



Debates

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Wednesday, 6 June 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.

Albert Hall

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (10.32): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the poor state of the Albert Hall, clearly a result of some years of government neglect;
- (b) the cultural and heritage value of the Albert Hall to the Canberra community;
- (c) that on 24 May 2007 a public meeting was held to discuss the future of the Albert Hall;
- (d) the disappointment of the meeting with the failure of the Government to send a representative competent to comment on the tender process; and
- (e) that public management of the Albert Hall offers the best guarantee for continued community use of the facility; and

(2) directs the ACT Government to:

- (a) abort the current tender process for the management of the Albert Hall, and arrange a six month extension of the current management arrangements to enable a period for proper community consultation;
- (b) expend the \$1.8 million necessary to restore this building to an appropriate standard;
- (c) maintain community access balanced with periodic commercial use to ensure the upkeep of the facility;
- (d) establish a joint body with the Australian Government, including community representation, to report and advise on the planning and management of the Albert Hall Heritage Precinct; and
- (e) ensure that the report or advice of the committee is considered against any future tender for the sale of the precinct.

Mr Speaker, before I start, I foreshadow that we will be putting forward an amendment to paragraph 2 (e) of the motion concerning the deletion of the word “sale” and the insertion of the word “lease.” We are concerned, of course, about any

future tender for the lease of the precinct, not the sale of it. A minor technical amendment is being circulated now.

I stand today to demand that the government abort the current tender process for the management of the Albert Hall and extend current management arrangements for at least six months. I also stand to heavily criticise this government for its neglect of this fine old building, and I stand to demand that the government ensure adequate community use of the hall in the future.

The Albert Hall is a much-loved icon and has been part of the Canberra landscape since 1928. Until the 1960s, when the Canberra Theatre was completed and cinemas were constructed, the Albert Hall was Canberra's main entertainment venue. It was used for concerts, meetings, dances and public displays. Many community groups have had a very long association with the hall. The Horticultural Society of Canberra first started using the Albert Hall for their floral displays in 1929 and only stopped as recently as 2002. The wonderful antiques and collectibles fair has been associated with the hall for many years and, Rotary first used the hall 78 years ago.

The Albert Hall once accommodated up to 450 functions per year and it could easily do so again. Recent years have seen less community use, mostly due to the failure of this government to adequately maintain the facility to a minimum standard. In some cases it has been because the costs for many community groups to use this hall have begun to outstretch their budgets. They are being asked to pay somewhat too high a price to cover what really has been years of neglect by this government.

It is very important that the Albert Hall remain in public ownership. We do not quibble or have any concern at all with the tendering process, which involves private contracting, but we do say that it is essential that this hall ultimately remain in public ownership. It is critical to keep the management of this hall as a public asset. It is a valuable public asset. It should not ever be lost to the public as an icon, as an asset, that can be used by the public.

We certainly have no problem with the Albert Hall being used also for commercial purposes. If part of a tendering process in the future involves commercial use to allow a tenderer to recoup the costs of maintenance, if maintenance is a responsibility as part of that contract, we would have no problem with that either, but it is very important that the government set in place conditions that allow for a very fair balance between community use and any form of commercial use. As I was saying, the hiring cost for community groups must never be put out of reach. Affordable community access to the Albert Hall is a must.

Mr Speaker, let me turn now to the appalling state of the Albert Hall currently. It is in a state of neglect. This lovely old building has been allowed to run to rack and ruin. The figure for priority work identified in the tender document is \$1.02 million. The works program of the current tender specifies that this work needs to be completed within a three-year time frame. The tendering process suggests that there will be another compliance report in four years, which would entail unknown costs. As management procedures go, that should be the bottom line, but we are concerned that the hall in its current state be refurbished as quickly as possible before its tendered use goes much further.

There is also a requirement for conservation work to bring the hall up to scratch from a heritage point of view—my colleague the shadow Treasurer will speak more to that shortly—in view of the conservative management and landscape plan. This amount of work has been conservatively estimated at about \$1.5 million, but the relevant paragraph in the tender document itself—paragraph 3.9.4—refers to the CMLP, the conservative management and landscape plan, as only a guideline for maintenance and repair. We think that is probably a little bit loose and we want to see that aspect of maintenance tightened up.

Why did this government let the Albert Hall go to rack and ruin? Why do the government continue to allow our heritage landmarks to decay in such a public manner? Why do they do that? Why, for example, have we seen the heritage-listed Tharwa bridge decay to such a point over a number of years that at the last moment the government had to respond impulsively to—

Mr Hargreaves: Your lot let the contract.

MR PRATT: You are in the seat, minister. I am not in the seat, minister. You are in the seat, minister, and we are talking about 5½ years of neglect of Tharwa bridge, the Albert Hall and other icons. The Tharwa bridge is another example, and I think it is relevant for me to talk about the Tharwa bridge in this debate. The government was well aware of the state of disrepair months and years prior to the closing of the bridge, all the time doing nothing to prevent the inevitable. In fact, I am fully aware that Roads ACT has oodles of files that date back to pre self-government times on the state of the Tharwa bridge. The tender process in that instance is also flawed. Again, we had no public consultation in terms of the Tharwa bridge's future.

Mr Hargreaves: What absolute rot.

MR PRATT: You have been down to talk to the Tharwa community. As you have just raised the issue, let me be sidetracked.

MR SPEAKER: Order! This is not a conversation across the chamber. This is a debate, and the Tharwa bridge really does not have much to do with what we are debating.

MR PRATT: All right, Mr Speaker. Like the Albert Hall, there has been no consultation on a range of issues incorporating icons such as the Tharwa bridge and other assets that we have in the territory. Like the failure to consult on the closure of Griffith library, this government has failed to consult with the community about the future of the Albert Hall.

Let us look at the tendering process. On the face of it, the tender is clearly at odds with what the community wants. The tender clearly does not specify that community, cultural and civic uses should be the primary uses of the building, nor that this should be the central objective of the successful manager. The most likely outcome would be that commercial interests would overwhelmingly outbid community groups for usage of the hall. It is clearly the intention in the tender document that the Albert Hall become a fully commercial operation. That is something that we are concerned about.

There is only one direction the government can take on this; that is, to scrap the current process altogether and start again. As I said at the outset, the opposition very strongly encourages the government to abort the current tender process, allow the existing management plan to play itself out for at least the next six months and recommence the tendering process with a better set of specifications which ensure an adequate balance between community use and commercial use and which, more importantly, ensure that the responsibilities, be they shared or be they unilaterally exercised, are to maintain the hall at least to the minimum standard, which we have not seen for some years.

We have talked about the consultation process. It is simply flawed in this case. At the public meeting two weeks ago there was not one representative of the government available to answer questions from the public about the tendering process. Minister Hargreaves was unable to attend. We accept that. We believe that he was somewhere else on fundamentally important ministerial business. But he did not send somebody to represent him on the urban management issues that revolve around the Albert Hall. Andrew Barr simply had no damn idea. Andrew Barr, who was present for the government, had no idea about the tendering processes and could not answer the questions pelted at him by the community.

Mr Mulcahy: Simon should have been sent.

MR PRATT: Of course, the one minister who might have been able to answer questions was gagged and relegated to the bleachers. Perhaps the Chief Minister was frightened that Mr Corbell might come up with some alternative process for the use of the Albert Hall. In fairness, at least Mr Corbell had the corporate knowledge, had the background, to be able answer the questions. It is so important that government, with the appropriate authorities, confront communities in advance of decisions being taken and be able to consult properly. They have failed to do that in this case, as they failed to do with the Griffith library closure, and as they failed to do with the whole project for the reformation, restoration, refurbishment or rebuilding of the Tharwa bridge. This government have a poor record when it comes to consulting with the community on the very important assets that adorn our landscape.

As we have seen from the budget handed down overnight, the scar tissue of neglect by the government runs deep and hard. While that budget is now addressing some of those issues, the fact of the matter is that we have scar tissue. Why do we have scar tissue? In the case of the Albert Hall, it is because they have not maintained this lovely old building in its pre-eminent style.

Therefore, the opposition directs the ACT government, firstly, to abort the current tender process for the management of the Albert Hall and arrange a six-month extension of the current management arrangements to enable a period for proper community consultation. The opposition demands that the government allow proper consultation to occur before any decision is taken at departmental level, cabinet room level or anywhere else, unlike every other so-called consultation which has simply been a lame excuse for their actions after the event. In this case, minister and Chief Minister, we ask you to consult with the community, to discuss with them the

pros and cons of the best way to manage the Albert Hall, the best way to make the Albert Hall available to the community, before you sign off on any decision.

Secondly, the opposition is saying that the government must expend the \$1.8 million necessary to restore this building to an appropriate standard. We say that that expenditure ought to be guaranteed and put in place before any new tendering process commences. You have to accept your responsibility to bring that building back to standard before you think about transferring any such responsibility to any other party through either a commercial arrangement or any other arrangement.

Thirdly, the opposition says that the government must maintain community access balanced with periodic commercial use to ensure the upkeep of the facility. You have an important decision to make, minister. If you assess from the options available once you go out to tender that a reasonable player needs to exercise commercial opportunities in that building in order to get sufficient revenue back to maintain that property yet at least get a small but reasonable profit, it cannot be at the expense of reasonable access by the community for community use of that hall. Therefore, your annual program needs to ensure that there are adequate windows of opportunity for all of our community groups that need and have traditionally used that hall to be able to continue to use that hall at a cost that they can afford, at an entry fee that they can afford.

Finally, we seek of the government the establishment of a joint body with the Australian government, including community representation, to report and advise on the planning. The government has a responsibility to bring that hall up to standard and to ensure that the community gets access.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for the Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Housing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (10.47): I only wish that Mr Pratt would actually read the RFT, as he could then speak a little bit more meaningfully on it. He would know, for example, that it talks about no rent for 10 years. No rent for 10 years means that that is where the capital funds could actually come from. Notwithstanding that, Mr Speaker, I urge—

Mr Pratt: That is very encouraging, for a change.

MR HARGREAVES: Yes. Just read the document and you will see.

Mrs Burke: You might table it. That would be good.

MR HARGREAVES: I do not have to table it as it is on the website, Mrs Burke.

MR SPEAKER: Order, cease interjecting! Mr Hargreaves, direct your comments through the chair.

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker, I note that Mr Pratt has gazumped Dr Foskey on this issue, which is a bit of shame. He did not have to do that. He could have just waited until Dr Foskey's motion came on and we could have discussed it then. But he has to have his share of the sunshine and make himself look really silly. I would not deny him that. They both want the government to slow down its processes but neither

was prepared to wait until August before bringing on this debate. I do not know where that leaves us, but there are parts of both motions that the government cannot agree to, and I will in due course propose an amendment.

What is certain is that we all want the same outcome: to ensure that the cultural and heritage values of the Albert Hall are recognised and preserved. In fact, the government only recently received the final version of the conservation management and landscape plan for the Albert Hall precinct. The plan is currently on the Environment ACT website, for those people who insist on having things tabled. The plan will inform a number of processes, not least of which is the current request for tender. The plan is referred to in the RFT and the successful tenderer will need to embrace it.

The plan has been endorsed by the ACT Heritage Council and will support the application for national listing, and the plan finds that the precinct and its landscape are of considerable cultural significance, but that the buildings and the landscape are currently in poor condition and the current ad hoc uses of the place are not appropriate to its status. I note for the record that it was the Carnell government that put it out to private management in the first place. Obviously, something needs to be done, but what?

As was noted by Dr Coltheart during her speech at the public meeting at the Albert Hall, the hall has played many valuable community roles over its 80-year history, including being the equivalent of a town hall, a meeting venue for community groups, a dance hall and a hall for annual shows and events. Many Canberrans in the 1960s and 1970s attended rock performances at the Albert Hall because it was the only venue able to take them. Likewise, it was utilised for all sorts of events, such as orchestral concerts, flower shows, eisteddfods, gang shows, government meetings and land auctions.

However, not only do people's entertainment wants and needs change over time, but so do cities and their facilities. In the 1920s the Albert Hall was the only venue of its type and other community facilities were rare. By the middle of the last century, Canberra was growing rapidly and new community facilities were being built across the city. Furthermore, by then Canberra was starting to see the emergence of large licensed clubs that were making space available to community groups as part of their community access charters.

By the end of the 20th century, the two major universities and large licensed clubs such as the Southern Cross Club and the Tuggeranong Vikings Club had effectively replaced the Albert Hall as venues for concerts, meetings and other large community events. The result has been that while the Albert Hall once enjoyed capacity booking rates, with myriad community and commercial uses, there are more venues as competitors for the hall.

Last year—you ought to take note of these numbers, Mr Pratt—the Albert Hall was only used for 115 days. Of those, 25 days were utilised by community groups and 90 by commercial renters. A search of the current manager's financial records has shown that there has been a gradual decline in usage of the hall since 1997, when the Liberals had stewardship of that particular facility.

The records do not show community events that were held free of charge or events supported by Mr MacLachlan's company, such as Sing Australia, Playgroups and the Strauss Ball, because there was no hiring charge. Without those events, the high point of community bookings was in 1997 and it was for just over 80 days. Under the current management arrangement, community groups have continued to enjoy access to the Albert Hall, even though there is no guaranteed time allocated to community use and community usage has declined.

The days available for community use include weekends, and in recent years bookings for community groups such as the Rotary antique fair, the Monaro Folk Society and Oxfam, to name a few, have been preserved. There is nothing in the existing contract that can guarantee any number at all for community access. You need to have that in the background.

Mr Pratt: Then rectify it.

MR HARGREAVES: That is exactly what we are doing: rectifying it. The tender process currently being undertaken by the government is intended to encourage growth in the use of the hall. The commercial hiring of the hall is regularly at or near the maximum of 110 days a year permitted by the national capital plan. The national capital plan limits the commercial hirings of it to 110 occasions a year, and that will not be allowed to increase. What will change will be having a vastly improved facility that may encourage more community users and community use.

The RFT released publicly through the BASIS website in April has a number of safeguards in it that improve the ad hoc arrangements that were put in place by another government 11 years ago. For example, there has been an outcry that the hall should be retained for community use, yet, as I said, the current management contract does not require that. The new contract will require the successful tenderer to actively promote opportunities for community and cultural use of the hall through a subsidised hire cost regime on not fewer than 50 days a year—not fewer than 50 days a year.

There is misinformation abroad that says that this is limited to the first year only. Mr Speaker, it is not. It is for the life of the contract. The only thing that is limited to the first 12 months is the hire charge. At the end of 12 months, the charges can only be changed with the consent of the government's representative. That is a reasonable commercial arrangement common to many contracts.

Some may say that 50 days is not enough for community use. I say that it is 50 days more than the current contract and it is 25 days more than the actual community usage of the place last year. It is also said that the hall should not be used for commercial purposes. The permitted land uses are set out in the national capital plan, which permits ancillary short-term commercial retail activities limited to—this should be taken note of—a total of 110 days a year. Each retailer can only have four bookings a year and each booking is not to exceed seven days.

In addition, Mr Pratt calls for widespread community consultation. He makes a lot of moment about there being a lack of it. For the information of Mr Pratt and other members, there was widespread consultation throughout 2006 before the RFT was

drafted. I am advised that the department consulted with at least the following groups: Canberra City Rotary Club; Theatre Organ Society of Australia; Monaro Folk Society; Artists Society of Canberra; embassies, including the Spanish, Sri Lankan and Korean embassies; Oxfam; and Pedal Power. How were these groups chosen? It was by departmental officers searching through the manager's booking records to find out who uses the hall. The actual users of the hall were consulted.

The Friends of Albert Hall group obviously could not be consulted, as the group was not formed until March 2007. No one knew they existed until recently. The RFT closed on Thursday, 24 May 2007. The process from here is that the tenders will be evaluated and a successful tenderer chosen and then—this is the important bit for you to note—contract negotiations will be carried out with the successful tenderer. All this will be done under the supervision of a probity auditor.

While this process is going on, the government will consider all options for assuring ongoing and effective public use of the hall. We will, for example, consider augmenting the successful tenderer's funds for restoration. The contract negotiations could possibly be used to strengthen the successful tenderer's business plan for usage of the hall. The RFT sets a requirement for tenders to "specify the extent of the activities for the initial 10 years, describe the central purposes and activities to be undertaken at the site and centre"—for the initial 10 years! The contract negotiation process could be used to elicit further details of the extent of those activities and build in key performance indicators.

Another requirement is to "specify target markets in which the business proposes to operate and/or plans to promote the facilities available at the site and centre". Obviously, that is subject to the requirement to promote opportunities for community and cultural uses of the hall through a subsidised hire cost regime of not less than 50 days a year. Again, the contract negotiation could elicit more detail around these requirements. Tenderers are required also to provide a detailed program, including estimated costs of a capital works program and scheduled and reactive maintenance works. This detailed program must involve the expenditure of \$1.02 million in the first three years of the arrangement. In other words, the successful tenderer will be required to overhaul the condition of the hall and keep it in good condition.

The Albert Hall is a terrific public asset which the government has nominated for national heritage listing. However, nomination does not of itself provide the territory with the immediate funding required to address all the major maintenance issues, some of which were already evident but not funded when the commonwealth handed the hall to the territory in 1989.

As part of the consultation process in 2006, the government encouraged the submission of ideas on how to restore the hall and yet ensure that it remained accessible by community groups. Many ideas were submitted and tested with the regular community users. From this process it became clear that it would be possible to achieve the joint aims of repairing the hall and maintaining community usage rates if the previous practice of short-term management agreements was replaced with a long-term agreement. This would provide any contracted manager with the necessary long-term source of funding needed to cover the costs of repairs and ongoing maintenance.

I am advised by the department that there have been responses to the RFT, although I have not been told by the department, and nor should I, who the actual tenderers are. As members will appreciate and support, it would be inappropriate for me or anyone in the Assembly to interfere in a process that is governed by the procurement legislation and is required to be independent of government. Accordingly, the tenders received will be evaluated by a properly constituted tender panel, with members drawn from my department with support from ACT Procurement Solutions and overseen by a probity auditor.

When the tender panel has arrived at its conclusion, assuming that there is a successful tenderer, the department will then negotiate a contract with the successful tenderer which will put all the necessary safeguards in place. The contract will certainly include clauses that will not only require the hall to be managed in accordance with the Albert Hall precinct conservation management and landscape plan, but also meet the additional requirements that will arise if the hall is listed on the national heritage list.

The government will therefore move an amendment to Mr Pratt's motion to take account of the community consultation that has already occurred, the ongoing cultural value and heritage of the hall, the fact that the hall has been managed by a private sector operator for the past 11 years, and the concerns expressed at the community meeting on 24 May 2007.

Mr Speaker, I have been criticised for not being at the meeting. I wish to advise the Assembly that I was at a ministerial council meeting discussing the water crisis facing the ACT. I have to say that that was where my priority was, and I am sorry but that will be my priority. I would like to formally move the amendment circulated in my name.

Mr Speaker, I have been criticised for not being at the meeting. I wish to advise the Assembly that I was at a ministerial council meeting discussing the water crisis facing the ACT. I have to say that that was where my priority was, and I am sorry but that will be my priority. I would like to formally move the amendment circulated in my name.

Mr Pratt: Typical of Mr Hargreaves—another napalm air strike amendment.

MR HARGREAVES: I move:

Omit all words after "Assembly", substitute:

- “(1) recognises the ongoing cultural value and the heritage of Albert Hall;
- (2) acknowledges the importance of continued public ownership and community use of the Hall;
- (3) acknowledges that the Hall has been managed by a private sector firm under Government supervision for the past 11 years;

- (4) notes that a tender for the continued management by the private sector, under Government supervision, closed on 24 May 2007 and is currently being evaluated; and
- (5) notes that, concurrently with the tender process, the Government will consider all options for assuring ongoing and effective public use of the Hall.”.

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (11.01): Mr Speaker, I propose to speak in opposition to the amendment and in support of the original motion moved by Mr Pratt. I am pleased to speak in support of my colleague’s motion today. This is a very important motion and I am pleased, as I know the Our Albert Hall group is, that we are able to debate this matter in the Assembly before we break at the end of the week. I reject the suggestion that we should stall all this until August, because there is pressing community demand that this matter be considered by the Assembly at this time and not be put on the backburner for some months.

I think that the ACT government has been surprised to an extent by how much passion this issue has incited in the Canberra community. Quite frankly, I am not at all surprised. The Canberra community has issued a very strong warning to this government, as it did with the closure of the Griffith library, that it is to be ignored at the government’s peril. The Albert Hall, of course, is an historic icon in Canberra. It was completed in 1928, just 15 years after the founding of Canberra.

This motion notes the current poor condition of the Albert Hall, which is a disgrace and an indictment of those responsible for the complex: the ACT government. It is no good saying that it is the fault of someone back in 1997. This government was not elected last week, it has been in power since 2001 and it is the government’s responsibility.

The hall was designed for the Federal Capital Commission by architects John Kirkpatrick, Robert Casboulte and Henry Rolland. From the time of its construction until the 1960s, when it was overtaken by the Canberra Theatre, the Albert Hall was Canberra’s premier entertainment venue. As we all know, because members attend many of these events to this day, the hall continues to host a number of events, including exhibitions, balls, cultural and artistic performances, and public meetings. It also hosts civic functions such as citizenship ceremonies and public meetings which are vitally important to our community. That is a function of the hall that could well be expanded.

There is no doubt that the Albert Hall is a treasured community asset. The hall has a significant and ongoing cultural value in the ACT and this value is clearly demonstrated by the strong feelings generated over the last few months. I have been fortunate to have had discussions with the Our Albert Hall group and with other ACT residents that are concerned about the state of the Albert Hall and the current tender. I would like to acknowledge the sterling effort by Di Johnstone, who is in the gallery today, and her colleagues who have vigorously and relentlessly pursued this issue on behalf of the people in the area who share the concern that those of us on this side of the chamber share in relation to the future of that wonderful facility.

In contrast, it is apparent by the process undertaken by the government that they had not adequately consulted prior to their decision to issue a tender. They should have consulted more widely with current, prospective and former users of the hall. They should have learnt to listen to the people of Canberra. It is interesting, to use Mr Pratt's phraseology, that the napalm air strike on this motion that has been presented by the government has all the characteristics of the previous mishandling of the Griffith library. They will not tolerate dissent out there. They will not tolerate people who question their decision making. So attempts to debate that in this chamber are stifled by these all-embracing amendments that in fact are nothing more than an attempt to take the Assembly out of the equation.

While there were a number of issues and resolutions that were raised at the recent Albert Hall meeting, the clear message which was reaffirmed to me from the Our Albert Hall group was that their primary concern is to maintain a high level of affordable community access to the hall. I could not attend that public meeting as I was on a flight that night from Singapore, where I had been attending briefings on water. I could not be there but I have had very detailed reports from my colleagues, including Mr Seselja, who will speak on this matter shortly.

Many ACT residents are concerned that the current tender process will see the end of community use of the hall. The tender provides for 50 days of community access per year, which is below the previous level of community access. The community is concerned that the current tender process will result in the successful enterprise having to neglect community use of the facility to generate enough revenue to cover the significant costs required to bring the building to an acceptable standard. This is unacceptable and fails to appreciate the importance of the Albert Hall to the Canberra community.

Residents have called for a joint ACT and commonwealth body to consider the future of the hall and many have expressed a concern that, whatever happens, there should be an open and transparent public process dealing with the hall. Indeed, on this occasion I think there is compelling argument for equal representation from the community on such a group, which is not a position I would normally favour, but I think that there is a very clear message coming from the people of Canberra that this is what they expect. This motion supports these proposals.

As mentioned earlier, the hall's decay and disrepair are a disgrace. Mr Hargreaves spoke of declining demand for the facility. I have conferred with those who are championing the saving of the Albert Hall and the protection of its previously enjoyed use and they have indicated to me that there is a range of factors that are impacting on declining community use. They have cited the cost as one factor. They have cited the terrible state of the facility and its failure to meet a range of standards that are expected these days. Of course, one of the most pressing issues which have not been adequately addressed is the requirement for public liability insurance, which many small organisations can no longer meet and they are simply precluded from use because of the impositions now in place which they have to meet. For many smaller community organisations, that simply rules them out as prospective groups to access those facilities.

