair at all times.

Dr Foskey, we take sustainability and climate change seriously. It is one of the most serious issues facing us, acknowledging that the ACT is responsible for only one per cent of the greenhouse gas emissions in Australia, and Australia is only responsible for just under one per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. But, with the leadership that we normally show on all issues, this government is concerned to lead this community and to work with this community in dealing with these most pressing issues, and we are doing that through a raft of programs. I am happy to detail those if you have a supplementary question.

DR FOSKEY: I ask a supplementary question. Could the responsible minister—and I do know that he at least will be a he—advise the Assembly whether the Sustainability Expert Reference Group will continue to advise him on sustainability, energy and water policies, given that he still has responsibility for these matters, or whoever has responsibility for these matters, and especially given that I believe it has not met for a long time?

MR STANHOPE: One of the significant initiatives of this government was to appoint the Sustainability Expert Reference Group in 2002. Indeed, it was the first such group established in Australia. It was established by me to advise me as the then minister on sustainability issues. This was an Australian first. We were the first government in Australia to establish, particularly within a head of government's department, an office of sustainability. We were the first government in Australia to appoint an expert reference group on sustainability—the Sustainability Expert Reference Group. These, of course, are initiatives of which I am proud. I am glad that you acknowledge their importance, Dr Foskey.

We are, of course, through the work that we have done on the development of a new climate change strategy, looking again at the way in which, in a rapidly changing environment, we deal with issues around climate change, greenhouse gas emissions and sustainability. We need constantly and continually to assess and reassess the best way forward in relation to these complex issues. In the context of that, it is appropriate that we review the best governance models for taking these particular issues forward, for getting access to the best science and advice, and to have available to us the best processes for working with the community.

Many of the initiatives that communities will have to pursue in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions will be successful only if they are adopted and embraced by the community. The government has a role but the government acknowledges that 69 per cent of our greenhouse gas emissions are produced by the utilisation of electricity and that just under 30 per cent of our greenhouse gas emissions come from the use of petrol. These are issues that will require the significant cooperation of the Canberra community just, of course, as our very successful efforts at reducing the consumption of water relied almost exclusively on the community.

Whilst the government will lead, can lead, and can show leadership and commitment—and this government has done that—the government will be looking to the people of Canberra to work with us in the reduction of the use of electricity. Sixty-nine per cent of all our greenhouse gas emissions in the ACT are produced from the utilisation of electricity and 27 per cent come from the use of petrol, almost all of them in this town because we do not have a significant manufacturing base. Almost all of that use is by individual citizens in their homes and in their cars. So the way forward requires that we collaborate and that we work in cooperation and consultation with the people of Canberra.

We need continually to work with the expertise available to develop programs to do that. So the Sustainability Expert Reference Group continues in existence. We constantly and regularly review the role and function of all our expert advisory groups, so I am not going to stand here and say it will continue in this form forever, but it continues now and it is an incredibly valuable body. It has produced very significant reports which have led Australia in the *People place prosperity* report of March 2003; *Measuring our progress—Canberra's journey to sustainability* report of 2004, “Water ACT”, a draft policy for sustainable water resource management; and think water, act water, the ACT's strategic plan for dealing with issues around water.

In addition to that, as I mentioned before, I am more than happy to go through the very significant range of initiatives that this government has pursued to deal with the issue of greenhouse gas emissions: the Electricity (Greenhouse Gas Emissions) Act, the go gas scheme, the single most significant and important initiative pursued by the ACT government; the ACT energy wise program, which continues; the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act, which was passed in March 2005; the Utilities (Shortage of Essential Services) Amendment Act 2005; and our participation with COAG in the work that it is doing.

I think we need to acknowledge the significance of the commonwealth government in the necessary leadership in relation to climate change; the fact that the Liberal Party refused until two months ago, when the polling told the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party that they were on a loser in continuing to deny the reality of climate change. Of course, the Prime Minister is now incredibly sorry that he has never embraced Kyoto. He has been caught short. The Liberal Party here, of course, in their sycophantic acceptance of that position, are similarly embarrassed. (*Time expired.*)

Emergency Services Agency

MR PRATT: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, last week we saw the resignation of David Prince, the chief fire officer of the fire brigade, in disgust over the Corbell restructure. Today we have seen the unprecedented resignation of a significant number of the captains and deputy captains of the brigades of the ACT Rural Fire Service. Over the past year we have seen the former commissioner and a number of senior officers in the Emergency Services Agency resign over changes to the structure.

Mr Corbell has been the minister responsible for the serious problems in ACT emergency services. Why will you not sack Mr Corbell as the Minister for Police and Emergency Services?

MR STANHOPE: I think it is important at the outset to deny the slur on Mr Prince that has been perpetrated by the Liberal Party. Mr Prince retired. The suggestion that Mr Prince was sacked—

Mrs Burke: No-one said he was sacked.

MR STANHOPE: I heard Mr Smyth say it this week. In fact, Mr Corbell asked that it be withdrawn and Mr Smyth stood up and withdrew it. In this place this week Mr Smyth said that Mr Prince had been sacked. Today Mr Pratt follows on with a question about the basis on which Mr Prince left the Emergency Services Authority. This is a defamation of Mr Prince.

Mr Pratt: He resigned in disgust.

MR STANHOPE: Oh, he resigned in disgust! You have absolutely no basis on which to defame David Prince in this way.

Mr Smyth: Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. Standing order 118 (b) says that the minister shall not debate the subject to which the question refers. The word “sacked” was not in the question that Mr Pratt asked. He asked whether or not he would now sack Mr Corbell.

MR SPEAKER: The Chief Minister will come back to the subject matter of the question.

MR STANHOPE: I just wanted to make the point for the record that this willingness to attack the reputation of public servants is really a worrying aspect of this opposition’s behaviour in this place. They will go for the jugular of any public servant at any time without remorse.

Mr Pratt: No, we are going for your jugular.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Pratt!

MR STANHOPE: Mr Pratt, the people that are suing you for putting their lives in danger when you were a spy over there in Serbia are going for your jugular.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister, direct your comments to the subject matter of the question.

MR STANHOPE: Having said that, there have been changes in personnel. But to suggest that there will be a wholesale desertion from the Emergency Services Agency as a result of the actions of the minister are simply absurd. People make changes in their career. They make career decisions. They move on. They change regularly and constantly. In fact, a number of officers, including senior officers, have left the Emergency Services Agency, to the great regret of the government. They have expressed their regret and sorrow at the fact that officers are retiring or departing or moving on. These are incidents of life.

I must say that I do find it passing strange that the Liberal Party in this place, with the level of turnover of staff in their offices over the last couple of years, would actually cast aspersions about other people moving on. It would be educational to go through each office of the Liberal Party over the last few years and discuss who it was that has left, how many have left and the reasons they left; how many actions of false dismissal there have been; and how many actions for other unacceptable employment practices there have been.

Mr Pratt: I raise a point of order under standing order 118 (b) as to relevance.

MR STANHOPE: How many actions for defamation have been pursued in relation to people that have left your employment?

Mr Pratt: The Chief Minister has gone 10 light-years away from the question, Mr Speaker. See if you can drag him back. You cannot answer it, of course. That is why.

MR SPEAKER: Draw the connection with the subject matter of the question.

MR STANHOPE: I will conclude, Mr Speaker. To suggest that, as a result of departures from a particular authority, the minister should be asked to leave his job is patently absurd. It is absurd to suggest that the minister with administrative responsibility for a function should resign because people have left their employment.

To pursue that argument to its logical conclusion, if the minister were to resign because a number of senior executives have left the Emergency Services Agency, what responsibility will you take for the churn within your offices: the lawsuits for false dismissal—we will not go into Mrs Burke's particular lawsuit—and the defamation actions which have been brought? Mr Smyth is up to his third defamation action now. Is it not remarkable that in a reasonably short political career he has now been dragged through the courts for defamation on three separate occasions? I think we could compare their response to this issue with this government's—(*Time expired.*)

MR PRATT: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question.

MR SPEAKER: I call Mr Gentleman.

MR PRATT: I did not resume my seat, Mr Speaker.

Members interjecting—

MR PRATT: I put the wrong glasses on, Katy; I was looking for my notes.

Mr Barr: Crouching tiger, hidden dragon!

Mr Hargreaves: And you just lost your seat, Steve.

MR SPEAKER: Order, members! Mr Hargreaves!

MR PRATT: I was looking for my notes. Perhaps I've got your glasses on, John.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Pratt, can you direct your comments through me. If you have another question, let me know.

MR PRATT: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I have a supplementary question. Chief Minister, why can't you express confidence in your minister, Mr Corbell—which you failed to do in answer to this question and which you failed to do in this morning's vote on the motion of no confidence? Why can't you?

MR STANHOPE: The expression of my confidence in the minister was reflected in my vote—just as the reflection of Mr Pratt's confidence in his immediate past leader was reflected in his vote. We now see his immediate past leader on the back bench. The vote of every member of the Liberal Party was taken, and Mr Smyth now finds himself in this particular wilderness, where, of course, he will always stay. I have absolute confidence in—

Mr Pratt: Poor old Simon.

MR STANHOPE: I have every confidence in Mr Corbell, just as I have every confidence in every member of the government. Compared to you lot, we have got nothing to worry about. This electorate expressed their confidence in you in the last two elections. I have absolutely no doubt that they will continue to express the same level of confidence in you as they have over the last five years, and that is none—that is none because you do not deserve it. The verdict on you has been passed and it will be passed again. You are simply not credible. You have no policies.

Here it is again today. We do not sit again for a little while, but there is still not a single question on health, education or community safety.

MR SPEAKER: Come back to the question, Chief Minister.

MR STANHOPE: And simply because you do not want to do the work; you just want to play these silly games. You are not interested in work, you are not interested in policy and you are not interested in the things that matter to the people of Canberra.

ACT Health—work force

MR GENTLEMAN: Mr Speaker, my question to the Minister for Health concerns the ACT Health work force. Minister, given the changing nature of demands being placed on the public health system and the constant challenge of recruiting and retaining a highly skilled health work force, will you please inform the Assembly of the actions taken by the Stanhope government to rise to these challenges?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Gentleman for the question. If it had not been for him it looks like I would not have had the opportunity to speak during question time this week.

Mr Speaker, ensuring the supply of qualified staff and retaining those staff is a critical component in the planning for any future health provision in the territory. It is something that this government has invested significant resources in since coming to government. We know that the demands being placed on the public health system will continue to grow. We know that there are international, national and local shortages across the health work force and we know that we have to be proactive in addressing these work force issues in order to be able to provide into the future the health system that we have now.

Our first graduate doctors will graduate at the end of next year from the ANU medical school. I think in the next couple of years we will be exporting more doctors to other jurisdictions across Australia than we can employ ourselves. We have already graduated 21 physiotherapists, eight dieticians and 14 pharmacists from courses at the University of Canberra. As I said, the first graduate doctors will graduate at the end of next year.

We have also been looking at diversifying the work force. For example, under the previous minister we established the role of nurse practitioner. In fact, as we speak, we have several nurse practitioners employed in the health sector. We have also worked with the Canberra Institute of Technology to develop an enrolled nurse medication administration course and a certificate IV course for allied health assistants across the three disciplines of occupational therapy assistance, physiotherapy assistance and speech pathology assistance, all of which have proven to be extremely popular.

Also, in last year's budget we invested around \$4 million to support further work force initiatives, particularly around retention of our current work force. We have developed career pathways for our nursing and midwifery work force and established clinical development nursing and midwifery positions within the service to support new employees, particularly new graduates. We are already seeing some of the benefits of that effort in our separation rates for health professionals, which have decreased significantly from 15.9 per cent in July 2004 to 10 per cent during December 2005-January 2006. Seventy-nine per cent of nurses who have taken part in the nursing and midwifery scholarship scheme, which we commenced in 2001, are still working within our service.

The budget certainly looked at initiatives such as scholarships in order to support our current work force and ensure that we can retain them into the future. Our separation rates are already proving that some of those structures are effective. Also, we have the EBA coming up for our allied health staff and nursing staff. Our VMOs have been dealt with, as have salaried medical officers. We will have those discussions with our nursing and midwifery work force and our allied health professionals.

Certainly, the view of this government is that we will need to pay rates of pay that make our salaries competitive with those of other jurisdictions. They already are competitive but we need to maintain them, otherwise we will see those separation rates increase. All health professionals are in an international market, getting snapped up across the world. If you have a health professional qualification, you really can live and work anywhere you like. So we do have to be on the front foot, ensuring that we

are making the investments, targeting the professions where we can offer more support, and ensuring that the ACT is an attractive place to come and work. Hopefully, once they have made that decision, they will stay here.

MR GENTLEMAN: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Minister, what contribution has capital investment played in addressing our work force needs?

MS GALLAGHER: There are two very good examples of where the ACT government has provided a capital investment to support our future work force needs across the health system. The first one is the ANU medical school, where we provided just over \$12 million for the building at TCH and just under \$2 million to refurbish an area at Calvary Hospital to ensure that we are in a position to start exporting doctors in the next couple of years. Members will be well aware of the role of the medical school.

More recently, we provided \$10 million to the University of Canberra in its allied health school building. I opened this just last month. This is the culmination of I think a three-year collaborative partnership between the University of Canberra and the ACT government. It was pretty much a complete refurbishment of the old school of health sciences building and included additions to that school. They are now able to offer students a centre of excellence so that they can come and learn in the ACT. Hopefully, they will then choose to work in the ACT.

The new building has a 220-person lecture theatre. It has disability access. It has lecture tables for left-hand writers. We also have put in a gait analysis track for rehabilitation of patients. So students can learn to use that. There is specialist equipment for the school and skill laboratories for the pharmacy students. For the physiotherapy students there are a couple of pretty much fully equipped hospital wards fully oxygenated, with all the tubes and everything you would see in a hospital ward. Those students have access to this. When they go on work experience, they will know what it is like to work in a hospital setting.

This has allowed for a total reorganisation of the school of health sciences. This will focus on dietetics, pharmacy and physiotherapy. They have already had the master's graduate. I think the first graduate was in 2005. Fifty per cent of graduates from that program have gained employment in the ACT region, whether through ACT Health or other private providers.

We also look at other smaller programs in terms of supporting and looking after our staff. It is not just about students. For example, I recently went to the hospital and looked at the 65 hoists that we have installed across certain clinical areas of the hospital to reduce manual handling injuries of staff. We are already seeing very big reductions in manual handling injuries of wardspeople and nurses, largely related to lifting patients into or out of bed. These hoists assist with that. In the last figures I saw there was I think a 40 per cent reduction in work force injuries related to lifting patients or moving patients from beds to chairs. That program is already successful.

It does not have to be a big capital program such as building a new building—but we have some examples of that. It is also about capital investment we can make within our own facilities to make sure that we are looking after staff. That staff then know

that, when they come to work in ACT Health or in the health system across the ACT wherever they choose, they will be looked after and respected, and that they will have access to the best facilities that we can provide.

MR SPEAKER: Before we go to the next question, I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of members of the University of the Third Age. Welcome.

Emergency Services Agency

MRS BURKE: My question is to the minister for emergency services. Minister, following the release of the details of the new structure of the Emergency Services Agency on 6 March 2007, you said that the adverse reaction to the changes was being made by “a few noisy people”. How do you reconcile your statement that only a noisy few oppose your changes with the mass resignation this morning of all volunteer bushfire brigade captains?

MR CORBELL: At the time I made those comments, the only criticisms were coming from Mr Jeffery in Tharwa. In fact, I think that was the only cited source that was being referred to when those comments were being made. That is why I made that comment.

MRS BURKE: Minister, what action will you now take to restore the confidence of volunteers in the structure of the agency, in the Commissioner for Emergency Services, and in you as minister for emergency services?

MR CORBELL: The issues around change in an organisation are always difficult, particularly when you are challenging existing structures and saying that new structures need to replace them. I can understand the concerns of volunteers in that regard. As I said to volunteers this morning and as I will continue to say, the issue is to sit down and work through in detail the matters of concern to them and for the government, the commissioner and me to continue to explain the advantages of the new structure.

The advantages of the new structure are very clear. They are very clear in that it will mean less money being spent on senior management and it will mean more money being spent on the services that matter at the front end. I said in the debate this morning, I have said it in question time and I am happy to keep saying it for as long as it takes for it to sink in over there that the issue is that we need less money in our Emergency Services Agency being spent on back office functions and we need more being spent on those functions that directly support and assist the front line to do their job. That includes issues such as training, risk management and risk analysis, and all the others which I have emphasised on a number of occasions in answers to previous questions.

Those opposite would seek to establish a whole new bureaucracy. They would seek to re-establish the ESA as an authority, which would mean that it would have to have its own human resource management, its own IT management and its own ministerial support, all those things associated with running a separate department, because that is what it would be, in effect. It would be a separate department. It would not be able to call on the resources of other departments for a large range of those functions. That is

the difference. The opposition will put forward a model which would result in more money being spent in back offices, rather than on the front line. Our model is about reducing the levels of senior management and spending more money on the front line—more money on training, more money on risk management, risk assessment and preparation for keeping our community safe.

Emergency Services Agency—consultation

MR MULCAHY: My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, on 6 March 2007 the new Commissioner for Emergency Services and you announced a new management structure for the Emergency Services Agency. In the business plan for the agency for the period to 2009-10 it says that the agency will “engage and value our people through careful and considered consultation ... and acting in an ethical way to all”. The Volunteer Brigades Association today issued a media release stating that the restructure was “made without any meaningful discussion” with them. Minister, why did you and your commissioner fail to implement the requirement to engage in effective consultations before the new management structure was finalised?

MR CORBELL: We did not. What occurred in relation to the restructure is that a briefing on the restructure and the new business plan was provided to representatives of the volunteer brigades, to brigade captains and to SES commanders the day before the announcement, and the invitation was made for further discussion on the details of that in the coming weeks. The response, regrettably, of the volunteers in this regard was not to come back with further comments, not to seek further meetings, but to hold the rally they did today.

That is their decision. They are entitled to approach it in that manner. But the offer was made at the time for further discussion. That offer remains and that will be reiterated by the commissioner in the coming day or so, when he will reiterate his offer to sit down and discuss these issues in more detail. I think the issue that we need to address in particular is that, if the volunteers have concerns about how the management structure will impact on their operational affairs, we need to have that discussion. We stand ready to have that discussion and the invitation will be made again to the volunteer groups to invite them to engage in that discussion.

MR MULCAHY: I ask the Minister a supplementary question. Minister, why have you not provided sufficient time to the four services to consider and comment on the changes to the structure of the ESA?

MR CORBELL: I think I have just answered that question.

Emergency services—volunteers

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, in a letter to the editor in the *Canberra Times* of 10 March 2007 a letter writer dealt with, amongst other things, respect for volunteers and he said in part:

What Corbell and the bureaucrats overlook is that volunteer organisations such as the SES and Rural Fire Service stand or fall on the goodwill of the volunteers. Lose the goodwill and you lose the organisation.