One of the reasons for the current tender process is that the Albert Hall has been allowed to fall into a state of disrepair. The ACT government has been busy with all manner of superfluous projects, but it has not kept its buildings from falling apart and it now wants the private sector, effectively, to pick up the slack. I have not been in this place for a terribly long time, but I have vivid recollections of hearing Mr Quinlan, in estimates just two years ago, tell us about a tranche of funds that he said were going to be used for the convention centre, and then he told Mr Seselja and me when we questioned him that money was there already to upgrade the Albert Hall, first to do a feasibility study for \$40,000. He said, "That will leave us \$8.5 million out of the \$40 million that is going to be spent on the convention centre and it will be able to be used to improve this place." What ever happened to that money? It has disappeared into the ether and now they have come up with an ingenious way of saying, "Shift the cost onto somebody else." I do not think the people of Canberra are all that thrilled that this hall will simply become a wedding reception centre at the expense of community interest.

Prior to the tender process currently under way with the Albert Hall, I understand the ACT government had discussions with the National Capital Authority. The NCA has been working towards resolving some of the issues that are currently the subject of dispute. My office has been told by staff at the NCA that, through their discussions with the ACT government, the NCA believe that the government intended to wait until these issues were resolved. That is what this motion says: wait. You do not get 400 to 600 people come to a community meeting if the community think that they have been adequately consulted. Clearly they have not.

Mr Hargreaves: Two hundred.

MR MULCAHY: Mr Hargreaves says there were 200. He was not there and I was not there. I have seen reports in the media and heard from my colleagues that there were somewhere between 400 and 600 people. I will take even the conservative figure of 400. When 400 people come out on a cold night in Canberra to say that they are unhappy with the decisions of a government, I suggest to the minister that he ought to start taking notes. We saw the fury of people in the Griffith area and neighbouring suburbs over the library, and my strong view is that the same fury is going to continue to be perpetuated in the area until we put the brakes on this tender process and go back and adequately consult and listen to what the people are saying to us.

The NCA believe that the government intended to wait until these issues were resolved and amendments finalised before it commenced the tender process. Of course, that has not been the case. Instead, the government has taken the surprising step of beginning a tender process for a building with an uncertain future in terms of its uses clause and its heritage status. The government has been rather vague on what the uses clause allows. The government told residents that the uses clause allows the hall to be used as a cultural facility and for ancillary retail and commercial activities, but it did not assure the community that the hall would be restricted to these uses.

The community is entitled to have some certainty over the future of the hall, and the issue again shows that the government has failed in its priorities. The government should not have allowed the Albert Hall to degenerate to the point where it is now

under significant threat. Even having allowed this to happen, the government should have consulted more widely and sought to resolve the issues that are important to the community before commencing any tender process. The future of the hall needs much more consideration. (*Time expired.*)

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (11.11): I was surprised, but pleased, to see Mr Pratt's motion on the notice paper for today. As members would be aware, I had a similar motion on the notice paper last week. I would like to thank Mr Pratt and the ACT Liberals for their support but not for their lack of consultation with the Greens on the matter. In particular, I welcome the delayed interest of the ACT Liberals in this issue. I note that they are much more interested in attacking the ACT government than in joining in the concerns about the way this matter was handled at the federal level.

The two motions relating to the Albert Hall follow the well-attended public meeting at the Albert Hall on 24 May in response, first, to the NCA's planned changes to development and uses in and around the site and, second, to the ACT government's tender process for its management. It seems clear to all of us that the proposed changes to permitted use and adjacent development by the NCA and the attempt by the ACT government to generate more activity in the hall—at a constrained cost, presumably—are in conflict or, at the very least, are unresolved. It is also evident that the changes and the manner in which they have come to light have generated a great deal of hostility and frustration. As is appropriate in this place, the motion that is now before us addresses the responsibilities of the ACT government.

Because we did not get around to discussing the motion that I had placed on the notice paper, I raised this matter last week during the adjournment debate and put on the record the motions that were passed at the 24 May public meeting. After looking at the order of business in this place, I agreed yesterday to take my motion off the notice paper, and I thank Mr Pratt for submitting his motion. While the motions passed at the 24 May meeting are pertinent to today's discussion, I do not plan to read them out again. Nonetheless, I hope that these resolutions have informed the government's thinking on this matter and future decision making.

It may not be clear from the debate so far that Albert Hall has been managed by a private operation for some years now, and the minimal maintenance carried out on this old building probably reflects its low level of use for community as well as commercial activities. I acknowledge that substantial work needs to be done on better using and managing the hall and that some new scoping from both the NCA and the ACT government is in order. But I recognise two key problems with the processes to date. One is that the NCA and the ACT government appear to be acting independently of each other. The other is that there has been, and is likely to continue to be, no real partnership with interested members of our community.

Let us not underestimate the significance of this building and the importance of establishing an open process to decide on its future. The public reaction, first to the NCA's proposed variation of the national capital plan and then to the ACT government's management strategy, makes that clear. I do not believe the level of reaction ought to have surprised either party. I am using this debate as an opportunity for them to get off their high horses and seek common ground with each other and

with members of the public—and by “either party” I mean the NCA and the ACT government, not the Liberals and the Labor Party.

I note that the ACT government is writing to the commonwealth asking that the Albert Hall be put on the national heritage list. If that is successful—and there is a good chance it will be—it will affect both the opportunities and the responsibilities of its managers. It would also be likely to attract federal funding at different times. I hope that is the case. There is no doubt it is going to be expensive to do up this hall and this may require the support of the commonwealth. At the very least, heritage listing would provide a reason to slow the process down.

I understand that the ACT government thinks it is handling the problem effectively. Events having overtaken the process, I think we can see that it is not doing so. To pursue the tender process in order to engage a business as manager of the hall, before the NCA has finalised any variation to the national capital plan and before the matter of heritage listing is finalised, will create more problems than it will solve. This is further complicated by the proposal to make the winning tenderer pay for capital works. Members of the Assembly would be aware of problems that have emerged when private operators have made capital investments in community assets. Ten years free rent does not solve the problem of who ends up owning a facility in which significant private investment has been made.

The Phillip pool is a recent example. Private investment in the site saw the establishment of an ice skating rink, and decisions on the future management of the facility by its owner, the government, were strongly affected by the need to take into account that private interest in the facility. Some of the complications around the Phillip oval also reflect the shared investment in its development. That is one reason why it is the view of the Greens and those who attended last month’s public meeting that Albert Hall should remain entirely in public hands and that the responsibility for capital works should remain with its owner.

At the heart of the frustration is the lack of trust many people in our community have in this government’s plans for the hall. The motion asks for the public to be able to participate in determining those objectives, and I notice that is totally absent from the government’s amendment. Why should this government be afraid of making such a commitment? Handing that decision over through an open tender process to a private operator, or perhaps on the quiet to a preferred tenderer, would make people in this town very angry.

There are divergent views on how best to ensure public access to this facility for social and cultural events. For the past 11 years there has been little or no guarantee as to the number of days assured for community use. I understand that the existing tender documents would guarantee a number of days for that use, but people outside of government have very little confidence in that process. The meeting reflected a general view that community access and enjoyment of Albert Hall is its primary use, and I hope that all members of the Assembly could support that.

The key questions yet to be addressed are about maintenance and improvement to the hall and the level of support needed for community and cultural use. We need a project which draws the NCA and the relevant part of the ACT government together

to ensure that future plans work on both fronts. However it is structured, we need a transparent process to provide the opportunity for relevant experts and interested members of the community to provide their insights into and perspectives on the potential role and uses of Albert Hall. This might assist in constructing a management plan.

Albert Hall is one of the few buildings in Canberra that have been central to the Canberra community since its early days. The NCA plans for the precinct have already created significant disturbance, and I would be very interested to see what rules the NCA will put in place if further development in the precinct is to occur. If there is to be development adjacent to the Albert Hall, I have no doubt that Canberra people would want to see a sympathetic visual design which is leading edge in energy efficiency, water use and amenity.

The use of the hall over the past several years as a carpet warehouse has been a great irritation to the Canberra people. I am supporting this motion because, like most people in Canberra who are interested in Albert Hall, I would like to see a collaborative, inclusive approach taken to the decision making for one of Canberra's few community cultural heritage icons. It is absolutely essential that there is a concerted attempt by all players to thrash out the objectives for the future use and management of the site. We need to remember that it is a community icon. It is in the national triangle but it was built as a community hall for Canberra, and that point must be pre-eminent in all our thinking.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo) (11.21): I commend my colleague Mr Pratt on bringing this important motion forward. I need to respond to Dr Foskey, who spent the first few minutes of her speech lambasting the opposition for daring to have Mr Pratt's motion brought forward before her motion. According to Dr Foskey, it is all about her. It is not about the issue we are talking about. It is not about protecting Albert Hall and its cultural and heritage values—

Dr Foskey: So you are going to spend your 10 minutes—

MR SESELJA: I will spend a minute or two in response to what Dr Foskey said.

Mr Mulcahy: It is self-promotion.

MR SESELJA: It is about self-promotion. She would prefer that debate on this motion be delayed until August just so that she could get the running on it, just so that she could lead the charge and lead the debate. Well, Dr Foskey, there are seven members of the opposition here as opposed to one member of the Greens party. We are the alternative government and we will lead debates. We are not going to dance to your tune and to your timing as to when we bring forward issues of concern to the community.

Albert Hall is a much loved Canberra building. It is an iconic building in Canberra, and we do not have many buildings of this kind. We do not have buildings that have been around for a long time, that have significant cultural and heritage value and that are much loved by the Canberra community. There is broad consensus in the community that Albert Hall is a building that is worth preserving, protecting and

enhancing. I think a big part of why Mr Pratt has brought this motion forward is that Albert Hall is important to many members of the community—people who use the hall now and people who have used it in the past.

I remember as a child attending eisteddfods there, and I know there would be many Canberrans who have wonderful memories associated with this building. Unfortunately, at the moment the main reason for going to Albert Hall is to attend coat sales, rug sales and fashion sales. I think I bought one of my good winter coats from a sale at Albert Hall. It seems that this is becoming its main use. It is clear from going to sales and from attending the meeting that was held recently that Albert Hall is a building in need of significant repair, and that is an important part of this motion as well.

DA53 has caused some concern in the community. I understand and share some of that concern. I was pleased to see that the NCA has amended the draft amendment by removing reference to an eight-storey building. That was a positive step in that I do not think we need a tallish building as part of this precinct. Also, the NCD has confirmed that the buildings will not be used primarily for commercial purposes. I think it is important that we get a balance. If the redevelopment in this precinct goes ahead we would want to see things of cultural and artistic merit. In particular, we want to see a lot of open space. We would also want to see some incidental commercial uses that enhance the area. I think that is important. Also, open space needs to be protected. We need to find that balance.

I do not think the traffic issues have been resolved yet. Getting the traffic issues right is going to be of real significance and concern to the community. I think the idea of removing Flynn Drive and creating a park has some merit but it may have unintended consequences. It may slow down traffic significantly.

Dr Foskey: You can't slow down traffic.

MR SESELJA: Dr Foskey interjects, "You can't slow down traffic." Preferably, where possible, we like to keep traffic flowing and I think most people in the community would prefer to see that. I have said to the NCA that it is important that they get these issues right. But this proposal does have potential, and I am not necessarily anti all of the amendment.

Mr Hargreaves: The motion is not about DA53.

MR SESELJA: I understand that. I am giving some background, Mr Hargreaves. But it is important that they get this right. It is important when we talk about the value of Albert Hall that we look at these issues. If they get this right there will be the potential to enhance Albert Hall and to appreciate its heritage value. At the moment this building is hidden behind a row of pine trees and is accessed by an off ramp. It is simply not able to be utilised as well as it could be if they get this right.

Let me turn to a couple of the provisions within Mr Pratt's motion. Paragraph (1) (d) refers to the "disappointment of the meeting with a failure of the government to send a representative competent to comment on the tender process". It would have been apparent to any of the several hundred Canberrans who were at the meeting that night

at the Albert Hall that the government does not take this issue seriously. It clearly does not. We saw this even on the morning before the meeting. On ABC radio the Deputy Chief Minister said, “Well, look, no one is able to come because the Chief Minister is overseas, the minister for TAMS is away and our planning minister is sick. We cannot send anyone.” When asked, “Can you send a public servant?” she said, “Well, we are not sure.”

Then, helpfully, Simon Corbell called in. He was able to clarify the position by saying, “Well, look, I know a thing or two about planning. I could attend. If the planning minister is sick, I am happy to step into the breach.” He said he would be there. Of course, he said things like, “It is important that we have our ears to the ground on this issue” and “Obviously, I do not have direct portfolio responsibilities any more but if there is no other minister available—and I am familiar with the issues—I would be delighted to attend.” What could be more helpful than that? So, obviously, the former planning minister was quite helpful and was willing to attend.

After that there was a miraculous recovery by the current planning minister, who was able to attend. Although we were told that he had lost his voice—and he did not seem 100 per cent—he was able to speak and answer some of the questions. But the real issue, and the issue that concerned the hundreds of concerned Canberrans who had turned out, was that the new planning minister—and it was not his fault—was not across most of these issues because they were the direct responsibility of Minister Hargreaves. We cannot blame the planning minister, but why was a representative for Mr Hargreaves not sent?

So initially no one was going to be sent. However, once a former planning minister embarrassed the government by saying that he was prepared to attend, the government sent the current planning minister. Unfortunately, the planning minister did not know anything and was not able to answer most of the questions that were put to him. The whole handling of this matter was very disappointing to most of the people who came along and it is indicative of how the government has treated this issue. They have not responded to community concern. They sent someone who was not able to answer. Initially they were not going to send anyone, and that was their attitude to consultation.

Mr Pratt has gone over this. We have seen in relation to Griffith library, Tharwa bridge and a whole host of other issues that this government pays lip-service to consultation and does not engage in genuine consultation. How can it be genuine consultation if the minister sent out there at the last minute, once he was embarrassed into doing so, does not know about any of the substantive issues? It is not his fault but it is the government’s fault. They should have sent someone who on the night could have answered the community’s concerns.

One of the key issues, apart from the maintenance and the upgrading of Albert Hall, is community use. At the meeting it was put very strongly to the government that we need to enhance the amount of community use. The figure of 50 days that has been bandied about seems inadequate to me. This means that there would be less than one day a week for community use.

Mr Hargreaves: That is twice as much as they are using.

MR SESELJA: Mr Hargreaves interjects but there are a lot of community groups that would like to use it and, if it were upgraded, I am sure there would be more. Fifty days a year seems very low for an important community asset when significant numbers of community groups are lining up to use it.

Mr Hargreaves: It is a minimum.

MR SESELJA: Mr Hargreaves is now interjecting across the chamber. It would have been helpful if a representative of his had been there on the night to answer some of these questions and allay some of these concerns. But unfortunately, because the government really did not care about the community's concerns and misjudged the community sentiment, they have been caught short. They have been embarrassed into now paying some lip-service to it. I hope it is not just lip-service. I hope they will take these issues seriously. If they were serious they would support Mr Pratt's motion, delay this process and get it right.

MRS BURKE (Molonglo) (11.31): I thank Mr Pratt for putting this motion on the notice paper. I note Dr Foskey's comments and I would like to take her up on one point. I was at that community meeting, as were Mr Seselja, Mrs Dunne and Dr Foskey. I, for one, have been talking with concerned people for around 12 months about, firstly, the duck-shoving proposal by the government to move the Albert Hall into commercial hands and, secondly, about the incredibly appalling state of disrepair the building is in. So it is really disingenuous to somehow say we have just jumped onto an issue.

Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, for the information of members, I seek leave to table a document entitled *A future for our Albert Hall: issues and ideas* that was distributed at that meeting. Members may find it useful.

Leave granted.

MRS BURKE: Thank you. When I look at the government's amendment I have to come to the conclusion that the government cannot help itself. It cannot just have a straight debate, can it? No, it has to move amendments to all motions other than those that it has placed on the notice paper. That, in itself, shows something, does it not?

The government's amendment shows a lack of commitment to working with the Australian government to resolve the issue. This is quite clear. They are very keen to remove paragraph (2) (d) of Mr Pratt's motion relating to the establishment of a joint body—I think this is quite sensible—including community representation, to report and advise on the planning and management of the Albert Hall heritage precinct. Of course, this would involve Mr Mulcahy.

It has been an incredibly difficult time for the people at the hall who have been in "caretaker" mode for 18 months. Let us face it: we all know what it is like to be in "caretaker" mode. There is no authority to do anything. There is no real direction or ability to invest in something that you have no legitimate long-term tenure over. Of course, this now carries a \$2 million price tag.

We cannot merely centre this debate on current user groups either. I say that because, as Mr Hargreaves would know, many groups and people who have lived in Canberra for much longer than I have and who have used the Albert Hall in the past have moved on. Why? They have done so because of the disrepair of the building. The toilets—and I note that Mr Hargreaves is nodding his head—

Mr Hargreaves: No, I am not. I am shaking it, Mrs Burke. I am not nodding it, I am shaking it.

MRS BURKE: So the toilets are working then? The toilets used by people in wheelchairs are all working? So people have gone because everything is working well? It does not quite add up, does it? If all these things were fixed, the horticultural society would gladly come back tomorrow, Mr Hargreaves.

Mr Hargreaves said this morning that we all want the same outcome. It was interesting to note that he also mentioned Mrs Carnell and the former Liberal government. So I would ask: if the Stanhope government, and particularly Mr Hargreaves, were so against Mrs Carnell's move in a previous government to tender out the running and management of the Albert Hall, why has it taken the Stanhope government six years to do anything about it? That sounds a bit strange.

Mr Hargreaves: Because there was a contract.

MRS BURKE: This is serious and Mr Hargreaves might want to listen. He might also make some inquiries about rumours circulating regarding selected people talking to the government before the tender process began. I bring this to your attention because these concerns have been raised with me, minister. Perhaps you can move to quash such rumours today.

Mr Hargreaves: No, I can't.

MRS BURKE: I hope you will look into it because it is a serious rumour. If you can, I want you to tell the Assembly by close of business today if any—

Mrs Dunne: We will give him leave to speak again.

MRS BURKE: We could do. I want him to tell the Assembly if any selected people were talking to the government prior to the tender, almost behind closed doors. It is a rumour but I am giving him the ability to find out if that is true or not.

It is really important that the future of the Albert Hall, as set out in the document I have tabled today, is closely looked at. It is not too late to stop the process. One of the issues set out in the tabled document is "the need for the ACT government to achieve far higher levels of affordable community access and guarantee the future of the Albert Hall as a public venue for civic and cultural purposes".

On a final note, I would like to say that if we continue to allow our heritage in Australia to be moved into public or commercial hands, we are going to lose the essence of what Canberra is about.

Mr Hargreaves: Into public hands?

MRS BURKE: We must be the only capital city in Australia—

Mr Hargreaves: You don't want to be in public hands?

MRS BURKE: Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, I am sorry but I am finding it difficult to speak. There is a lot of noise.

MR TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Gentleman): Members, there are conversations going on in the background. Mrs Burke has the floor.

MRS BURKE: Thank you. It must remain—

Members interjecting—

MR TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Members of the Assembly, Mrs Burke has the floor. If you want to have conversations you can use the anteroom.

MRS BURKE: Thank you, Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker. I really appreciate your intervention. My voice is getting better but I am struggling. Thank you for your indulgence.

The Albert Hall must remain in public hands. We must be the only city in Australia, I would say—and somebody can correct me if I am wrong—that does not have its own dedicated town hall. So why would we not make the Albert Hall our town hall? Why would we not give it to the people? Why can we not work in a bipartisan way to find out how we can do that? Why are we not working with the Australian government and the NCA over section 53 to ensure that we can do that?

Mr Hargreaves: Because they are treacherous.

MRS BURKE: You can have your say again, Mr Hargreaves, but I think it is a sad indictment to watch—

Mr Hargreaves: They are the people that abolished the RNE.

MR TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

MRS BURKE: this building go down—

Mr Hargreaves: The Registrar of National Estates.

MR TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves!

MRS BURKE: Thank you, Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker. It is a sad, sad day for Canberra to see this building simply going down the drain. It was pitiful to be in that hall with 400 or more people and to look at the state of disrepair. The occupational health and safety issues in that place are also of major concern to me.

I hope that the government will not allow things to go bad and then, in their usual style, throw their hands in the air and say, “Well, it is so bad, we cannot fix it.” I hope they are going to work really hard. Mr Hargreaves laughs.

Mr Hargreaves: That is amazing.

MRS BURKE: It is amazing, is it not, that you would—

Mr Hargreaves: You are amazing.

MRS BURKE: It is amazing that you would laugh at that. I think the electrical issues at the Albert Hall need to be looked at. For example, there is a serious problem with electrical circuitry.

Mr Mulcahy: It is a fire hazard.

MRS BURKE: We have a real problem. Mr Mulcahy has mentioned fire issues. What are we doing to address that in order to protect the user groups that are using it at the moment? This should not be an excuse to say, “It is all too hard for the government. We need commercial operators in.”

I commend this motion to the house. I commend what has been said by Mr Pratt and Mr Mulcahy. We need to make sure that our Albert Hall remains our Albert Hall.

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (11.39): I thank my colleagues the shadow heritage minister, Mr Mulcahy, and the shadow planning minister, Mr Seselja, who both spoke quite passionately about this issue. I also thank Jacqui Burke. I thank my three erstwhile Molonglo MLA colleagues, who at least know how to genuinely represent their community on this priority matter, the Albert Hall.

I need to address a couple of issues. Firstly, we did not ask Dr Foskey of the Greens to withdraw her motion. We would have welcomed Dr Foskey putting her motion on the table today. That would have just added more power to the engineering of a very important debate on a very important issue. So it is absolutely disingenuous for Dr Foskey to bleat and moan because, in fact, she chose to withdraw her motion.

She has grabbed the opportunity, in a most crass and opportunistic way, to put up a new and most dubious motion on the refugee subject, the SIEV X disaster. She chose to do that. By the way, it is a motion which is greatly ill-advised, but that is another matter. Dr Foskey’s choice to drop a fundamental grassroots community issue such as the Albert Hall in favour of a national interest issue speaks volumes about Dr Foskey’s real priorities, and I find that extremely disappointing.

We should make sure that the residents of Molonglo are not misled by Dr Foskey and the Greens about being here to represent the best interests of the community. That is simply not the case with the Greens, as we have seen illustrated here today. The Greens are really here to misuse their place in the Assembly to pursue their batty national and international interest issues. The Albert Hall today is dispensable in the eyes of the Greens. Dr Foskey’s complaint that we did not consult with her and

delayed the pushing of the Albert Hall case is gratuitous in the extreme. I see that the minister is batting his eyelids.

I turn briefly to the government's amendment. The government's amendment is typical of their arrogant approach of wiping from the notice paper a sensible motion and simply replacing it with one of their spin-doctored pieces of work. We reject that entirely. I want to pick up on the minister's comments about consultation. The minister said here today that his department had consulted with the community about the Albert Hall. I accept the minister's words that his department had identified a number of community user groups that had been known to use the hall in the past. But the consultation process must go much more broadly than that. If the department's consultation process had been really effective and had incorporated all the people who share an interest in what happens to the Albert Hall, then why did we see a meeting the week before last of 300 to 400 people? Why were there 300 to 400 people concerned about the status of DA53 if consultation had been conducted properly? I put to you, Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, that the government has failed yet again to consult.

What is the definition of consultation? The definition of consultation is that parties speak with each other, share their views and take information from each other before decisions are taken. But what is this government's definition of consultation, as we have seen with the school closures program, we have seen with the Griffith library closure and we have seen with the absolute disaster with the management of the Tharwa bridge? Their definition of consultation is that you speak to the community only if you are pressured to do so and you do that after the event, after the decisions are taken at cabinet level, and you then spin why you have taken a decision and what you are going to do about it. That is this government's definition of consultation and they have failed yet again with the Albert Hall to consult properly.

In conclusion, community use of the Albert Hall has fallen off because this government has neglected to maintain that hall. It has been allowed to run down to a dilapidated position. In management terms, that is a crime. Any concern about the drop-off in community use is because the government has not maintained it at the condition at which it should have been maintained. We are concerned too about whether 50 days is sufficient for community use. Mr Hargreaves interjected during Mr Seselja's speech that 50 days is a minimum.

Mr Hargreaves: That's right.

MR PRATT: He has again indicated that. It may be a minimum, but we are questioning whether the tendering process and the contract process will guarantee that minimum or whether it will mean that if the community wants to use that place for more than 50 days a year they will have the opportunity to do so, or will they be squeezed out by other commercial priorities?

Mr Hargreaves: They cannot. The national capital plan does not allow it.

MR PRATT: Minister, we look forward to your assuring the community that that is going to be the case.

The opposition today calls upon the government to move quickly to refurbish the Albert Hall by the expenditure of what would appear to be a minimum of \$1.8 million to return it to a reasonable standard before the government embarks on any other commercial arrangement to incorporate management procedures, and we call upon the government to ensure that community use is guaranteed for the Albert Hall. Mr Speaker, I commend the motion.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo): I seek leave to respond to some comments made by Mr Pratt. I do not know the wording to use and I seek the Clerk's advice on that.

MR TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: If you feel that you have been misquoted or misunderstood, you can seek under standing order 47 to explain that.

DR FOSKEY: I seek leave to make an explanation under standing order 47.

MR TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: You may proceed, Dr Foskey.

DR FOSKEY: I think it is really important to clarify the record here. I knew that the Friends of Albert Hall were talking with the Liberal Party in an effort to bring this motion on today, which I also wanted to happen because I believed, along with the Liberal Party, that August would be too late to debate it. There was some talk in the wind of a swap of space in the roster because, as people would be well aware, as the single crossbencher I was very unlikely to get my business up today, and certainly did not get it up last week.

My concerns, as expressed at the beginning of my speech, were that the first that I knew that something like that had actually happened, and I must say that I was pleased that I did not have to swap my business and that the Liberals had decided to prioritise it, was when I saw the notice paper yesterday. I had assumed that there would be a conversation between the Liberals and me, given that we both had—

Mr Mulcahy: I take a point of order, Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker. Where is the misrepresentation? We are not hearing any evidence of a misrepresentation. It is just an historical account. Could we get to the point of the misrepresentation?

DR FOSKEY: Thanks so much for your interest, Mr Mulcahy. What I heard was that I had no interest in this issue because I had taken it off the notice paper. Given that it was to be discussed as the first item of business for private members' business today, it did seem rather redundant to have a very similar motion, which was my motion that had been placed there last week, still on the business paper and I elected to have it taken off. I believe the SIEV X issue is an important one, but it was not a matter of prioritising. I believe that I have been misrepresented by Mr Pratt in his comments to that effect. Hopefully I have cleared the record.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

Mr Barr
Mr Berry
Mr Corbell
Ms Gallagher
Mr Gentleman

Mr Hargreaves
Ms MacDonald
Ms Porter
Mr Stanhope

Mrs Burke
Mrs Dunne
Dr Foskey
Mr Mulcahy
Mr Pratt

Mr Seselja
Mr Smyth
Mr Stefaniak

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Health—smoking

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (11.53): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that tobacco accounts for the greatest single health burden of disease and injury in Australia, 7.8 per cent of the total burden, according to *The Burden of disease and injury in Australia 2003* report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare;
- (b) the significant reforms made by the ACT Government to reduce smoking in our community;
- (c) these reforms have included the banning of smoking in enclosed places and further tobacco control measures;
- (d) the positive impact these reforms have had on the ACT community; and
- (e) that after a thorough consultation process, the ACT Government is planning further tobacco control measures; and

(2) calls on the ACT Health Minister to report to the Assembly on a timetable for these further reforms.

The other evening I managed to catch part of the series *Life on Mars* on the ABC. I was amazed to see portrayed in this episode, set in the 1970s, two policeman sitting smoking in a hospital ward. I am not sure how accurate a portrayal of the smoking regulations of that time it was, but it did serve to emphasise how far we have advanced in our knowledge and attitude since then. For instance, when I was a young trainee nurse in Wollongong, back in the 1960s, smoking was definitely a popular pastime—particularly, it seemed to me, amongst health professionals. I managed to resist the temptation to join with many of my fellow trainees in this habit, and in fact

earned myself the nickname of “the pure one”. Just a few years ago I felt the very real pain that this dreaded habit can inflict when my half-sister, a heavy smoker suffering from emphysema, succumbed to a winter bout of influenza and died.

By this time tomorrow, nearly 50 Australians will have died prematurely from diseases related to smoking. The direct causes may be varied, but each one will be connected to smoking-related illness and disease. About three million Australians still smoke regularly, and nearly 19,000 will die this year from the various diseases and illnesses that it causes.

The real issue is not what we say here—it is not what we assert; it is not even what we propose in this place—but what we do. That is what I want to highlight today. I want to highlight what the Stanhope government have done, what we are doing, and what we plan to do.

I do not think that anyone would argue about the enormous economic and social costs associated with smoking. There is any number of reasons which motivate this government to act in relation to this most pressing issue.

As I have already explained, approximately 19,000 Australians every year will die from smoking-related causes. Smoking has a devastating impact upon our community and is destructive on many different levels. The damage inflicted on our society has no respect for age, class or gender. Even a cursory examination of the figures reveals a staggering amount of pain and suffering for hundreds of thousands of Australians, including many Canberrans. It is important to keep this in mind as I refer to the following disturbing facts.

Smoking is the single greatest cause of death and disease in Australia. In 2001 alone it was responsible for over 140,000 hospital episodes. It is responsible for approximately 80 per cent of all lung cancer deaths and 20 per cent of all other cancer deaths. It is linked to cancer of the mouth, cervix, bladder, kidney and stomach, to name only a few.

Smoking lowers the capacity of one’s immune system and causes greater risk of respiratory infections in particular. There are detrimental effects on one’s digestive tract, possibly blindness and premature wrinkling of the skin. Women smokers suffer from reduced fertility and a risk of premature menopause, and there is a risk of stroke and heart attack for women who smoke and take oral contraceptives.

Smoking is responsible for multiple cases of lung cancer and death from lung cancer—approximately 11 people a year in Australia alone. Smoking can kill those of us who do not smoke and can subject countless numbers of us to many illnesses and diseases. Consider the following: smoking by expectant mothers is linked to premature births, miscarriages and low birth rates and an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and diabetes for these children when they reach adulthood. Smoking is a significant factor in the development of asthma in children. Paternal smoking has been linked to sudden infant death syndrome as well as an increased risk of upper respiratory tract and ear infections in babies and children. Finally, if you are a non-smoker and you live with a smoker, the chance of you having a heart attack or dying from coronary heart disease increases by a huge 24 per cent—

24 per cent! Those facts should give us all a chance to reflect on how important it is that we consider not only smoking but also passive smoking.

The above represents only a sample of the dangers associated with smoking. The information is obtained from a number of sources, including various government agencies and non-government agencies which are active in this area. Although the sources may vary, the message is singular: tobacco-related illness and disease are wreaking havoc amongst a vast number of Australians. Furthermore, this reality is compounded by the simple truth that tobacco-related pain and suffering are 100 per cent preventable; that is, all of the social and economic costs are wholly preventable.

It is vital that, when we discuss or debate these issues, we remember that the costs associated with smoking are in many ways unique—as opposed to the costs associated with many other social problems. A clear example is that of motor vehicle accidents. No matter how many safety devices our manufacturers create and no matter how many traffic codes, infringements or regulations we may impose, motor vehicle accidents inevitably happen. This is markedly different from the effects of smoking on our society; the economic, social and health effects of smoking are, as already mentioned, preventable. Smoking belongs to a small class of problems that are 100 per cent preventable.

This government, through its health minister, Katy Gallagher, has been instrumental in providing strong and decisive leadership on this issue for the ACT. I highlight the positive ways in which our government is helping Canberrans to kick the habit.

As of December 2006, all public places in the ACT became smoke free. This reform ensures that workers are protected, young people are less likely to pick up the habit, and existing smokers have another reason to quit. We have strengthened the licensing system. These reforms mean that officers from the Office of Regulatory Services can ensure that tobacco retailers are complying with advertising and display requirements. The reforms have already proved successful in thwarting new and inappropriate ways of repackaging and marketing tobacco to our young people. The ban on fruit-flavoured cigarettes is a clear indicator of the success these reforms have had. What a devious and appalling marketing ploy—fruit-flavoured cigarettes!

A further reform is in the method of compliance testing of licensees. This reform was introduced in light of the information that shows that our young people often start smoking between 15 and 16 years of age. Compliance testing protects our young people. In 1999 the legal age for purchasing cigarettes was increased from 16 to 18 years. The impact of this positive reform is self-evident and is reflected in a recent survey that reveals a decrease in the proportion of 16 and 17-year-olds who bought their last cigarette between 1999 and 2005.

Since 2000 there have been restrictions on the number of points of sale for tobacco, product displays and health warnings and signage requirements. This reduces the visibility of tobacco products to the general public and diminishes the visual enticement that advertising can provide for tobacco. In 2006 vending machines were banned in the ACT. Our young people can no longer access tobacco products through the ease and convenience of this form of delivery. Again, the advantages of this reform are self-evident.

These reforms are an example of the hard work and commitment of this government on this critical health issue. Clearly our reforms are having a positive effect and a positive impact. Ms Gallagher's commitment and strong leadership in this area have ensured that the good work of previous Labor governments has continued. Furthermore, the fruits of this work are reflected in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report that revealed that smoking rates have dropped by a massive 23 per cent since 1977.

However, this is not the full picture. I have some serious concerns about the way in which the federal colleagues of some of us in this place have dealt with this issue. The federal government receives approximately \$5.2 billion a year from tobacco taxes, but it chooses to contribute only a minute fraction of that amount to helping Australians kick the habit. The Howard government not only wants to reap the financial benefits of the taxes it collects from the misery that tobacco companies exact on our people but also wants the states and territories to pick up the tab for the economic and social havoc that smoking wreaks on our health care budget.

Not only does Mr Howard want the money instead of the lives, and not only does he want the states and territories to pay for the social and economic costs, but he continues to accept the tobacco companies' funds. Their white-as-snow profits are adding to his party's war chest. I refer to the donations and in-kind support the federal government receives from the tobacco giants. Perhaps we should imagine that these donations are given because the tobacco companies are firm believers in the fundamental ideology that champions the causes of social justice and fairness for all. You will forgive me, Mr Speaker, if I am somewhat cynical about this. The Australian Labor Party, with its policy of not accepting donations from this source, stands in stark contrast.

Are those opposite raising the roof about their federal colleagues' behaviour? Are they protesting long and hard and calling on their colleagues in the hallowed house on the hill to commit to working with us to end this threat to our health and this drain on the public purse? Where is their compassion for the pain and suffering of thousands of Canberrans? It is inconceivable that this opposition believes that the minute amount of funding provided to help Australians who are addicted to nicotine to kick the habit is a reasonable amount of funding, given the \$5.2 billion the federal government receives in taxes from tobacco.

We on this side of the chamber are not asking the opposition to agree with us on every single detail of our smoking reforms—either at present or in the future—although that would be refreshing. It would be a breath of fresh air, should we say? However, let us not hold our breath. We would ask that they make a passionate representation to their federal colleagues on this issue, for the sake of all Australians.

This government is doing its part. It has implemented a raft of measures and reforms designed to help all Canberrans who are impacted by smoking-related issues. I invite those opposite to do all they can to support these measures and talk some sense into their federal colleagues.

In conclusion, the reason we are in this place is to make a difference. This motion serves to remind Canberrans that this government does make a difference to the lives of people who live and work in the ACT. Through the effective legislation and reforms this government have introduced in this area, we have made a difference. We know that the job is not yet finished. We must continue to introduce reforms that will serve to protect the health of many tens of thousands of Canberrans, as well as those not yet born—and this government will.

At the beginning, I spoke of the 50 Australians who will die in the next 24 hours. These Australians are not numbers; they are mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, colleagues we work with or socialise with on a daily basis, valued members of our community. I also mentioned the effect that smoking has on our yet unborn children. I think that all of us in this place would agree that it would be remiss of us if we were to neglect our responsibility and not pursue the matter further. We cannot and must not abrogate this responsibility. I call upon the Minister for Health to report to the Assembly on the timetable for further reforms.

MRS BURKE (Molonglo) (12.08): I apologise that because of the order of the program today I did not have a chance to talk to Ms Porter about the amendment that I have circulated in my name calling on the ACT government to make public the proposed control measures by 30 June 2007 and calling on the government to report to the Assembly by the last sitting day of September 2007 on the outcomes of the consultation. As Ms Porter has rightly said, it is an issue where we need to work together, so I hope that will be taken into consideration. Again, I offer my apologies for not having talked to her about that sooner.

The burden of disease and injury in Australia 2003 stated cancer, at the rate of 19 per cent, and cardiovascular disease, at 18 per cent, to be the leading causes of death; tobacco smoking remained the main risk factor, responsible for the greatest burden of disease on our health system in Australia. The damning factor is that the increases in the incidence of coronary heart disease, stroke and peripheral vascular diseases, as well as a range of cancers and other diseases, are also attributable to smoking.

It is apparent that the incidence of smoking is declining and that antismoking campaigns are having an overall impact, but it is hoped that our youth, our young people, will continue to heed the warnings and stop the initial uptake of smoking. I know that Ms Porter made those points as well. It is interesting to note that, overall, 80 per cent of Canberrans choose not to smoke, but, unfortunately, Ms Porter, I think you and I are both on the same track: it is our young people who continue to take up smoking.

Interestingly, around 40 per cent of men and 53 per cent of women nationwide have signified that they have never smoked tobacco. That is a very encouraging statistic. But of real concern, as I have just said, is that almost a third of men and a fifth of women aged over 16 years have smoked tobacco. Such a figure, in the context of the ACT, must signify that governments need to do more to ensure that the uptake of this deadly habit is curtailed—again, particularly amongst our young people, in the main young women—and that the promotion of antismoking campaigns is followed through.

I commend the government on this. It is a difficult issue and one I know the health minister is working really hard on. It is difficult because people feel that their rights are being removed in some way, but we have to consider the rights of people to a smoke-free environment also. It is a very careful balancing act—but not when it comes to the overall cost of the health budget, as I am sure the minister would agree. As a community we must work together to ensure that the incidence of smoking becomes almost non-existent. The government had the Liberal opposition's support when the first round of legislation was implemented to shift towards non-smoking in enclosed areas, with the final ban coming into effect in December last year.

The ACT government's approach to tobacco control has been comprehensive, overall, and it has introduced a number of measures intended to reduce demand, control supply and protect non-smokers. No one would dispute that government has a responsibility to work on the reduction of the uptake of smoking. This, in my opinion, is the most important task, and it is one that has the support of organisations such as the Australian Medical Association.

On 1 September 2006, the sale of tobacco from vending machines was prohibited. In October 2006, the Tobacco (Compliance Testing) Amendment Act 2006 was passed, enabling the territory to implement safeguards to prevent tobacco sales to minors. In turn, a significant measure in reducing exposure to environmental tobacco smoke, ETS, was the passing of the Smoking (Prohibition in Enclosed Public Places) Act 2003.

By all accounts, I would say that the legislative reforms already passed will be proven to have had a major impact, allowing those who work in the hospitality industry and patrons the right to work in or enjoy clubs, cafes and pubs that maintain a safe, smoke-free environment. It is hoped that this ban will have had a significant flow-on effect in reducing the number of young people taking up the habit. We can all agree that smoking is no longer a social norm. It is not like it used to be. People are distancing themselves and coming to the realisation that you can save a heck of a lot of money by not smoking and also that there is a health impact. In either case, if we can encourage people to give up smoking, then it is all to the good; we will all benefit.

The enforcement of indoor smoking bans has forced Canberrans to head outside to smoke. That is an issue that often bugs me; I do not know about other members. Minister Gallagher is talking about smoking around playgrounds. That is a difficult one. How do you police it? But I encourage the government to keep on with this. Wherever we can, we will support the notion that smoking around children is not a good thing. Being outdoors, it is going to be a difficult one, but let us hope that we can work through it sensitively and sensibly.

Another thing that I have brought to attention publicly concerns places like bus interchanges: you are undercover and smoke is often pushed down. In interchanges there are a lot of people who do not drive for one reason or another—young people, people with a disability. It is not a healthy environment there either.

I have to say that I stand here as an ex-smoker, so I do understand both sides of the fence. It is a challenge for people who are forced outside, but it is also a challenge

when you have had to run the gauntlet of smoke to get in and out of buildings, shopping centres and the like.

We ask people to think about the benefits of giving up. We do not want to be the big-stick people and become the nanny state. As an ex-smoker, I concede that giving up is a really hard thing to do, but the government is working—and the federal government have worked hard too—to provide much more information, support and advice in this day and age than was available when I gave up smoking.

Back in December 2006, the Minister for Health responded to a question on notice concerning the ACT government's approach to extending the ban on smoking to include public places such as outdoor dining areas, playgrounds and around public building entrances. Part of the response to the question implied that preliminary work had commenced on a regulatory impact assessment to identify the best approach to controlling smoking in outdoor public places. I hope that initial assessments were conducted with the full input of the ACT business community, to consider the possible impacts on business that further bans on smoking would have. In developing the initiatives, ACT Health apparently conducted extensive consultation with ClubsACT, the Australian Hotels Association ACT, health and community organisations and other interested groups.

If these initiatives have been developed to the point of finalisation, it would be timely for the Minister for Health to release them for public comment now before taking steps to introduce any further legislative measures to impose a ban on smoking in outdoor public places. I would support the minister in recognising some of the benefits that can be reaped from banning smoking in certain public spaces. I agree that there can be no justification for any claims that there is a safe level of exposure to environmental tobacco smoke, ETS. I do not back away from strong evidence that exposure to ETS can lead to diseases and premature death in children or adults who do not smoke.

ACT businesses have been able to adapt to the ban on smoking in enclosed spaces, and patrons have received the changes very well. From a selfish point of view, I quite enjoy that now; but again—the balance is there—I feel for businesses and for patrons who would like to smoke. However, they have received the changes well, the transitional period over summer 2006-07 proving to be very successful. Both smokers and non-smokers have been well catered for under the new legislative measures. I believe that the key to the success has been a combination of more education programs about the dangers of smoking, selling good health messages and sensible regulation in order to see the reduction in the incidence of smoking.

Given that outdoor cafe areas are already required to maintain adequate airflow standards, the difficulty that may be faced down the track is that a further impost or ban on outdoor smoking may not have any significant impact in reducing the incidence of smoking in public places. The reason I mention this point is that it may also be very difficult to closely monitor patron behaviour, placing a further burden of enforcement on a business owner, to police any new regulation. That goes on to what I am saying; I am looking forward to the health minister being able to shed some light on the issue of how we actually do the mechanics of this.

Obviously we have to get to a place where we have got to cut our health bills significantly. If we can do that through legislative measures without becoming the nanny state and overregulated, as we are often accused of, then it is all to the good. The question is: will the government provide the necessary resources to achieve a full ban on smoking in outdoor areas? We are all very much aware of the dangers that both primary and secondary smoke can cause to our health. I hold concerns about the modelling of behaviour by children, for example, and agree that wherever possible smoking in front of children should be discouraged.

In closing, let me say this. I believe that the debate about smoking in outdoor public places should be centred in the first instance on achieving full smoke-free environments at major sporting events or facilities, Floriade or outdoor concerns in our parks. It is a contentious issue and it is one that we will probably get a lot of flak on, but, as Ms Porter has said, as long as we as an Assembly can work in a bipartisan way—we come sensibly into the arena with this debate and we do not seem to be hitting people over the head with big sticks—we can bring people with us. Then, down the track, I think that we will see more than 80 per cent of Canberrans committing to saying, “I want to give up; I want to quit.” Not the least of the argument is that smoking not only costs a lot of money to the individual but also costs an incredible amount of money to taxpayers via our health system.

I commend Ms Porter’s motion to the Assembly and thank her for bringing it on today. I move:

Add the following words after paragraph (2):

“(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

(a) make public the proposed control measures by 30 June 2007; and

(b) report to the Assembly by the last sitting day of September 2007 on the outcomes of the consultation.”.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (12.19): I would like to speak both to the original motion and to the amendment. I thank Ms Porter for bringing it on and Mrs Burke for giving it the consideration that is required in order to move an amendment.

On the whole, the debate about the impacts of passive smoking has largely been won. We have seen that over the years here in the ACT, first with the removal of smoking from restaurants, which I think happened in the late 1980s, and then with progressive moves. Even smokers appreciate being able to eat, drink and recreate in a smoke-free place. Second-hand smoke is an extremely unpleasant experience, and now we have more and more knowledge about its health impacts. Before that it was just “my hair smells” or “my jacket is all smoky”. But we know that it is not just the way it makes us smell; it is also the impacts. The occupational health and safety issues that have been raised were probably a counter-factor for the clubs as they made their protestations, to some extent, about the potential loss in business when they did the renovations that were required to comply with the 75 per cent rule.

It is worth going back to the recent history of smoking and entertainment and to comments made by ClubsACT and similar bodies in other states. While everyone recognises the significant health impact of smoking and the dangers of compulsive gambling, especially with poker machines, it is a fact that clubs were concerned about the loss of revenue that comes with breaking the nexus between them. In other words, the viability of clubs in the ACT and more widely around Australia is linked into people smoking cigarettes whilst being trapped in that second addiction of problem gambling. I think that it is time to start to consider whether we should view clubs as entertainment businesses rather than the community facilities with the social purposes that once they had.

Nonetheless, the Greens opposed the 75 per cent rule when it was introduced a couple of years ago, because it simply did not make sense and because additional regulations ruling out smoking in dining areas were being predicted by the government at the same time as it was requiring clubs to make those alterations—I am sure quite expensive in some cases—to create these 75 per cent enclosed areas that the government was able to define by sleight of hand but that I do not believe that the Collins or Oxford dictionaries would see as outdoors or unenclosed space.

I am concerned that what the Greens predicted at that time—and we were alone in that battle—has come to pass and that future public health improvements are being impeded by the understandable resistance of businesses who have already made that substantial capital investment in complying with the government's definition of what was an unenclosed space. In that sense, while I wait to hear what the minister says, I am inclined, philosophically at least, to support Mrs Burke's amendment, which suggests that those public proposed control measures be made public—

Ms Gallagher: They are public; I have no problem with it.

DR FOSKEY: Okay. I am going to hear what the minister says in a moment. But I feel that they were always on the cards. It may be that Mrs Burke's amendment is unnecessary; we will see what the minister says.

While it is a bit of a no-brainer to support Ms Porter's motion, I would like to add into the mix what we discovered when it was revealed that quite a considerable amount of our superannuation funds is invested in tobacco companies. We need to follow this right through so that we are not supporting the very villains that are otherwise demonised. As it turns out, our investment portfolio does include some tobacco companies.

I also wonder whether the cuts to, or lack of increases for, support for community sport in this recent budget might not be seen as counter to the thrust of this. On one hand, sport and such activities make smoking less attractive to people. On the other hand, we know about the sponsorship of community events such as sport. This is an area where companies that profit from smoking—and drinking—are very likely to fill the gap.

I just make those comments. Of course, I could not possibly oppose Ms Porter's motion, but it is probably not quite as simple as it seems.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.26 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice

Budget—impact of drought

MR STEFANIAK: My question is to the Chief Minister and Treasurer. Chief Minister, the ACT is in its fifth year of drought and so far during 2007 inflows are even lower than they were in 2006, which was a record low. Despite this, you have failed to make provision for the continued impact of the drought on ACT government finances. Why have you failed to budget for the continuation of the drought, given the drastic circumstances that we face?

MR STANHOPE: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. It is an important question and, of course, a very important issue for Canberra, not just in a future budgetary or economic sense but, indeed, in the context of the other potential impacts of the drought on the ACT.

As I indicated in the speech on the appropriation bill yesterday, the ACT government has taken the same attitude in its budget as the commonwealth took in its budget delivered recently by the federal Treasurer, Peter Costello. We have adopted exactly the same attitude and position in relation to the drought and the budget. Mr Costello, in addressing federal parliament in relation to his budget, made the point that the growth predictions included or incorporated within the federal budget presumed that the drought will break and that potential impacts of a continuation of the drought following the federal government's budgetary position had not been incorporated into that budget.

That does not deny, of course, that the federal government, as does this government, stands ready to provide whatever assistance may be sought or required in the event that the drought does not break and some of the aspects of a continuation of the drought that might impact on us would not be met, and would not be met and approached vigorously. In that context, the ACT government and Actew, in recent times and for quite a significant period of time now, have been working assiduously to address issues in relation to the possibility of moving to level 4 water restrictions.

Actew has consulted quite heavily and significantly with aspects of the different parts of the community, most notably the business community; the sporting community; and those organisations, institutions and businesses that depend on water for their existence, their survival and their effective operation. Indeed, the ACT government has been involved in similar considerations and similar consultations. Just this week I announced, in order to ensure that there was a cross-government approach to the potential impacts and implications of level 4 restrictions, the appointment of an interdepartmental committee, to be chaired by the chief executive of the Department of Territory and Municipal Services, to ensure that every one of the possible impacts are taken into account, whether it be in relation to business or sporting events and fields and capacity and opportunity, whether it be in relation to some of our

institutions, whether it be in relation to the impact of level 4 restrictions on our construction industry, whether it be in relation to some of the potential health impacts that one might imagine might affect members of the community as a result of a prolonged period of dry weather or of a dry spell.