Respected and experienced volunteer leaders have said already that across the brigades and units their strength this bushfire season is down variously between 25 and 40 per cent. Minister, how will you maintain the current volunteers and recruit new volunteers and ensure that the goodwill of volunteers is not undermined?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mrs Dunne for the question. In the last budget we announced funding for additional recruitment and training of volunteers, and that was in the order of, if I recall correctly, between 60 and 80 additional RFS volunteers and around 20 to 40 SES volunteers. We have provided the additional money for training and equipment and I have to say that those recruitment efforts have been very successful. We have seen a significant influx of new RFS volunteers; I have certainly seen them in my own experience and I know that other brigades are also seeing significant numbers of new recruits. So we are doing that work on new recruitment.

Volunteering is always a challenging culture to maintain. There are so many pressures now on people's lives and time demands on them that it is difficult to keep people, especially for extended periods of time. But I know that the members of the RFS are overwhelmingly a very dedicated and committed bunch of people, and these are things that I continue to focus on in terms of providing additional opportunities for training and so on.

This only reinforces my point about why we need to do things like spend more money on training and why the restructure is all about that. If you continue to train your volunteers and give them the support, the refreshers, the skills development and the advancement that they deserve you are more likely to keep volunteers. That is what the restructure is all about. It is about spending more money on training, it is about spending more money on risk management and assessment and it is about spending money on the things that matter in keeping volunteers, in keeping a viable and effective emergency service organisation operating. That is the government's whole focus and that is the approach we will continue to adopt.

MRS DUNNE: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. Minister, how will you ensure that the core capabilities of the SES and the RFS are not further compromised through the loss of experienced volunteers? How will you replace those experienced people who resigned on you en masse this morning? And do you think that training will be enough to bring those people back?

MR CORBELL: The resignations this morning are obviously designed to make a political point and to put pressure on the government. There is no doubt about that, and they are entitled to do that. But, as I have said in my answers to previous questions, these matters can be resolved through dialogue and discussion. That is the most appropriate way forward and that is the approach we will endeavour to foster and continue to adopt.

Bushfires—warnings

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, in question time on Tuesday you described this week's *Four Corners* program on the 2003 bushfire disaster as being an "excellent, objective and rigorous discussion" of the issues.

During this excellent, objective and rigorous discussion, a person who is described in the transcript as “man at the Canberra fires” was filmed saying, “It was a hopeless cause because there was no warning.” Chief Minister, given your high opinion of this objective *Four Corners* program, why did you fail to warn the ACT community about the approach of the bushfires on 18 January 2003?

Mr Corbell: Point of order, Mr Speaker. This question has already been asked on numerous occasions and I think it is out of order.

Mrs Dunne: No, it has not.

Mr Pratt: It is in the context of this program. This is new information.

Ms Gallagher: The question is not about *Four Corners*.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Gallagher!

Mr Corbell: The question was, “Why did you fail to warn the Canberra community?” We have heard that question repeatedly in this place, most recently in the last couple of days. The question is therefore out of order. The Chief Minister has already answered the question.

MR SPEAKER: It is right that that particular part of the question has been answered, but Mr Smyth has drawn the connection between a response that the Chief Minister gave here and a recent publication. I think the question is fair enough.

MR STANHOPE: I certainly have answered this question ad nauseam, but it is interesting that during the week there was a very good discussion on ABC television about the McIntyres Hut fire. The point I made was that the McIntyres Hut fire, which is the fire that burned into Canberra, does not feature in the coroner’s report.

I made the point—and I make it again—that we have been delivered a report by the coroner which does not deal with the fire that burned into Canberra, and that is a pity. We saw that in the discussion on *Four Corners*. It was discussion around the response of the New South Wales authorities and the New South Wales Rural Fire Service to the McIntyres Hut fire. It raises questions about the response of Phil Koperberg and the New South Wales Rural Fire Service to that fire. We have no information on that—none. The coroner chose not to deal with the McIntyres Hut fire. In the coroner’s report, there is absolutely no discussion of the fire that burned Canberra. She delivered her report on the other fires.

It is interesting that we as a community sought answers and were not provided with them in relation to the McIntyres Hut fire. Absolutely nobody disputes that the fire that burned Canberra was the McIntyres Hut fire—and the coroner did not deal with the McIntyres Hut fire. Nor did the New South Wales coroner. He had a two-day coronial inquest and made the findings that he did—essentially that nobody could be held responsible for the damage caused by that particular fire.

The question in relation to the McIntyres Hut fire is a question that should be directed to the New South Wales government and the New South Wales authority. I reiterate

my regret—my enormous regret—that the coroner did not deal with this fire, though, as I mentioned when this question was asked the other day, this matter is now being agitated before the Supreme Court of the ACT in an appeal by two ex-members of the ACT Emergency Services Authority, Mike Castle and Peter Lucas-Smith, and two other members of that authority as they take action, which of course they are entitled to take, in relation to the way in which the coronial inquest was conducted and around the issue of the fact that the fire that caused the damage in the suburbs of Canberra, the McIntyres Hut fire, was not the subject of the coroner's report.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Smyth?

MR SMYTH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Chief Minister, in the face of the objective and rigorous testing of evidence about the handling of the 2003 bushfires, why have you consistently failed to acknowledge your responsibility in failing to warn the ACT community of the approach of the bushfires?

MR STANHOPE: I have not, Mr Speaker.

Education—policy

MS PORTER: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, can you inform the Assembly of some of the current initiatives and achievements in the education portfolio?

MR BARR: It is with great pleasure that I inform the Assembly of some of the current initiatives and achievements in the education portfolio. I thank Ms Porter for her ongoing interest in the education portfolio. It stands in marked contrast to the George and Mildred team on the back bench, stirred as they are out of their bad seventies sitcom to take an interest in what is going on in education.

The government is in the process of delivering four new schools in the ACT. On the weekend we saw the advertisement in the *Canberra Times* for a project manager for the next stage of the new west Belconnen school that is to open in 2009. Construction of the new school will begin in September on the site of the former Ginninderra district high school.

We have also recently called for tenders for a consultancy to undertake the master planning for the new senior secondary college in Gungahlin on a site adjacent to the Gungahlin Town Centre. The master planning study will examine the feasibility of incorporating facilities for the Canberra Institute of Technology on this site, thereby creating a joint campus with the new college.

The facilities being planned for the college will include a theatre and a gymnasium designed to cater for community use outside college hours. The master planning study will also consider the co-location of a range of sporting and other facilities for the community on the site, which may also include a community library.

These are not the only new schools that the residents of Gungahlin will benefit from. The Harrison school is now well under way and will be open for the 2008 school year.

The people of Tuggeranong will be involved in the first consultations regarding the design of the new start-of-the-art P-10 school on the site of Kambah high school.

While these new schools are being built, the government is also renewing our older schools to ensure quality teaching and learning environments for all Canberra students. As members would be aware, a record \$90 million is being invested over four years to upgrade school infrastructure. This is the single largest investment in education in the ACT since self-government. This year alone we are seeing 223 separate upgrade projects being undertaken across more than 72 ACT schools. I have had the opportunity to visit some of the schools that are undergoing upgrades and I can say that the improvements to the teaching and learning environments are obvious and will be of great benefit to students and teachers.

A major focus of the renewal will be on improving the environmental sustainability of our schools and to reduce their running costs by retrofitting efficient and environmentally friendly plant and equipment that will make greater use of renewable energy. This retrofitting will be a major focus of the projects in coming years and will mean that all of our schools will be more sustainable. But that is not all. The government has also committed \$20 million over the next four years to build on information communication technology in our schools to ensure that the ACT continues to lead the nation in the use of IT in teaching and learning.

Broadband connections will be upgraded in every public school in the ACT, including high speed fibre-optic cables to all secondary schools—an Australian first. Wireless networking capability will also be rolled out to all schools. This will put ACT schools at the leading edge of bandwidth provision, both nationally and internationally. These upgrades are happening as we speak and already students in the ACT system are benefiting from increased bandwidth and accessibility.

While these upgrades are providing students with better access to IT and better learning environments, the government is also engaging in a major reform process of what is being taught in our classrooms, in both government and non-government schools. Our curriculum renewal process is currently in trial phase, before full implementation in 2008. The ACT is leading the nation in incorporating the national statements of learning for English, mathematics, science, civics and citizenship and information and communication technologies.

The government continues to work closely with schools and the community to ensure that the ACT continues to lead the nation in education, lifelong learning and training. The government is renewing our education system to make sure that our schools are of the highest quality and that what students are learning in them is relevant and providing value.

We know that education is an extremely important issue. It is an important foundation of individual success and the success of our society and our city. It is a clear priority for this government. That is why I was dismayed yesterday to learn that those opposite, including Mrs Dunne, the shadow minister, are no longer interested in education. It is a great pity. This government continues its strong focus on reform and delivering a world-class education system for the ACT.

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

Speaker's ruling

MR SMYTH (Brindabella): Mr Speaker, I seek your ruling. On several occasions during question time Mrs Dunne asked you to address standing order 42, which deals with members rising to address the Speaker. I note that on page 489 of *House of Representatives Practice*—

Mr Stanhope: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. The member is not addressing the chair. He is not looking at you, Mr Speaker. He is not addressing the chair.

MR SMYTH: You are actually speaking about the old standing orders that said ministers could not read speeches. They were rejected in 1965.

Mr Stanhope: Address the chair.

MR SMYTH: Mr Speaker, page 489 of *House of Representatives Practice* states:

As remarks must be addressed to the Chair—

Government members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: I cannot hear what is going on.

Mr Stanhope: That is because he is not addressing the chair.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Chief Minister!

MR SMYTH: Page 489 of *House of Representatives Practice* states:

As remarks must be addressed to the Chair, it is not in order for a Member to turn his or her back to the Chair and address party colleagues.

Would you please give your interpretation of standing order 42?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, I endorse the comments in *House of Representatives Practice* that you have just read.

MR SMYTH: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, do I take it that you have ruled on the point of order that I raised during the debate and that in future you will require the Chief Minister not to turn his back on you?

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, the standing order is intended to ensure in the first place that members address the chair in all their comments. The reasoning behind that, of course, is to avoid, where possible, the sort of confrontation which plagues this house. If I were to be pedantic about this, with all of the finger pointing that goes on in this house, I would be interfering in almost every debate.

I have been fairly relaxed about that and have not felt insulted by the fact that our gazes do not meet at all times. But you make a fair point and Mr Smyth makes a fair point. The standing orders require members to address the chair, but we have to be reasonable about this. Members cannot be expected to be frozen in their places with their gaze fixed on my personage. They might find that distracting.

Paper

Mr Speaker presented the following paper:

Study trip—Report by Mr Smyth MLA—Capitals Alliance Canberra 2007 conference—Parliament House, Canberra, 22 and 23 January 2007.

Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act—regulations Paper and statement by minister

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts): For the information of members, I present the following paper:

Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act—Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition (Commonwealth Regulations) Endorsement 2007 (No 1)—Notifiable Instrument NI2007-77, dated 10 March 2007.

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

Leave granted.

MR STANHOPE: As the designated person under section 6A of the ACT's Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act 1997, I have endorsed the proposed regulations of the commonwealth regarding the special exemptions that apply to the commonwealth's Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement of 1997.

The Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement is an agreement between the commonwealth, state and territory governments of Australia and the government of New Zealand. The agreement allows goods to be traded freely and enhances the freedom of individuals to work in both countries.

When the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement was signed in 1997, exemptions were made in industry areas where it was thought that mutual recognition had the potential to generate net benefits but where there were issues outstanding that needed resolution before mutual recognition could apply. While some progress has been made in resolving the issues, a number remain unresolved.

A comprehensive work plan sponsored by the Cross Jurisdictional Review Forum is under way to resolve the outstanding matters. There are five remaining areas to which special exemptions from mutual recognition still apply. These areas are: hazardous substances, industrial chemicals and dangerous goods; therapeutic goods; road vehicles; gas appliances and radio communications standards.

The Prime Minister has written to me supporting the rolling over of the current special exemptions for a further 12 months; that is, until April 2008. The additional time will allow relevant cooperation programs to continue to address the remaining differences between Australian and New Zealand laws and regulations.

States and territories endorse the changes to the agreement's special exemptions by gazetting the regulations in their respective gazettes or, in the ACT, by notifying the instrument on the ACT Legislation Register.

Actew Corporation Ltd annual report 2005-06—corrigendum Paper and statement by minister

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts): For the information of members, I present the following paper:

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Actew Corporation Ltd—annual report 2005-06—corrigendum.

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

Leave granted.

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, I table a corrigendum to Actew's 2005-06 annual report.

In October 2006, I tabled Actew's 2005-06 annual report. Actew has since advised that there are two errors in the statistics table on page 21. The errors relate to 2006, total water consumption, reported as 69,090 megalitres and corrected to 54,340 megalitres and 2006 water consumption per person per annum, reported as 162 kilolitres and corrected to 149 kilolitres. I commend the revised table on page 21 of Actew's 2005-06 annual reports to members of the Assembly.

Homelessness strategy Paper and statement by minister

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Minister for Health, Minister for Disability and Community Services and Minister for Women): For the information of members I present the following paper:

Homelessness Strategy—Breaking the Cycle—second progress report for the period July 2005-June 2006.

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

Leave granted.

MS GALLAGHER: I am pleased to table in the Assembly today the second annual progress report on the implementation of *Breaking the cycle: the ACT's homelessness*

strategy. Breaking the cycle is an ambitious strategy, but to engender real social change and to improve the lives of people experiencing, at risk of, or transitioning from, homelessness, we have to be ambitious. I am proud of the achievements of our community in implementing the strategy to date. There are many players involved and each has been influential in improving the ACT's response to homelessness.

The homelessness strategy provides the framework for achieving a coordinated community response to homelessness. This second annual progress report provides an overview of the range of activities associated with the implementation from June 2005 to July 2006. The strategy is one of the ACT's key strategies for social change and it sits under the policy framework of the Canberra plan and the social plan. The social plan provides a long-term target of reducing primary homelessness in the ACT to as close to zero as possible by 2013.

The homelessness strategy provides the blueprint through which the community will work together to reduce the level of homelessness, as well as its causes and effects. My job is to work with the community to substantially improve the lives of its most disadvantaged and socially excluded members. We do this through direct service delivery, such as through our disability, care and protection and therapy services and through the development of informed and consultative policy.

In developing and implementing the homelessness strategy, we have set out a program of social change. We have moved from the situation a few years ago prior to the strategy where what we had was a number of stand-alone services for homeless people, such as refuges, and mainstream services such as health services and housing, most of which homeless people found it difficult to access.

Today we have a situation where we are building an integrated service system which works to provide seamless services for homeless people and those at risk of becoming homeless. For example, we have protocols between mental health and the supported accommodation assistance program—SAAP—services to ensure that homeless people get access to mental health services.

We have made significant changes to the public housing rental assistance program to ensure that Housing ACT has the flexibility to more appropriately respond to the needs of applicants with high and complex needs. The changes position Housing ACT as the post-crisis housing provider and as part of the service continuum where SAAP provides the crisis response.

We have reformed Housing ACT gateway services so that housing applicants are now linked to the support they need from the time of application for housing assistance through to the time they are allocated a home. We have client support coordinators working inside public housing to support tenants and provide assistance to sustain the tenancies of people who are at risk of eviction. We have two sustaining tenancy programs to work with public and community housing tenants who are at risk of being evicted.

We have commissioned research into the needs of children who are experiencing homelessness, which will also deliver a resource for those who work with children. We are prioritising emergency accommodation for women and children forced to

leave their homes because of domestic violence. We are working with a model of social inclusion, where we build on the strengths of individuals, rather than ministering to their weaknesses.

One of the key strengths of the implementation of the strategy is that it has been driven by a joint governance model between government and the community sector. During the reporting period, the homelessness committee consisted of members of the Australian government, ACT government agencies and the community, through various peak bodies and frontline homelessness services. Members represented young people, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, older people and the SAAP sector. Other member and peak organisations include ACTCOSS, ACT Shelter, the ACT Churches Council and the Youth Coalition of the ACT.

To date community organisations have contributed enormously to the development and implementation of the strategy. Their involvement in various working groups and willingness to embrace new ways of working to reform the service system has enabled many achievements. For example, the women's pathways project, which was convened specifically to explore issues around women's homelessness, especially in relation to escaping domestic violence, consisted of a group of expert community sector members. The work of the women's pathways project involved exploring ways into and out of homelessness and proposing changes to the current service system in order to improve the continuity of care for clients. The success of the women's pathways project has been so great that pathways projects are being rolled out into the men's, youth and families homelessness sectors.

The progress identified in the report is progress borne from a shared commitment to responding to homelessness. During the second year of the strategy the government concluded negotiation of the SAAP V agreement, which sees the commitment by the Stanhope government of \$27.46 million over the five years from 2005 to 2010. In addition, during the second year of the strategy this government committed an extra \$3.89 million over and above its SAAP V contribution to homelessness services.

The nine new services funded through this initiative have already established themselves in the community sector. They include accommodation for 20 single men, five of whom are exiting or involved in the criminal justice system; supported accommodation for six single men and their children; supported accommodation for 18 families in the Gungahlin, west Belconnen and Tuggeranong regions; outreach services for single women, young people and men, with or without children; and recurrent funding of the Canberra Emergency Accommodation Service, which brokers emergency accommodation in a range of pre-leased sites.

The community inclusion fund has provided additional funding for support and services for homeless people. These include the Early Morning Centre, which provides free breakfast and a drop-in centre for people who are homeless; an outreach worker for Karinya House to provide support to young women with babies who are transitioning from their supported accommodation service; and a support worker to assist vendors of the *Big Issue*, a street magazine sold by people who are homeless or otherwise disadvantaged.

The 2006-07 budget required the homelessness services sector to make significant savings, in the order of \$1 million dollars. This was an extremely difficult thing to ask of the sector, and I would like to formally acknowledge my appreciation of the services that were tasked with achieving these savings targets. I would especially like to thank St Vincent de Paul, Centacare, Toora Women Inc, Beryl Women's Refuge, Anglicare and the Salvation Army for not only contributing to making these savings but also working with the government in such a collaborative way. These services have shown true leadership in the way they have worked with government to change their service models, their staffing structures and, indeed, the way they work together to form a service system. The commitment these agencies have to their client group has meant that they were able to make the required savings with no reduction in bed capacity.

There have been many successes to date in implementing the strategy, yet this progress report identifies that there is still work to be done. A priority issue for 2006-07 will be to finalise a supported accommodation service, an outreach service and a boarding house network for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

In tabling this progress report, I would like to acknowledge the work of the ACT Homelessness Committee and thank its members for their ongoing commitment. I would also like to acknowledge the commitment and contribution of housing minister John Hargreaves, who had the carriage of this strategy for most of this reporting period until I took over in April last year. I look forward to future reports and achievements as we address and respond to the causes and effects of homelessness as a community.

Paper

Mr Corbell presented the following paper:

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Canberra
Institute of Technology—annual report 2006, dated 13 March 2007.

Leave of absence

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

That leave of absence from 16 March 2007 to 30 April 2007 inclusive be given to all members.

Effect of taxation changes on budget Discussion of matter of public importance

MR SPEAKER: I have received letters from Dr Foskey, Mr Gentleman, Ms MacDonald, Mr Mulcahy, Ms Porter, Mr Pratt and Mr Smyth proposing that matters of public importance be submitted to the Assembly. In accordance with standing order 79, I have determined that the matter proposed by Mr Mulcahy be submitted to the Assembly, namely:

The impact on the revised budget position of changes to ACT government taxation in the 2006-07 financial year.