We take into account all of the possible impacts and we put in place and develop the responses that are needed to ensure that no part of our community life or of community activity is not considered and assessed in relation to the response which at the end of the day we as a community might need to make to extended level 4 restrictions.

So we are doing the work. Actew is doing the work. The ACT government is coordinating across all agencies a response to all of the perceived or imagined issues that might arise as a result of the continuation of the drought and we stand ready to respond to that consultation and that consideration. To the extent that there are economic impacts or costs, we will visit those and we will deal with those through the capacity most particularly that we now have to do that through a particularly strong budgetary position and balance sheet.

The community of Canberra is now in a very strong position financially to be able to respond to any risk, whether it be an externally applied risk that affects our economy through decisions that, say, the commonwealth government makes, by way of example, or whether it be as a result of something over which we have absolutely no control; for instance, the drought. We have done the work. We continue to do the work. We have adopted the same attitude in a budgetary sense as the commonwealth. To that extent I took some leave from Peter Costello and adopted the precise attitude—as I often do. I took some leave from Peter Costello in relation to this issue.

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

MR STEFANIAK: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the Chief Minister for that answer. Chief Minister, why are you assuming that the drought will break in your budget, given that the best modelling from the best scientists did not predict the record low inflows over the past 18 months? Does this effectively make your budget a “fingers crossed” budget?

MR STANHOPE: It is interesting—and the Leader of the Opposition is correct—that the advice on which Actew has acted and the advice on which Actew has relied in its advice to the ACT government in relation to long-term water security for the Australian Capital Territory did depend very extensively on expert advice from a range of scientists and experts, not just from within Canberra but also from across the nation, but most particularly from work commissioned by the CSIRO in relation to some of the anticipated effects of climate change and drought on our storage capacity and our water security.

The Leader of the Opposition is quite right: the experts that Actew relied on, and on which Actew relied in advising the government, did not predict inflows as low as seven per cent for the long-term average, although, to be fair to the CSIRO and those experts which the Leader of the Opposition just quotes, they did talk about long-term averages. They advised Actew, and Actew in its subsequent advice to the government

relied on a prediction for modelling which suggested that, as a result of climate change, it was possible and that Actew and the ACT government should plan on the basis that long-term average inflows might decline to 60 per cent of their long-term average.

The decline in inflows to seven per cent, one would think, did not feature in a long-term average of 60 per cent. But it is conceivable—and one has to be fair to the CSIRO—that there might be inflows as low as 10 per cent. Indeed, we now face the prospect, of course, that it might happen twice. It is now June. Inflows this year are lower than they were last year, and last year was the lowest record of inflows on record.

It is interesting to have the Leader of the Opposition's acknowledgement that the advice that Actew had relied on in some of its predictions in relation to long-term water security to date appears to be at some threat or risk. It is not fair to discount them yet. At this stage in the continuation of this drought, we have not had long enough to suggest that their assessment of a reduction of 60 per cent will not in fact be the long-term average.

The latest advice from the Bureau of Meteorology in relation to weather forecasting and rain for this year continues—at least in the last briefing I had—to suggest that there is a 50 to 55 per cent possibility of above average rain for the rest of this year. That is the most recent advice that I have available to me, and that is now at least a week or two old.

Mr Pratt: So you've got your staff out there doing rain dances, have you, Jon? That's why you need those 22 extra officers?

MR STANHOPE: I think there is no possibility that we should overlook in relation to what we might do to induce an end to the drought. That is the latest advice I have. I cannot predict whether it will rain; I cannot predict whether the drought will break. Just as I did not cause the drought, it is not within my gift to end the drought.

At this stage, it is not possible for me to predict that the drought will end. It may; it may not. All I can say is that I am thankful. If the drought does not break and if we go into extended level 4 restrictions or worse, then I think we will all be grateful that we have the buffer of an anticipated surplus of \$103 million. If that does transpire, nobody in this place or in the Canberra community will be sorry that we have a surplus of \$103 million.

Budget—accounting standards

MS MacDONALD: My question is to Mr Stanhope as Chief Minister in his capacity as the Treasurer. Chief Minister, as we know, you delivered the government's sixth budget yesterday, the first under the new adjusted GFS accounting presentation. I note that the budget delivers a surplus of \$103 million in 2007-08. Chief Minister, can you please explain to the Assembly why you called it a prudent budget?

MR STANHOPE: I thank Ms MacDonald for the question. As I previously indicated to members, I was very pleased yesterday to present Labor's sixth budget and its sixth

consecutive surplus—a picture that contrasts starkly with the four consecutive deficits recorded by the previous government. It is all the more pleasing that this budget delivers a surplus under the new accounting system that the government adopted in last year's budget.

This budget is a prudent budget. It is the right budget for the ACT. It is a budget that takes the territory forward by investing in areas of greatest need and greatest importance. It ensures that ACT residents can continue to receive the high level of services they demand, but without leaving the bill to future generations.

To put this budget in context, the ACT's expenditure on government services, as we all know, was around 20 to 25 per cent above the national average before last year. Our revenue-raising effort, on the other hand, has been around the national average. This was not sustainable. We all know that it was not sustainable. The numbers did not add up. We all know that the numbers did not add up.

To address the imbalance, Labor embarked on a major structural reform as part of the 2006-07 budget—reform that would maintain capacity for investment in physical and social infrastructure, preserve the high quality of services and outcomes in priority areas and provide a buffer against any potential fiscal shocks, including the potential for a fiscal shock that might be a result of a continuation of the drought.

Efficiencies flowing from that reform have reduced the cost of administration and directed the savings to front-end services. Efficiency savings will total \$383 million over four years. In 2007-08 those efficiencies total more than \$99 million. This would equate to around \$9 billion in a commonwealth budget.

One of the traps we see in commentary on an ACT budget and on ACT finances comes from a misunderstanding of the size of the ACT budget and the implications or effects of just a \$3 million, \$4 million, \$5 million or \$6 million investment or change. When you consider and contemplate this—and it needs to be done in order to fully understand the significance of this surplus and some of the decisions taken in this budget—you will see that, for instance, \$99 million in the ACT equates to \$9 billion in a federal budget. That is how significant some of these things are.

The full effect of the efficiencies to be realised in 2009-10 will be around \$118 million a year, or 3.6 per cent of total expenses. In other words, expenses in that year would have been 3.6 per cent higher if the efficiencies were not in place.

This budget is prudent because it maintains fiscal restraint while allowing the government to invest in new policy initiatives in priority areas—new hospital beds, more elective surgery, additional funding for disability services, additional funding for mental health and more ambulance officers.

The budget is prudent because it builds on the government's achievements in key service areas—taking the territory forward, not backward. For example, the government has increased expenditure on health by over \$355 million since 2001, funding more hospital beds, elective surgery, medical and nursing staff and greater operating theatre capacity. Canberra's public hospitals now admit more than 75,000 patients a year. There are 147 more hospital beds than when we came to government.

The government has also delivered record levels of elective surgery over the past four years, providing an extra \$22 million to fund 5,000 more operations.

This budget is prudent because it makes major investments in the territory's physical and social infrastructure, investments that allow the territory to grow but ensure that we retain a buffer against fiscal shocks.

This budget is prudent because it ensures that the government is in a position to manage the risks facing the territory. The territory, like other jurisdictions, needs to address the effects of an ageing population, growing health care costs, increasing superannuation liabilities and the needs of a growing economy.

The government is also mindful of the challenges of global climate change and water security, which have the potential to impact adversely on the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the community.

This budget achieves all this in the context of declining commonwealth contributions to key services. For the ACT specifically, as I said earlier, between 2001-02 and 2005-06, per capita specific purpose payment funding to the ACT by the commonwealth decreased by 10 per cent. In 2001-02, the commonwealth contributed 31 per cent of the acute care costs in the ACT. That has now dropped to 23 per cent.

MS MacDONALD: I ask a supplementary question. Chief Minister, does the government stand by its use of an adjusted GFS operating balance as its headline measure?

MR STANHOPE: It needs to be understood that the ACT's budget figures are presented on a comparable basis to the state governments. We apply the same standards and present our budget in exactly the same way as the states and territories of Australia. We had confirmed this morning that a Liberal government, if one is ever elected, will budget consistent only with the pure GFS accounting standard. I think that is the first policy commitment that the Liberal Party has made in three years, that it will, in government, utilise only pure GFS.

It is probably something of a pity that a Liberal government in the ACT would actually step aside and separate itself from the accounting practices of every other state and territory in Australia. It would be a unique situation if it were to adopt an accounting standing that would be measured inconsistently. By adopting pure GFS it would stand outside the accounting practices of every other state and territory.

But let it be said now and let it be understood that one of the reasons for moving to GFS was so that the ACT's budgetary outcomes could be compared, like for like, with the states and the Northern Territory. That is what we have achieved in the budget that was delivered yesterday—a budget that can be compared precisely with every other state and territory in Australia.

But the Liberal Party today have announced that they will not do that. They will not account for long-term superannuation returns, as every other state and territory in Australia does; they will move to pure GFS. Mr Mulcahy, this morning in fact,

suggested that the commonwealth does not do that. No, the commonwealth does not. At this stage the commonwealth is the only jurisdiction that stands out from GFS.

Mr Mulcahy: You have been quoting all afternoon.

MR STANHOPE: The commonwealth does. It stands out. It adopts an underlying budget surplus, or deficit, methodology in the declaration of its surpluses. Interestingly, the suggestion that Mr Mulcahy or Mr Stefaniak might make in raising the commonwealth's model as a model that perhaps the ACT might replicate or aspire to is that, were we to adopt the same basis of reporting as the commonwealth, our surpluses would actually increase between now and 2010-11. The surpluses that have been reflected in our bottom line for the outyears would increase. The initial year, 2007-08, would decline, but by 2010-11 the anticipated surplus under the commonwealth's accounting methodology or treatment would increase to over \$300 million.

The four-year total, or combined, surpluses under the commonwealth model in the ACT would actually increase the currently budgeted \$320 million surplus to somewhere well in excess of \$500 million.

Mr Barr: Really!

MR STANHOPE: Yes, \$300 million in one year. If we adopted the commonwealth's methodology and accounting treatment, the budget surplus in the ACT would be just over \$300 million in 2010-11.

If the Liberal Party is suggesting that we should perhaps not be compared with the states and territories and should not account in the same way as the states and territories, if they intend to persist with their determination not to account for the long-term average return on superannuation of 7.5 per cent in their budgets, perhaps, just for the sake of comparison, we should compare our budget outcomes with those of the commonwealth. I do not have the final number but I know that in 2010-11, it is \$310 million. I would be suggesting a budget surplus somewhere in the order of, perhaps, \$500 million over four years.

Mr Mulcahy: It sounds a good figure, doesn't it?

MR STANHOPE: I will confirm it. It is \$310 million in 2010-11. We will work back from there. Whichever way you look at it, what we have is a Liberal Party that is determined, in government—it has made the commitment today publicly—if it is ever elected, to account pure GFS in its budgets. It will not take into account, Mr Stefaniak and Mr Mulcahy have told us today, long-term returns—currently averaging 7.5 per cent—on superannuation as every other government in Australia, except the commonwealth, do. The commonwealth uses a different methodology.

There we have it. Yes, we stand by the use of the adjusted GFS operating balance as a headline measure because it ensures that our accounting is consistent with every state and territory in Australia. *(Time expired.)*

Planning—Molonglo land release

DR FOSKEY: Regarding the commitment in this year's budget to release land for housing in Molonglo—

MR SPEAKER: To whom is the question addressed?

DR FOSKEY: I think it is for the Minister for Planning, but it is one of those areas that may be for the Chief Minister. I am going to leave it to the experts to decide. It is a planning question. Consequently, I will first address it to the Minister for Planning.

In regard to the commitment in this year's budget to release land for housing in Molonglo by 2008-09, can the Minister for Planning please advise the Assembly of the time frame for the National Capital Authority to amend the national capital plan and for ACTPLA to amend the territory plan so that the roads and services can be designed and the building begun?

MR BARR: I thank Dr Foskey for the question. I can provide some information in relation to that. I understand that the National Capital Authority board met on 22 and 23 May to consider the draft amendment to the national capital plan for the Molonglo Valley. A consultation period is likely to commence in July for a period of eight weeks. I am advised that the authority is preparing a consultation strategy to facilitate wide community access to information and displays, including a 3D computer model, on the proposed development.

DR FOSKEY: Can the minister please advise the Assembly on how long it usually takes from the first circulation of proposed variations to these two plans to the first work on the ground?

MR BARR: It is somewhat difficult to provide a usual instance in this case because this is the first time that such a process has occurred. It is the government's intention, as outlined in the budget, to see some development, following the appropriate process, within the 2008-09 financial year. I understand that there are two parallel planning processes that have to occur. It is difficult for me to give an exact answer to Dr Foskey's question because it is not a usual practice. I can perhaps take further advice on the time frames and the processes, depending on the aspects of the NCA's consultation, and provide further advice to the Assembly, perhaps when we next sit, as we will have further clarity around the NCA process and its exact time lines for consultation at that time.

Housing—public

MRS BURKE: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Housing. Minister, according to your media release yesterday, Housing ACT has estimated that under-utilisation of properties has resulted in an equivalent 500 three-bedroom properties sitting empty across the ACT. At the same time you said:

We have a situation where families with three or more children are waiting for public housing, while single tenants are residing in three and four bedroom homes.

Minister, why have you allowed this mismatch of housing to develop to such a point of crisis?

MR HARGREAVES: By way of explanation to the Assembly, I should quote back to Mrs Burke something that is relevant to her question. In one of her press releases she said:

It's a bit like the statement of the bleeding obvious, isn't it, when you've got 500 three-bedroom properties lying idle and over 1,050 people on a waiting list urgently requiring a roof over their heads ...

Then she said to the *Canberra Times*:

What poor management. We now have an estimated 500 taxpayer-funded public houses sitting there empty while thousands are languishing on the waiting list.

Let me make a couple of points. Her first statement was that there were a thousand people on the waiting list and then she says there are thousands of people languishing on the waiting list. Of course, very mischievously she say there are 500 three-bedroom properties lying idle. That is Mrs Burke's interpretation.

We told the people of Canberra some time ago that where people have a bedroom over-entitlement and you divided that by three, it has the equivalence of 500 homes. This is not 500 individual properties lying idle across the community. This is Mrs Burke either getting it confused or being deliberately mischievous. I will give her the benefit of the doubt and suggest that she is once again grossly confused. Let me correct her. Firstly, there are not 500 empty properties out there. There is an equivalence in spare bedrooms in over-entitlement. Secondly, Mrs Burke really ought to apologise to the people out there in the community for misleading them by saying, as reported in the *Canberra Times*, that there are thousands languishing on the waiting list. I have told people in this place before—

Mrs Burke: You cut it by half. Now they are homeless.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Mrs Burke: You took them off the waiting list and now they are homeless.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mrs Burke!

Mrs Burke: Sorry, Mr Speaker.

MR HARGREAVES: I have said in this place before that we have just over a thousand people on the waiting list.

Mrs Burke: You know jolly well what you have done.

MR HARGREAVES: I have told this—

Mrs Burke: You have changed the criteria and now they are homeless.

MR HARGREAVES: For God's sake, Mr Speaker—protection, please!

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mrs Burke! You asked the minister a question. Please listen to his answer in silence.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Mrs Burke says that there are thousands languishing on the waiting list. Let me say that the priority housing people—these are the people who are in absolute dire need—numbered 21 as at 4 June and the average waiting time for people in priority housing is 40 days. This is not thousands of people languishing on the waiting list. What a picture Mrs Burke paints! I am happy to table these two documents if she so desires. She may not have them in her scrapbook of confused utterings. I will quote again what she said. She said:

We now have an estimated 500 taxpayer-funded public houses sitting there empty ...

There are not 500 and she knows it. I have answered that question here before. She does not know the difference between spare bedroom capacity and bricks and mortar. She shows her ignorance and frightens the horses yet again. She says there are thousands of people on the waiting list. But what does she say in her press release? She said that there were 1,050. When I went to school, 1,050 was not many thousands of people languishing anywhere.

Mrs Burke has got it wrong again. She has been sprung and she has not got the good grace to stand up in this place and admit that she has got it wrong. She has made a complete and absolute goose of herself. All she has to do now is put out a press release saying, "Sorry, people of Canberra, yet again I get the goose of the week award. I got it wrong." This is either blatant confusion on the part of a shadow minister who should be ashamed of herself, or it is mischievous, in which case she should be ashamed of herself. In either case, Mrs Burke ought to be thoroughly and completely ashamed of herself.

MRS BURKE: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. Minister, how many properties are actually standing vacant at this time?

MR HARGREAVES: The information on the number of vacant properties as at 4 June 2007 is that there were routine vacancies, which are just vacancies, of 94—this is not thousands; properties awaiting demolition, seven; of properties awaiting and undergoing redevelopments for allocation there are 186; of properties awaiting or undergoing upgrading and refurbishment there are 33; and there are nine properties waiting to be sold. We have recently purchased three that have not got people in them just yet, and one is being reviewed, and there are 11 new vacant properties—a total, including that, of 344. If you take the redevelopments out of that, there are 158. We have a gross vacancy rate of 2.97.

Mrs Burke: No, you're playing with numbers. Shame on you!

MR HARGREAVES: Here she goes again—

Mr Barr: So you should never refurbish the properties?

MR HARGREAVES: lies, damned lies and statistics. Here we go!

Mr Barr: This is the Liberal Party position: you should never refurbish public housing property.

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Barr and members of the opposition will remain silent.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks very much, Mr Speaker. I remember some time ago when Mrs Burke put out a press release with all of these properties and asking us what are these properties. Mr Barr will remember this.

Mr Barr: I do.

MR HARGREAVES: She put out this press release saying there were all these vacant properties everywhere.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Barr!

MR HARGREAVES: So we looked into it. We looked into the list provided by Mrs Burke—

Mrs Burke: You mean you didn't know at the time?

MR SPEAKER: I warn you, Mrs Burke.

MR HARGREAVES: And guess what: she got it right once; only one was there. All the rest had either been sold or they never were ours in the first place. You cannot trust a thing, you cannot trust a number, that Mrs Burke ever produces when it comes to housing. Mrs Burke wants to be serious about this thing. She keeps saying in this place: "Look, I'm happy to cooperate with you. Let me work with you." Such warm and fuzzy things; I am really taken by this—to the point of tears sometimes, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Come back to the subject matter of the question instead of crying about it.

MR HARGREAVES: I am. All Mrs Burke has to do to stop herself looking stupid by putting out numbers which are wrong is to ask a question. We are very happy to provide her with the information any time she likes. But she does not; she launches

into really idiotic statements like that there are 500 three-bedroom homes lying idle—because she got it confused with the statement that they are the equivalence of 500 homes with bedrooms in overentitlement. She has got it wrong. She has been sprung again. She ought to do the honourable thing and stand up and apologise, admit she got it wrong, or surrender her shadow portfolio to someone with the intelligence to do it properly.

Budget—Chief Minister's Department

MR MULCAHY: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, it has become apparent that the 2007-08 budget provides for an extra 22 policy officers in the Chief Minister's Department at a cost of \$9.2 million over four years. In light of your unwillingness to take questions from the floor about the budget at your expensive fundraiser last night and your sidestepping of this particular issue at the business council breakfast this morning, can you now tell the Assembly what is the purpose of this additional policy team and who has fulfilled the role over the last five years of your government?

MR STANHOPE: I welcome the question from the shadow Treasurer. As I think everybody is aware, the government has embarked—actually it did it over the last two years—on some significant efficiencies within the ACT public service. They are not restricted just to the last year; indeed, over the last two years there has been significant and ongoing restructuring and the generation of efficiencies throughout all agencies. I do not have a final count, but I think it is fair to assume that in the last two years there have been somewhere in the order of 1,000 reductions in overall staffing levels within the ACT public service. I think there would have been a reduction in public service staffing across the board of somewhere in the order of 1,000 in the last two years and a bit.

As I indicated earlier today, in the last year the ACT public service lost 500 permanent employees and somewhere in the order of 200 casual and part-time employees from its establishment. As everybody is aware, there have been across the board some quite rigorous cuts and changes to the nature of departments as a result of decisions announced in last year's budget. There have been significant cuts to the Chief Minister's Department, as there have been significant cuts to other areas of ACT government administration.

I have indicated that I was as rigorous in seeking those efficiencies in order to implement last year's budget in relation to areas for which I was administratively responsible as I was in relation to areas for which my colleagues—other ministers—were responsible. That has resulted in a significant reduction in capacity within the Chief Minister's Department—the central agency of the ACT public service, an agency that is important in terms of cross-government policy development and delivery of advice.

Because of the gains that have been achieved as a result of the efficiencies demanded last year and because of the emerging needs and priorities—central and across the board—I and the government have resolved to restore some policy capacity and to enhance policy capacity within the Chief Minister's Department.

There has always been capacity within this most significant central agency to develop policy advice to me as Chief Minister and, through me, to other ministers and other agencies. For instance, there was the very significant work undertaken by the affordable housing task force, with a most significant report that was leading Australia in its breadth and potential implications and that I have no doubt will be a model that will be adopted by other jurisdictions. That was led by the Chief Minister's Department. It was a piece of most significant work which will have enormous implications for a large number of Canberrans. It is work that was driven out of the policy capacity and functions of the Chief Minister's Department.

But the resources are thin—very thin. The Chief Minister's Department would probably have the narrowest or thinnest policy capacity of any central agency of any government in Australia. We are seeking, through this very sensible decision to enhance the capacity of the ACT public service, to provide top-level advice to the ACT government on issues of significant concern to the ACT government and to the people of Canberra—issues such as affordable housing.

MR MULCAHY: I have a supplementary question for the Treasurer. How do you reconcile this expansion-of-policy back flip with your earlier claims to have contained the expansion of the bureaucracy in the ACT?

Mr Hargreaves: He just did.

MR STANHOPE: That is quite right; I just did. It is interesting, isn't it, the silence that now emanates from the other side in relation to the Shared Services Centre? We remember this time last year the opposition, the scarifying commentary, the total scepticism around the capacity for a Shared Services Centre to deliver the sorts of results we see reflected in this budget that actually allow us, through the efficiencies that have been gained, to provide additional resources to priority areas. Those priority areas are reflected in jobs growth in this particular budget. There has been a significant reduction within essentially the clerical, broadly described, sections of the ACT public service.

In this budget we have invested the dividend from the restructuring and from the hard work that has been done over the last year in high-priority areas, areas of real need, such as an additional 16 ambulance officers; the nurses that are required, along with the doctors, to staff the theatres and the activity that will be generated by the additional \$10 million for elective surgery; the disability services officers that will be employed as a result of the investment of another \$16 million in disability services; the mental health staff and the community sector workers who will be engaged as a result of the additional \$12½ million investment in mental health.

There will be additional employment. They will be ambulance drivers, they will be doctors, they will be nurses, they will be paramedics, they will be mental health workers, they will be people that will work to make the best possible return on the \$68 million investment in health which is a central feature of this government, and they will occupy fundamentally important policy positions within the Chief Minister's Department, an area of high priority and an area of fundamental need for any

government that seeks to expand its horizons and to recognise the opportunities to govern in a way that meets the needs of a community.

It is interesting that you can employ additional ambulance drivers and you can employ additional nurses without comment or commentary, because they are respected and recognised immediately, but another fundamentally important function of government, of the public service, that is, the development of policy, all of a sudden is dirty. "A policy office! For goodness sake, what do you want people to develop policy for?"

Ms Gallagher: The Liberals wouldn't need them.

MR STANHOPE: But then again, of course, across the board the Liberal Party would not need policy officers. We have seen the colour of a Liberal government. We saw it this morning when the shadow Treasurer indicated that a Liberal government would attack the \$61 million overfunding of the Canberra and Calvary hospitals! You cannot with any credibility stand up at a significant function on budget day as the alternative government, presenting an alternative vision, and say there is \$61 million of excess expenditure in our public hospitals and then sit down. You cannot with credibility say, "A Liberal government, confronted with this \$61 million of overexpenditure for the Canberra Hospital, will cut it, will reduce it, will remove it, if not in its entirety, to this degree." But we do not see that. We see today a blank list. You do not need policy officers for that. The Liberal Party has decided, the shadow Treasurer has indicated today, that the Canberra Hospital and Calvary Public are overfunded to the tune of \$61 million. He went on to say, "Why don't we replicate Queensland's funding base? Why don't we seek to achieve the outcomes that are achieved in Queensland?" He stopped one step short of saying, "Dr Death, brought to you by the Liberal Party of the ACT." He stopped one step short.

Mr Mulcahy: I take a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is beyond the pale and I would ask you to direct the Chief Minister back to the matter on which I have questioned him.

MR SPEAKER: Come to the subject matter. The minister's time has expired.

Budget—tourism

MR SMYTH: My question is to the minister for tourism. Minister, in the 2006 ACT budget, the Stanhope government cut \$3.5 million from the tourism budget, with a further cut of \$1 million slated for the 2007-08 budget. In the 2007-08 ACT budget, it is unclear how the tourism budget total has been determined. Minister, what are the components of the \$24.8 million that has been determined as the budget for tourism in 2007-08? What is included in the 6.158 that is listed on page 285 of the budget as "events"? Where were these funds transferred from?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Smyth for the question. I understand that Mr Smyth has been somewhat confused by the budget papers. I noted his comments in the *Canberra Times* this morning. These issues were raised at the tourism industry briefing that I held last night with the tourism industry. I am very pleased to advise the Assembly that, as Mr Smyth has identified, in the 2006-07 budget papers there was a separation

of tourism funding, which was just over \$16 million, and events funding, which was in the order of \$6.15 million, giving a combined total of \$22.39 million.

Mr Smyth is correct to identify that in 2007-08 the tourism and events funding has increased from \$22.397 million to \$24.838 million—an increase just short of \$2½ million. Those increases identified in the budget papers yesterday relate to increased expenditure for Floriade, the world mountain bike championships and other events associated with Stromlo Forest Park, and additional moneys into other territory venues and events.

The combined funding for tourism and events in 2007-08 is \$24.838 million, an increase of about \$2.4½ million—\$2.44 million, I think—on what was available in those combined entities in 2006-07. As a result, I am very pleased to be able to advise the Assembly that we are targeting additional funding into important tourism and event areas within the territory budget, particularly Floriade.

I am also pleased to advise the Assembly, as I have not had the opportunity since the announcement was made last week, that we have achieved a successful negotiation with the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport about the continuation of the Rally of Canberra. That arrangement has freed up three quarters of a million dollars into the outyears—each year into the outyears—for the tourism portfolio. A one-off payment is made to the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport for 2007-08, leaving \$450,000 of additional funding available in 2007-08, rising to \$750,000 in 2008-09 and into the outyear.

So a total of \$2.7 million in additional funding will be redirected back into the tourism portfolio available for the promotion of the city; available, as I announced last night, for additional funding for the Canberra Convention Bureau to support the government's \$30 million investment in the refurbishment of the National Convention Centre.

It is again a sound budget for tourism, one in which we are investing in our key events. There were some prudent negotiations around the Rally of Canberra. We have been able to free up \$2.7 million in additional money for the tourism budget as a result of some difficult and complex negotiations, which were handled extremely well by the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. I commend all the officers who were involved in those negotiations. We will see an ongoing rally here in Canberra. It is fantastic news. The organisation of the event has been taken over by the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport and there will be a \$2.7 million dividend back to taxpayers in the territory, back into our tourism budget.

Difficult decisions had to be taken during 2006-07. But looking forward to the next four years, there will be outstanding results for tourism in the territory. It is interesting that Mr Smyth raises these issues today. I am sure that in the supplementary I will be able to provide some information on the latest international visitor survey figures for the ACT, which again provide more good news for tourism in the ACT.

MR SMYTH: I ask a supplementary question. The minister will be disappointed because it will not be about visitor numbers. But we will get to that. Minister, what is included in the 6.158 listed as events, and where were these funds transferred from?

MR BARR: I will have to take on notice the detail of the 6.15, but they relate to support for Stromlo Forest Park and a number of other venues and events that are run through the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. All of this money is within territory and municipal services. It has, of course, been kept within that department.

Venues and events have reported to me, as Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation. There is, again, no change in the reporting lines. It is simply that there is a very close alignment between events and tourism, and the particular initiatives that the government has put forward in relation to such venues as Stromlo Forest Park have a very clear tourism objective. It underpins our support, for example, for the 2009 world mountain bike championships, an event that, when held in New Zealand in 2006, attracted 30,000 to 40,000 international visitors to Rotorua. So we are very much looking forward to hosting the 2009 world mountain bike championships at what is a world-class venue in Stromlo Forest Park, a venue in which this government has invested \$7.5 million.

Another key initiative in the budget was the announcement of the Rob de Castella invitational cross-country event, another new event on the Canberra sporting and tourism calendar. It is a very good and welcome initiative. It comes on the day that Tourism Research Australia released some figures on international visitation. I am very pleased to advise the Assembly of a 2.7 per cent increase in tourism visitation to the ACT—

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. The minister can make a statement at any time. The question was about the specific sum of money in the budget. If the minister wants to make a statement about tourism numbers, he can seek leave on another occasion.

MR SPEAKER: Answer the question, Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The money that we are investing in tourism is delivering fantastic returns. I thank Mrs Dunne for identifying the fact that the number of visitor nights by international visitors, as registered by Tourism Research Australia, has increased from 1.8 million to seven million in the year ending March 2006, up to a whopping 2.267 million visitor nights; that the average length of stay for international visitors has increased from 11.5 to 14.9 nights and that the direct expenditure into the ACT economy from international visitors has increased from \$156 million in the year ending March 2006 to \$190 million in the year ending March 2007.

Can I say that it is particularly pleasing that in the areas where we have been targeting our marketing efforts and the tourism dollars that Mr Smyth is so concerned about, particularly the key markets of Singapore and Malaysia, we have seen an increase of 8.4 per cent in those markets—well above the overall increase of 2.7 per cent. I note Mr Mulcahy's ongoing interest in the backpacker market, and I am pleased to advise that our investment in tourism has seen an 11.5 per cent increase in the number of international backpackers visiting the capital in the year ending March 2007, up to nearly 38,000, which is fantastic.

Our top five international markets continue to be the United Kingdom, the USA, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, China and New Zealand. This is a fantastic result. It is seen in those who are visiting the ACT for holiday purposes and also, importantly, those who are coming here for business. I am very pleased that we have been able to get these fantastic results. I thank Mr Smyth for the question.

Health—services

MS PORTER: My question is to the minister for health. Minister, can you update the Assembly on recent strategies the government has announced to meet areas of need in disability services and our health system?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Ms Porter for her continuing interest in the health and disability portfolios. As members would be aware, the areas of need in disability and health continue to grow every year. This government has prioritised a number of strategies to address meeting that demand. This has been reflected in the announcements contained in the budget yesterday.

In regard to health, we are targeting areas of need in the acute sector, with 20 new acute care beds, 10 of which will be used for orthopaedic services. This builds on the 126 beds that were provided in the previous budget but continues our investment in ensuring that our acute care capacity keeps up with demand.

In addition to this, we will provide more support services for critical care services at the Canberra Hospital and Calvary. There is \$5 million for a new intensive care capacity at TCH. And, importantly—and this one has not received a great deal of attention—there is a new intensive care, coronary care and high dependency unit at Calvary hospital. The government will be working in partnership with the Little Company of Mary to deliver this project through an investment of \$3½ million to purchase the equipment and fit-out the new unit and repayment of a capital charge for the project at Calvary hospital. This has been long fought for by doctors at Calvary and has been received warmly, I understand. This is a great boost for health services on the north side of Canberra, which is an area of growth. We need to make sure that we keep up with that demand and that Calvary hospital can have increased capacity to deal with more intensive and acutely unwell patients.

We are also providing an extra \$10 million for improved access to elective surgery. This will allow the commissioning of a 10th operating theatre, along with the purchase of 300 more operations a year. We are expecting throughput to exceed 9,300 this budget year, another record high in throughput in elective surgery. This investment will continue. It is estimated that we will reach a target of around 9,600 during the next financial year. The 10th theatre will be a great addition; it means our operating theatres are working to full capacity, but it will meet some of the demand we are seeing for elective surgery and, hopefully, minimise some of the waits that are experienced on our waiting list.

There is more money going into chronic disease management and, importantly, into dental care. There is a new program to establish support for vulnerable children and their families in their first years of life. That is targeting the 0 to 2-year age group. We

will work with families, including looking at how we can improve parenting skills and make sure that parents of children who have a mental illness, who are involved with drug and alcohol or who have substance abuse issues are able to provide the care and support that their children will need.

We will also look at public health and continue to fund growth in access to cancer services—another area where, regrettably, demand for health services is continuing to grow.

Capital investment will focus on a new car park at the Canberra Hospital, to ensure that we can meet some of the demand for parking, and also create a separate, new helipad at the top of the structure with a direct link into the Canberra Hospital. Again, that will be warmly welcomed by hospital staff, who have been concerned about the walk across the car park in order to get patients into the hospital.

MS PORTER: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. Thank you, minister. Can you further elaborate on how these strategies will ensure services reach those most in need?

MS GALLAGHER: We have attempted to ensure that the strategies we put in place will reach those members of the community who are most in need and who seek government support, and in that sense the extra funding going into mental health has been warmly welcomed by the mental health sector. It will ensure that again we can keep pace with demand but also, importantly, that we are providing alternatives to hospitalisation for people with a mental illness, that we are looking at our partnerships in the community sector to make sure that those with the expertise in community based support are given the capacity to continue to extend and implement their programs. It will allow for extra support in our older persons mental health inpatient unit. It will support mental health nurses in the emergency department. It will provide extra accommodation in the community for step-up/step-down for adults and young people and ensure that we are providing the additional staff with the training they need to appropriately address the changing needs of the mental health system.

Also in terms of our commitment to mental health, we will progress the work over the new adult inpatient facility, which will be at the Canberra Hospital, along with the forward design work for a forensic facility, a secure mental health unit. This will replace our existing psychiatric services unit and, once completed, will create a best practice environment to support the best patient-centred care that we can provide.

The disability sector over the past year has lobbied me very strongly for extra support, particularly for elderly parents who have been caring for their children at home for extended periods of time and who may now be getting quite elderly themselves, those whose children are now 50 years old, and those parents who have been looking for solutions for longer-term care and support for their children, along with parents of younger children, particularly those who are about to leave the school environment and who have no other alternatives to daytime support. This has been an issue for us at the end of every schooling year, particularly once they leave, say, Black Mountain school: what happens and where do they go?

This increase for the disability sector is substantial. It is the most significant investment for people with disabilities since self-government. It recognises that there is unmet need in the community; that we are trying to deal with that but that more needed to be done. So this will target supported accommodation, additional respite services, community access places and individualised funding. Some of that will be provided by the community sector because they have expertise in this area, but I know already from feedback that we have received from both the mental health and the disability sector that both of the funding commitments handed down yesterday, including the strategic direction of those funding decisions, have been warmly welcomed by the sector and I look forward to working with them to implement the best arrangements and the best support models that we can to support those members of our community who need that.

Emergency Services Agency—funding

MR PRATT: My question is to the minister for emergency services. Minister, in this budget you have addressed a number of capability, equipment and training shortfalls in the emergency services budget which are long overdue and those delays have affected the performance of the emergency services in various ways. It would appear, however, that the emergency services organisation has become dysfunctional. There still remain the 40 captains and deputy captains of the RFS who resigned in disgust, there is still widespread discontent across all the volunteer RFS and SES units about lack of consultation, and there are many disgruntled career officers across the services because of your mismanagement of the restructuring of the emergency services organisation. Minister, why have you failed to address the fundamental issues around your restructuring of the emergency services and the relocation of emergency services back into JACS?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Pratt for the question. I think that this budget says it all when it comes to the effectiveness of the organisation to communicate to me as the minister and to the government what resources the emergency services need. I think that this budget says it all in demonstrating to volunteers and professional paid staff on the ground that, when it comes to getting the message through about what resources are needed in our emergency services, our structure delivers.

Let's talk about what has been delivered on the ground for the emergency services personnel and let's demonstrate that the structure works and let's demonstrate that it gets the message through to me as the minister and to the government as a whole as to what our emergency services need. We can have an argument, if you like, about what is the best administrative arrangement, but I will tell you what makes the difference on the fire ground, makes the difference in the storm event or makes the difference in the flood event. It is not the administrative arrangement. It is about whether or not the emergency services personnel have the equipment and the training that they need to do the job. That is what makes the difference.

That is why this government has invested \$6½ million in the most significant vehicle replacement program in the ESA for over a decade. The \$6½ million will replace 32 vehicles over the next three years, including a large number of light units, heavy tankers, command vehicles and urban fire appliances. That is the level of investment

that this government is prepared to make in emergency services. When it comes to the incident on the ground, it is not going to be the administrative arrangements that will be foremost in the minds of our volunteers. What is going to be foremost in their minds is whether they have the resources to do the job. That is what this budget delivers on. It is not just about vehicle replacement. It is also about training. We need to make sure that our emergency services personnel have the training that they need to do the job and to keep their skills up to date.

What investment is the government making in that regard? First of all, we are training for a range of things, including driver training to make sure that we have more people qualified to drive the large, heavy vehicles that are needed at the scene of a bushfire. We are training more incident controllers. What can be more important than making sure that we have more senior members of our services trained in the very important skill of managing and controlling an incident and directing resources on the ground? More money is going into that. But there is more than that. There is also training for remote area firefighting teams.

A key recommendation of the coroner was the early attack of fires in remote areas, and that is what remote area firefighting teams deliver us. They deliver us the capacity to get into a remote area and deal with the fire early, before it gets large and more problematic. That is the level of funding that we have put into our emergency services in terms of improving the capability of emergency services. All these initiatives demonstrate that our structure works in terms of getting the message through to the minister and to the government about what is needed on the ground. That is what makes the difference, not some esoteric argument about administrative arrangements.

At the end of the day, we need to drill down and address the issues at a practical level about what we need to do to reassure our volunteer captains and deputy captains that the new structure delivers and that their concerns can be and are being addressed. That is exactly what we are doing. The commissioner has been meeting regularly with representatives of the volunteers and the volunteer captains and providing them with feedback and information to address their concerns. Yesterday, I indicated in a letter to all of the volunteers in charge of our volunteer brigades and units as well as to our CFU units that I would be very interested in convening a meeting with them as soon as possible, as the first of an ongoing and regular pattern of meetings with them, to discuss issues around the implementation of this major budget package and the implementation of other issues that come up. That is what we are doing in response to those issues. (*Time expired.*)

MR PRATT: I ask a supplementary question. Minister, do you expect that by throwing additional funding at emergency services you will resolve the fundamental problems inherent in your restructuring of emergency services? When will you get your 40 captains and deputy captains back?

MR CORBELL: The leaders of our volunteer brigades, RFS brigades, are still, in effect, performing all of the duties they performed as captains. Yes, they have resigned as a symbolic act of protest, but in effect they continue to do the work they did when they held those offices. They have confirmed that in communications to the ESA, that they will continue to organise and continue to perform their duties as volunteers, but they will not hold formally those offices.

Mr Pratt: But not as captains.

MR CORBELL: Well, we understand the symbolic protest that they are making and we treat it seriously. They have not walked away from the RFS. It is not like they are not going to training any more. It is not like they are not showing up at the shed regularly. It is not like they are not communicating with the rest of their brigade members, because they are. Their protest was a serious one, and I treat it seriously.

We will work through these issues with the volunteers. This is not about throwing money at volunteers, hoping that this issue will go away. This is demonstrating yet again the government's serious commitment to improving community safety. It is about ensuring that, as a community, our emergency services have the best possible facilities and equipment to do the job.

It is extraordinary that Mr Pratt would criticise the government for investing in the very issues that the volunteers have been concerned about for so long. Who can forget Mr Pratt's questions earlier this year and late last year about the reliability of the RFS fleet? Do you remember that? Do you remember that Mr Pratt and Mr Smyth stood up and complained and complained and complained about the adequacy and reliability of the aging RFS fleet?

That is the issue of concern to volunteers, and that is the issue that we have addressed. That is what makes the difference on the ground—better equipment, better vehicles, better training and better community safety. That is our commitment to the ACT community.

Budget—skills shortages

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Deputy Chief Minister. I refer to a comment on the budget from Ms Kim Sattler of UnionsACT, and a Labor candidate at the last ACT election, about the failure to provide money to address skill shortages in the community sector. On the ABC Ms Sattler said:

We have shocking skills shortages in that industry but there has been no investment made in developing the community sector workforce whatsoever.

In her press release, Ms Sattler said:

It is a stain on this government that this budget and its surplus have not addressed funding to the community sector workforce.

Minister, why have you failed to invest in addressing skills shortages in the community sector?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mrs Dunne for the question. I welcome the opportunity to be able to disagree with that press release for a start and to outline the commitments in this budget that do support the community sector. In fact, the Chief Minister and I have just had the opportunity to talk with the community sector about those initiatives and explain some of the detail behind the initiatives that will benefit the community

sector. Unfortunately, I do not believe Ms Sattler was in the room. She would have been able to hear directly from us how many of those initiatives benefit the community sector.

I also have to respond to the hypocrisy of the opposition, who for years in government failed to meet even basic pay increases in the community sector, let alone index the community sector at a rate that is favourable. In fact, when we came to government, there were a number of budgets—including back to 2002-03—in which we provided SACS award increases to address the shortfall of the SACS awards, the wages in the community sector, which were not able to be met by the mean-spirited indexation arrangements that existed at that time.

We index at 3.75 per cent—the most generous of all states or territories. Any government in this country does not index the community sector as we do—3.75 per cent. The average is around three per cent. It goes below; it goes down to about 2.5. We have the most generous indexation arrangements on offer in the community sector from any—

Mrs Dunne: And it's not all community organisations.

MS GALLAGHER: It is a combination of the wage price index and the CPI. It is 80 to 20. But that is driven by wages—80 per cent. We have taken it from two per cent, to 2½ per cent, to 3.75 per cent in the community sector.

There are also a number of initiatives in this year's budget to further address demands in the community sector. As I have said, quite a bit of the money from the mental health initiative will go to the community sector. There is money in the disability initiative to the community sector. We have return-to-work grants, which will benefit many of the women that the community sector provides support to.

There are capital programs for upgrades of facilities, and for targeted refurbishments of childcare facilities and other venues that the community sector reside in, which we will provide extra support for. There is a range of initiatives in this. There is the youth health service initiative, where we are further expanding the junction youth health model, again to be provided by the community sector. The alcohol and drug sector will receive extra support for a women's and children's initiative.

There is a lot in this budget for the community sector. I disagree with Ms Sattler's analysis. I think it was unfair. We are meeting our responsibilities to the community sector. We work in partnership with them and we work very well with them. In fact, the meeting that the Chief Minister and I attended, along with Dr Foskey and Ms MacDonald, at lunchtime today reflected that strong relationship that exists and acknowledgement of a lot of the initiatives in this year's budget to support the work of the community sector.

MRS DUNNE: I ask a supplementary question. The Deputy Chief Minister outlined a number of initiatives—

MR SPEAKER: Come to the question, please.

MRS DUNNE: in her answer to the question. But my question still remains: what are you doing to address the skills shortage amongst those people who work in the community sector?

MS GALLAGHER: As I have already outlined, the government has provided generous indexation to the community sector. That is what the community sector rated as their No 1 priority in terms of future injections into their areas so that they could meet some of the costs of wage increases and ensure that their staff were looked after, in fact, to ensure that their staff could be retained in the community sector. We delivered on that commitment this year. That will be continued into next year.

There are further initiatives in education and training. I am working with the childcare sector around training for childcare staff. We are seeing large numbers of people come into training but not stay in the sector. We will further progress the work of the community sector task force, which I now have responsibility for, in terms of looking at how we can best provide support around employment conditions and industrial relations advice, which seems to be an area where it is in the government's interests to provide that extra support to organisations, particularly small stand-alone organisations.

We are dealing with a number of consortia in the community sector over the desire to rent some of the surplus school capacity. Minister Hargreaves is progressing that work. Again, it is in our interests to ensure that, where there is a desire by community organisations to collocate to streamline some of their overheads, they are able to do that and reinvest some of the extra money that they may be paying on private rental arrangements back into service delivery.

This is a continuing piece of work. There are a number of initiatives in the budget, including extra money for training to support apprentices and trainees through the CIT, but also through private providers, if they choose. Basically, if you want to do training, you get paid. It is a demand-based system. That does not exclude the community sector.

Mr Smyth: But what are you doing?

MS GALLAGHER: I have just given you two and a half minutes.

MR SPEAKER: She is busy answering Mrs Dunne's question, Mr Smyth. That is what she is doing.

MS GALLAGHER: What makes it uncomfortable is the fact that I actually am answering the question and you are not happy with the fact that we are dealing with these issues and responding to them. There is a list of ones that I can think of off the top of my head. I am sure there is a whole range more where we are working at the departmental level with staff, but they are the ones that I am aware of that come under my responsibility.

We will progress, as I said, to the community sector this year. There is more work to be done. We have continued our support of the community sector. That is reflected in

this year's budget. There will always be people that want more from every budget, and we will continue to work on those priorities with the community sector.

Planning—EpiCentre development

MR SESELJA: My question is to the planning minister. Minister, documents released under freedom of information and reported in the *Canberra Times* on Saturday, 2 June 2007 state:

We conclude that the National Capital Authority's assessment of the EpiCentre development is reasonable and sufficient to support the draft finding that the project is inconsistent with the requirements of the National Capital Plan.

Minister, what efforts were made by your agencies prior to approval of the EpiCentre development to assure themselves that the development and ACTPLA's interpretation of the territory plan were in accordance with the NCP? Was the NCA consulted on this point? If so, when and what was their response?

MR BARR: As members would be aware, a lot of the detail that Mr Seselja is seeking occurred prior to my time in the portfolio, so there will be some aspects of detail that I will have to get back to him on. But I can advise that the report that was provided to the National Capital Authority was undertaken by a group called SGS Economics and Planning and that that report was provided to the planning and land authority on 22 December 2006. The NCA advice to ACTPLA by letter was: "I enclose for your information and any action you consider appropriate a copy of a report prepared for the National Capital Authority." It is important to note that the National Capital Authority has not said that the DA was illegal. As I understand it, this particular peer review report has not been considered at an NCA board level.

I am sure members would be aware that, with conditions, ACTPLA had determined the DFO development application for section 48 Fyshwick ACTPLA on 21 September 2006—a number of months before the NCA made available its peer review report. The information provided by the NCA at the time of ACTPLA making the decision did not advise that the approval would be inconsistent with the national capital plan but rather referred to what mattered in its opinion and what ACTPLA should have regard to.

The NCA provided the peer review report having regard to ACTPLA's role as the decision maker. But it is important to note that the NCA has not vetoed ACTPLA's decision to approve the DFP development. As the NCA acknowledges, ACTPLA is the decision maker and must ultimately be responsible for interpreting the national capital plan. Members would also be aware that matters raised in this draft NCA report are included as part of the Supreme Court actions that have been taken by the Capital Airport Group and that the hearing dates for these matters are between 30 July and 3 August.

I do not propose to make any further comments in relation to this as it is before the Supreme Court, but in terms of the key point around the timeline the NCA did not provide their peer review report to ACTPLA until three months after the decision by ACTPLA was taken.

MR SESELJA: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. I do not think the question has been answered.

MR SPEAKER: Come to the question, please.

MR SESELJA: I will. Did ACTPLA seek assurances from the NCA in relation to their interpretation of the national capital plan? If so, when?

MR BARR: The advice I have from ACTPLA is that they took the decision to approve the DA with conditions on 21 September. The NCA provided a letter to ACTPLA in relation to the peer review that they had undertaken, and they provided that letter and that advice to the planning and land authority on 22 December. So the decision was taken by ACTPLA on 21 September 2006 and the report was provided by the NCA—a commissioned peer review report provided by the NCA—to ACTPLA on 22 December.

Ambulance service—demand

MR GENTLEMAN: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, can you advise the Assembly of the demands being placed on the ACT Ambulance Service in the past 12 months and the steps that the Stanhope Labor government is taking to address these demands?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Gentleman for the question and I acknowledge his ongoing interest in matters affecting the ACT Ambulance Service. I note that Mr Gentleman held a very successful forum last Thursday evening which was an information session for members and members of the public on the challenges and the workforce skills that our ambulance officers have.

The government is very cognisant of the fact that the ACT Ambulance Service continues to see a significant increase in demand for its services. Indeed, in the past 12 months alone there has been a 15 per cent increase in the number of calls for service by the ACT Ambulance Service and that is a trend that has been going on for a number of years; we repeatedly see increases in demand for services of over 10 per cent per annum.