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (3.47): I wanted to focus in particular on the midyear review of the ACT government's financial position, which has shown that we can expect the territory to have a positive net operating balance by the 2008-09 financial year. In 2005-06, the net operating balance was in deficit to the tune of \$140 million, but in this financial year it is expected to have a deficit of \$42 million.

The Chief Minister has touted this review as evidence of good financial management by the ACT government. After all, this is \$98 million less of a deficit than last year and we will eventually, if things go to plan, get into surplus. I suspect that could be achieved earlier than even forecast.

We have seen press statements by the government telling us that this is a result of good management. Sadly, the figures in the midyear review and the experiences of Canberrans tell a rather different story. This projected surplus has been achieved by two main factors. The first is large-scale increases to taxation, which are hardly cause for celebration, and the second is large increases in forecasts for long-term gains from superannuation assets. Since this is the job of fund managers, this also is hardly a consequence of good management by the territory government, despite the claims being made. In fact, increases in taxation revenue and in projected superannuation gains account for a massive 85 per cent of the decrease in the deficit.

In the 2005-06 financial year the government collected some \$782 million in taxation revenue. This year they estimate they will collect \$827 million. As I have made clear in previous statements to the media, the whole point of avoiding deficits is that they impose an inevitable burden on people in the future, whether that be through increased taxes or through decreased levels of service. Sadly, we have won on both counts here. We are copping the increases in taxes but we are also seeing the deterioration in levels of service. The whole idea, of course, is to avoid these results.

The only way that these results can be avoided is by greater efficiency in government. This is the only viable way to reduce the tax burden while delivering services, by reducing spending on wasteful projects and inefficient management. We have seen wasteful proposal after wasteful proposal by this ACT government. The last fiasco, an expensive bronze statue to remind us all how great the Labor Party is, is just one in a long line of projects by a government with more dollars than sense. Sadly, they are not their own dollars; they are the dollars that are provided by the people of Canberra in greater and greater quantities.

I am quite convinced that the public are becoming more and more alarmed at the level of reckless spending by this government, and the crescendo of concern is growing. The government were warned that their spending binge would lead to deficit, and it certainly did. But instead of learning a lesson, instead of curbing the spending, they have decided the way to go is just to take more of our money. I am reminded of a skit by comedian Jerry Seinfeld, who remarked that helmets were invented so that humans could continue living their head-cracking lifestyles; that rather than abstaining from activities which crack our heads open, we simply chose to invent a device that will allow us to continue with these activities.

The government of this territory has been similarly inventive. They have observed that their reckless spending put this territory into massive deficit, but, instead of reducing their spendthrift activities, they have simply invented a way to keep going, a very simple way, and that is to take more money—to take, take and take more each year from the pockets of ordinary Canberrans.

The ACT government has introduced a raft of new taxes. We were told as a community that with GST would come the abolition of a number of state and territory taxes and charges. We were told that, with this growth tax which the states had asked for, the pressure of new tax measures on the Australian community by the state governments would disappear. But this territory has been ingenious in copping the GST, which is increasing, which is being paid by this community, and simply is being handed over by the commonwealth. They have decided they want to supplement that further and extract more dollars out of this already hard-hit community. General rates have risen substantially. This has resulted in a slug to the finances of Canberra home owners. Renters are also most likely to be hit as property owners pass on these increased charges.

Apparently these are the actions of a government that like to wax lyrical about their concern over housing affordability. On the one hand, we hear all these proclamations about housing affordability, but in the same breath we are seeing the territory government on a host of fronts, not the least being in the area of taxation, compounding the cost of people keeping their own home or people who are renters or people wanting to enter the market.

The government has also moved to index future increases in rates by the wage price index, rather than the consumer price index. This will see rates increase at a quicker rate, ensuring that higher rates will become automatic under this government. They will not even have to think about it; the rates will be going up. It reminds me of the rather ingenious way in which excise was tackled at the commonwealth level.

When I was very young the budget was an annual event. Everyone at home would sit around and hear the budget announced. You would pick up the paper the next day and cigs would be up by x cents, beer up by x cents and so forth, and people would reel with horror at these increases. Then the geniuses said, “The best way to take this off the front page of the paper is to just keep ratcheting the indexation arrangement up and it will not attract much media interest at all.” It is great for governments that want to keep dragging in more money and not concern themselves with the impact on communities.

Similarly, the geniuses in Treasury who have come up with this wage price indexation system know that not only is it going to bring in substantially more over time than the CPI increase, but it will not draw the immediate attention of people as an annualised event. The effect is that not only will it go up at a faster rate than CPI; it will also compound the increases, which will see rate increases at a quicker rate, ensuring that higher rates will become automatic under this government. Indeed, it will simply ensure that the rate of taxation increase moves further and further ahead of the rate of inflation.

We have also seen other fees and charges indexed by the wage price index. Once again, this alleviates the unpleasant task of having to admit that you are raising them. It simply becomes automatic. People wake up one day and see that these rates and charges have gone up and say to themselves, “How on earth are we going to find the money to pay for this?”

I know that things are more prosperous than they have ever been. We have had 10 years of great prosperity due in very large part to the direction of the Australian government. But there is a limit to how much people can afford. Many Canberra families have substantial mortgages. They are not only being told that their rates are going up but also hearing about these other hidden charges, such as the fire emergency services levy, the utilities tax on the internet and things that their kids access, and their telephones. All these subtle ways of extracting money are making life more difficult for ordinary households. Heaven help you if you are a retiree living on a superannuation arrangement and facing the erosion of your standard of living, because thanks to these charges your charges are going up at a far faster rate than the indexation that applies to your superannuation income.

Of course, there is the other terrifying prospect that if there is a change of government at the federal level and if the left have their way, they are going to start slugging people’s superannuation. As confident as the Chief Minister may be about how wonderful the people of Canberra have been to the Labor Party, just watch the backlash from the retired public servants when you start hammering them with tax levels on their superannuation and reverse the reforms introduced by the Howard government to ensure that people can be self-sufficient in their retirement years.

The CPI is a sensible indexation for charges because it preserves their value in real terms by accounting for inflation. Thus, a charge indexed by the CPI remains constant in real terms over time. The wage price index, on the other hand, indexes average wages which, due to greater productivity, tend to increase over time and contain inherent distortions. By indexing rates to this index the government is ensuring that, no matter how productive we become in the future, the government will always increase its ravenous appetite commensurately. In particular, this means that in the ordinary course of events, when the WPI increases faster than the CPI, taxes will increase automatically over time in real terms—not just in nominal terms but in real terms.

The government has also increased the ambulance levy, the water abstraction charge and other small charges. There has been an increase in development application fees. There is a definite pattern here of increases in rates and charges, more and more rapacious government and less money for Canberrans to keep in their pockets. The government have even introduced some brand new taxes, and they have been very good at this. They have been very inventive. You really have to admire their creative spirit.

Some people paint great art and others make scientific discoveries. But this government are as creative as any in finding new ways to take out money, and when it comes to taxing us, they really are in their element. We have seen the introduction of

a new utilities tax, which will no doubt be passed on to utility users, which is basically everyone in this community. The government has also introduced a new fire and emergency services levy. One would like to believe that this levy will collect money for improvements to emergency services. But that is not exactly how it is going to go. It will go into general revenue. It is another disguised form of taxation given a fashionable name and one that, on the face of it, sounds almost reasonable, except that you know it will be absorbed into the clutches of Treasury to fund all manner of activities.

The effect on households is important. What this means for Canberra households in a city that is dominated by salary and wage earners is quite important. If you are a householder down in Banks, then, according to Treasury figures, you can expect to pay about 25 per cent more on your rates bill this year. It is about \$191 on average. It is \$191 net of disposable income that you will not have. But you might have to earn as much as the high \$300 mark to have that money available. Some other suburbs can expect to pay an average of \$200, \$300 or even \$400 more this year.

Of course, you cannot expect any relief on your utility bills. You can expect them to go up, too, since the utility providers are also paying more in taxes. People will look to the future and ask themselves: what about the future? What if I work a bit harder but become more productive? If my wages increase, maybe I can outrun the government's increases in taxes and charges? I would say to you: good luck, because you will be running against not just increases due to inflation but automatic increases in real terms, and that is the big difference with these tax measures.

I called around Australia and I could not find any state in Australia that has gone down this road of wage price indexation in relation to its revenue base. I was met with disbelief by people at commonwealth and state level. They said, "It is extraordinary that they can get away with it." I said, "When you have got a majority, you can what you like."

These are the impacts that families in the territory are starting to feel. As the full impact of these charges goes through and families in the territory understand how the deficit is being reduced, I think that many families in this territory will find that the pain of this tax regime is something they can relate to. The fact is that people will be able to do a bit less of going out to movies or to dinner. But they will be able to visit some of the wonderful landmarks, such as the arboretum or the new statue of Al Grassby. They will be able to see where their money has gone. If they cannot spend it on their own pleasures, at least they will be able to see what the territory government is so prudently doing with the taxes they contribute.

This is the great Australian dream under the Stanhope government—lofty speeches about concern for housing affordability and then increases in Canberra property rates, averaging 18.63 per cent, according to Treasury figures. That is over 18 per cent, with more increases in real terms to come.

Aside from the specific effect on individuals, there are wider economic effects from increases in taxation. It is basic economic theory that increases in taxation reduce incentives and thereby stifle production. That is when people lose their money to taxation. They also lose the product of whatever it is that they would have spent it on.

I have told the Assembly before about some officials who came to my office—this was part of the city heart levy, another one of these great initiatives—and said to me, “We are going to empower people to spend their money.” It is individuals who make money, not governments. When governments embark on these taxation and spending measures, it is public money they are spending.

We can only speculate on the lost opportunities for private production consumption and savings that have followed from the government’s increase in taxation. Much of this increase has been in general rates and the fire and emergency services levy that is levied on households. It is clear that a substantial extra tax burden has been placed on home ownership. This has economic ramifications that affect all of Canberra, and it is not good news for potential home buyers. This government has not solved its spending problems. It has not turned over a new leaf. (*Time expired.*)

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts) (4.02): Mr Speaker, I must say that I was very pleased to see this matter of public importance listed today for discussion. It is a very important matter because it gets to the heart of an issue that I have been seeking to address over the last two weeks, and that is, of course, the implications for the ACT community of a Liberal government proceeding with the tax cuts which Mr Mulcahy, in his address just now, indicated a Liberal government would not support.

This is an important debate. We have, once again, had the shadow Treasurer giving us a full dissertation on the taxes, the tax regimes and the charges that a Liberal government will not support. This is an important debate which is at the moment very much at the heart of an election campaign in New South Wales, with the Leader of the Opposition there essentially employing exactly the same tactic that Mr Mulcahy says the Liberal Party will employ here in an election campaign and which they will pursue in government—that is, that a Liberal government will not support and will abolish the emergency services levy. We have heard that here most particularly from the shadow spokesman, and Mr Mulcahy in his speech today endorsed that position.

Since coming to government we have increased expenditure on emergency services by more than \$20 million. We have increased expenditure on emergency services by 46 per cent since coming to government. Mr Mulcahy now bewails the fact that we are not hypothecating the emergency services levy to emergency services. It is not a practice that we particularly follow. Mr Mulcahy, of course, will not be hypothecating the emergency services levy to emergency services either because his party will abolish it.

That then, of course, raises immediately the question: what or where will the Liberal Party take the \$20 million that will be available through the emergency services levy, which it will not receive? It talks about there being not enough resources for emergency services, it talks about the pity of not hypothecating the emergency services levy to emergency services, and then says, “But in any event, we will abolish it.” So that is \$20 million less there.

Mr Mulcahy has just again expressed in strong terms his major concern around the wage price index measure as opposed to the CPI. He speaks publicly on behalf of the Liberal Party and says, "Oh, yes, we think this is abhorrent but we will do nothing about it." What he is saying is that a Liberal government will return to the CPI. He has no option but to put out his next press release and say, "I, today, in a matter of public importance, have committed a Liberal government to the abolition of the emergency services levy. I have committed a Liberal government to returning to the CPI."

Of course, although he was a little bit more coy today, he and his colleagues say, "We as a government will not support the water abstraction charge. We as a government do not support land tax at its current level. We as a government do not support payroll tax at its current level. We as a government will not continue to collect parking fees from a range of areas." Mrs Dunne is on the public record, on behalf of the Liberal Party, as saying that they will not continue with paid parking in Belconnen and Tuggeranong. Mr Pratt is on the record as saying that they will abolish paid parking at our hospitals. When one assumes and takes advice on the quantum of the rates, taxes and charges which the Liberal Party in government will not persist with, the figure is of the order of \$100 million. Mr Mulcahy has repeated that today. This is the Debnam line.

If you are not going to abolish the wage price index as a measure, why did the shadow Treasurer stand in this place today and criticise us trenchantly? Or are you going to leave it there? Are you trying to have two bob each way? Are you saying, "This is abhorrent but if we get into government there is absolutely no way we are going to abolish it"? Do you dare stand today and say that you are not going to abolish the emergency services levy? Do you dare stand today and support Mr Pratt's promise to abolish the emergency services levy? The Leader of the Opposition should tell us when he responds.

The Liberal Party is on record in this place as saying it will not support the emergency services levy and the water abstraction charge. We have just again seen a major attack by the shadow Treasurer on the utilities tax. So there we have it. Let us go through the services to get the formal Liberal Party position. Do they, in the context of this matter of public importance, which they have brought forward, commit today to the abolition of the utilities tax, the emergency services levy, the water abstraction charge, paid parking, land tax and payroll tax? Do they, today, commit, as they have said they will, to rebuilding all of the schools that have been closed? Do they, today, commit, as they have said they will, to re-establish the Griffith library? Do they, today, commit to abolishing the shared services centre?

Commit today to the essential heart and guts of your matter of public importance: will you or will you not continue with those charges? Will you or will you not abolish those charges? If you do what you have been saying, that you will not seek to mislead this community any longer in terms of your intentions around these charges, then do the honourable thing, the honest thing, and begin to inform the Canberra community of which range of services you will cut. Will you, in government, return to the situation that we inherited where the ACT had nearly the lowest per capita level of expenditure on mental health in Australia? Is that where you will go? That is your

form; that is your history. That is what you did last time you were in government, Mr Stefaniak. When you were last in government, Mr Stefaniak, you had nearly the lowest level of expenditure on mental health in Australia. That is your record.

Mr Stefaniak: The education system—

MR STANHOPE: Mr Stefaniak, of course, wants to talk about his portfolio responsibilities. Let us go to Mr Stefaniak's record on child protection—appalling, embarrassing. Since coming to government we have increased expenditure on child protection by 174 per cent. We know Mr Stefaniak's personal form on child protection because he was the responsible minister. So will Mr Stefaniak reduce expenditure on child protection by 174 per cent to take us back to where we were when we inherited government? That is his form. Is that what he will do?

Emergency services are another good example. We have increased expenditure on emergency services by 46 per cent. Mr Mulcahy will support his shadow minister for emergency services, who has said, categorically, that the emergency services levy will be cut. To put this another way, the Liberal Party's promised revenue cuts amount to 12 per cent of revenue from those sources. They, in fact, provide almost 30 per cent of total government revenue at about the \$100 million-plus mark. That is what the Liberal Party has on the table in relation to its continued attacks on these sources of revenue. That is what it has on the table—a proposal to cut 12 per cent of current revenue from each of those sources. A cut of that order is on the table.

I think it is remarkable that the Liberal Party can put weasel words on the table as a matter of public importance. They stand up and attack charges that we have made in the first serious attempt since self-government to reduce very significant overexpenditure of around 20 per cent above the national average on all government service delivery across the board. This has been something that every government since self-government has participated in. There are no peaks and troughs and dips in this.

For 18 years governments across the board have expended at around 20 per cent above the national average on government service delivery. This was initially supported by transitional funding from the commonwealth, and since those transitional years every government has been supported by land sales. This government, my government, one year ago said, "Enough is enough."

Mr Mulcahy: It took a long time.

MR STANHOPE: Well, the Liberals were in government for seven years and were not game to try it. In order to try and build their surpluses, they cut mental health, they cut disability services, they cut child protection. They did not fund the essential services. They did not provide the infrastructure. They did not go to the issues of most importance to this community. It was this government that did the hard work of building up all of those services. It was this government that did the hard work of getting the budget under control. For the first time ever, it was this government that took the steps that were needed to actually remove our reliance on land sales.

History will show that only this government had the courage to move to the general government finance sector accounting standard. The Liberals in seven years were not game to do it. They were not game to move away from the Australian accounting standard. They were not game to take themselves off the teat of land sales. They did not have the guts, they did not have the moral strength, to face the community and say, "This is something we must do." We took the hard decisions. We have got the budget back on track to be balanced. The deficit is down to \$40 million.

In the context of the matter of public importance that is now before us, one is reminded of the dramatic front pages which Mr Smyth produced at exactly this time last year. Remember that fantastic photograph of Mr Smyth standing up with his front-page coup: "Budget deficit for 2006-07 heading for \$390 million". Remember that? Actually, the Liberals sacked him a month later. I often think the catalyst for Mr Stefaniak finding the courage to challenge was in fact the absolutely appalling embarrassment which Mr Smyth created by his claims of a \$390 million deficit. It is now down to, I think, \$40 million. He was only \$350 million out. In fact, it was not courage on Mr Stefaniak's part. Actually, Mr Mulcahy prodded him forcefully to make the challenge. Of course, it will be Mr Mulcahy who will lead the next challenge as well.

What I have been saying is at the heart of this matter of public importance. Why come in here today and rant and rave and criticise the steps that this government has taken and the revenue measures that we have put in place to ensure that we as a community pay for the services that are delivered so that we do not have to rely on the continued sale of the family jewels? We have achieved that; we have removed our reliance on the unsustainable source of land sale receipts as a revenue measure. In other words, if the community rightly requires or demands the provision of this level of services, the community must pay and not rely, as every other government has done, on land sale receipts.

Mr Stefaniak and Mr Mulcahy can say whatever they like, but they propped up their Australian accounting standard budgets with land sale receipts and superannuation receipts. Mr Mulcahy quite rightly excludes himself from that, and he is entitled to do so; but Mr Stefaniak is not. Mr Stefaniak balanced his budgets on land sale receipts and by refusing to fund essential services like mental health, child protection, disability services, community health, and Aboriginal issues and health. When we came to government, issues around Aboriginal health and services were an absolute shambles; it was a scandal and it was across the board. That is what we inherited. That is how they balanced their budgets. Go back and have a look. They balanced their budgets by land sale receipts and by not funding mental health, not funding disability services, not funding child protection, not funding indigenous issues, not funding the community in any meaningful way, and not supporting health and providing the infrastructure that was needed. That is how they did it. If you cut those services to the bone, of course you can balance your budgets—but you leave a shocking mess for others to pick up. We picked it up and we fixed the mess.

DR FOSKEY(Molonglo) (4.17): This debate seems to be centred on the shadow Treasurer's assertion that as Labor has been in government since 2000 it has had plenty of time to practise good economic management and thereby it should have

prevented the 2006-07 budget deficit from occurring and avoided the need to increase taxes and other revenue raising measures.