In response to this I am very pleased to see that in the budget yesterday the government is providing funding to the total of \$4.9 million over four years for two additional intensive care ambulances, as well as 16 staff, including a large number of that for trained paramedics to staff those ambulances, as well as funding for an additional patient transport vehicle to assist people leaving or travelling to hospital in non-emergency situations and, importantly and perhaps regrettably, an ambulance designed to transport people who are morbidly obese.

This is a very important investment for the ACT community. We have one of the best response times in the country—in fact the best response time in the country—for ambulance services and we know that getting an ambulance to a household early makes all the difference as to whether or not someone survives a major medical emergency such as a heart attack or a stroke. So the provision of these additional

ambulance services and additional ambulances will make a really big difference on the ground. It will also make a significant difference for the staff of our ambulance service because I know that the staff of our ambulance service are very dedicated in the work that they do. They rightly deserve their ranking, in the latest *Reader's Digest* assessment of professions, as the most trusted profession in the country.

I have been concerned as minister to see that increasingly our ambulance officers have been unable to take scheduled meal breaks, have been unable to take the time off due to them in their roster, because of demands on overtime or extremely busy shifts. That is a direct result of the issues in terms of increased demand. These additional ambulances will make a difference. They will make sure that we have more ambulances on the ground at those peak times when we need them to respond to the increased demand and in addition we will make sure that we have additional capacity to get people out of hospital, so we are going to continue to encourage that weekend discharge from our hospitals. That will help with issues around bed block and access block in our hospitals. At the same time we will have the capacity to manage the care and safe transport of people who suffer from illnesses associated with their being morbidly obese. It is a very important investment for our ambulance service and, again, one that demonstrates the government's commitment to improve safety and wellbeing for the Canberra community.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Gentleman?

MR GENTLEMAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, what other measures has the government implemented since its election to address the increase in demand for services from the ACT Ambulance Service?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Gentleman for the question. Of course, the latest investment that we announced in the budget yesterday comes on top of an ongoing level of investment for our ambulance service since we came to office. Since Labor has been office we have seen eight intensive care ambulances replaced with new state-of-the-art vehicles which are award winning in their design. In addition, we have provided substantial investment in state-of-the-art cardiac monitor defibrillators.

Again, this has been very important in protecting and assisting the ACT community in the event of heart attack or stroke. We know that what happens in the immediate minutes after a heart attack makes all the difference between life and death. We need to make sure that our ambulances have that capacity, and Labor has invested in making that happen. We have also updated patient stretchers to allow our ambulance staff to more effectively and safely move patients to and from vehicles. This is an important OH&S issue as well as an important safety issue for patients.

So that is Labor's commitment when it comes to the ambulance service. It is one of more vehicles, more paramedics, better equipment and better support for staff to do their job in protecting our community.

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

Personal explanation

MRS BURKE (Molonglo) (3.59): Mr Speaker, I seek leave under standing order 46 to make a personal explanation.

MR SPEAKER: The member may proceed.

MRS BURKE: Mr Hargreaves in question time today alluded to the fact that I had misled people. I want to read out a couple of things from my press release and then from Mr Hargreaves's press release. I will go with Mr Hargreaves's first, as his was the first out. In Mr Hargreaves's release—I quote the last two paragraphs—he says:

We have a situation where families with three or more children are waiting for public housing, while single tenants are residing in three and four bedroom homes.

Housing ACT estimates that under-utilisation has resulted in the equivalent of 500 three-bedroom homes sitting empty.

I say in my media release:

It is absolutely astounding that the Minister for Housing has only just now been informed of an apparent under-utilisation of properties managed under the Housing portfolio. How could the Minister have discovered now that there is an equivalent of 500 three-bedroom properties lying idle—

Mr Hargreaves: No, you didn't say that in the *Canberra Times*, did you?

MRS BURKE: Hang on; I am coming to that—

while Canberra families continue to sit on waiting lists to access housing assistance.

A *Canberra Times* article of 6 June by Marika Dobbin stated:

Opposition housing spokeswoman Jacqui Burke said the minister's mismanagement of his housing portfolio was a disgrace.

“What poor management that we now have an estimated—

MR SPEAKER: Order! My leave for you to make a statement pursuant to standing order 46 goes to the issue of being misrepresented in this place.

MRS BURKE: Yes, I am getting to the heart of that, Mr Speaker. I will move along very quickly. I note your ruling on the matter.

MR SPEAKER: Well, come to it, please.

MRS BURKE: What I wanted to move on to was the second point of Mr Hargreaves's point. I had said that there were thousands on the waiting lists, and I

do apologise to the house because I had clearly forgotten that, due to the changes to the eligibility criteria last year, many, many people were indeed culled from the waiting lists. I am not sure where they are now, but they were culled.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Planning—EpiCentre development

MR BARR: I have a couple of additional dates in relation to Mr Seselja's series of questions. I can advise the Assembly that the DA for the DFO development was referred to the National Capital Authority for comment on 25 May 2006 and that a written submission from the National Capital Authority was received by ACTPLA on 16 June 2006. Supporting documents arrived from the NCA 10 days later, on 26 June, and I can confirm that ACTPLA's decision to approve the DA with conditions was made on 21 September 2006.

ACT Housing—shopfront closures

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker, yesterday in response to a question from Dr Foskey, who is not here—

Mr Mulcahy: That is not unusual.

MR HARGREAVES: No, it is not unusual, Mr Mulcahy, through you, Mr Speaker. If you are listening Dr Foskey, I am about to answer your question for you.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Come to the issue.

MR HARGREAVES: I undertook to get hold of a copy of a letter sent to community housing providers and to make myself so aware and I now really am so aware, and I would like to respond to Dr Foskey's point. The answer is that Housing ACT is committed to providing a high level of customer service. In line with this, Housing ACT established an outreach program following the closure of the Housing ACT shopfronts in September 2006. Outreach services have provided a number of SAP service locations, including the Early Morning Centre, Toora women's service, Salvation Army youth services, YWCA, Inanna, Samaritan House, the St Vincent de Paul Society and regional community services. Outreach services are now being established at the Tuggeranong and Gungahlin child and family centres.

As part of good customer service, the Director of Housing ACT sent a letter to the community organisations asking them to identify and quantify the impact of the changes to housing operations on these services so that Housing ACT could identify any improvements needed to its services. Information received as a result of the letter will be used to enhance the delivery of these outreach services to continue to improve service delivery to Housing ACT customers.

Finally, this initiative is part of a series of initiatives which came out of the ministerial housing forums in 2005 and we are responsive to pleas from the community housing sector.

Personal explanation

MR PRATT (Brindabella): Mr Speaker, under standing order 46 I seek leave to make a personal statement.

MR SPEAKER: Have you been misrepresented, do you think, Mr Pratt?

MR PRATT: I would not quite go that far, Mr Speaker. I really do seek simply to clarify—yes, indeed, I would say that.

MR SPEAKER: Go ahead.

Mr Corbell: No. Leave is not granted.

MR SPEAKER: In relation to standing order 46, if it is not a personal statement—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order, members! If it is not a personal statement, please do not try and pursue it under standing order 46. If it is, pursue it under 46, but I will stop you if I find that it is not.

MR PRATT: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will adhere to your findings. Today in question time Mr Corbell indicated that I had attacked the level of funding for the emergency services in the budget. In fact, I did no such thing.

Trade and investment mission to China and delegation to Public Utilities Board in Singapore

Ministerial statement

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Minister for the Environment, Water and Climate Change, Minister for the Arts) (4.05): I seek leave of the Assembly to make a ministerial statement concerning an ACT government trade and investment mission to China and a delegation to the Public Utilities Board in Singapore.

Leave granted.

MR STANHOPE: As members of the Assembly would be aware, I recently led a delegation of Canberra and region businesses to China, and visited Singapore on the return journey in order to inspect that city's water purification system. I would like to report to the Assembly on some of the outcomes of the mission and the Singapore visit.

Canberra's economic footprint is minuscule compared to China's, or indeed against the footprint of many of China's great cities. In fact, about three-quarters of all trade is now organised around the activities of multinational companies. For Canberra to continue our trajectory of strong economic growth we need to build stronger links to

the economies which are shaping the economic future of the globe. China and India are undoubtedly the best examples. This is why the ACT Labor government took the step of organising and supporting the first ever trade mission to India this year and why I led the second trade mission to China a few weeks ago.

Trade missions expose local companies to international opportunities and wider horizons. They provide a link to something bigger and more dynamic, and in a collegiate business community like that of Canberra they often lead mission participants to involve other local companies in the opportunities arising from such missions on their return to Canberra.

Most of the companies and organisations that have participated in the India and China missions are part of the ACT Exporters Network, an initiative in which the ACT government invests around \$140,000 per year. It is an important forum providing information, planning and mentoring support to exporters at all stages of their development.

Australia is currently very much top of mind in China. It is a good time to visit as an Australian seeking to do business in China, as trade between China and Australia is now at an all-time high. In 2006 Australian trade with China totalled \$50.4 billion, up 23 per cent on 2005. Recently released quarterly figures reveal China is now our largest trading partner, displacing Japan, which has held the top spot for decades. It is a significant milestone. Just as Australia's trade relationship with Japan grew from that country's appetite for Australian raw materials in the 1960s and 1970s, so too with China.

But it would be wrong to think China views Australia as simply a quarry or a farm. The trade relationship is developing across all sectors. China imports around \$2.5 billion in Australian manufactures each year and China is our fourth-largest services market. China has a strong desire to develop its services sectors. As a service and knowledge based economy, the ACT has much to offer and gain in this area. The services sector in China has been much slower to open up to foreign investment, due to state controls, but that is changing. China is Australia's largest source of overseas students, with over 81,000 enrolled in Australian educational institutions, and over 2,000 of these students study in Canberra. Tourism is also an important opportunity, with around 285,000 Chinese visitors arriving in Australia last year.

The message we took to China was about the diversity of the ACT economy, our track record in innovation and our city's position as Australia's leading "knowledge cluster" economy. While for me the mission was largely about building on existing government to government relationships, it was also about directly supporting a number of ACT businesses operating in China and others who wish to do so.

Like the mission to India in February, the Australian Trade Commission was contracted to manage the overall business program. The professional support provided by Austrade was exemplary, as it was in India, and I am very pleased to say that Austrade and my department work very well together for the benefit of the ACT business community.

The China mission participants were ACT Education and Training, Air Sine Pty Ltd, Inland Trading Company, Perpetual Water Ltd, Ruleburst Ltd, the University of Canberra, Wellspring Environmental Arts and Design, Yellow Edge Pty Ltd, John Walker Crime Trends Analysis, Lambert Vineyards, ACTECH Australia Pty Ltd, Hindmarsh, and Snedden, Hall and Gallop. This is an eclectic group in terms of products and services, made up of a mix of first-time, emerging and established exporters. The group was very supportive of one another, sharing information and advice readily, and I suspect that as relationships developed abroad a few new business partnerships also resulted locally.

Seven of these organisations benefited from the ACT government meeting Austrade's fee for service, which was valued at around \$5,000 to \$7,000 per company. Four organisations travelled with the mission, leveraging the ACT government's presence in China to support particular projects they were already progressing. It is still a fact of doing business in China that some form of government support opens doors and gives confidence, and I was pleased to offer my direct support at this level. The mission visited three cities in China: Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen, spending two days in each.

Austrade always goes to some pains to caution mission participants to focus on the medium to long term and to be patient and realistic about complex markets like China. It can take some time to get established. It is often hard to stay engaged. But, once you are in, the rewards can be immense. So the level of immediate success was a very pleasant surprise to some of the companies and, indeed, Austrade. I will give a couple of examples.

Mission participant Inland Trading Company, who specialise in the supply of premium-quality wines to the world market, are enthusiastic about direct and future outcomes of the mission, reporting two confirmed contracts totalling in excess of \$130,000, as well as five new and major sales leads.

For Yellow Edge Pty Ltd, an ACT consulting firm that delivers leading-edge business solutions, agreements were reached to conduct a pilot leadership assessment project in June for 25 staff at the Shanghai-based China Executive Leadership Academy Pudong, or CELAP. Further agreements between Yellow Edge and CELAP include collaboration between their RandD departments, agreements to design and conduct a joint leadership program for Australian and Chinese public servants to be delivered in Shanghai, and the promotion of co-branding and guest speaking arrangements with CELAP. Yellow Edge also reported several prospects for follow-up in Beijing and Shenzhen.

The University of Canberra also reported highly successful outcomes. The UC met with its course partner the East China University of Science and Technology. The universities' joint master of business administration program has been rated as the fourth most influential in China, and UC has around 420 graduates. The universities are now looking at an extension to this very successful program. The University of Canberra has also signed three new agreements with Renmin University of China in Beijing for articulation pathways to the master of international economic law, the master of information technology and the master of technology courses. In Renmin,

UC representatives were also able to farewell the last of a cohort of around 30 students coming to Canberra to complete a bachelor of business administration degree.

At Tsinghua University, discussions centred on jointly offered professional development courses through the UC's professional development unit. The university also had a meeting with the Beijing public security bureau regarding 20 students attending the full-time master of management program in Canberra. These graduates are needed for the Beijing Olympics, and since returning to Canberra, this lead, which is worth around half a million dollars, has been formalised.

Another mission participant, John Walker Crime Trends Analysis, reported that its expertise in analysis of criminal justice systems was well recognised in meetings in China. The company has also developed a world-first methodology for identifying the extent and impact of transnational crime and money laundering. The company's meetings in Shanghai, Beijing and Shenzhen generated considerable support from the law schools in each city's universities and developed strong prospects for future collaboration. John Walker Crime Trends Analysis also had meetings with the public prosecutor's office and the public security university in Beijing, and the Shanghai district bureau of justice. These meetings focused on strategic planning in the criminal justice system, and again Mr Walker says he received an enthusiastic response.

ACT company Wellspring Kiku designs and supplies distinctive and stylish artworks and features for interior and exterior use. Over the past 10 years the company has completed a diverse range of projects for a diverse range of clients, including governments, health and educational institutions and commercial developers. Wellspring's objectives in China were to establish contacts in the planning, architectural, landscape design and construction sectors. The company followed through specific leads such as assisting the Shanghai urban planning bureau in its five-year project to develop its public art strategy for the Hong Kou district. The company also had discussions with the bureau to supply major public artworks in urban parks.

As a result of the mission, Wellspring is now looking at a project to provide landscape architecture services and interior artworks for a chain of high-end serviced apartments being developed over the next three years across China. Wellspring also reported a strong interest in its services by other private design firms and government. Potential projects include the headquarters for a major international software organisation, urban renewal and streetscape works and major shopping centres. The company is confident it will be invited to participate in a range of projects over the next 18 months.

For Perpetual Water Ltd the mission provided a number of leads to explore offshore manufacturing, direct supply opportunities and an opportunity to learn about China's market dynamics. Over the next 12 months Perpetual Water will be focused on developing networks in China, mostly through contacts established via the mission. They are looking to develop distribution partners and are following up on leads to establish a manufacturing base in China. They will set up a process to negotiate with Chinese government agencies and establish test and demonstration sites in several key locations. China is a complex but potentially large market for Perpetual Water and

they now have a number of strong links that will help them prepare for the commencement of operations there, possibly next year.

Snedden, Hall and Gallop also participated in the delegation as a partner in Shenzhen Developments, along with Mr Kenny Zhang, Managing Director of Waratah Australia International Pty Ltd. I would add here that Mr Zhang is a great friend of Canberra and Australia and I thank him for his efforts to build trade between the ACT and China. In 2006 Snedden, Hall and Gallop entered into a joint venture with the ACT government to establish a representative office in Shenzhen to assist ACT businesses to explore opportunities in southern China. Shenzhen province, with a population of 130 million, is the economic powerhouse of China. Thirty per cent of China's industry is located within Shenzhen and in Guangzhou. It is an area where there is great potential for the ACT and ACT businesses.

While in Shenzhen, I had the pleasure of formally opening the Canberra office there and I can also report from my meeting with the Mayor of Shenzhen, Mr Xu, that there is considerable interest in Canberra and possible business ties between our cities. Snedden, Hall and Gallop have made contact with a number of Chinese businesses that are investigating involvement in the Australian market, primarily in the IT area. Snedden Hall and Gallop have advised that the mission provided a great fillip to their efforts in southern China and they now anticipate many more businesses will use the Canberra Commerce Office.

There is also growing interest in Snedden, Hall and Gallop's business migration services after they participated in a business migration seminar with officers of my department. The business migration seminar was one of three conducted in each of Shanghai, Beijing and Shenzhen, with around 80 potential business migrants attending the sessions.

ACTET, a local education service provider, have reported good meetings with Chinese government officials and key education agents. They met with the Beijing international education exchange, and subsequently the Beijing education commission in which the potential for collaboration with Canberra educational institutions was discussed. From these meetings ACTET are confident that growing demand for vocational education and training in China can provide them with great opportunities.

These opportunities are some of the immediate results and immediate impressions of some members of the group that travelled to China with the mission. A full debrief of mission participants has been scheduled for this month, when Austrade and my department will more fully assess the commercial outcomes of the mission and start the process of planned follow-up. Mission participants certainly made the most of their time in China, conducting over 100 meetings to explore trade and investment opportunities with companies and organisations hand-picked by Austrade staff in China. It was a very busy six days and I am confident it will prove to be a very fruitful and rewarding mission both for the companies involved and for our business community more generally.

While the mission participants were focused on doing business, my program was separate but designed to be strongly supportive of the trade and business development objectives of the companies. A significant component of the program in Beijing

revolved around the Beijing-Canberra sister city relationship. This was particularly important in light of the recent decision of the Beijing Olympic Games Committee to include Canberra in next year's Olympic torch relay.

Canberra is, as we all know, one of only 22 cities worldwide, and the only Australian city, that will host the Olympic torch next year. For two days in April 2008 Canberra will be on hundreds of millions of TV screens in China and globally. This has enormous potential to showcase our city around the world, to get people thinking about coming here to visit and to do business.

In Beijing I met with Mr Liu Qi, the President of the Beijing Olympic Games Organising Committee and Party Secretary of the Beijing Municipal Branch of the Communist Party of China. Mr Liu was also the original signatory to our sister city arrangement. He and I discussed Canberra's support for and hosting of the torch relay. I assured Mr Liu that Canberrans are very excited and honoured to be hosting the relay and that it will be a great occasion. It was also a timely meeting, as BOCOG officials were in Canberra last week for a series of meetings with Australian and ACT government officials and the Australian Olympic Committee.

I also met with the Vice Mayor of Beijing, Mr Lu Hao, who was keen to explore ways to better connect our firms and institutions. ACT and Chinese officials will explore this issue over coming months with a view to providing a clearer business development context to the sister city agreement.

While in Shenzhen I was pleased to attend the opening of the Australian Business and Industrial Centre and to show my support to Canberra-based company ACTECH Australia Pty Ltd. ACTECH has signed contracts with the nearby government of Xinxiang to establish the centre in that city. The Australian Business and Industrial Centre has been designed to provide companies with a highly cost-competitive base in China and to provide new entrants to the Chinese market with the opportunity to be situated near and learn from other Australian companies. It is very pleasing to see a local Canberra company as the major development partner in this project, headed by Mr Tom Wu. I also thank Mr Wu for his support and participation in the mission.

As noted earlier, I attended a successful meeting with mission participant Yellow Edge and the vice president of CELAP. CELAP was established by the Chinese government to train China's emerging leaders, including ministers, governors, company leaders and city mayors, and it currently trains around 5,000 officials a year. As a result of our meeting Yellow Edge and CELAP have agreed to develop joint leadership programs for Australian and Chinese public servants.

In Shanghai I also met with Hindmarsh China and its joint venture partner Beijing Kingdy to review their development plans in Shanghai and Beijing. In 2004 I also assisted Hindmarsh in its joint venture negotiations and it is pleasing to see the joint venture now trading profitably with over 30,000 car parking spaces under management. The Hindmarsh-Kingdy joint venture has also led to other commercial investments and encouraged a two-way flow of merchandise and capital between Canberra and China.

In Shanghai I also visited the Canberra Commerce Office. In 2005 the Hindmarsh Group established this office with financial assistance from the ACT government. The Canberra Commerce Office in Shanghai is conveniently located in Pudong and provides free short-term office space and services to ACT companies that want to explore opportunities in China. Besides officially opening the new Canberra Commerce Office, I also met with the mayor, who was very interested in the Canberra relationship and the opening of the representative office.

I also met with Mr Ren Zhengfei, the President of Huawei Technologies Co Ltd. Huawei is the largest diversified ICT company in China and one of China's emerging global brands. With current revenues of around \$US11 billion and projections of 30 per cent revenue growth this year, it is a company to watch.

The six-day mission concluded in Shenzhen and I was pleased to be able to briefly address a gathering of around 250 Australian businesses that were there for an "Experience Australia" promotion organised by the Australian consulate-general and Austrade. It was a suitable way to end the business program and a great opportunity for our mission participants to network and learn from other Australian companies.

I would like to thank all those involved in the organisation of this mission, particularly Austrade and their staff in China and the many ACT officers who worked hard to make it a success. I would also like to thank the Australian Ambassador to China, Mr Geoff Raby, for his counsel and hospitality, and the senior Australian consular staff, Susan Dietz-Henderson in Shanghai and Sean Kelly in Shenzhen, for their support. I also thank the companies on the mission.

As all members of the Assembly know, the ACT, along with much of Australia, is in the grip of the worst drought on record. With inflows at 10 per cent of normal levels, our dams at around 30 per cent capacity and no certainty of a return to normal rainfalls, we are faced with the potential of running out of water in 18 months or so unless we find other water sources. The government has already invested heavily in the ACT's water security, the Googong-Cotter transfer facility and the Murrumbidgee pumps being two examples. These solutions rely on rainfall which we all hope for but of which we cannot be certain.

In this context Actew have put forward their proposal to purify water. The government have made it clear that this project will only proceed if it can be scientifically shown to present no additional public health risks to the people of Canberra. We have established an independent expert panel to advise the government on the health aspects and have convened a roundtable of experts to discuss the issue. Through Actew we have made information available to the public through websites, display stands, advertisements and public fora. We have encouraged Canberrans to gain as much knowledge as possible about the project and to debate its merits.

Just as I encourage Canberrans to find out all they can, so I took the opportunity to learn what I could about the purification process in Singapore on my return journey from China. Singapore is considered to be at the forefront of water purification, using the technology as part of its mainstream water supply. Despite a completely different climate, including high rainfall, Singapore has similar water supply problems to those

of the ACT and is considered to be water scarce. High population densities, flat terrain and lack of available land do not allow Singapore to operate what we would consider a traditional water supply network reliant on local catchments and large storages.

The Public Utilities Board of Singapore, or PUB, have developed an integrated management plan for water that is designed to be diversified and robust. They have branded this the four national taps policy, which includes water from local catchments, imported water from Malaysia, desalinated water and purified water known in Singapore as NEWater. Due to its exceptionally high quality, NEWater is principally used to cater for demand from industry for pure water. As production of NEWater is expanded, it is anticipated it will be further used or more greatly used for potable supply.

Before visiting the various Public Utilities Board sites, I met with the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources for Singapore, Dr Yaacob Ibrahim. The delegation then visited Bedok NEWater factory, where the visitors centre is central to the PUB NEWater public education and engagement program. We also visited the Seletar NEWater Factory, the Marina Barrage, which is an innovative project that involves the construction of a dam across the Marina Channel forming a reservoir in the middle of the city, the SingSpring desalination plant located at Tuas and the Keppel Seghers Ulu Pandan NEWater plant.

We also visited the WaterHub facility established by PUB to be a premier centre for research and development in cutting-edge water technologies. The Hub comprises a Centre for Advanced Water Technology, a venue for partnering with the private sector and overseas partners and a centre of academic and industry training. Of most interest was the Seletar NEWater factory, which uses a similar process to that which has been under consideration in the ACT, namely ultrafiltration membranes, reverse osmosis membranes and ultraviolet disinfection equipment.

The plant has a current capacity of 24 megalitres a day, which is a similar size to the plant currently under consideration in the ACT. Due to its high quality, 75 per cent of Seletar's production water is sent to local electronics industry wafer fabrication plants. The remaining 25 per cent is sent to storage in the lower Seletar reservoir and is used for drinking purposes.

The key message from Singapore was that of the critical nature of NEWater in diversifying water management within Singapore. The NEWater program's key objective is to free up more of the natural catchment water for domestic use by replacing water used by industry with NEWater, which due to its very high quality is attractive to industry in both product quality and price. At the same time, PUB is educating the community about the concept of purified water by placing a percentage, a small percentage at this stage—around three per cent but proposed to rise to 10 per cent—of NEWater production in domestic water supply reservoirs.

What we saw was impressive—First World technology meeting the needs of a sophisticated First World city state. The delegation in Singapore had a hectic schedule from which I am sure we all gained a great deal of knowledge. I thank all the members of the delegation and the officers of PUB for their hospitality and their

willingness to share their knowledge with us. I particularly acknowledge the participation of Mr Mulcahy representing the Liberal Party. In Singapore he displayed the same mature, bipartisan approach to the issue of securing Canberra's water supply as he showed in his capacity as the relevant shadow minister. I do congratulate him on rising above politics on this most important issue and I look forward to the same approach from the current spokesperson.

I present the following paper:

ACT Government Trade and Investment Mission to China/Delegation to the Public Utilities Board in Singapore—May 2007—Ministerial statement, 6 June 2007.

I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (4.29): It is important that we engage in trips to countries that we seek to engage on trade, and I think it is a great thing that the Chief Minister has led this delegation to China. He mentioned that he thought it was quite wonderful that we are the only city in Australia that will receive the torch relay that will herald the arrival of the Beijing Olympics late next year. Perhaps that is the small thank you that the people of Beijing extend to the people of Canberra for the assistance that we gave them when they were negotiating to be the city that would host the 2008 Olympics.

For those that were not here or who may have chosen to forget, the ACT government, through our business areas at that time, assisted the Beijing government to put their bid together. Indeed, the only non-Chinese national who was on the BOCOG team was, in fact, Mr Hai Tau Wen—at that time an ACT public servant. Hai Tau was very important in the putting together of that bid, as was the assistance of the ACT government and business community.

So I think there is a small thank you in this and an acknowledgement of the sister city relationship that we have with Beijing. I think it is incredibly gracious of the Beijing government and the Chinese people to extend to us the courtesy of having the torch relay come through the ACT and particularly to overlook the insult of Mr Stanhope, who abstained from supporting that sister city relationship at the time. He led his Labor colleagues out and they did not return. It is most unfortunate, Mr Speaker, that again Mr Stanhope walks out of the chamber when somebody speaks about his past actions, which he refuses to acknowledge.

I would like to say how gracious I think it is of the Beijing government and the Chinese people actually to allow the torch relay to come to the ACT. I think it is an acknowledgment of the success of the sister city relationship that was negotiated and organised by former Chief Minister Kate Carnell. When people see that relay come to Canberra next year, they might think back and reflect that this may never have happened but for the efforts of the previous Liberal government.

That said, it is good to see that the Chief Minister has come to his senses and that he actually does realise that you must negotiate and come to grips with all of the issues

that are encompassed in international trade. The best way to break down barriers is to include people, to trade with them and to influence them by the way that we live, the things that we do and the things that we say.

I think it is incredibly important, particularly for the economic development of the ACT that we look for new markets. I remind this place that when we were last in office, we were involved with the Japanese. We were certainly involved in China. In 2001, Mr Moore led a delegation to Bangalore to talk to the business community there. We also had business delegations to South Africa. Unfortunately, those leads that we followed and the relationships that we established were not followed up by the incoming government. It has taken them six years to get to the point where they are again engaging with China on a regular basis, and that is welcome. But it is important to have continuity. In 2001, Mr Quinlan and I made a trip to Beijing to look at the university games and to extend the goodwill of one sister city to another.

That being said, it is great to see Canberra firms willing to have a go in China. It is acknowledged that it is a difficult market. I think the Chinese themselves would acknowledge that they are learning all the time. We can assist them by setting them an example through our business community. Indeed, they will assist us in our development through their needs and through the provision of students for our educational facilities.

But it should be on the record that when leadership was required the then Leader of the Opposition, Jon Stanhope, now Chief Minister, failed. He stayed out of the chamber. At least Mr Kaine, Mr Osborne and Ms Tucker actually had the courage to vote against it, as they saw fit. I think it is a great shame that the then Leader of the Opposition, now the Chief Minister of the ACT, did not have the courage to vote as he felt.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee Membership

Motion (by **Ms MacDonald**) agreed to:

That Ms MacDonald be discharged from the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure for the period 29 June to 27 July 2007 and that Ms Porter be appointed in her place for that period.

Health—smoking

Debate resumed.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Minister for Health, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Disability and Community Services, Minister for Women) (4.34): I thank Ms Porter for bringing such an important health matter to the Assembly. Last Thursday was World No Tobacco Day. The government will support the amendment, and I will speak to it in my comments.

There is no doubt that the ACT has led the way in many of the tobacco control measures that are now pretty much commonplace in Australia. I think it was the Follett Labor government in 1994 that moved to enact legislation to prohibit smoking in enclosed public places, despite quite serious attempts to derail that idea at the time.

When reflecting on tobacco control, considering that it has been some 40 to 50 years since the link between tobacco and illness and, ultimately, death was first recognised, I think it is regrettable that, here we are in 2007, looking at further tobacco control measures. I think there is an acceptance that it was in the early sixties that the scientific community determined that smoking was related to the increase in lung cancer and probably to heart disease.

We know that it is now one of the leading causes of disease burden on our community. This is confirmed in the latest report of the AIHW on the burden of disease and injury in Australia. It says that cancer is ranked as the leading disease burden and that, not surprisingly, tobacco is responsible for the greatest burden amongst those health risks. There is no doubt that those original thoughts back in the sixties have been confirmed in subsequent years by scientific evidence.

Forty to 50 years down the track, we are still talking about whether or not we should ban smoking in outdoor areas, whether we should ban smoking in underage functions, whether we should look at further advertising restrictions and whether we should look at further restrictions on point of sale information. It shows, I think, the lengths to which the tobacco industry will go and how quick it is to move to adapt to new and emerging markets. Certainly, with the emergence of fruit-flavoured cigarettes and split packs that come in the size of an iPod, they have shown how quick they are to move and to look at new areas to entice people to take up smoking. It is important that we continue this reform process that started back in 1994.

It is interesting, too, to look at the way industry groups have moved over the years. Industry groups, certainly in years past, have been quite proactive in refusing to accept the role of tobacco in relation to harm to the public, to workplaces and to the environment. Environmental tobacco smoke has been the main cause of harm in public places. This morning I had a meeting with the AHA—coincidentally, not organised—to discuss some of the future reforms that the government is considering, and I have had meetings with the clubs in recent weeks as well. The very pragmatic response that industry takes now is not about whether reforms will come in; it is about when. When the government has decided which way to go, we will be able to discuss with them how to proceed, and when. But there is certainly an understanding there now that it really is inevitable.

This year the Northern Territory won the dirty ashtray award, with the ACT coming seventh out of eight. The award is run by the AMA and is measured on implemented reform, not just things you have got in the pipeline. Whilst they score us for all the issues we are looking at in terms of tobacco control, they are not recognised because they are only in the pipeline. They will be recognised once they are legislated and that will ensure that we do not get the dirty ashtray award. It also shows how quickly the other jurisdictions are moving to implement reform and how quickly they are moving in recognition of some of the facts.

The tobacco institute has been very strong in its opposition to these reforms. There is quite a good document called *The diary of denial*, which documents the tobacco institute's justifications, in the eighties and up to the late nineties, for not implementing further tobacco control. As late as the late eighties, it was saying that there is no evidence at all that smoking has any link to increases in diseases that may or may not be associated with smoking, including arguments quite recently about whether or not young people take up smoking because of advertising at point of sale and incentives around it.

Some of the quotes are quite amusing in the sense that you cannot believe they have been said. In 1995, the chief executive of the tobacco institute said that it is certainly nothing to do with advertising; that it is matters other than smoking which may encourage youth or juveniles to try smoking, and that the evidence suggests that young people do not take up smoking because of advertising; they take it up for other reasons.

The debate on tobacco smoking has matured. As I said, the AHA and the clubs have undergone quite significant changes in recent times. It was only on 1 December that the enclosed public places legislation come in. Certainly the clubs are saying they have seen business drop—I think it is around 10 per cent—and the AHA less so. They say they are less able to attribute the drop to smoking because there are a number of different things that they would count. They also represent movies and restaurants, which have been smoke free for a long time. Some businesses say there has been no effect; others say there has been some. They have shown a willingness to work with the government and it is our preference that, when the ban comes in, we do it in agreement with each other. Of course, we are not going to agree to a long implementation period, and that seems to be the issue.

I am sorry that Mr Mulcahy is not here. He worked for the tobacco institute and then for the AHA. I did some reading about the tobacco industry's role in lobbying against legislative reform and I came up with an American case in 1994. It cited the campaign that was launched by the AHA and the tobacco institute here in the ACT about ACT legislation. It was quite a surprise. It talked about the tobacco institute's successful strategy of essentially quietly backing up the Australian Hotel Association and not running the campaign as a health issue. In a letter written in reference to proposed ACT legislation to ban smoking in enclosed public places, Donna Staunton, who took over from Mr Mulcahy at the tobacco institute, stated:

This legislation which proposed to ban smoking in certain public places, has now been referred to the Standing Committee on Conservation, Heritage and Environment for enquiry and report. I believe this is a significant achievement.

The letter continues:

The Tobacco Institute deliberately kept a low profile in relation to the lobbying that took place prior to the Bill being referred to the Standing Committee. The Tobacco Institute did not want to turn the debate into one about "health". The Tobacco Institute instead provided assistance to the National body of the Australian Hotels' Association. You would probably be aware that Richard Mulcahy (an ex CEO of the Tobacco Institute) is now CEO of the AHA.

The Tobacco Institute will make, or arrange to make, submissions to the Standing Committee. Our submission will endeavour to promote “choice” and the issue of indoor air quality rather than legislative action. We will continue to offer assistance to the National Body of the AHA.

Those comments turned up in American case. They are quite interesting, but they show how far we have moved on. (*Time expired.*)

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (4.45): Mr Speaker, before the luncheon break, the minister indicated that she might table the guidelines. I am happy for that to occur.

MR SPEAKER: You can table them any time you like.

Ms Gallagher: I table the following paper:

Tobacco control—Areas on which ACT Health consulted.

MR SMYTH: I thank the minister for that. It is important for the Assembly to be informed. Often things are put into the public realm that are not brought to the Assembly. As the body that legislates for and looks after the ACT, it is important that the Assembly is told in a formal way what is going on.

The autumn edition 2007 of *Healthy Territorian*, a newsletter for ACT health care providers, contains an article on health promotion. It does outline some of the things that the minister is consulting on. The article states:

“We’ll continue to investigate ways of building on the successful implementation of the smoking ban in order to deliver significant health benefits to Canberrans,” Health Minister Katy Gallagher said.

“The evidence is clear that everything should be done to prevent public exposure to smoke, and options currently under consideration include further restricting tobacco use in outdoor eating areas and at under-age functions.

“In order to reduce young people’s exposure to smoking and decrease their likelihood of taking up smoking, the government is also investigating prohibiting tobacco product displays,” the Health Minister said.

These are all worthy options to be considered. But I would like to take members’ minds back to the last appearance of Jim Shonk as President of Clubs ACT. In a speech to members at the Hellenic club he said, “Look, we know that it is coming.” I think he said, “We know that it is evil.” He said, “We indulge because we do,” and he went on to say that all the industry wanted was some degree of certainty. They wanted to know that if they invested in outside areas—and just about every club and pub in the territory has—they would have a chance to pay it off before a new round of investigations into what might be done to further tighten down smoking. He said, “This ban is only just coming into place and the government is already starting to look at it.” I know there is disquiet, particularly in the club industry, about what this will mean for them in respect of time frames to pay off, in some cases, quite substantial investment in outdoor facilities.

Ms Gallagher: It is around the time frame, yes.

MR SMYTH: The minister says it is around the time frame. It is very important that we make that quite clear from the start. That is why I welcome Mrs Burke's amendment, which would require the government to inform the Assembly of the time frames and the progress that is being made so that we actually do know what is going on. It does have an effect.

The statistics confirm that it is an urgent problem. Every year in Australia something like 19,000 deaths are related to tobacco products. That is 52 deaths a day. If you take two per cent of 19,000, which would be, on average, the ACT's percentage, that is 380 deaths in a year. That is one death a day from smoking tobacco related products. Indeed, from the start of this debate at midday today until now, something like 11 Australians died from smoking and tobacco related problems.

Perhaps it is time to actually acknowledge and have a real and serious discussion about where we go to from here. Early intervention is clearly the answer. Tobacco is a legal product and unless somebody wants to change that, it will be for sale. We have to make sure that we get to kids early and alert them to it. If we consider it to be a health risk—and I do—we have to continue to tell them that it is bad for them. Young people are taking it up. Young females, in particular, are taking it up faster than young males. We need to understand the reasons for that as well.

Perhaps the minister might like to enlighten us during the debate as to the effect of recent changes to the enforcement regime. There were few, if any, convictions under the old regime. What has happened? Has it improved it? Has it made a difference? Then we might work out where we go from there. It is a vexed issue. My shadow portfolios cover business, economic development and gaming and racing. The people in the pubs and clubs and the people that are making investments in infrastructure simply want certainty. As the former shadow minister for health, I am aware of the consequences of smoking. We have got to come up with a path that is absolutely clear so that everyone knows where we are travelling and what we are doing.

We have been told that tobacco is a blight on society. Today we had some gratuitous advice from Ms Porter about how the Liberal Party takes money from some tobacco companies. It is a legal product, Ms Porter. If you do not want it to be so, bring the legislation in and ban it. Standing there throwing jibes across the chamber is well and good, but it does take away from the debate. It shows the amount of intellectual rigour that you have put into this case. Equally, I could throw back poker machines. They are another blight on society. A lot of people have problems with poker machines. We all acknowledge that there is problem gambling. Yet you are a beneficiary of profits from poker machines donated to campaigns that help get you elected.

Will you stand up when you finish this debate and commit not to take that money? Let us not have any hypocrisy here. Let us not say, "Curse the Liberal Party. One of their candidates in a federal seat in Victoria took some money from the tobacco lobby that happens to employ hundreds of people in her electorate." Your campaign was funded from a dividend from the Labor club, and that dividend comes from poker machines. The hypocrisy on this matter is always galling. It is interesting that Mr Osborne, who

used to be in this place, at least had the dignity to stand aside because he took a job with a club that had poker machines that paid for his coaching benefits.

Let us not stand here and throw stones. People in glasshouses should be very careful, Ms Porter. I am looking forward to hearing your commitment not to take a cent from poker machine revenue. It will be interesting to see if you have the courage of your convictions, because I think we all acknowledge that there are problems with gambling. So if we are going to pick on one vice, let us pick on them all. Let us have them all on the table, and if you want to bare your soul, Ms Porter, go for your life. If you are living in a glasshouse, you need to be very, very careful before you come into this place and poke fun at others. I think that takes away from the debate.

Mrs Burke and Ms Gallagher got it right when they said that there is a growing maturity in the debate in the city, and that is a good thing. We need to look at it. We need to keep those numbers in front of us. Every year in this country, 19,000 deaths are related to tobacco products. That is a huge number. When you consider that road fatalities are down by about 1,800 from a high of about 6,000 in the late sixties and early seventies, because we have taken steps as a community to minimise the impact, which is a good thing, tobacco related deaths are right up there. Tobacco is a far greater blight on society than all the money that we spend on illicit drugs. It is the worst drug of the lot.

I am grateful that the minister has indicated that she is happy to accept the amendment. We need to know what the government is doing. The community wants to know what the time frame is. I thank Ms Porter and Ms Gallagher for agreeing to Mrs Burke's amendment.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (4.52): I would like to thank all members who have participated in this important debate. I was really confident that bipartisan agreement on this issue would be achieved as there is no doubt the cost to the ACT community in terms of our health and our budget is significant. As all speakers have said, it is obvious that the arguments about passive smoking are now won. It is rather like the climate change debate, really. We now know that smoking is harming the smoker and harming those who are exposed to smoking, yet, as the minister said, it is surprising that we are still debating the pros and cons of various reforms.

Earlier the minister and others in this place clearly articulated the effects of this unfortunate habit. I could go through all the long list of health effects again. However, perhaps it would be more useful to remind members why the harm is caused. I quote from a document from a site called Better Health Channel, which is a Victorian government site. I will not read all of it, obviously. The document refers to the content of tobacco smoke and states:

Tar—this is a collective term for all the various particles suspended in tobacco smoke. The particles contain chemicals including several cancer-causing substances ...

Carbon monoxide—this odourless gas is fatal in large doses because it takes the place of oxygen in the blood ...

Hydrogen cyanide—the lungs contain tiny hairs (cilia) that helps to clean the lungs by moving foreign substances out. Hydrogen cyanide stops this lung

clearance system from working properly, which means the poisonous chemicals in tobacco smoke can build up inside the lungs ...

Free radicals—these highly reactive chemicals can damage the heart muscles and blood vessels. They react with cholesterol, leading to the build-up of fatty material on artery walls. Their actions lead to heart disease, stroke and blood vessel disease.

Metals—tobacco smoke contains dangerous metals including arsenic, cadmium and lead. Several of these metals are carcinogenic.

Radioactive compounds—tobacco smoke contains radioactive compounds, which are known to be carcinogenic.

It sounds pretty ghastly, really, when you read it out. The document continues:

many of the 4,000 chemicals in tobacco smoke are chemically active and trigger profound and potentially fatal changes in the body.
smoking harms nearly every organ in the body.

Today in this place the Minister for Health has outlined her commitment, a commitment she made clear on 31 May this year—World No Tobacco Day—when she urged Canberrans to create their own smoke-free environments. As we know, World No Tobacco Day is an annual World Health Organisation initiative highlighting the health risks related to tobacco smoking globally. This year's message was: 100 per cent smoke-free environments. The minister encouraged people to create their own smoke-free environments in their own home, near their children's playgrounds and at their community events. She reminded people that on 1 December 2006, the ACT went smoke free in all enclosed public places.

The World Health Organisation message reinforces the importance of smoke-free environments. Fortunately, Canberra's wholehearted embrace of the smoking ban in indoor public places is evidence of the importance that this community places on people being able to live their daily lives without facing the health risks that are posed by passive smoking. Creating smoke-free environments encourages people to quit smoking and reduces the likelihood of young people taking up the habit.

Another initiative which is planned is to distribute antismoking packs to 17 government and 13 non-government high schools to help ACT students quit. The youth smoking prevention and cessation pack is a joint project of the ACT government and the ACT Cancer Council. As part of the project, in 2005 the ACT government carried out a secondary student alcohol and drug survey of 1,148 students aged between 12 and 17 years in ACT government and non-government schools.

This survey found that there has been a large reduction in smoking amongst school students, but of course we are still concerned about any young people smoking in the ACT or elsewhere. As more than 19,000 Australians are predicted to die over the next year from illnesses caused by smoking related diseases, kicking the habit is indeed a life and death matter. This government needs to do all it can to prevent these deaths and smoking-related illnesses; otherwise, what price do we place on the lives of Australians?

As I highlighted earlier, the Stanhope government is continually investigating ways of reducing Canberra's exposure to tobacco use to reduce the health risk, but all Canberrans can take action. We all need to work together on this, as with many other issues. Habits are not easy to break, as we know, and helping people overcome their addiction to this particular habit needs the combined effort of all of us. By the way, further information on tobacco controls or smoke-free environments can be obtained by calling the health protection service, and enforcement queries can be directed to the Office of Regulatory Services.

I thank all members for their contributions to the debate. As the minister said, we will be supporting Mrs Burke's amendment. Thank you for that amendment, Mrs Burke. My motion required the Assembly to report on the timetable, so we are in agreement, Mrs Burke. I thank everyone for their contributions to the debate.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Personal explanation

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo): I wish to make a statement pursuant to standing order 46 in that I have been misrepresented.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member may proceed.

MR MULCAHY: In the course of that debate—and I heard only a part of it; my ears were drawn to the mention of my name—two statements were made by the Deputy Chief Minister. First of all, she cited that my successor in running the tobacco institute back in the 1980s was Ms Staunton. I do not believe that to be the case. I think it was Mr St Vincent Welch. I took a position in the tobacco institute in 1988 or 1989 for a period of 15 months.

The second issue concerns a series of documents that have been published pursuant to a matter in the state of Michigan. I think there is something in the order of a million documents. In one of those documents, a report appears under the name of Ms Staunton. Ms Staunton claimed that she was working at the office at the AHA, which I headed up, and was providing ongoing assistance. I want to place on public record that Ms Staunton never met with me or with my staff. She once sought an appointment and then withdrew the request for an appointment. Any claims contained in her report to her employers indicating that assistance was provided are fabricated. I made that position known in an ABC interview a number of years ago. The report is false. I can only speculate on the motive. It is a serious misrepresentation to suggest that I was taking assistance from or operating under any direction or guidance whatsoever by those people in relation to the matters that were before my organisation.

Health—system

MRS BURKE (Molonglo) (5.02): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that despite the ongoing dedication and commitment by the ACT's nurses, doctors and allied health workers in the public hospital system:
 - (a) the recently released report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found the ACT performed poorly against a range of health indicators;
 - (b) elective surgery lists continue to grow, with Canberrans waiting one month longer, on average, than the national median waiting time for elective surgery; and
 - (c) medical labour costs are growing and the ACT recorded the worst emergency department performance out of all States and Territories; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
 - (a) acknowledge the poor performance of the ACT health system against other jurisdictions; and
 - (b) take action to make the necessary improvements that will provide Canberrans with a higher quality of care.

I must make it very clear from the onset of debate on the motion this afternoon that the ACT's nurses, doctors and allied health workers are, I am very certain, working extremely hard to offer the best health service to all Canberrans. But, sadly, I have to say that I do not believe that the system is working for them or supporting them as fully as it could.

This motion draws attention—again, sadly, for another year—to the point that Canberra is falling further behind other jurisdictions across Australia in one of the key areas of responsibility of our government: offering a health system that maintains and protects our quality of life.

The Stanhope government, in handing down the 2007-08 budget, trotted out a number of initiatives to fill the holes in the dyke. It appears that no matter how much funding is targeted to fill these holes—with the rollout of program after program and new initiative after new initiative—the government simply cannot, in some crucial and critical areas of performance for hospitals, outperform any other jurisdiction in Australia. It is the responsibility of the Stanhope government, and in particular the health minister, to now take appropriate action to correct the situation that, unfortunately, for the past two years, has not seen very encouraging figures produced on the performance of Canberra's public hospitals.

The opposition is calling on the government to take urgent and appropriate action to improve the performance of the ACT public hospital system. It is all very well to pontificate about the additional funding being pumped into the system from the latest budget—close to \$67 million extra over four years to high priority areas. However, Canberrans expect that, when they get ill, they will be looked after by staff who are

well supported in their workplace. I will say that again: Canberrans expect, when they get ill, to be looked after by staff who are well supported in their workplace.

I do not believe that the simple approach to pouring funds into the system will improve performance. In five years, the Stanhope government has allowed the system to fall behind in key performance areas. It is not me saying this; this is fully supported by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, which offers high-level, high-quality analysis and findings, some of which reflect poorly on ACT hospital performance.

Many comments have been made by people in reaction to the budget. For example, there are comments in the *Canberra Times* today, Wednesday, 6 June. The Australian Medical Association president, Dr Andrew Foot, whilst noting that it was a positive budget in terms of targeting “a broad spectrum of health needs including acute and chronic health issues”, states:

Further work needs to be done to improve time to treatment in accident and emergency; shorter waiting times for elective surgery; more funding for the surge of medical students and extra junior resident officer places.

Let me look at the ACT’s shocking record on elective surgery. If we take this year’s budgetary injection of \$10.5 million to combat the waiting list as an example, it becomes all too apparent that this funding boost was desperately needed. But why? Just to keep in touch with the current demand for elective surgery in the ACT public hospital system. The astounding figure of 9,620 removals from the elective surgery waiting list in 2007-08 is a clear indication of how perilous the situation has become.

Ms Gallagher: Come on.

MRS BURKE: Isn’t it? You bragged about taking 9,000 people off the list—

Ms Gallagher: Perilous?

MRS BURKE: Clearly you are not waiting for an operation, minister. It has become a perilous situation to people out there. It seems certain that if this funding were forthcoming now, for a four-year period, a compounding effect would have ensued whereby more and more patients would have wallowed on the waiting lists. This is an indication of desperation. No doubt the Stanhope government would have to be seen as acting promptly, particularly given that it is now taking steps to open a 10th operating theatre at the Canberra Hospital for five days a week just to cope with the additional strain placed on the system.

I am deeply troubled by the fact that the ACT has a 61-day median waiting time for elective surgery. Minister, wasn’t it 45 days last year? You can correct me if I am wrong.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, and I have explained it.