The Chief Minister in his tabling speech for the 2006-07 budget, and again today, alluded to consecutive ACT governments, Labor and Liberal, spending beyond their capacity for the past 17 years. I have problems with both Liberal and Labor arguments. I note that the shadow Treasurer spoke as though the ACT is an economic island. I did not hear him talk about the federal budgetary context.

Mr Mulcahy: Yes I did. I said the GST—that it has all been dished out; that we are wasting it.

DR FOSKEY: In this sense there is a lot more than the GST involved. And the GST, of course, has become a political lever used by the federal government against the states and territories when it suits it.

The Treasurer said that the budgetary pressure the ACT government was facing had increased in urgency and something had to be done as soon as possible to fix it for the future. While I acknowledge that there was a problem in consecutive governments relying on land sales and superannuation, I and members of the public will never be sure how big that problem was. We will never be privy to this information because it was analysed within a secretive functional review.

If the situation really is, or was, so dire, I do not believe that the economic governance situation the ACT was facing could only have been a result of the last five years or only the fault of Labor. Surely it has to have been the result of the last 17 years, and perhaps even before that. It was a result of consecutive governments failing to think for the long term in a sustainable manner. We also have to realise that we started off with a stunning infrastructure funded through a federal government department. We can all see that the infrastructure, particularly pipes and drainage systems, is now ageing and calling out for attention, which I do not believe it is receiving in all cases, especially as we tax it more strongly by increasing urban density in some areas. We need only look at ActewAGL electricity poles, which are the subject of a renewal program which I believe is falling behind.

So this government does have a problem which should be brought to the attention of the whole community. But I do not think this problem was suddenly obvious the night the budget was announced. And I find it difficult to understand how the Stanhope government only came to this realisation within the last 18 months. If such a problem had been occurring for 17 years, why did it take consecutive governments 15½ years to realise it? But, finally, a government did acknowledge that there was a problem to address, and I think that we should take our hats off to the ACT government for that. Prior governments should have acknowledged the problem and taken action—and perhaps Mr Stanhope should have acknowledged the problems sooner and taken action sooner—but they did not and this only increased the mess that needed to be fixed.

So now there is a government that has acknowledged that its budget practices were not working, and it is the responsibility of this government to respond to the problem in the most appropriate way possible for the benefit of the community it serves; the

key words being “community it serves”. But somehow the Stanhope government came to believe that it could fix 17 years of budgetary malpractice or incompetence, whatever you like to call it, in one fell swoop in one budget, relying on a tiny group of economic advisers who had little, if any, social or environmental expertise or experience. And these, interestingly enough, were the very areas which were identified for the deepest cuts.

The Treasurer said, “Today, I hand down a budget and announce a suite of structural changes that will put the finances of the territory on a sustainable path.” There we have it: in one day he could fix it all. That was the first we heard about the problem and the Treasurer gave us what he considered to be a fully baked fait accompli solution—an incredible feat by anyone’s standards. And, what is more, he and his cabinet were apparently wise enough to know how to fix it all without talking to the people it impacted: the people who provided the services, received the services or paid the taxes to fund the services. Basically, the government had become the experts.

More and more we are hearing “trust us; we are the government”. They claim to be a progressive Labor government, but, to tell the truth, I think they are starting to look and sound too much like the Howard government. Honest Johnny Howard survives on this “trust in me” approach and his perverse paternalistic governance. It is a case of “don’t you little people worry about the big decisions; I’ll take care of that”. Has there ever been more reason to be cynical of a government that divulges no information and publicly involves no-one in its decisions? I have no idea who gets listened to by this government. No doubt there are some, and I am sure that Mr Mulcahy might give some of these same people a good hearing too.

If this government really was suffering severe budgetary problems and had to find a way to increase its revenue, did it stop to consider the best manner in which it could produce taxation proposals that met its progressive dream? No, it did not. In regard to the new revenue measures, Mr Stanhope said in his speech:

I am pleased to say that, significant as these measures are, important as they are, they do not require the government to relinquish the social and economic principles we have articulated in our vision for this city—the Canberra plan.

This government’s lovely progressive words, enshrined in a number of documents and the Human Rights Act, mean nothing if they are not backed up by actions. Last year’s budget was a particularly regressive action and a wasted opportunity to advance social environmental concerns while paring back unnecessary spending commitments. No-one is going to put their hand up to say, “Yes, tax me, please—no problem.” But there are ways you can go about it without putting the community so offside as has been done. The best way to do that is to talk to them and tell them what you are thinking of doing and give them a chance to respond and a chance to come up with better ideas—because the government does not own them all—and go on from there. They may even be able to come up with suggestions as to how the government’s own proposals can be improved upon.

The Assembly has consulted with the community about revenue-raising measures before. Three key recommendations from the February 2004 Public Accounts Committee report on revenue-raising issues in the ACT were to encourage the

government to consider more progressive taxes, to call on the government to establish a comprehensive concessions policy and to request that the government consider the feasibility of incorporating environmental concerns into revenue-raising measures.

Here is something I said in my December speech about the utilities bill:

The current concessions regime is a mess. There are a number of cases where people who do not need the government's help get it anyway and people who need help are not eligible ... Anyone who wants information about what they are eligible for had better have plenty of time on their hands to search through the maze of government publications. It is high time this government finished the concessions review it was conducting between 2002 and 2004.

Instead of seeing a government that acknowledges its budgetary pressures and uses the opportunity to develop or alter revenue measures that also seek positive social and economic impacts, in conjunction with the community, what we have here is a government whose guiding principle is rapidly looking like it is "stay in power at all costs". Instead of dealing with this complex problem over a period of time and seeking the best outcomes for the community it serves with the community it serves, we have a government that has made blinding decisions in one fell swoop in order to give itself maximum scope for pork-barrelling in 2008 in order to win another election. In the absence of compelling and publicly examinable evidence to the contrary, it is open for people to think that the group whose primary interests were served by the 2006-07 budget was the Stanhope government.

MS MacDONALD (Brindabella) (4.27): Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister has outlined why this government increased fees and charges in the last budget. We all know that the revenue from these measures will fund high-quality services provided by the ACT government. The ACT community is well served by ACT government services, but these come at a cost, which continues to increase. The Liberals have proposed to overturn the increases in fees and charges by cutting a significant proportion of government revenue, estimated conservatively at around 12 per cent of that gained from taxes, fees and charges.

The question needs to be asked as to what services the Liberals would cut in order to compensate for these voluntary reductions in revenue. All the Liberals have come up with is to pledge to abandon one-off capital projects such as the prison and the arboretum. The prison will be finished by the time of the next election and something has to be done with the arboretum site. If not an arboretum, then the question has to be asked: what shall we put there? This is a short-sighted approach. Both the prison and the arboretum are one-off capital initiatives. They cannot be set aside and turned into ongoing expenditure.

I am sure I need not remind my Liberal colleagues that revenue is necessary to fund recurrent expenditure—or maybe I do. Abandoning a \$100 million construction project does not make up for relinquishing the same amount of revenue in perpetuity. This revenue is necessary to fund primary health care and education, police on the streets, our ambulances, our hospitals, mowing of grass verges and removal of household garbage year after year.

Withdrawing funding for the prison also does not take into account our moral obligation to care for and rehabilitate our own prisoners. We owe that to their families and to ourselves as citizens of a caring community with a social conscience. The prison is about much more than dollars in this sense, and should be recognised as something we have to have as we mature as a self-governing community.

Amazingly, alongside cutting revenue, our Liberal colleagues have committed to funding for a raft of initiatives. These include funding for new initiatives, pledging greater support for existing areas of government services or restoring funding to a host of activities and interest groups. Unsurprisingly, tourism, sport and business support have been singled out for more funding. How the Liberals can commit to further funding for numerous initiatives while cutting revenue is difficult to fathom. I would like to know their secret. To me it indicates a future hole in the territory budget and cuts to services. It also shows a lack of understanding of territory finances and the narrow revenue base in the ACT.

What the Liberals are proposing brings a real risk to both government service provision in the ACT and the economy. Ask the business community how they would perceive the ACT's credit rating being downgraded and the ACT going into a long-term deficit. Ask the community how they would feel about cuts to services, and hidden charges, under a Liberal government. I think we can predict their responses, and they will not be supportive.

We need a government in the ACT that will tackle the structural reforms necessary to place the budget on a sustainable fiscal footing. The government started this work in the last budget by making sizeable savings and increasing revenue. Making promises to reduce revenue while at the same time increasing spending does not fit with a sustainable budget strategy underpinned by a commitment to a surplus operating position. A cut in revenue would be a cut to services and detrimental to the ACT economy. This government has a record of sound economic and financial management. This government has a record of sound budget decisions with a focus on the future. This government has a financial strategy to take care of the future of the territory—something that the opposition appear to be sadly lacking.

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra—Leader of the Opposition) (4.32): Mr Speaker, this government's reputation for squandering record GST gains and record stamp duty receipts at a time of economic prosperity, doing so after inheriting a surplus budget following a lot of hard work by the previous Liberal government, is on record. The government is also on record for having shown some amazing knee-jerk reactions in the last budget as it panicked following its functional review. I am not going to stand here today and give credence to the myth that Mr Stanhope and Ms MacDonald, following her leader, seemed to be trying to perpetuate, that we are somehow going to abolish \$100 million in taxes and charges.

Mr Stanhope: So it is all bulldust, is it?

MR STEFANIAK: In fact, over the next 18 months you will find out exactly what we are proposing. We have proposed a number of things so far and I will state a few of those now, but do not try to put words into our mouths. Might I point out in terms

of your barrage of taxes and charges that there is one that you might have a problem with; that is, the water abstraction charge, because of the potential for court action there. You might find that you will end up with a hole in your budget because of potential court action. But that will be because of potential court action. So do not try to put words into our mouths.

Let me point out a couple of things to Ms MacDonald. Ms MacDonald said that we would increase spending and tourism. We have made a number of commitments there. This government cut tourism by \$3.5 million, and what will that do? That will lead to about \$20 million less coming into the coffers over the next financial year. Sometimes you have to fund some initiatives to make money. You can actually do that in the area of tourism and business.

The previous government inherited a deficit of some \$344.8 million, but it got back into surplus in very difficult times—times when the Howard government cut 10,000 public servants from Canberra, on top of the Keating government's cut of about 9,000. We created 9,990 jobs and we had a number of initiatives there which enabled us to provide services in tough times. That is called knowing how to prioritise, knowing how to put money into where your priorities lie, rather than funding vanity projects such as a statue of Al Grassby, the arboretum and the bus lane, which I note still has not been scrubbed. It is true that we might well have to inherit your prison, Mr Stanhope, which is again something that is not wanted.

I am at least impressed that Ms MacDonald does seem to appreciate what is recurrent expenditure and what is capital expenditure. That is a good start in terms of Labor governments being able to have a vague understanding of economics and how to run a territory. In terms of any promises we have made, Mr Stanhope, we have indicated that we would scrub hospital parking charges. It is a complete furphy to try to extend that any further. What do you get from hospital parking charges? You get an extra \$500,000 a year. If you take into account all the costs involved in administering that, I wonder whether it is costing you more than what you are actually saving.

Mr Mulcahy: And a million dollars worth of grief.

MR STEFANIAK: The shadow Treasurer is probably right there. Mr Stanhope, we have had considerable experience in terms of inheriting government in tough times and turning the situation around through prudent financial management.

Mr Stanhope: Tell us what you are going to cut.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Stanhope!

MR STEFANIAK: One thing we have said, Mr Stanhope, and this is a classic example of your increasing the bureaucracy—

Mr Stanhope: You must have been annoyed when Smyth knocked you over to get to the speaking podium. I felt for you, mate.

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, cease interjecting. Mr Stefaniak has the floor.

MR STEFANIAK: In April last year the Chief Minister was surprised to find that there were 2,500 extra public servants. He did not really know where they came from. Mr Stanhope, it is somewhat pleasing to see that you are at least trying to rein that back, but how on earth did you let that happen in the first place? How on earth would any responsible government let that happen? Yes, you do need sometimes to increase the number of public servants you have in key areas such as police, emergency services, nursing and perhaps education, but an increase of 2,500, from 15,500 to 18,000, is a very significant increase. That is a 16 per cent increase. That is rank incompetence.

Mr Stanhope: How much are you going to cut disability by?

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Stefaniak has the floor, as you did some time ago, Chief Minister.

MR STEFANIAK: I note in the time available that the Chief Minister is saying, "We have revolutionised; we are no longer dependent on land sales." I seem to recall a figure of about \$900 million of additional revenue which the government actually got but did not expect from GST revenue, a luxury the previous government did not have, plus stamp duty. Where did that stamp duty come from? Quite a bit of that was from land sales. So, Mr Stanhope, do not give me that nonsense.

Mr Mulcahy has carefully dissected the figures for this midyear review and he has shown that it is not the good news that you like to pretend that it is. He has given figures which are relevant and explained the reduced levels of deficit that we are now seeing as being due to increases in taxes and superannuation gains rather than better spending practices.

In fact, what did the government say when they got these figures in the midterm review? What did they say when they looked at the figures and found that some 85 per cent of the decrease in this year's deficit was due to higher taxes and projected gains in superannuation assets? What did they say in relation to that? Did they tell the public? Were they actually honest with the public and the people of Canberra? Did they put out a press release saying, "We are reducing the deficit by raising taxes, and we also got lucky this year because we got very good returns on our superannuation assets"? Did they tell that to the public? Of course not.

Instead, they sent out a media release patting themselves on the back. They said, "The fact that the ACT budget remains on track demonstrates the responsible financial management of the Stanhope Labor government." They went on to say, "It would have been irresponsible for the ACT Labor government to take the easy political route and allow the territory budget to grow out of control into the future." What on earth did they think they were doing in the few years before then? Where did these 2,500 extra public servants come from?

In that press release about the ACT budget being on track is there any mention at all of the increase in taxes? No. It says that figures released by Treasury show the budget recorded a net operating surplus of \$47 million in the year to December 2006, that it remains on track for a final outcome deficit of around \$42 million, and that the

2006-07 budget required the ACT government to make some hard decisions to ensure that future generations of Canberrans would not be left with crippling debt. It does not say anything about increased taxes—nothing whatsoever.

I can table that document if members want to look at it or just pass it around. It says nothing at all about the increased taxes. There is just a small mention about making some hard decisions. I wonder how much money they are actually saving by making some of those hard decisions. Education is a case in point. Even with their much-trumpeted school closures they are not going to save very much money at all there—a matter of several million dollars a year. There is nothing in this press release about the huge increase in debt being incurred, the fact that ordinary Canberrans in many instances are paying 40 per cent more in their rates and taxes, and the fact that small businesses are paying up to 65 per cent more.

Mr Stanhope: What do you say, Mr Mulcahy? Are you going to reopen them all?

MR STEFANIAK: You are aware of our promises, Mr Stanhope. You do not have to try to gild the lily, play Joseph Goebbels and invent a whole lot of nonsensical policies that we have not committed to or said anything about. Do not put words into our mouths, Mr Stanhope. Our policies are on the table.

Mr Stanhope: The table is pretty bare, though.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Stanhope!

MR STEFANIAK: In terms of parking charges, we promised we would abolish them at the hospitals. Guess what, Mr Stanhope: we will probably save a bit of money because the administrative expenses for that cost you more than the half a million dollars you say you are going to save there.

We have here a government that has increased taxes and increased charges to cover itself and it does not like what the figures actually show. It does not want to use the numbers in the midyear report that show the increases in taxes and, instead, use a different set of numbers. The government told us about figures measured under the Australian Accounting Standards showing a net operating surplus, never mind that the standard are no longer used.

Mr Smyth: You went back to the old system.

Mr Stanhope: Mr Smyth told us about a \$390 million deficit.

MR SPEAKER: Order! You are leaving me nowhere to go.

MR STEFANIAK: Since then we have moved on. So what do we have? We have a government who have incurred deficits by runaway spending. They are now starting to pull themselves out of the pit. Some actions they have taken have been incredibly panicky. They are starting to pull themselves out of the pit, but not by better financial management; it is largely by increasing taxes and charges, with a bit of good luck along the way, especially in terms of the superannuation revenues that are coming in.

To add insult to injury, they just refuse to level with the people of Canberra, refuse to tell them what the budget figures make clear, and the Chief Minister was here today perpetuating myths he has been trying to spread in the hope that the Canberra community will actually believe them. They will not, Mr Stanhope. What we have promised is quite clear. One area, by the way, that would save a bit of money is abolishing the Human Rights Act, which is an added layer of bureaucracy. That would save some money because it does not do anything for the rights of ordinary Canberrans. But watch this space in terms of some sensible policies that would enable a Liberal government, if elected in 2008, to run the territory properly. (*Time expired.*)

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (4.42): My colleagues have emphasised that, with a reduction of fees and charges, it would be difficult to sustain high-quality services. Mr Mulcahy must be speaking to different Canberrans than I do when I conduct my regular mobile offices, because people tell me that they expect service delivery to remain at the level that they have at the moment and that they are happy to pay for it through the measures that this government has instituted. They are happy to pay for it through the measures that this government has instituted because most of these people are sensible people who have not gone to the same school of economics or self-interest as those opposite.

Without the additional revenue, our record expenditure of \$752 million on health services this financial year would be difficult. Health services would be placed under greater pressure and waiting lists would increase. The \$10 million committed by this government over the next four years to address waiting lists would be difficult to afford in this environment. The extra \$12 million to boost acute bed capacity at Calvary Hospital may not go ahead without the increased revenue. Additional hospital beds for older persons with mental health issues and other issues and for subacute rehabilitation would be under threat, as would the 14-bed medical assessment planning unit. The \$5 million for investing in increasing the number of mental health specialists would have to be rethought without increases in revenue.

Without additional revenue, proposed new state-of-the-art schools may be off the agenda—those that were mentioned earlier by the minister for education. These include a new preschool to year 10 school at both Tuggeranong and west Belconnen, the one at Harrison, and the CIT campus for Gungahlin due to open in 2010. Over the next four years, the record \$90 million that has been allocated to improve learning and teaching environments in our public schools may not be possible if taxes are cut. Without sufficient revenue, the 223 separate improvement projects in 72 schools may not happen. The additional \$20 million for improvements to information technology may be withdrawn.

Funding for care and protection, currently \$43 million, would be challenged without additional revenue, as would funding for disability services and infrastructure. Think about the National Convention Centre, for instance. Without revenue, the focus for governments would be on core services. Funding for environmental measures, community development and the arts may be compromised. This government is using this revenue to sustain government service provision in the ACT.

If we took up the Mulcahy approach to funding service delivery in the ACT, our community would be much the poorer for it. Colleagues, is that the Canberra that you want to live in? We would all like to keep fees and charges as low as possible. But, in the context of providing funding for all those services that make Canberra a good place to live, the increases in government charges are a small price to pay. That is exactly what this government has done in order to sustain the quality of our services.

As I said before, if we were to take the Mulcahy approach to funding service delivery, we would be living in a community that would not be socially responsible. Dr Foskey was calling for those sorts of things that would be very much threatened—environmental measures, community development and the arts—if we were to take the approach that Mr Mulcahy has proposed.

Mr Stanhope: Let alone mental health, of course.

MS PORTER: Let alone mental health. As I said earlier, the very heart of this city would be under threat under Mr Mulcahy's approach to funding and to revenue raising. In fact, we would not be raising the revenue; we would be cutting revenue from our coffers, and in that way the whole of our economy would be under threat under his approach—

Mr Stanhope: When he is the leader.

MS PORTER: Yes, when he is the leader, it would certainly be under threat.

Mr Stanhope: It will be sooner rather than later.

MS PORTER: That is right. I do not think we will see him in government in 1,000 years, but never mind.

MR SPEAKER: The time for this discussion has expired.

Planning and Environment—Standing Committee Reference

Debate resumed.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for the Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Housing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (4.47): I rise to support, with an amendment, the referral of the matter to the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment. I move the amendment which has been circulated in my name, namely:

Omit all words after “investigate”, substitute:

“the services provided by ACTION buses specifically:

- (a) examining how well it meets the needs of different segments of the community while recognising that ACTION's role is a mass transport provider;

- (b) incorporating comparative analysis of other bus transport operators in Australian jurisdictions;
 - (c) focusing on ACTION's services within the context of the sustainable transport plan with particular reference to:
 - (i) the appropriateness of the plan especially targets;
 - (ii) progress towards implementation; and
 - (iii) measures needed to ensure targets are met; and
 - (d) providing guidance on principles and key priorities for future service planning;
- (2) the Committee report by 30 June 2007; and
- (3) if the Assembly is not sitting when the Committee is ready to report, the Committee may send its report to the Speaker, or, in the absence of the Speaker, to the Deputy Speaker, who is authorised to give directions for its printing, publication and circulation.”.

I understand from the advice of the Clerk that, in speaking, I will be speaking to both the amendment and the substantive motion.

The government agree to the reference to the planning and environment committee suggested by Mrs Dunne. We want to change the terms of reference to ensure that appropriate comparisons are made with similar transport operators in similar sized cities in other jurisdictions. We do understand and appreciate that the matter of bus travel in this town is of immense importance to the people of the ACT. There is a lot of talk about it, there is a lot of media speculation and there is a lot of media attention, and it is most appropriate, we believe, that one of the parliament's standing committees looks into it. However, we would be asking for it not to drag out too long.

We are confident that ACTION is providing a public transport system that is efficient and meets the mass transport needs of Canberrans. There are some people who continually criticise the organisation and mischievously spread false stories. For example, Mrs Dunne claimed that it takes her daughter from 7.40 am to 11.00 am to get to work at Kingston from Fraser. Officers have examined the timetables and, if Mrs Dunne's daughter catches the 8.30 am service from Fraser, she can be in Kingston at 10.00 in the morning. Those times may not particularly suit Miss Dunne, but 1½ hours is considerably shorter than the period claimed by her mother. It should be noted also that it is ACTION's charter to provide mass transport options and it is unable to accommodate every individual's transport needs.

I have no wish to pre-empt the findings of the committee, but there are some things that we know that the committee will find. ACTION's operations are open and transparent. All information is, and will continue to be, documented in annual reports, including ACTION's performance against indicators, financial statements and governance. The *Canberra Times* reporter Mr Graham Downie has requested and has

been given so much information and so many statistics that all ACTION operations are in the public arena at substantial cost to the organisation.

Bringing ACTION back into a department has improved efficiencies. The buses now run full, not empty, meeting the sustainable transport plan's targets and visions. As I told the Assembly last week, in line with the government's sustainable transport plan, we are seeing a shift from car usage to public transport. Canberrans are concerned about air and noise pollution and our increasing dependence on non-renewable fuels.

More people are choosing to take ACTION as their preferred choice of travel to work. This is demonstrated by the significant increase in adult travel on ACTION services. In February last year, 450,808 adult passengers used ACTION. In February 2007, a year later, 562,561 adults used the service. These are just a few of the things I expect the committee to find.

One of the other things the committee will no doubt report on is whether supply matches demand. Network 06 was developed matching resources with patronage. Prior to 4 December 2006, ACTION was supplying enough buses to carry approximately 8,000 passengers an hour between the peaks on a weekday. They were actually carrying approximately 2,300 passengers. I will say that again: they were supplying enough buses to carry approximately 8,000 passengers an hour between the peaks and they were actually carrying approximately 2,300 passengers. There was an overservicing of 70 per cent capacity. The changes introduced aim to better utilise resources while still providing capacity for 5,000 passengers an hour between the peaks.

Again without any disrespect to the committee, I need to continue with the initiatives designed for continuous improvement of ACTION services. The community has demanded some changes, and those changes have been delivered. The community has demanded additional services, and those additional services have been delivered. Some routes have reverted to the old timetable and some additional routes have been put on for the shoulder periods. We have had an increase in service.

Since the introduction of the new network, ACTION has monitored patronage levels on services to ensure appropriate loadings are on the buses. A number of augmented services have been introduced to relieve some capacities. A range of changes to the network has occurred, including up to 14 additional services on the intertown routes, and up to 23 augments of intertown interpeak services; for example, amended travel directions on route 939 to cater for elderly passengers in this area.

Some further measures will shortly commence; for example, the extension of selected peak services, the adjustment of some routes, the introduction of some additional services, and the implementation of on-platform ticket validation. ACTION will continue to work with the community to ensure that the appropriate balance of services meets demand. ACTION plans to develop a new timetable through a proper planning and community consultation process, and implement that timetable in October 2007. This work cannot be delayed pending the outcome of a committee inquiry, so I ask that the reporting date be brought forward to 31 May 2007.

Incidentally, we will not be treading water between now and 31 May 2007, because we will be responsive where we can. Where deficiencies have been identified and we can fix them, they will be fixed. I look forward to whatever results the committee may come up with but, of course, the government will need to do a response to that report. That response will take a bit of time. That response will need to be considered by the Assembly. If the Assembly had in mind that the response could be adjourned and further discussion happen later on down the track, quite frankly, whilst I think that conversation within the context of the parliamentary debate is a very good idea and quite welcome, I am not going to wait to implement changes which we hope will result in a responsive network in October of this year.

Finally, let me make it clear that security on the buses is an issue that I take seriously, but let me correct a newspaper report of this morning. Mr Pinkas from the TWU did not listen to what I said about police travelling free on the buses. I said that I wanted uniformed police to travel free. At the moment, any police officer can travel free, whether they are distinguishable or not. The point about free travel for police is that they are visible and other passengers can see that they are police officers. There is no point to the concession if they simply look like any other passenger.

For members' benefit, if a police officer identifies himself or herself to the driver by the production of a badge, that is sufficient identification. On the one hand, that is all right because, in effect, we have, if you like, unofficial police officers under cover, as it were, in plain clothes, and they can actually intervene if they see something happening. But having a uniformed officer sitting on the bus will have a deterrent effect. So we are talking to the police about saying to the police officers that if they want free travel we want to see them in uniform.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Bus marshals, Mr Hargreaves?

MR HARGREAVES: Not at all, Mr Deputy Speaker, because bus marshals are generally gung-ho, pistol-toting people—transit police; somewhere between the Australian Federal Police and the Red Angels of the Bronx. As Mr Gentleman would know from his contact in a previous life with AFP guys in his protective services capacity, our police officers are members of the community; they walk with us every day. What we are saying to them as they walk with us every day is that, if they wear their uniforms, people do not muck around, they give them a wide berth, if they are going to be recalcitrant or if they are going to be miscreants.

Mr Mulcahy: Why won't they go into pubs and nightclubs?

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Mulcahy asks a question through you, I am sure, Mr Deputy Speaker. In fact, he was looking in your direction at the time, let me observe. He is good like that. They go into pubs and clubs, but they are not permitted to drink. But, more importantly, there is an unsavoury element in some of the pubs and the clubs which would go looking to pick a fight with a police officer in those particular venues. I trust the judgment of the police in this regard, absolutely. I would like to see a bit more visibility on the buses. If you are going to take a \$6 ride to work and back for free, we will have for free a \$6 look at your uniform when you do it.

I am also happy to say that money for security cameras was allocated in the 2006-07 budget, not a couple of years ago. I am advised that the cameras will be installed before the end of this financial year. These two misstatements of fact by the TWU are part of their continuing campaign, I believe, on EBA negotiations. The union is attempting to apply pressure, keep the stories rolling and use unwarranted bad publicity to gain concessions.

Mr Smyth: The TWU wouldn't do that, would they, Mick?

MR HARGREAVES: To be quite honest, it is a legitimate part of an industrial process, but your WorkChoices legislation would remove any type of legitimate industrial process. People will use whatever pressure they feel they need to use to bring about wage justice and conditions justice for their workers. I will defend their right to do that at any time. We just need to recognise it for what it is, but I will defend their right to do it, as I have done on many occasions.

It is the government's priority to ensure that ACTION lives within its means and continues to provide an effective public transport service for Canberrans. To that end, I will welcome the findings of the committee when it reports.

I thank Mrs Dunne for bringing the motion forward. I have moved the amendment circulated in my name. I have attempted to move away from the term "mass transport" generally because the issue in the public arena at the moment is around the bus service. It is not about light rail, it is not about air travel and it is not about the taxi service. The issue that we have at this time is to do with the bus service. Whether it be about the mass passenger transport system, workers, commuters or school kids really matters not. We are talking about the bus service and I want to make sure that the conversation is focused on that, hence the amendment. I commend the amendment to the Assembly and would seek members' support for that amendment.

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (5.01): I speak today in support of what will become the amended motion. The amendment will enjoy the support of the opposition as well. I believe the ACT government needs to look quickly at the bus timetable situation and that which was in operation before the introduction of the network 06 arrangements in December 2006 and thoroughly review all services to ensure that ACTION in fact provides a service that meets the needs of all users.

My interest in this area has been prompted by the number of representations I have had, which I have passed on to the minister's office so that he is aware of community disquiet over the new timetable. It is generally recognised that the introduction of network 06 was a mistake that has not been well received by the ACT community. The government, I suspect, is starting to understand that it was a mistake to slash \$10 million from ACTION bus routes, and that is why the operator is set to reintroduce a number of the abolished services towards the end of this year, an action which bus users believe cannot come soon enough.

It is one thing to make a mistake, but there is nothing worse than failing to admit or acknowledge that mistake and give credit where credit is due. The recognition is starting to sink in that a better job should have been done and that remedial action is required.

I have received, as I said, many expressions of concern about ACTION bus services. I describe some of these representations to provide for the Assembly examples of how bus route cuts have adversely affected the community. I have had complaints that bus services are overcrowded, that they are running late, or that they are insufficient in certain areas of my electorate.

For example—and I will not use names of constituents, but I am happy to make them available if there is any interest; I think the minister would have all these in more detail by way of correspondence—constituents from Isaacs have written to me expressing their concern that the cutting of bus route No 698 meant that their child would no longer be able to travel by bus from Isaacs to Mawson primary school and arrive at school on time. They have been in contact with the government since the bus route cuts last December and, although there has been some modification of arrangements, they have continued to indicate to me that they do not believe that the solution to their concerns or to this problem is in fact adequate.

The best ACTION was able to do was to reroute high school bus No 616 so that it dropped off students at Mawson primary, but this would mean that my constituents' young child would have to be at the bus stop at 8.00 am and then be at the school from 8.30 am until classes start considerably later. This is not an adequate solution. I understand that my constituents wrote to the Minister for the Territory and Municipal Services only a few days ago to yet again plead with him to reinstate this important bus route.

Another constituent, from Forrest, who is elderly and legally blind, believes that the reduced services have severely affected and disadvantaged elderly people such as she who rely on these services as their only means of transport.

Yet another constituent, this time from Swinger Hill, who is also an elderly resident and is opposed to the ACTION bus route cuts, has written to me. When I made representations to the government on her behalf, I was informed that the decision to cut suburban routes during peak periods was due to low patron demand and that the government understood that “these changes were frustrating for commuters”. If they understand that they are frustrating for commuters, let us see whether they can get them reversed. It seems that while they were happy to effectively fob her off in January, the government obviously underestimated just how frustrating, to use their term, these bus route cuts would be for the entire Canberra community.

It is not just elderly people and schoolchildren who have been affected by these changes. A constituent from Kingston contacted my office in September last year to protest about the then proposed withdrawal of all lunchtime services of the No 40 bus route to and from Campbell Park. These bus services were designed, following direct consultation between the community and ACTION some years ago, to provide Campbell Park workers with a bus service to the city during the middle of the day so that they could run essential errands during their lunch hour if needed. However, this service was scrapped, along with all the others, and all the good cooperation between ACTION and the community to set up that service was absolutely in vain or wasted. The changes have also meant that there are fewer special use buses operating in the community.

Yet another constituent, from Narrabundah, contacted me to complain about the route cuts. He now finds it very difficult to do his shopping, as the easy access bus service to Narrabundah now only operates on Saturdays. He was also concerned that there were not enough easy access buses servicing Canberra's hospitals. When I made representations to the government on my constituent's behalf, I was given the same line about the changes to suburban routes coming about as the result of low patronage demand and that the government understood that these changes were frustrating for commuters. Just as when the Griffith library was closed last year, I do not think there has been an appreciation of the individual difficulties this is creating for many of our citizens.

Another constituent, in Garran, contacted me about this issue as well, explaining that the bus route cuts have completely discouraged Canberrans from using public transport. She has a valid point. How can the government expect more Canberrans to use public transport when they are cutting services and making it harder for residents to use public transport? The less appealing we make it for people to be on public transport, the more they will rely on motor vehicles and the more there will be the pressure on the infrastructure and the difficulties we are presently seeing in parts of Canberra.

The government has lost the trust of existing bus users who have had their services cut across the board and has driven away potential bus commuters who might have considered using the service for financial, environmental or any other reasons. However, it is not just the cutting of services that is frustrating for members of the Canberra community; there is also the fact that in many cases ACTION has not provided adequate reasons for individual bus route cuts. A constituent from Kingston had great difficulty in receiving a reason from ACTION for the cutting of bus route No 84. This was an essential service for many sections of the community, including schoolchildren and senior citizens.

I have used the examples of these individual constituents' concerns to try to personalise the problems experienced by thousands and thousands of Canberrans as a result of these bus route cuts. There are many more examples of lives of ordinary Canberrans being put out by these cuts, but I have used a few select examples to try to get through to the government that this new timetable was a mistake and needs to be reversed.

The motion originally put forward explained that the introduction of the new ACTION timetable in December 2006 significantly reduced bus routes, and I am hoping that the willingness on the part of the minister to inquire further into these issues along the lines that have been proposed in the amendment will ultimately result in a situation where we see a better standard of service in the ACT for bus commuters.

People have all sorts of ideas on how to make public transport more popular. I know that one of the notions that have been advanced in some quarters—and I heard it mentioned this morning at a seminar—was: why not make it free? Work in other countries does not support the view that that is how you get people on buses.

What you have got to do is make it an economic decision between the cost of operating a vehicle and using public transport, but you have to have a public transport system that is convenient, extremely reliable, punctual, accessible and meets the needs of the travelling public. It is no good having a bus system that works wonderfully well for the operators, for the shifts that are contained in award agreements and the like, that appeals to Mr Gentleman's colleagues over there and those in the trade union movement but does not take into account the needs of parents and their children in getting to school, and our retired citizens, who will be growing in number.

It is significant in Seniors Week that we are talking about this issue that Mrs Dunne has put on the table. It is important to recognise in Seniors Week that a looming problem will be the ageing population, access to transport, and mobility and the challenges that older people are going to face in terms of driving themselves. We have to recognise that this will be a growing problem in the territory.

We have to ensure that the transportation system in Canberra is developed and advancing, with a view to accommodating and meeting those needs, and to recognise that there will be a substantial percentage of the community that is going to come to rely on public transport. We have to make the provision of that transport safe and reliable. We do not want a situation where people are frightened to go to interchanges—and I hope to talk about that later today—but it is staggering that people have apprehensions, and we need to ensure that the service is responsive to community needs.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (5.12): My preference is still for an inquiry, using the terms of reference that Mrs Dunne proposed, because I note that what is to be removed by the government's amendment is the examining of issues related to governance, administrative function, budget and timetabling. Those are quite key factors and they certainly go to the essence of the problem.

One of the reasons why I believe quite unsound decisions have been made is the abolition of the ACTION board. If we are going to talk about how the government takes advice, we have to have some section there on governance; otherwise we see the government making its decisions without reference to the community.

We had a new timetable put into place—again, I believe, without consultation, certainly from the ACTION board, which had been abolished—and then we were told that people could complain, they could issue complaints, and the government would respond to the complaints. That is a very backward way of doing things. To me, it is a band-aid approach, rather than looking at the needs, where the needs are and then designing within our resources a bus system that suits those needs.

Realistically speaking, I am quite sure that the government's amendment will get up and it is nice that the opposition supports the amendment. But I lay on the table—

Members interjecting—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Could the two scrums on my left and right please quieten down. Dr Foskey has the floor.

DR FOSKEY: If we do not talk about governance, I am not sure how we are going to ensure that any improvements that might be made will stick.

I am assuming that the committee was consulted on this inquiry. Obviously Mr Seselja was not, unless he had a phone call in Taiwan. But I am assuming that they are happy with the very short time frame. To report by 30 June is quite a big ask. There is going to be a lot of material there. I hope that every single ACTION consumer's issues and complaints—and there may even be some praise—are considered and incorporated. I hope that that short reporting time is not an indication of a lack of real attention to the detail.

I know that the government is talking about setting up a new timetable and, hopefully, putting more resources in, in October. I guess that is the time frame that is required to do those things. It is, I suppose, a form of consultation, and we should be happy about that.

While I am quite sure that Mrs Dunne is very happy that her motion was taken seriously—and it is hard to imagine that it would not be—I am sure that the government are getting at least as many complaints as I am, as a crossbench member, and the opposition are. So there is very clearly a need to reconsider. One of the things that we are seeing is attention to the bus timetable.

I am not quite sure how we are going to address issues related to, for instance, the Woden interchange and, no doubt, the Belconnen interchange. I hear anecdotally from young people that both those places are considered very dangerous places to be, especially on your own, and it does not seem to matter what time of day you are there. I have no idea what plans the government has in mind for the Belconnen interchange, but I know, because I was at a Woden Community Council meeting some years ago, that a consultant for ACTPLA presented plans for a new Woden interchange to be incorporated into a redesigned town centre. It all looked very good. I have not heard a word about it since; it is still on the backburner. These are the issues that we are going to have to address, as well as our timetable, if we want to make bus services more attractive.

The very people who are most reliant upon the interchanges, the elderly and the young, are the ones that are scared stiff of going there. We have had severe incidents in the last day or so, and it could well be that bus drivers are being targeted now. It is getting in the news. Maybe it is because the bus services are considered deficient by some patrons. But for young people, the interchanges have been dangerous for a very long time. It does not have to be dangerous in terms of physical violence. There are all kinds of threats. People are asking for money, with menaces, even if those menaces are verbal. That certainly happened to my daughter at the Woden interchange, which makes me believe, given that it was not a random incident, that it happens with great regularity.

It being 45 minutes after the commencement of Assembly business, the debate was interrupted in accordance with standing order 77. Ordered that the time allotted to Assembly business be extended by 30 minutes.

DR FOSKEY: I was on the point of finishing anyway. I just wanted to say that issues such as the Woden interchange should not be put aside while we focus on the timetable, because it needs to be brought back onto the agenda. It is always very pleasing when the government, and in this case the opposition, respond to community concern. They are supporting that motion of Mrs Dunne. In fact, I have to thank her for consulting me on the terms of reference that she suggested. Here we are; we are all working together. It is nice, isn't it?

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (5.19): On the amendment, I welcome Mr Hargreaves's cooperation on this matter. He needs to be congratulated on taking on board the issues that are raised in my motion. It is interesting that, although the format of the motion changes significantly, generally speaking the tenor of the motion has not changed.

I quibble a little in that I originally envisaged this as something more broad ranging than just an inquiry into the bus system. Although there is still some emphasis in Mr Hargreaves's paragraph 1 (c) in relation to the sustainable transport plan, it is much narrower than the original intent of the motion. I could do some fancy footwork and move an amendment to the amendment, but that would be a waste of time because Mr Hargreaves has the numbers and I do not. I should take the victory that has been delivered to me by Mr Hargreaves today in good grace.

We had a discussion, just after the Assembly sitting was suspended, on bringing forward a reporting date, which was something that I had in the back of my mind. I am concerned, as Dr Foskey is, about the shortness of the reporting date. I suggested to Mr Hargreaves—and I put this suggestion now to the planning and environment committee as well—that they might report on that date on the ACTION parts of it but perhaps maintain an ongoing brief to look at aspects of the sustainable transport plan, which has never been reviewed by any committee of the Assembly.

After a few years in operation and some little look at it in its nascent form during the taxi inquiry, there is some value in the planning and environment committee looking at the sustainable transport plan and whether it is on the money. I have always been supportive in general of the sustainable transport plan. I said to the previous minister that I thought the targets were a bit on the weak side and that they could be more adventurous.

My major quibble with this is that we are still looking at Canberra as a place where public transport is provided by buses. Buses may not be the best answer in the future. I know that Mr Mulcahy goes into wince mode when I talk about anything other than buses. I understand there are a lot of practical and financial impediments to moving beyond buses. We see that there are even financial impediments and practical impediments to infrastructure like the busway as well.

These are things that the planning and environment committee should be looking at. The planning and environment committee tends to have a preoccupation with planning issues, and the environment seems to come a distant second in the deliberations. That is part of the structure of the planning and environment committee. It is a busy committee, and it is a good opportunity for it to look at this important environmental issue, because it has a remit in relation to transport.

Dr Foskey is correct. We need to place on the record that, while I do not expect the minister to wait for this committee to report on security at the interchanges and I expect to see him do more work more quickly on the concerns raised by constituents and by the TWU about safety at the interchanges, I also expect that this committee will look at those issues. The revised terms of reference that the minister has provided will allow that to happen.

This is a welcome change of heart from the minister. Last week, when we attempted to debate the bus timetable, we had an attempt by the minister to close down that debate by circulating an amendment that was just another self-congratulatory piece of work, which is standard for the Stanhope government on private members day. This is a real meeting of the minds. While I still have a few quibbles, this is a great victory for public transport and ACTION bus users in the territory. The opposition will be supporting Mr Hargreaves's amendment.

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts) (5.24): I and the government are pleased to support an inquiry into ACTION and ACTION buses. It is a very important issue and there is a very significant community debate occurring now in relation to ACTION, and certainly the new timetable.

I just want to respond to a few issues that have been raised in the debate. On the issue of timing, commentary has been made by both Dr Foskey and Mrs Dunne in relation to the reporting date of 30 June 2007. It has been brought forward somewhat. Certainly, as always in relation to the work of committees, that does not necessarily mean that it is set in concrete, but our hope and expectation are that the committee will conclude this report by that date, and I am sure they can.

Some of the government's thinking in relation to that date was of course around the fact that the government is not standing still in relation to ACTION and its network. The minister has announced a number of initiatives and measures that he has been pursuing in response to community and customer feedback. There is always this tension with work that government does during the period of an inquiry—and this is an Assembly inquiry of which the government wish to be respectful—but, mindful of this, we are nevertheless pursuing a range of issues and measures such as the extension of selected peak services; the adjustment to routes, which continues and is a feature of constant change and response; the introduction, as the minister has said, of some additional services; and the implementation of on-platform ticket validation.

It is appropriate that I respond. There is always the temptation, and we see it in this debate of course, to never acknowledge the significant advances that have been made in relation to any government service delivery. The bald fact is—and it is an indisputable fact—that in the last 12 months patronage on ACTION has grown from 450,808 adult passengers in February 2006 to 562,561 adult passengers in February 2007. That is an increase, in the space of 12 months, of 112,000 adult passengers. That is a remarkable achievement.

Let us not have a debate of doom and gloom and beating and flagellating ACTION and the government in a situation in which in the last 12 months an additional 112,000

adult Canberrans have caught the bus. It is a really significant achievement and it needs to be acknowledged. So in the context of this motion to have an inquiry into ACTION buses let us provide the framework, let us provide the context, in terms of what the government has achieved and continues to achieve.

Let us acknowledge, as we agree to an inquiry into ACTION, that, in the space of three months since the new routes were announced, there has been a seven per cent increase in patronage. In the space of the last three months patronage has increased by seven per cent. The flavour of the debate is that ACTION is a basket case—that these changes, the new measures, have been rejected by the entire travelling public. But they have not. Patronage is up seven per cent in three months.

That is certainly not to deny that the new routes have caused some significant angst, that the government and members in this place have been subjected to significant representations around routes and inconvenience and that the feedback in many regards has been negative. But let us not forget, in the context of some of the disadvantage that some members of the travelling public have suffered, that patronage has increased by seven per cent since the new routes were introduced. So there are a lot of people out there that are not complaining, that are not saying to members of this place that this is all dreadful, this is all awful. There has been an increase of seven per cent. So there are a lot of Canberrans who find the new arrangements satisfactory—not only satisfactory, there are a lot of Canberrans who are happy with the new routes and the new arrangements to the extent that our patronage levels have increased by seven per cent. So we need to acknowledge that; we need to put that in some context.

I know that in his heart Mr Mulcahy at least thinks about some of these issues around efficiencies. Essentially, as we have just heard through the matter of public importance, it is all about efficiencies. It is not about increasing revenue; it is all about extra efficiency. So the facts and the detail which Mr Hargreaves provided earlier would, I am sure, have struck a particular chord with Mr Mulcahy. The new network was introduced on 4 December, so it is just on three months and patronage has increased by seven per cent. In the between-peak period prior to that—and I know this is the sort of stat that goes straight to the heart of Mr Mulcahy's entire philosophy of life—we were providing enough buses for 8,000 passengers per hour between peaks and we were carrying 2,000 passengers per hour between peaks. We had an excess capacity of 70 per cent. Of course we non-economic rationalists, we progressives, do not dwell on these numbers so much, but I just know that the food for thought—

Mr Mulcahy: It sounds like an award problem there—an EBA problem.

MR STANHOPE: Well, perhaps there is an organisational issue, perhaps there is a governance issue, perhaps there is an issue around long-entrenched conditions of service. But the Mulcahy response in his address did not go to that. The Mulcahy response was: “Well, you're seeking to address a whole range of issues, and it's not working, so scrap it and let's condemn it.” But what Mr Mulcahy did not say, of course, is what Mr Mulcahy would do. What would the Liberals do?

Mr Mulcahy: You need a bit of compassion for the disadvantaged. You don't let all the disabled and the disadvantaged fall between the cracks.

MR STANHOPE: These are issues and that is why the government is supporting this motion and this inquiry. There is a whole range of issues—and I will raise these just by way of example—with which the government is grappling in the context of a community conversation around public transport and around ACTION, a mass transport carrier, around which the community need to be aware so that we have an informed debate, an informed inquiry. We need some context around the issues that are relevant to a debate or a discussion around ACTION, and that is that under the old system—

Mr Mulcahy: Fifty-seven people on my kid's school bus—57 and it seats 30.

MR STANHOPE: Well, that is it. Mr Mulcahy, what the government is thinking in the context of the feedback that we are receiving is that we had 70 per cent excess capacity between peaks under the old system and we sought to address that, and it has not worked to our satisfaction, and indeed not to the satisfaction of the commuting public.

But let us acknowledge the issue that we are seeking to address. Mr Mulcahy says, “You’ve gone too far—57 children are on my child’s school bus.” At one level, that is a great achievement—that we are now seeing full buses rather than buses at 30 per cent capacity. In the context of this debate, it does need to be understood—and every member of the Canberra community, of course, has a stake in this—that there is a question around the appropriate level of community service obligation payment. At the moment it is a million dollars a week; we are supplementing the ACTION budget by \$1 million a week—\$50 million a year.

We sought to deal with some of those issues in relation to efficiencies, acknowledging the community service obligation, acknowledging the fundamental importance of public transport to a fair, egalitarian society, but, of course, looking for efficiencies—always looking for efficiencies. That is what we sought last year; we were looking for efficiencies. We will continue to look for efficiencies whilst maintaining our commitment to a reasonable level of community service obligation but providing a service that meets the needs of those that rely particularly on public transport, that meets the needs of our sustainable transport policy and aspiration, but which is efficient.

I am looking forward to this particular inquiry and the interstate comparisons and the benchmarking which are now part and parcel of this motion. I think it will be very useful and it —

Mr Mulcahy: Are you going to look at the private providers?

MR STANHOPE: I want to see the private providers, yes, and I am very keen to see how the Liberal Party will respond when the report is tabled. (*Time expired.*)

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (5.34): It is fine at last to hear the Chief Minister say that they are willing to look at the private providers interstate and the sort of services that they provide, because the very important part of this equation if we are going to get the ACTION bus services right so that we make up for the failings of the 06 service,

which, of course, have disadvantaged students and concessions in an extreme way, is that we have to look interstate and benchmark properly. I welcome the acknowledgment by the Chief Minister that they got it wrong. It is great to see at least the Chief Minister coming on side with a Liberal initiative to look at—

Mr Stanhope: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. At no stage did I concede that the government had gotten it wrong. There is a point that needs to be reached—

MR SMYTH: What standing order?

Mr Stanhope: There is a point that needs to be reached, Mr Speaker. I am not prepared to sit here and have Mr Smyth, as is customary because he is essentially dishonest—he is more than that, but he is essentially at heart an incredibly dishonest person—

MR SMYTH: Well, he has to withdraw that.

Mr Stanhope: to stand today and say—

MR SPEAKER: You have got to withdraw that.

Mr Stanhope: No. He just accused me of admitting something which I did not admit.

MR SPEAKER: Well, you cannot—

Mr Stanhope: I did not admit a mistake. I did not say that. That was misleading. He misled the house in saying that.

MR SPEAKER: Order! You have got to withdraw both of those. You have got to withdraw the—

Mr Stanhope: I will withdraw, Mr Speaker, but I will not resile from the fact that I was just accused of making a statement which I did not make. Is that not unparliamentary or inappropriate?

MR SMYTH: You do it all day.

MR SPEAKER: It is a debating point. We are in the middle of a debate about a motion and, if it is felt that that is inaccurate, somebody needs to—

Mr Stanhope: I need to move a motion of censure, do I? Is that the only option available to me?

MR SPEAKER: You could do that, or—

Mr Stanhope: Mr Speaker, on the point of order: could I, in order to deal with this problem, move a motion that Mr Smyth is a serial liar. Is that the form that the motion would take in order to deal with his constant misrepresentation of my position? I would like to stand and say—

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Stanhope: that I have got to move a censure that he is a serial liar in order to deal with his misrepresentation.

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

Mr Stanhope: He is a lot worse than that, of course. The fact that he is that as well is a problem.

MR SPEAKER: It is open to you, Chief Minister, if you feel you have been misrepresented, to seek leave from me to address the situation pursuant to standing order 46. All of those things that you have mentioned are available to you, but you should not use points of order as a device to make a point—

Mr Stanhope: What—that he does not tell the truth?

MR SMYTH: He has got to withdraw that, Mr Speaker.

Mr Stanhope: Well, we just heard him, Mr Speaker, not tell the truth.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Just withdraw that. You are just turning up the heat.

Mr Stanhope: I withdraw that, and I will deal with it as appropriate.

MR SMYTH: Mr Speaker, the tetchiness of the Chief Minister on this is indication of how important it is that we get the ACTION network right. The Chief Minister spoke of indisputable facts. Well, let us put a couple of other indisputable facts onto the table. It is an indisputable fact that boardings and trips by students have declined. It is an indisputable fact that his government, through their network, have caused the number of concessions to decline. They are indisputable facts if we are talking about indisputable facts.

This is the problem with this government: they just cannot get it right. They have punished students, the most vulnerable. They talk about education reform, but there is no point reforming the education system if the kids cannot get to school. And they talk about protecting the most vulnerable in our community; but why have they targeted concessions so that the people who in the main rely most on the buses, often use them out of the peak hour because they cannot use them at peak hour because their concessions are not valid, have fewer buses to board?

We heard Mrs Dunne talk today about somebody who had approached her who cannot make the trip to Kingston. I have had a similar constituent from Chisholm say to me that for her to get from Chisholm to Kingston or Manuka on the weekend to catch up with her friends would normally take about two hours—two hours in the nation's capital! So it puts young people at risk. It also means that the homeward-bound trips for the young people are taking way too long and often will terminate after dark, which again, in particular, puts young females at risk. And this is the 06 network that the Chief Minister's government has put in place.

I am pleased that we are going to look at how efficient the network is. I notice that Mr Hargreaves's motion is very close to what Mrs Dunne had originally moved. Imitation is the sincerest form of praise, so it is good to see that it is imitated. I would be very concerned if in paragraph 1 (b) in Mr Hargreaves's amendment, "incorporating comparative analysis of other bus transport operators in Australian jurisdictions", is used in some way to justify or dumb down the system even further, because we know that we will compare very unfavourably in regard to some issues. From Hornsby to Cronulla in Sydney is about the same distance as from the top of Amaroo to the bottom of Banks. Sydney has managed to cram six million people into that area; we have 300,000. So, yes, there are inefficiencies because of the specific layout of the city that will come into effect.

Mr Gentleman is the chair of the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment, and I certainly hope that it is the intention of the committee, when it looks at this, to take into account some of these factors—that the very wide plan and the structure of the city which have been cemented in place over the last 40 or 50 years actually militate against public transport if you have got the timetable wrong. From all the people I have talked to about it, it would appear that the peaks seem to be working well, and that is a reasonable thing, but it is an indisputable fact that students and concessions have declined under the 06 network—this from a party that claims to be in favour of education and students and, of course, of supporting those less well off.

So there are a number of problems here. I commend Mrs Dunne for bringing the motion forward. It is a very important issue. It is an issue that people are talking about out there in the community. It is an issue that needs to be looked at seriously, and it does raise the question, when the Chief Minister said he looks forward to getting the results, as to why this sort of inquiry was not done before they changed the network. Why wasn't this done beforehand? Similarly, on consultation with volunteers: why weren't volunteers consulted? If you had got consultation right and used the government's own consultation protocol you would have had this information before you changed the network.

I have seen something today that I have never seen before. In the newsletter sent home to parents from the Marist College in Pearce there was a warning that certain buses were full and could not be relied upon and that certain route buses were also full and could not be relied upon. It is quite astounding when a school in this city sends home a warning to parents that they cannot rely upon or trust the bus network as provided by this government.

So it is a timely motion; Mrs Dunne is to be commended for bringing it on. I congratulate Mr Hargreaves for having the good sense and the common sense to say, "Okay, let's get this right." The best way is to listen to the community, and perhaps if the government had followed their own consultation process before they had done this they might have got it right then. But we have a really good opportunity here, and we take the Chief Minister at his word that they will look at the private providers interstate as well. I believe that a bit of competition is a good thing in bus services. We know that for years Deane's over the border have been keen to provide competition and extra service, which would hopefully be to the benefit of the provision of bus services in the ACT and to the benefit of the consumers. That being said, I will sit down and say well done to Mrs Dunne for bringing this motion on.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (5.43): Mr Speaker, this is an important motion today and it is an important, dare I say, junction for the government that it has eventually come on board so that we will together make some progress to improve the bus system in the ACT.

The minister and the Chief Minister have talked about the improvements in the bus service, and there have been improvements in the bus service; nobody doubts that. The government like to selectively quote their facts. But one of the things that hides away in the back of the government's own fact sheet about ACTION patronage is that over the last two years we have seen substantial losses in patronage from concession users, and that, Mr Speaker, is the elderly, the young and the disabled.

Over the last two years we have seen 67,000 fewer concession users on the buses. This means that the bus service is failing to provide its social justice elements. It is now becoming a bus service for the middle class, for people who have jobs, usually well-paid jobs, and who are travelling to work. I do not see that there is a problem with that; people who have simple journeys to work should be using the bus as much as possible—

Mr Stanhope: Are you going to increase the budget?

MRS DUNNE: and we should be encouraging them to do so for a whole range of reasons.

Mr Stanhope: How much more money are you going to put in?

MRS DUNNE: The other thing that we see is that, after a reasonable increase in the number of schoolchildren—

Mr Stanhope: Get that calculator out, mate.

MRS DUNNE: using the buses in 2005-06—

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MRS DUNNE: I can talk over him, Mr Speaker; it is all right. In 2006-07 26,000 fewer schoolchildren used the buses. If you lose the schoolchildren—if schoolchildren never get the idea that it is all right to use buses, that you can get around and it provides a service for you—we will have lost them for life. The culture of using public transport will be lost to a large part of the next generation, and that has real implications for the future sustainability of public transport.

Mr Hargreaves likes to talk about the 120,000 extra boardings, but when you divide that by the number of working days it is actually quite a small number—fewer than 500 people extra a day using the buses—and that is a real problem for us. There are increases in public transport use going to work, as I have said, but most of the other sectors are losing out, and we need to find ways of getting it back into kilter.

I will pass over the churlish and disorderly interjections of the Chief Minister and congratulate Mr Hargreaves for getting on board and doing something to ensure that ACTION buses will be better in the future. I commend the motion and I thank those helpful members of the Assembly who have assisted in this today.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Bushfires—proposed order to table

Mr Stefaniak: Mr Speaker, I seek leave to move a motion circulated in my name.

Leave not granted.

Standing orders—suspension

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra—Leader of the Opposition) (5.46):

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Stefaniak from moving a motion to require the Chief Minister to table papers relating to the Canberra 2003 bushfires.

Mr Speaker, this motion requires the Chief Minister to deliver to your office for distribution to members by the close of business tomorrow, it being far too late today, the following documents: a briefing paper to cabinet prepared by Mike Castle and Tim Keady warning of the potential serious impact to the urban area and listing the urban edge as an asset under threat; any other documents created for or resulting from the cabinet briefing given on 16 January 2003; and, thirdly, cabinet minute decision 0516 noting arrangements for the declaration of a state of emergency and the need to recall cabinet if decisions had to be made about the future of assets.

The reason for this is that the Chief Minister refused to provide these documents and referred everyone, as he has been doing in questions, to the transcript and to the court. However, if one looks at the web, these documents, I am told, are not there. When you go through the coroner's report, whilst there are points from the cabinet briefing which are referred to in volume II of the report, the document is not attached.

These documents we submit are crucial. They are documents that were certainly available before the court but which are not available elsewhere. They are not documents that were attached to the report, they are not documents that were readily available, but they are very germane and very pertinent to some very serious issues in relation to the bushfire and the inquiry. Despite asking for them over the last two weeks or so, we still do not have a number of answers to questions that are of crucial concern to the population of Canberra. These documents were very much relied upon, were looked at by the court, relied on by the coroner and are mentioned, in some instances, I think, at page 60 or so of volume II—

Mr Gentleman: Mr Speaker, I draw your attention to the sub judice rule, which we have discussed recently in regard to this. Paragraph (1) of Mr Stefaniak's motion here goes specifically to the people that are being involved in that court action. I would ask for your ruling on it.

Mr Smyth: Mr Speaker, on the point of order—

MR SPEAKER: I think I can fix this up.

Mr Smyth: You can fix this one up?

MR SPEAKER: Yes. These are documents that became public documents as a result of the coronial inquiry; so sub judice does not apply in relation to those papers because they are documents that were in fact on the web at one stage.

MR STEFANIAK: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for that ruling, and that is quite so. I think at about page 59 or 60 of volume II of the coronial inquest there is a list of dot points which are part of the briefing paper to cabinet. That in itself is reasonably well covered, but of course the rest of the paper is not. But the other documents—any other documents created for or resulting from the briefing—of course are very pertinent to a number of issues that we still do not have answers for, which are being debated in this place and which we have been asking questions about. We still have not been given answers to them.

I can understand the Chief Minister's tactic in now saying in answer to these questions: "Refer to the transcript. Refer to the report." That is all very well as far as it goes. But that can only take people so far. He continues to refuse to answer a number of questions which are germane and which are still causing considerable concern to the people of Canberra. These documents, which are referred to in part of the court process but which are not available, we have asked to be tabled. He has refused to do so. They would be of great assistance in terms of, hopefully, finalising this matter and getting some answers to questions that he has not answered. Accordingly, Mr Speaker, I submit that it is very important for this Assembly to ensure these documents are tabled and that we have the debate in relation to that. No doubt the government will probably refuse to, but at least we have a duty to attempt to get these documents; hence the point of this motion and my moving for suspension of standing orders to move it.

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts) (5.51): The government oppose the suspension of standing orders. Today was an important day, or was meant to be. There is legislation to be debated and passed. We have seen two stunts today by the opposition—two stunts by an opposition that is not prepared to do the work that an opposition is required to do, namely, deliver policy and question the government on policy. We have had not a single question. We are now into the third month of the year, and we have had not a single question on health, not a single question on education. We had a stunt of a motion this morning, the confetti motion of no confidence—an absolute joke, a stunt. We have had two motions of no confidence in two weeks.

Mr Smyth: Well, you deserve it.

MR STANHOPE: And you say this is a very rare and serious motion, the motion of no confidence. You moved one last week; you move another one this week. They are just confetti—another day, another motion of no confidence. You have destroyed executive business for the morning. You did not allow the government to vote on and pass legislation. They are still there on the notice paper, waiting. If you wanted to move a motion, if you wanted to do a stunt like this, you can do that on private members day. You do not destroy the business of government. There were two bills to be debated and passed today—a financial management act and a procurement act. We are not going to get to them because of your repetitive, childish stunts.

You do not want to do the work of an opposition. You do not want to allow the government to do the work of government. So here we have it: a joke of an opposition, an absolute standing joke. I often think that if Peter Debnam came to the ACT and joined the Liberal Party here he would lift the standard and the quality. That is what you have sunk to.

What we need to understand in relation to this motion today, as it follows on from a no-confidence motion, is that the opposition today, through two stunts, have simply prevented the government from doing the business of government. We today have been prevented from debating and passing two important pieces of legislation because the opposition are too lazy, too disorganised, too fractured, too ignorant, to do their job. They will not investigate issues around health. They will not represent their constituency or the Canberra community in relation to education.

We have heard nothing on health and nothing on education from those opposite; nothing on any of the issues that concern the people of Canberra—just two stunts that have completely denied the government the opportunity to debate and pass the legislation that is on the notice paper. Be under no misunderstanding about this, be under no mistake about this: we saw them come in here today, this morning, piggybacking off a stunt, to pursue another stunt, a motion of no confidence, the second motion of no confidence in two weeks.

The opposition keep pretending that these are really serious motions: “We wouldn’t move these if they weren’t serious.” And then they do one a week, denying us the opportunity of debating our legislation. We get to the point where we had an opportunity to debate the financial management bill and we have now been denied that opportunity.

This is what this is about. This is why we will not pander to this nonsense. We will not pander to an opposition that has quite deliberately and brazenly today sought to deny the government the opportunity to govern on behalf of the people of the ACT—the people who, in their wisdom, put us here; the people who, in their wisdom, put us here in majority. And why did they put us here in majority? Because they know how hopeless you are, and you are illustrating it today. This is a fantastic illustration of why you are in opposition and why you will stay in opposition, because you are just not up to the job. You are hopeless, and in your destructive mode and determination to stop the government from doing the business of government you have today, on an executive business day, denied us the opportunity to debate our legislation.

The second aspect of this, and why we know it is such a stunt, why we know it is deliberate obstruction, is that all these papers were released by the coroner. They are all publicly available. They are all out there. This is a stunt. You do not have to come to me to get these documents tabled. Just go and get them. They are available. They are out there. They are in the ether. I cannot believe you have not got them. This is how serious you were about the issue: you did not even get the documents that were available. They were released to the coroner.

Mrs Burke: They were not.

MR STANHOPE: I have seen them published in the *Canberra Times*. This illustrates the extent to which—(*Time expired.*)

Motion (by **Ms MacDonald**) proposed:

That the question be now put.

A call of the Assembly having commenced—

Mr Stanhope: You are a joke! They're out there. What a dumb—

Mr Pratt: You blocked the streets of Civic with fire trucks. You're the joke!

Mr Stanhope: It just goes to show that what you get with Mr Stefaniak is what you see: a dopey big buffoon.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Withdraw that, Mr Stanhope.

Mr Stanhope: I withdraw.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 5

| | | | |
|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Mr Barr | Mr Gentleman | Mrs Dunne | Mr Stefaniak |
| Mr Berry | Ms MacDonald | Mr Mulcahy | |
| Dr Foskey | Ms Porter | Mr Pratt | |
| Ms Gallagher | Mr Stanhope | Mr Smyth | |

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that the standing orders be suspended.

Question resolved in the negative.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

**Reusable nappies
Zimbabwe**

MS MacDONALD (Brindabella) (6.00): I rise this evening to talk about two matters, one local and the other one international. The local matter relates to Reusable Nappy Week, which runs from 19 to 25 March. I understand this is the second year this has run and that there are more events in Canberra this year than there were for the inaugural week. The local events include information sessions, displays, workshops and gatherings, and they will occur at the Canberra Hospital on Wednesday, 21 March from 11.00 am to 3.00 pm in the main foyer; on Thursday, 22 March from 5.30 pm to 6.30 pm at Campbell Cottage Childcare Centre at Campbell; on Friday, 23 March at the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre from 11.00 am to 2.00 pm; and on Saturday, 24 March from 10.00 am till 2.00 pm at the Lifestyle Centre, Hyperdome, Athllon Drive, Tuggeranong.

A constituent came to speak to me today about the issue of reusable nappies, and it is my understanding from what I have been presented with that, as well as being environmentally sensitive, they can also save people who use these nappies quite a deal of money—save them lots and lots of money in fact. I have a brochure here that says that reusable nappies are friendly to the environment, you do not need to use as many, they are much easier to use and, unlike disposable nappies, they breathe.

The second matter that I want to refer to briefly this evening in the remaining time is one that is much more grave in nature and that is the current situation in Zimbabwe. I am sure that all members were shocked at the arrests and beatings on Sunday of members of the opposition parties who were making their way to—I understand they did not refer to it as a rally—a religious meeting organised by the Save Zimbabwe Campaign coalition. Obviously we all would say that we detest the use of violence against people who are making political representation.

I note that today—I got a press release just this afternoon—the South African government has put out a statement, which I do welcome, on the current situation in Zimbabwe. I think that is where the real key lies: in Zimbabwe's surrounding neighbours coming out and placing pressure on the government of Zimbabwe, trying to pressure them into change, allowing for an effective opposition to be able to work and for free and fair elections to take place.

We can only do so much from here in Australia, but I think it is important that we all, as parliamentarians, get up and express our concern when we see these things happening. Of course the situation in Zimbabwe is nothing new—there has been oppression in Zimbabwe for a long time—but it seems to be spiralling fairly dramatically at the moment, and to see the likes of Morgan Tsvangirai being beaten to such a state where they cannot appear in court because they have to go and have blood transfusions is highly distressing.

I urge all of us to send Amnesty International an email urging change within Zimbabwe and for change to occur by pressure from the surrounding countries' governments.

Emergency services

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (6.05): Mr Stanhope and Mr Corbell have today deliberately misunderstood the role of a minister of an administrative agency. Of course the bureaucrats manage an agency, and they are responsible for the operational decisions.

The issue that Mr Stanhope and Mr Corbell do not understand clearly is that of the appropriate role of a minister. The issue being debated today was in fact the role of the minister when the bureaucrats fail in their responsibility—that was the issue of today. Clearly the Commissioner for Emergency Services has made a decision about a new management structure. And what has that decision done? It has created considerable anger within various arms of the individual emergency services, culminating today in the extraordinary protest outside the Assembly.

The issue is quite simple: if there is a failure in the competence of senior bureaucrats, the minister has to act. It is the responsibility of a minister to act in these circumstances. The stupid scenarios painted by the Chief Minister are clearly that—stupid. It is not that we are suggesting that the health minister do the work of surgeons, that the education minister do the work of teachers or that the Chief Minister acting as the minister for emergency services go out to fight bushfires, although—

MR SPEAKER: That was a personal reflection; you should withdraw that.

MR SMYTH: Mr Speaker, I withdraw. Even though we know that the minister for emergency services has actually fought fires while he has been the minister for emergency services—and we compliment him on his actions there—the scenarios painted by the Chief Minister are clearly absurd. These suggestions by the Chief Minister simply demonstrate that he does not even understand his role. Moreover, we know that he does not understand his role through his abrogation of responsibility for the 2003 bushfire disaster.

Ministers have a role as minister for a department or for an agency. This role is not to micromanage a department or an agency; this role is to oversight the activities of their bureaucrats, and, when there are problems evident, to take appropriate action.

So what happened with emergency services this morning? Volunteers told the minister for emergency services in a unanimous vote that they did not have confidence in the reforms and they did not have confidence in their commissioner. This was a failure of management at the top level of the Emergency Services Agency and it is up to the minister to take action in the face of that turmoil. This is not an operational issue; this is an issue that goes to the heart of the appropriate role of a minister.

It is absolutely distressing that neither Mr Stanhope nor Mr Corbell understand that role. On the need to exert leadership, they have failed. On the need to show courage, they have failed. On the need to acknowledge responsibility, they have failed. It is a pathetic display of ministerial responsibility, or at least a complete lack of ministerial responsibility, from both ministers.

Zimbabwe**Air crash in Yogyakarta****Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo nature reserves**

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (6.08): Mr Speaker, it is a pity Ms MacDonald has left because she would probably be interested to know—following on from a couple of days ago when I mentioned Sekai Holland, one of the Zimbabwean democracy leaders who was detained—that it has been found that Sekai Holland was beaten up very seriously. She was jumped on, and her ribs were broken, by someone wearing big boots, and, after many hours of torture, an arm and a leg were broken. So she appears to have been singled out for the worst punishment of all the leadership, with the exception of Morgan Tsvangirai, who lost more blood and could have been killed with the blows to the head that he experienced.

So there are concerns there. I urge members to write to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, as I did, and ask him to put pressure on other African governments, because it seems they are the ones with the ability to act. I thought members would be interested in that.

I also want to mention something else that perhaps comes closer to home, and that is the loss last week of two Canberra women in the terrible air accident in Yogyakarta—women we could not afford to lose: Allison Sudrajat from AusAID and Liz O’Neill from DFAT. They were women who were climbing up the ladder and, as we know, it is so difficult for women to do that, especially women with children. My daughter attended Deakin high school with one of Allison Sudrajat’s children and I know that people in AusAID, especially women working there, are very much lamenting her loss. Liz O’Neill has been spoken about more in the press because she was a friend of Chris Uhlmann who, of course, as we know, has a strong voice.

Finally, to go local, last night I went to the Gungahlin Community Council meeting, and I want to show that when there is good news from the government I mention it. There was a presentation there on the Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo nature reserves and, most particularly, an initiative that is occurring called BOB, which is short for bush on the boundary. This is a really interesting place where suburban development is pushing up against Australia’s most significant area of Blakely’s red gum and yellow box forest. There are some very exciting experiments going on there which will also help people understand how to restore vegetation and, hopefully, the native wildlife to very degraded places like this.

One of the issues that was most eloquently spoken about was the long-necked freshwater turtle, which—did you know?—is very abundant in that area. A notice was put in *Gunsmoke*, the Gungahlin Community Council newsletter, asking people, if they sight one of these things, dead or alive, on the road to report it. In a month or so 70 reports have come in. What is interesting is that they map where these animals are found and, significantly, they were found particularly close to Yerrabi Pond and to other ponds.

The Forde development is part of the bush on the boundary reference group, which also includes the Ginninderra catchment group, the conservation council, UCAN,

ANU, CSIRO, Greening Australia, Invasive Animals CRC and the Canberra Ornithologist Group. There are issues there as they do their development. For instance, they drain wetlands and there is an impact on a lot of the wildlife, in this case the long-necked turtle, which spends a lot of time going in a straight line between wetlands and ponds and does not know anything about roads, is much the same colour as our asphalt roads and is very frequently squashed. I did suggest that their shells be painted with fluorescent yellow paint but it was decided that would not be very appropriate.

This is an initiative that the ACT government is a partner in and one that is really exciting. I would like to hear more about it from our minister but I have got a feeling that after that briefing last night I might know a bit more about it than even he does.

Emergency services

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (6.14): Mr Speaker, I rise to address a couple of issues relative to the debate earlier today. But, before I do that, I take this opportunity to echo the sentiments expressed by Ms MacDonald and Dr Foskey about Morgan Tsvangirai and the condition that he is in. Yes, it is very important that MLAs do whatever they can to raise that concern. While this world is so much more focused on other highly political issues, which perhaps are not as important as the Darfurs and the Zimbabwes, I guess we can look on, powerless.

I want to address a couple of issues raised by the Greens today in the debate on the no-confidence vote and to correct the record. Dr Foskey said that she had been told this morning that the opposition had decided last night to run a no-confidence vote and therefore why did we not advise her earlier than we did. But that is not the case; we did not decide to run a no-confidence vote last night. This morning, when we began to get an understanding that the brigades and units would be coming in to Civic and to the Assembly, we thought that perhaps we should think about doing that, but we did not make that decision really until after 10 o'clock, outside in the square in a group huddle. After we were absolutely aware of the gravity of the rebellion, we made that decision. So, Dr Foskey, we could not have spoken to you before then.

As to Dr Foskey's concerns, she was a bit critical of the poor old opposition here this morning. I thought perhaps she was a little too much in free-kicking mode for the government. She said in her presentation this morning that she had only begun the conversation with the volunteers, and I find that rather disappointing—

Dr Foskey: I said why didn't they talk to me as well as you, Mr Pratt.

MR PRATT: She wondered whether she should be talking for the volunteers. In fact she should have been talking for the volunteers here today—

Dr Foskey: I was.

MR PRATT: There has been sufficient information and evidence around in the last couple of weeks for any MLA in this place to have formed an informed opinion on exactly what the circumstances are. So I am quite disappointed that Dr Foskey chose not to join the no-confidence vote. There was sufficient evidence available, sufficient

information about the damage that has been done to the emergency services. It was not rocket science to work that out, and it is a great pity, an absolute pity, that she did not. Dr Foskey this morning said that she still does not quite know what was wrong with the ESB in 2003—that the facts about the circumstances of the ESB's failure in 2003 are still being worked through. I do not know where that comes from. I would have thought that any MLA in this Assembly after 2½ years would have a very good idea of what had gone wrong with the Emergency Services Bureau in 2003. The opposition would like to see the Greens inquiring into these matters somewhat more closely.

Dr Foskey criticised the opposition for apparently not representing the community yesterday in the motion that we ran on the ESA. But of course the opposition were representing the concerns of the emergency services, shall I say, subcommunity. We certainly were, and we were representing the concerns of our constituents, who need to know that they are going to be safe in the ACT, who need to have confidence that there is an emergency management system that is going to ensure that all the preventative planning is done in time, that our emergency services are well scrutinised and that ministerial oversight is in place to ensure that those services are there .

So we are quite disappointed with the fact that the Greens are missing in action at the moment on these major concerns. We would like to see a lot more scrutiny by the Greens of the government and its failures, particularly in emergency management, so we express our disappointment here today that that was not the case in the no-confidence motion.

Access card

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (6.19): Tonight I would like to discuss a very important issue which is due to be debated in the Senate next week, and that is the Human Services (Enhanced Service Delivery) Bill 2007. I would like to thank Dr Foskey for organising a forum on this very important issue held on Monday in the Assembly building. This legislation would see the introduction of the so-called access card. The Howard government maintains that this access card is voluntary. However, this is simply misleading. If someone does not have an access card they will be denied access to the Medicare rebate, pharmaceuticals covered by the PBS, family tax benefits and Centrelink benefits.

If passed in its current form, this legislation will have significant ramifications for privacy and other related problems in Australia. Despite the federal government's denial that this is an all-purpose ID card, it clearly goes beyond what is necessary to assess health and welfare benefits. In its current form, the legislation can lead to serious privacy abuses. I understand that privacy must be balanced against other public interests such as national security and law enforcement; however, this new scheme does not pass the balancing test.

This bill provides that a name, personal number, digital signature, biometric photograph and expiry date must be displayed on the face of the card. A digital signature is an obvious security risk; for example, a teller at the video store or bank can just take a photocopy. The information that will be stored on the chip is also of concern. Some information will be available to be read by anyone who buys a

smartcard from their local electronics store. However, other information will require a PIN. Allan Fels, who headed an inquiry into the card, expressed concern, particularly in regard to the medical information stored on the chip and the fact that it can be altered by anyone who has access to a card reader.

The Howard government has also claimed that the access card will reduce fraud. This is not true; in fact it may even foster it. The registration process is far from secure and watertight. At present the Australian government does not have the technology to detect fake birth and marriage certificates. The Attorney-General's Department revealed during Senate estimates in February that secure electronic document verification services, which will enable all governments in Australia to verify the authenticity of identification documents, will not become complete until 2010.

This throws up great concern since the government plans to start registrations for the access card in April 2008, two years before the DVS system is operating. This means that a criminal could steal somebody's entire identity by using scanned copies of original documents that cannot be verified. Clearly, rather than preventing identity fraud, an access card will perpetrate existing fraud and risk the security and privacy of millions of Australians.

Another issue of concern is the fact that an Australian must be at least 18 in order to be eligible for the access card. Under the current system Medicare cards and healthcare cards are available to 16 and 17-year-olds. However, every 16 and 17-year-old must write to the Secretary to the Department of Human Services to get permission for their own access card. This is simply ridiculous on a number of levels. Firstly, many young people live away from home and, secondly, this is particularly worrying for the confidentiality of teenagers for their access to Centrelink, medical services and PBS medicines. This is unacceptable as it denies young people the privacy and Medicare rights that they deserve.

Furthermore, the access card will have an adverse impact on consumer confidence in Medicare. This will lead to enormous problems with communicable diseases, as people will not use medical services due to fear of being traced because of the necessity to use an access card. At present the AFP cannot demand to see Medicare records. However, under the access card they will, along with ASIO, have full access to all information stored on the cards.

The federal government access card is clearly flawed. While I support the use of smartcard technology in improving service delivery for Medicare and social security, and in reducing fraud, this proposal is fraught with problems and disproportionately invades the privacy of all Australians.

Zimbabwe Emergency services

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra—Leader of the Opposition) (6.23): Mr Speaker, I too join Mr Pratt and others in expressing great concern in relation to the incidents in Zimbabwe. Whilst it is a long way away, these things do concern us. Indeed, the appalling human rights abuses by the Mugabe regime over the last five or six years are quite disgraceful and I think it is a concern that countries that could do something,

like South Africa, do not. I would urge them to take steps, because they are in a position to do so by withholding aid and exerting pressure, and it behoves them to do that.

I was a bit amazed, but not surprised, to hear people calling the no-confidence motion a stunt. I think that is utterly ridiculous. Mr Pratt was quite right in saying that the action of those volunteers surprised even us. We knew they were fed up; they had been contacting Mr Pratt's office and other offices in the opposition for some time, expressing their disappointment, indeed disgust, at what the government is doing. But it was an extraordinary action out there today—volunteers, senior people, captains and vice-captains of brigades, resigning, people putting keys in a bin and leaving them there and leaving their trucks there. They are so frustrated, they are so upset and they are so concerned at the actions of this government and this minister.

We would have been derelict in our duty if we had not come in here and moved a motion of no confidence. The motion of no confidence was finished, indeed, before lunchtime, and there is nothing to stop a government, if it wants to finish its business, from suspending standing orders and perhaps going after six. If you finish by seven, you do not have to worry about overtime for the staff. Or we could have come back tomorrow, if need be, if there was urgent business.

So to call a simple request for documents—documents that, if they are that readily available, why can the government not just provide them, as any reasonable government would—a stunt is ludicrous, because the government has the ability to deal with any additional business it might want to by staying later tonight or, indeed, by coming back tomorrow. The government called the motion of no confidence a stunt—when we had that extraordinary scene out there! Those men and women, who provide so much to our community, were so upset and so angry at this government that they took that action. I have not seen that before; I do not think any other members have seen that before—and that was no stunt. If things like that happen, yes, we will move no-confidence motions—that is our duty—and it is something we do not do lightly, because you cheapen them if you do things lightly.

Today was an extraordinary day, and you should be ashamed of yourselves. I hope Minister Corbell is true to his word when he seemed to indicate out there that he would talk to them. I know it is better late than never, and if he is talking to them I hope he listens, because he can make improvements. He can rethink his stupid actions in absolutely losing all of the goodwill of those volunteers—and think of the problems that will affect the territory if we continue to see a 25 to 40 per cent reduction in the number of volunteers in those brigades.

We have seen some pretty nasty fires—thankfully not in Canberra—elsewhere during this fire season. We are in the grip of some type of climate change. All the experts are telling us that it is not going to get any better. We are at risk of greater fires. It is crucially important that we have proper resourcing and proper measures in place to ensure that we can meet the challenges—and meeting the challenges are those brave men and women who are the volunteer fighters in our rural fire brigades, and the SES members too. Let us not forget them; there are a number of SES members there—the wonderful people who provide help to residents when there are things like the

hailstorms and floods we have seen recently. They are the ones affected, too, and there were a number of them there as well; let us not forget them.

Today was quite extraordinary and the government should be utterly ashamed of themselves for letting things get to a situation where so many good people were so upset that they not only demonstrated out here but brought their vehicles and left them—and many of them actually resigned. I call on the government as a whole, but the minister especially, to get their act together.

Public transport—violence

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (6.28): I received an email, as did other members for Molonglo, late last night from a Mr Smith of Isaacs and I just want to put it on the record because these are issues of concern that I have mentioned previously. He says:

Dear Member

As a concerned parent of a young student that uses Woden Bus Interchange on a daily basis to attend school, I am most disturbed at the level of violence that occurs in the area and the seemingly lack of interest that the authorities show in the safety or security of the passengers that must use the interchange.

During the last few weeks I have become aware of a number of armed hold ups perpetrated against students, both male and female, with the offenders threatening violence, and in one instance holding a knife to a young woman's throat. The motive for this violence appears to be the theft of property including mobile phones, ipods and cash. I am also aware of illegal drugs being touted for sale after school to students. Unfortunately, it has come to the stage where I feel it unsafe for my daughter to use the bus interchange.

This type of behaviour is clearly unacceptable, and reflects directly upon the Government and the Police. We are long term residents and ratepayers in ACT and have watched the deterioration of levels of safety at basic public amenities within our area. The recent stabbing of an ACTION bus driver in this vicinity also highlights the pressing need for swift and decisive action to be taken against the miscreants that have been able to operate unhindered in this area for some considerable time.

Could I please have an explanation as to what you are prepared to do about this ongoing problem and a time frame in which your remedial action can be expected ...

I endorse that sentiment, Mr Speaker, and I would hope that someone will take up this valid concern from this constituent.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.30 pm until Tuesday, 1 May 2007, at 10.30 am.

Answers to questions

Alexander Maconochie Centre (Question No 1450)

Mr Pratt asked the Minister for the Territory and Municipal Services, on 14 December 2006 (*redirected to the Attorney General*):

Are there any plans to include a library service in the Alexander Maconochie Centre; if so, (a) what will be the cost to supply books, (b) how many books will be supplied and (c) what will the recurring costs be for such a service.

Mr Corbell: The answer to the member's question is as follows:

A library has been included in the design of the Alexander Maconochie Centre as part of the education building.

- a) \$10,000 per annum has been proposed in the operating costs of the Alexander Maconochie Centre for the purchase and updating of library supplies.
- b) The Alexander Maconochie Centre will have storage space for approximately 5000 items.
- c) The proposed \$10,000 library budget will be recurrent.

Water—consumption figures (Question No 1465)

Mr Mulcahy asked the Chief Minister, upon notice, on 20 February 2007:

- (1) Further to the reply to question on notice No 1387 relating to the Water Abstraction Charge (WAC), what are the metered water consumption figures on which the audited WAC revenue for the years 2003-04 to 2005-06 inclusive was calculated;
- (2) How are these water consumption figures broken down between residential and non-residential water users over those years listed in part (1);
- (3) In relation to eligible costs directly attributable to the management, operation and administration of the ACT's water supply can the Minister provide (a) tables for each of the years from 2003-04 to 2006-07 inclusive showing for each year a full breakdown of actual or estimated expenditure within the categories shown in the table given in part (2) of the reply to question on notice No 1387, including breakdowns of salaries and duty statements for all public servants whose cost has been charged to water users, (b) explanations for each of the items listed within and below the table in part (2) of the reply to question on notice No 1387 as to how and why those costs are directly attributable to ACT water supply and (c) explanations for any other expenditure not otherwise covered in the above categories as to how and why it is directly attributable to urban water supply requirements as opposed to, for example, environmental flows or fish habitats;

- (4) Where any item of expenditure in part (3) relates to more than one purpose can the Minister provide the basis on which each item of expenditure has been apportioned, for example, on the basis of volume of water drawn for consumptive use as a percentage of total catchment and river flows.

Mr Stanhope: The answer to the member's question is as follows:

- (1) The metered water consumption for 2003/04 was 48,283,806Kl; for 2004/05 it was 47,532,792Kl and for 2005/06 it was 52,837,399Kl.
- (2) Residential consumption for the ACT was 31.49GL for 2003/04; 30.99GL for 2004/05 and 34.43GL for 2005/06. Queanbeyan receives a bulk water supply and ActewAGL does not collect residential metered data for Queanbeyan.
- (3) & (4). I am not prepared to authorise the use of the very considerable resources that would be involved in providing the detailed information required to answer the Member's question.

**Diplomatic service—outstanding fines
(Question No 1466)**

Mr Mulcahy asked the Treasurer, upon notice, on 20 February 2007:

- (1) What is the current amount of fines incurred by foreign diplomatic missions that remain unpaid and were incurred within the last two years;
- (2) Has any of the \$0.1 million in outstanding fines that the Minister highlighted in his answer to question 40 from the 2006 Estimates process been repaid;
- (3) How many embassies or missions currently have outstanding bills with the Territory.

Mr Stanhope: The answer to the member's question is as follows:

- (1) \$59,047
- (2) A total of \$60,448 has been either repaid or withdrawn.
- (3) 56

**Government—online payments
(Question No 1467)**

Mr Mulcahy asked the Treasurer, upon notice, on 20 February 2007:

- (1) How many different types of charges, fines and payments are accepted by the ACT government;
- (2) How many of these payments can be made online;
- (3) Which of these payments (a) can and (b) cannot be made online.

Mr Stanhope: The answer to the member's question is as follows:

- (1) The ACT Government accepts approximately 1,200 charges, fines and payments (of which approx 630 apply to health related charges). Fee determinations are published for every fee, charge and other payment established under an Act. This information is publicly available on the ACT Government legislation website.
- (2) Canberra Connect and Rego ACT provide for on-line payment for 45 of the most common charges, fines and payments.
- (3) The payments able to be made online with Canberra Connect and Rego ACT include:
 - Searches - Plan Copies
 - Training Levy
 - Land Rent - DDE
 - Electrical Fees - Other
 - Notice of Intentions
 - Reg of Backflow Test Reports
 - Building Conveyancing Report
 - Plumbing & Drain Start Work
 - Plumbers Drainers Gas Licences
 - Architects Board
 - Building Levy
 - Energy Rating
 - Design & Siting
 - Home Business
 - Lease Variation
 - Public Notification
 - Conveyancing Enquiry
 - Dial A Search
 - CIT Student Fee
 - General Rates
 - Land Tax
 - Water Restriction Infringement
 - Rates & Land Tax Online
 - Failure to Vote Penalty
 - Sundry Debt - ISIP
 - Housing Rent
 - Ambulance Transport Payments
 - Liquor Licence General
 - Dog Renewals
 - New Dog Registrations
 - Dog Licences
 - Replacement Tags
 - Infringement Notices - Dogs
 - Additional Bin - NoWaste
 - Rent W Belc Est Recov - NoWaste
 - Landfill - NoWaste Mugga
 - ACT Forests Camping Bookings
 - Library Fines
 - Road Opening Permit Payments
 - ACTION Ticket Sales

- Registration Fees
- Parking Penalties
- Traffic Infringement Notice Penalties
- Speed Camera Infringement Notice
- Red Light Camera Infringement Notice

Additional charges, fines and payments will be available on line over time. However, it should be noted that on-line payments are not always appropriate. This is particularly true where transactions or exchanges require payment on delivery of services, personal signatures, photo identification, document verification, proof or citing of documents/identity, or require supporting documentation. Examples of these transactions include: health services, drivers licences that require a photograph to be taken, and planning and land related transactions that require a range of supporting documentation and other evidence.

Planning—responsibilities (Question No 1471)

Dr Foskey asked the Chief Minister, upon notice, on 28 February 2007:

- (1) How many qualified or practising planners are employed in the Chief Minister's Department;
- (2) When were those appointments made;
- (3) Why it is necessary to employ planners in the Department in addition to the ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA);
- (4) How does the Government ensure that there is no conflict between the work of planners in ACTPLA and those in the Chief Minister's Department;
- (5) What mechanisms are in place to ensure ongoing dialogue between planners and people with responsibility for planning direction in the different departments.

Mr Stanhope: The answer to the member's question is as follows:

- (1) Whilst some staff employed in the Chief Minister's Department may have planning qualifications, no officers in the department are employed as planners.
- (2) Not applicable.
- (3) Not applicable.
- (4) Not applicable.
- (5) As a central policy agency, Chief Minister's Department has a range of mechanisms in place to ensure ongoing dialogue between the staff of agencies on across government issues. These include Management Council (comprising all Chief Executives), interdepartmental committees and other management forums. The Cabinet process is another formal mechanism for interagency dialogue. Less formally, there is extensive ongoing liaison between agencies, including between CMD and ACTPLA on a wide range of planning policy issues.

Canberra Day—performers (Question No 1474)

Dr Foskey asked the Chief Minister, upon notice, on 28 February 2007:

- (1) Why doesn't the ACT Government use Canberra Day to promote local performers;
- (2) Will a separate body be set up to organise Canberra's Bicentenary with representatives of the National Capital Authority, the ACT Government and relevant community groups so that planning can begin now;
- (3) Has the Government given thought to extending musical evening events which were popular with young people during the Multicultural Festival and the Fringe Festival, for example a Groovin' in Garema specifically geared towards the young, with a group of young people involved in the organising, over at least the period of daylight saving on one weekend evening on a (a) weekly, (b) fortnightly or (c) monthly basis.

Mr Stanhope: The answer to the member's question is as follows:

- (1) A key focus of *Celebrate in the Park* is promotion of local performers. Five local bands played to audiences between 7,000 – 15,000 people at this year's event on Sunday 11 March. This is a unique opportunity for these local groups to perform to such a large crowd and to develop their audience. The event provides local bands with the opportunity to further develop their careers by playing on the same bill as major acts. This is an outstanding opportunity that may not otherwise be available.

The local musicians are also promoted through media releases and opportunities with the local press. In the March 1 edition of the *Canberra Review* within *City News*, local band Meatbee was promoted on the front page and in a substantial article within the *Canberra Review*. This article also promoted Los Chavos and The Cashews who performed at *Celebrate in the Park*. Ben Lopez of Meatbee noted in this article that performing at an event of this scale had been a long-term goal of the band.

The local entertainers at *Celebrate in the Park* were also promoted in *The Canberra Times Lift-out*, which is produced to promote the *Celebrate Canberra Festival*.

- (2) The ACT Government is focusing on preparations for Canberra's Centenary in 2013 (assuming you are referring to the Centenary not the Bicentenary). Consultation has taken place across a wide cross-section of the community including the National Capital Authority, Department of Territories and Regional Services and relevant community groups.

Eleven working groups with broad representation of key stakeholder groups have been considering future planning requirements and funding sources. These groups have reported to the Chief Minister.

While overall planning is ongoing, the ACT Government is awaiting a firm commitment from the Australian Government to ensure a true partnership arrangement for the delivery of an appropriate Centenary program.

A taskforce formed by the five past and present Chief Ministers of the ACT is the overarching governance body and the Communications, Arts, Events and Protocol section within CMD has carriage of the project at present.

It is considered that it would be inappropriate to form a separate body until formal arrangements can be established between the ACT and Australian Government.

- (3) The ACT Government supports and delivers a large number of events during the daylight saving period. This includes the Round Town program of events, Christmas in the City events, New Year's in the City (which includes the Bass in the Place Dance Party) Groovin' in Garema, Australia Day (including ParkLive, a youth festival), the National Multicultural Festival and Celebrate Canberra Festival.

Between these various programs there is an event almost every weekend. It is interesting to note that 10,000 people attended the Bass in the Place Dance Party on New Year's Eve.

It is also important to note that ParkLive, delivered on Australia Day each year, is organised by the Special Events Unit of Chief Minister's Department in conjunction with a number of youth organisations, in particular *Parkway* and *Youth in the City*. Young people work with the Special Events Unit in organising and delivering this event.

The organisers of the Multicultural Festival note that many of its events are very popular with young people. The events within the festival are supported by the ACT Government but driven and, in-part, organised by the community (including young people).

The ACT Government would welcome suggestions from young people on events they would like to assist in organising. These suggestions would need to be considered in the context of current funding arrangements.

Organising an additional event on a weekly, fortnightly and monthly basis would require significant additional expenditure or the reallocation of existing event funding.

Prisons—probation and parole (Question No 1493)

Mr Seselja asked the Attorney-General, upon notice, on 28 February 2007:

- (1) What staffing levels were allocated to the Probation and Parole Service in each year from 1995 to 2006;
- (2) What is the projected staffing level for the Probation and Parole Service in 2007;
- (3) How many people were supervised by the Probation and Parole Service in each year from 1995 to 2006;
- (4) How many people are projected to be supervised by the Probation and Parole Service in 2007.

Mr Corbell: The answer to the member's question is as follows:

- (1) Data back to 1995 is not readily available. The following table outlines Probation and Parole (P&P) staffing levels from 1997.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
| 19 | 23 | 23 | 27 | 31 | 33 | 28 | 28 | 31 | 31.5 |

- (2) The P&P Service is budgeted for 30.5 staff in 2007, with additional funding for two staff to run the Intensive Intervention Program.
- (3) Due to the implementation of a new database, accurate data back to 1995 is not available. The following table outlines how many people the P&P Service supervised under probation, parole, bail and Community Service Orders from 1999 to 2006.

| | | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
| 1492 | 1883 | 2065 | 2215 | 2204 | 2162 | 1933 | 1845 |

- (4) It is not possible to accurately project the number of people that will be supervised in 2007, as this depends on the number of persons that the courts will order be subject to supervision. In 2007 to date, 1207 people have been supervised under probation, parole, bail and Community Service Orders.

Uriarra community—rebuilding (Question No 1517)

Mr Seselja asked the Minister for Planning, upon notice, on 6 March 2007
(*redirected to the Chief Minister*):

- (1) What is the status of the contract awarded to rebuild and increase the Uriarra community;
- (2) How many houses will be built;
- (3) What action needs to be taken before work can commence.

Mr Stanhope: The answer to the member's question is as follows:

- (1) The Village Building Company was announced as the preferred tenderer for the project to redevelop rural villages in July 2006. Since then complex negotiations have been underway and a draft Deed of Agreement, which includes the detailed planning requirements, is in the process of being completed. All elements of the detailed plans must be agreed before the final Deed of Agreement can be signed.
- (2) The village is planned to be up to 100 houses. Since six houses survived the fire, this means 94 houses are planned to be built.
- (3) See (1) above. The actions are already well underway.

Legislative Assembly—meeting room costs (Question No 1526)

Dr Foskey asked the Speaker, upon notice, on 7 March 2007:

- (1) What rates (a) is the Speaker and (b) are ACT Ministers charged if they host an event in the Reception or Exhibition Rooms;

- (2) What is the annual amount of funds available to (a) the Speaker and (b) each Minister that may be used for paying fees related to hosting events in the Reception or Exhibition Rooms.

Mr Speaker: The answer to the member's question is as follows:

- (1) (a) When the Speaker is hosting an event in his capacity as Speaker (e.g. citizenship function, Assembly Open Day, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association function) no charges apply. When the Speaker is hosting a function in his capacity as a Member for Ginninderra, the same charges that are levied to other Members are applied (i.e. security costs after 5pm). The level of rates charged is pursuant to a determination of fees made under the *Legislative Assembly (Precincts) Act 2001*. These rates, and the guidelines that govern the use of the rooms, were set following consultation with the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure.
- (b) Ministers are charged the same rates as non-executive MLAs i.e. security costs after 5 pm and no charge during normal business hours.
- (2) (a) As indicated in the response given in (1) there is no budget allocated for payment of fees as no fees are payable by the Speaker for Speaker type functions. In relation to functions hosted as a Member for Ginninderra the Speaker is able to utilise his discretionary office allowance.
- (b) Ministers' costs are not contained within the Legislative Assembly Budget.
-