MRS BURKE: Why should Canberrans, for example, have to put up with a median waiting time of 631 days for myringoplasty, involving surgical reconstruction of a

damaged eardrum, when in Queensland they would expect to wait—how many days?—60 days.

This is a simple indication that the ACT is not performing well against other jurisdictions. It also seems that performance and efficiency gains are not occurring in other areas of the system—for example, with acute care, labour costs or the emergency department, none of which I think the minister has denied to date.

The *Hospital statistics 2005-2006* report, assembled and released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, one of Australia's pre-eminent research and technical health information and commentary bodies, is the latest in a series of disciplined and standardised snapshots of health services and business delivery effectiveness. There are key words there: "delivery effectiveness".

The territory is bound by a cooperative approach by all jurisdictions in increasing transparency and good governance for the health service industry. The approach is one of the primary steps towards better health business and affordable services across the complex spectrum of modern medicine and the dynamic health needs of the people of Canberra. Every state government faces the challenge of swiftly tailoring health services to meet the demands of the health client base. We must counter the associated complexity of health technology with its long lead times and staff learning and development challenges.

The question remains: why does Canberra continue to fail to deliver where others have succeeded? The AIHW report recounts that, for yet another year, our hospital system continues to fall behind the standards set by the rest of the nation. From the outset, Canberra's basic infrastructure falls behind national trends—3.4 beds per 1,000 head of population compared to 4.0 beds in other states. One could for hours recite complex technical statistics contained in the report and cite Canberra's low rating, but this will do nothing to fix the problem.

Effective initiatives that re-engineer health services are the direction required by government to increase health service delivery outcomes. Why is it that, regardless of the burgeoning health expenditure, Canberra's health rating is so rapidly and consistently declining? Why is it that other state health systems with larger population bases and more challenging cost issues maintain or improve ratings? Why is it that the Stanhope government lacks the health planning capacity and foresight to turn the abysmal situation around here in Canberra? I am sure the minister is going to be able to answer all these questions for me, absolutely perfectly.

When elective surgery lists grow to the mammoth proportions of those in the ACT, we must acknowledge the impacts this has on the people of Canberra. These are not just numbers; we are talking about people and the impacts that this bad situation we have in the ACT are having on the people of Canberra. For example, basic questions are asked. "What might happen to me and my family while I wait up to 379 days for a hysterectomy?" "What might happen to my job while I wait up to 239 days for prostate surgery?" "How will my father cope with everything while my mother waits up to 149 days for a hip replacement?"

The social responsibility the Stanhope government was elected on was to deliver a balanced quality of life for all Canberrans. What possible quality of life is returned by waiting for extended periods for surgery and watching those around you put their lives on hold? What possible quality of life can be had when you do not know if your business will survive while you spend months on sick leave? What possible quality of life can be had when you fear that you may not be able to care for your children as you wait and wait to access health care services?

The Stanhope government seems focused on the lifeless economics of the balance sheet prior to an election year rather than on the immediate health needs of the citizens of Canberra. Yesterday's health budget was littered with recycled appropriation catch-up plays that failed to be delivered on previously. The chance to make a real impact on the health of Canberra families has been lost. I can back that up; I will do that in a moment.

We all have some understanding that a hospital emergency department is a challenging, frightening and demanding health facility. No-one ever wants to see a loved one in that circumstance. Canberrans want to know that they have the best possible health practitioner servicing their families—not the outcome of lowest possible price. Why is it that the Stanhope government has failed to engage, encourage and nurture this wonderful community of health professionals? Why is the morale so low?

Minister, there are lessons to be learnt from every other state health system—lessons that can assist in delivering improved service outcomes here in Canberra. I take issue with the strategy, leadership and foresight the minister has applied to matters in the portfolio. Flexibility, foresight, planning and economic decision making are just some of the hallmarks of effective government and the leadership needed in the health portfolio. I point members to an article written by Jack Waterford showing some insights into the budget debate itself. He said:

... while the Government has trumpeted various initiatives in health-care provision in this budget, it has failed to enunciate any overarching strategy to deal with the well-documented woes of the public health system in Canberra. With the ACT having the worst emergency treatment waiting times in the nation, an additional \$12.6 million for 20 new acute-care beds at Canberra Hospital is welcome, and \$10.5 million to reduce the wait for elective surgery (also the worst in the country) is a start. But on big-picture measures that might help deliver long-term improvements to the public health-care system, this budget is silent.

I call upon the minister to demonstrate to the Canberra community that she is prepared to lead the health sector and coach her team to deliver upon their promise to Canberra—health services up to the national benchmark.

This motion draws urgency from acknowledging two obvious and embarrassing fundamentals. Firstly, the AIHW benchmarks show that the ACT is running last in the business of delivering health outcomes. The failings in such outcomes are made much more painful for government by the fact of the high quality of the people delivering health services in the ACT.

What is wrong with Canberra? Is the business base that delivers health service too small for its client base? Are the health business process and the engineering of health services working efficiently and effectively? There are two keywords again—“efficiently” and “effectively”. Are the management and leadership of ACT health services working in an integrated and unified way to deliver flexible service outcomes to their client base? The question remains: how can the Canberra community continue to trust the Stanhope government to manage our health system with vision, foresight and a customer driven focus?

Finally, the evidence of the AIHW report measures the deficiency of the ACT health system from a politically managed perspective. It is time for the Stanhope government to take responsibility for the substandard health outcomes reported by the AIHW and demonstrate to the Canberra community that it has the leadership and management capacity to turn the health sector around. A team must have a winning game plan. The Stanhope government must demonstrate that it has a winning health game plan. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Minister for Health, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Disability and Community Services, Minister for Women) (5.16): I welcome the opportunity to have ongoing dialogue around the performance of our public health system, including the recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report that was released last week. The government will not be supporting Mrs Burke’s motion, but we will be supporting an amendment which will be circulated shortly. I have stopped short of congratulating the government on our tremendous performance, but it does list—

Members interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: I was trying to be humble. I think there is more work to be done, to be up-front with you. I think there is more work to be done. But I would also like to talk about the positive things that were found—things that occur every day in our public hospital system. I would like to talk about the positive aspects of the AIHW report.

The report, as I have said, outlined the fact that, against a national decrease in bed numbers, the ACT saw a 5.4 per cent increase in bed numbers. That is welcome. For the first time, the relative stay index, which is a measure of the efficiency of the public health system—I know Mrs Burke is interested in this—was below one, where one indicates that a patient’s length of stay is a good outcome and anything longer indicates inefficiency. That is below one for the first time—down from 1.02 in 2004-05 and 1.05 in 2003-04. It also shows that we are removing inefficiency in the system. I think both sides of politics will agree that that existed, particularly in administration and management. We have seen big reductions in this reporting period—down to about 14 per cent above average—and we are heading to a target of 10 per cent above average.

The AIHW report also shows that we led the country in potentially avoidable hospitalisations. That is linked to vaccine-preventable conditions and admissions for

chronic conditions. We led the country. In fact, we were 32 per cent below the national average. That is a good outcome; we should acknowledge that.

Certainly we saw the issues that we have spoken about around elective surgery and the emergency department waiting time. But the surgery part of the report also indicates that we have got the best performance around access to emergency surgery of anywhere in the country. We perform at number one. We should talk about things when we perform at number one; we certainly talk about them enough when we are not in the number one spot.

I turn to elective surgery. I know that there has been some discussion around the median waiting times, including, when I was absent from the chamber, a rather nasty attack from Mr Smyth.

Mr Smyth: Just maths, minister.

MS GALLAGHER: I did not understand the question. I could not understand what the confusion was around the question. Perhaps the error I made in discussion last week was in not understanding that we were not talking about the same thing. I kept referring to targeting long waits, which is what Mrs Burke asked me to do in her speech. She cited the case of someone who is waiting 379 days for surgery—why do they have to wait? I agree with her. We targeted the long waits, and that has blown out our waiting times. It seemed to me that Mr Pratt, particularly, could not understand how that could happen—because they were removed from the list and therefore the waiting time should be shorter because the long waits have gone. But the issue was that that measure measures removals from the list. It does not measure the waiting list; it measures the people who were on the waiting list who have been removed from the list.

Mr Smyth: It does not say that in the report.

MS GALLAGHER: It does say that in the report.

Mr Smyth: No. The definition says exactly the opposite to what you are saying.

MS GALLAGHER: Well, it is not true.

Mr Smyth: I will get you the definition.

MS GALLAGHER: Yes, yes. This is the advice—

Mr Smyth: I will read the definition.

MS GALLAGHER: There is no end point to people who are on the waiting list. This is the point. How can you measure—

Mr Smyth: What is the point of measuring people who have left? It is the ones who are left on the list that count.

MS GALLAGHER: But it is the removals from the list, and in the table it shows you that it is measuring—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Through the chair, please, members on both sides of the house.

MS GALLAGHER: Mr Deputy Speaker, it is measuring the 9,076 removals from the list who have accessed their surgery—what was the waiting time. If you are actually on the list, you have not had your surgery. How can you have a median measure of the length of time to have your surgery if you are on the waiting list, because you have not had your surgery? That is what I did not understand around the questions that were being put the other day, including by you. The group that is being measured has actually been removed from the list—the throughput. Because we are targeting long waits, those long waits are included in the measure. The median is the midpoint. If you have someone who has waited 700 days for surgery and 600 days, 500 days or 400 days, and then 10 days, 20 days, 30 days, the midpoint is 61 of the removals of the list. That table—it shows, and I think I said, 9,076 removed from the list. You cannot have that measure of the list, because you have not had your access to your surgery and therefore you do not have a waiting time. That was the frustration and confusion around what we were talking about the other day in question time.

Mrs Burke: We were not confused.

MS GALLAGHER: You are not confused now, surely, are you?

Mrs Burke: No, no. We were not confused then; you were confused.

MS GALLAGHER: Yes, you were, because you were thinking it was people on the waiting list waiting for surgery, and it is not; it is removals from the list.

Mrs Burke: You did not understand my question, as you just said yourself.

MS GALLAGHER: I did—I understood—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mrs Burke and minister, the duelling is over. Through the chair, please.

MS GALLAGHER: Anyway, it is clear from the interjections that people are a little confused. Anyway it is not—

Mrs Burke: Your explanation was as clear as mud.

MS GALLAGHER: It was common sense. I understood it. I accept that those opposite did not understand what I was talking about, and that is my fault. If I was not able to articulate the message, that is my fault. But we have targeted the long waits on the waiting list, and that has seen—for the end of April to this year, people waiting more than one year for elective surgery was 934.

Again, I think the number is too big, but it is a real improvement over the past two years. The April 2007 figure is 26 per cent better than the 1,265 people on the waiting list for times over one year in April 2005 and 17 per cent better than the figure for last year. We will continue to address the long wait patients. That, in addition to the recent and continued investment in access to elective surgery, should see that waiting time come down as we meet the needs of urgent patients and also those who have been waiting too long for surgery.

But there is more to be done. The budget will commission the 10th operating theatre. That means that we will be pretty much working at full capacity. We are having weekend sessions at TCH; Calvary has been doing weekend sessions for some time. This will purchase another 300 procedures.

It is to keep pace—not only to keep pace but to keep increasing throughput every year. This year we expect to reach 9,300 procedures, and next year we are aiming for 9,600. I have no control—in a way I wish Mr Smyth was in the portfolio. While he—

Mrs Burke: I know. I really annoy you, don't I? I really annoy you. Sorry, Katy. At least I am not wearing the pink jacket today.

MS GALLAGHER: It is just around the understanding of the issue. Whilst he beat me up over waiting lists, he knew that I have no control over waiting lists. If a doctor wants to put someone on the waiting list, that is what they do—and that is what they should do. What I do have control over is throughput. That is where I do have control—to make sure that throughput is increasing all the time. And it is increasing all the time; it is way up. Two to three years ago, we were doing 7,600 operations. We are moving up all the time. That is what I have control over and that is what I can deliver on.

In relation to the emergency department, again I acknowledge that people in categories 3 and 4 are waiting too long to see a doctor. We are attempting to address some of the issues around our staff, but I should say that that was in a year where we saw again a six per cent growth in numbers of presentations and again increased growth particularly for category 3 patients. I do not think that anyone could have predicted that level of growth over a single year.

There are areas where you can continue to highlight things that we need to continue to work on, and I accept that. Health is one of those areas where it is hard work. You do have to remain focused; you do have to have a plan about the future; you do have to work with the stakeholders: the doctors, the nurses, the allied health professionals, the support staff, the managers who run the hospitals and the administrators who provide all that support—who work 365 days a year, 24 hours a day to deliver what I would argue is an enviable health system, one that Canberrans are very proud of.

That is reflected in this report. This report shows that, despite the highest rate of private health cover in the country, we have the highest usage per capita of the public hospital system. That is despite very good access to high-quality private facilities. Here we have a situation where we have fantastic private facilities. We have access to fantastic public facilities. We have a very high private health insurance uptake in the

ACT. And where do people choose to go? They choose to go to the public system, because they know that it is access to very high quality, patient-centred care. That is reflected in this report. We are well above the national average per head of population for usage of the public hospital system. People do it because it is good quality—it is high quality—and they know that the treatment they will get there is excellent.

I will not agree with Mrs Burke when she says that there are substandard health outcomes. That is not reflected in this report. In fact, I would challenge you to find where the adverse health outcomes are outlined in this report. I think—

Mrs Burke: When did I say that?

MS GALLAGHER: I have written it down as a quote from you. I get quite protective of that because, in terms of patient outcomes, our hospital delivers every single day. We have fantastic patient outcomes, and that is directly attributable to the high quality of our health professional staff that work in those areas.

We have an effective and increasingly efficient public hospital system that people are proud of. Sure, there are areas to continue to focus on, and they have been highlighted in this report. They will be, and are being, attended to by government. But I will not accept that the public system is a system of well-documented woes. I will not have it run down. I will not have its reputation run down when that is not—

Mrs Burke: You had better tell your staff that.

MS GALLAGHER: I am talking about the system, because you—

Mrs Burke: Tell the doctors, the nurses and the people who are on the front line.

MS GALLAGHER: There was a differentiation between the staff and the system at the beginning of Mrs Burke's address. I will not have the system run down. The system is excellent. If you are going to get sick, the ACT is a great place to get sick. You will get treated very well, and your treatment—and that is documented in the report—will be very effective and very efficient.

We cannot have it both ways from the opposition. This morning, we heard the shadow Treasurer say that the balance sheet was not as strong as we were alleging—that we were delivering one surplus year and then a number of deficits. He went on to say that health was over-funded; then he went on to say that demand for health services was not being met. You cannot—

Mrs Burke: You are twisting words, Katy.

MS GALLAGHER: No, that is what he says: \$61 million more for this hospital system than other—

Mr Smyth: He did not use the word “overfunded”.

MS GALLAGHER: He added it up on his little slide—\$61 million more. That almost takes all the initiatives from this year and into the forwards. I wonder which

one of those they would not fund. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot acknowledge that demand is rising and say that the hospital system is inefficient and that it has \$61 million too much money in it—if you want to put it a different way, say that the balance sheet is not as strong as it should be but that we should be reducing the impost on business and looking to address areas of pressure. You just cannot have that argument. The shadow health spokesperson realises that when she says that we do not want the lowest possible price. Perhaps you should talk to the shadow Treasurer, because today he made it clear that he does want the lowest possible price in health. I move the amendment circulated in my name:

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

“notes:

- (1) the recent report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australian Hospital Statistics 2005-06, found the ACT's available public hospital beds increased from 679 in 2004-05 to 714 in 2005-06, an increase of 5.2% against a national decrease of 0.7%;
- (2) since 2003-04, the Stanhope Government has funded an additional 147 beds in the ACT health system;
- (3) this investment replaces the 114 acute care beds the previous Liberal Government removed from the ACT health system;
- (4) the ACT health system is delivering record levels of elective surgery;
- (5) the ACT Government continues to invest in the health system at record levels, most recently announcing an additional \$12.6 million for acute care beds, whilst driving efficiencies; and
- (6) the Stanhope Government's continued commitment to improving the ACT's already excellent health system.”.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (5.31): Mr Speaker, we can listen to politicians talk about the health system all day long. The government will take the view that they take that it is wonderful because they have put in an extra \$300 million over the life of the government, that they have had three health ministers and that they have had numerous reforms. The opposition, of course, will quote from reports that clearly indicate that for all the money and all the reforms the system is going backwards. I think the important thing is to listen to the staff.

There is a website in the ACT called “impactednurse”. I want to read what a nurse called “Smooth” said at 3.12 pm on 2 June 2007 about the AIHW report. There are a few expletives in the text. I will take those out and replace them. She said:

no longer able to muster the energy to be ...

upset—

we are now defeated.

a report released this week stated that the emergency department where i work has the longest emergency waiting times in the country.

i can hear the excuses now, “that was before the access improvement program”, “those figures are two years old” “we have opened MAPU and aged care beds” “we have allocated a total of 7 million dollars to improve access” blah blah blah

Sorry, minister, but it does sound like your speech. She goes on:

lets get a few things straight...

the access improvement program is bollocks, in our emergency department it has involved changes that have cost a lot but have had no real benefit to access. for example over 50,000 bucks, (kindly donated by you and me the taxpayer) was spent on the redesign of triage, including changing the desk and the laying of a really expensive bright red glittery floor, nice and calming!! the design of the desk = less room and neck ache, and the red floor hasn't really seemed to help getting people from the waiting room to emergency beds...whoops!!

also as a part of the access improvement plan, god knows how much money is being spent on new uniforms for emergency department nurses, scrubs in red (nice, we seem to be on a theme here)call me stupid but i can't work out how this will help access block, i think it is going to confuse patients, especially as the cleaners and the clerical staff also wear red....whoops

team nursing was introduced despite the nursing staff not wanting it and there being no evidence to its value in an emergency environment. but we get funding for it, and someone was planning to present it as a great success at an emergency nursing conference...whoops.

not sure how much money has been wasted here, but what it means in terms of staff can be quantified. there are fewer nurses doing hands on patient care, there are more nurses in patient free jobs. fewer nurses actually looking after patients equals extended time for patients in ED beds, simple really, the nurses can only look after and move patients as quickly as one person is able. and i mean one person because you guessed it, team nursing has gone out the window too. we have all been recently told that we need to be individually accountable for patients in our care, why does that ring a bell? Oh yes i remember, its because that is what nurses were saying all along!!

there are plenty more examples, loads of them, escalation plans, 321 plans, new jobs (higher grade) for bed allocations.

it's all ...

f-ed—

up.

the introduction of the first phase of the access improvement program has made no difference (this is a fact, waiting times are worse now than the recent report)

according to executive access improvement programs work in other states and in other countries, it is not working in our hospital, and i think that the people responsible for it's failure should be held accountable.

Do not believe the AIHW report because, yes, it is a year old. Do not believe the opposition. But there is a nurse in the emergency department saying a new floor, a new desk and a new uniform have not improved it. It is interesting that she mentioned the MAPU. We used to have in the army the expression SNAFU. Is a MAPU a medical SNAFU? I do not know, but perhaps it is.

Mr Speaker, let's look at some of the outcomes under this government. Let's look at what has changed. I would have to say that little has changed since February, despite the plaintiff bleatings of the current Minister for Health. I know that the minister inherited this problem from Mr Stanhope and then Mr Corbell, who ignored the portfolio. The reality is that despite hundreds of millions of extra dollars, three health ministers and many reform programs, the ACT still has problems in its health system. These problems continue in spite of the excellent efforts of the doctors, the nurses and the allied health professionals working in our system, a system that does not work for them and does not work for the residents of the ACT. They have done, and continue to do, a wonderful job and they have our thanks.

This motion identifies a number of issues that are having an adverse impact on the performance of the ACT's public hospital system. These include the findings of the latest report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the trend in our waiting lists, the waiting times for elective surgery and the cost of operations in the ACT. To those can be added such matters as occasions of bypass at our public hospital. Each of these indicators show that the ACT is not performing particularly well. The public hospital system could be called sick. It has been sick sometimes, particularly since the efforts of the Stanhope government. We have spent more and got less since they have come to office.

Ms Gallagher: More beds, more elective surgery.

MR SMYTH: The minister says that there are more beds. I notice that she says in her amendment that the Stanhope government has funded an additional 147 beds in the ACT health system. How many of those were acute? That is the real question. She has a shot at the former Liberal government, saying that they replace 114 acute care beds, but let's go to the critical numbers here. With fewer beds we did better, because we had a better system, because the hospital was independent and could perform as a hospital, not as an adjunct to the department. When we left office, the elective surgery waiting list was trending down and there were 3,488 people on that list. As of February this year there were 4,795 people on that list. What has happened \$300 million later? The list has gone up a third, more than a third. Across Australia, 32 people per 1,000 are admitted to hospital in cases where intervention may have avoided hospitalisation. The ACT, to its credit—

Ms MacDonald: He is just annoying.

Ms Gallagher: I know. It is bad for my blood pressure.

MR SMYTH: You need to listen as I am about to say something nice about you, minister. The ACT actually has the lowest rate of avoidable hospitalisations in Australia. There are some parts of the system that are okay. In this case, the

Northern Territory and Western Australia have the highest rates, at 47 per 1,000. But let's look at the other important issues across the board. Let's take, for instance, people waiting for elective surgery, which is an important health service indicator. Whether you like it or not, it is.

In 2004-05, one person in 10 in the ACT, one in 10, waited for longer than 12 months for elective surgery in our public hospitals. That was still the case in 2005-06. After hundreds of millions of dollars extra, minister after minister, and reform program after reform program it is no better. It is the worst outcome for any jurisdiction in the country. The Australian average was one in 20. We were one in 10. Moreover, the median waiting time for patients admitted from the waiting list ranged from 25 days in Queensland to 61 days in the ACT, more than double. The Australian median was 29 days. The ACT was more than double that. Of more concern is the increase in the median waiting time from 45 to 61 days. That is not good enough.

Take a different indicator, people waiting for attention in emergency departments of our public hospital. You heard me read the nurse's comments. She said that it does not work, that it is all glitz, all glamour, all gloss. It does not work and it has not worked because those people who dedicate their lives to medical practices in the various forms are not being given the structure in which to operate. The ACT again performed very poorly in regard to emergency departments. Of all the people presenting at emergency departments round Australia, 52 per cent or half of all presentations in the ACT were not seen on time—52 per cent. The Australian average was 30 per cent. The ACT was two-thirds higher; 73 per cent higher were not seen on time.

Take another indicator, the median time that people wait to be seen in the emergency department. People waited for 46 minutes in the ACT, much longer than anywhere else in Australia. The median time was 25 minutes. No other state was worse than 35 minutes. It was 84 per cent worse than the Australian average. We have a younger, fitter, healthier population in the ACT, but we wait longer. What about acute care beds? I am delighted that the minister made the commitment the other day to reach the national average. (*Time expired.*)

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (5.41): I would like to take this opportunity to express my support for the ACT's hospital and allied health workers, including our mental health workforce. I am sure that many of them welcomed the increase in funding in yesterday's health budget but, when we look carefully at where our health expenditure is going, it is clear that those highly pressured health workers will continue to feel the pressure well into the future.

This year's health budget is very much about bricks and buildings, not the services themselves, and certainly not primarily about keeping people well and out of hospital. Sadly, the largest single budget item is for car parking at Canberra Hospital, which presumably will pay for itself once it is up and running, and charging users. But when we take this budget item away, the health budget looks somewhat different. The increased funding for acute care is welcome. It is good to see funds for hospital services needed in the north of Canberra, such as the coronary unit at Calvary. There is no question we need to continue to invest in our hospitals. But merely spending money is not the best way to improve our hospitals.

I want to take over from where Mr Smyth left off in regard to the emergency services department. There would not be too many people in Canberra who have not had experience of the emergency services department at the Canberra Hospital. I have certainly spent many hours there, either for my own or for my children's concerns. I have relatives and friends who do. Recently I received an email from a parent who had also spent many hours there over the years. Often it is not one's own concerns that preoccupy us; it is that family with the child that will not stop crying or whatever and the absolute boredom of children. It was suggested by this parent that perhaps there could be some toys for children to play with, perhaps there could be a place where people could make a cup of coffee without having to go away and maybe lose their place.

I know that there have been several huge expenditures around the emergency services. Like most people, I know a few nurses around the place and I am not sure that they are consulted. Frankly, the changes that are made there indicate that they are made by designers, architects and administrators, but the people who work at the coal face would say that there is not a need for a big vestibule or whatever; there is a need for a more comfortable place. They might be able to advise about the colour scheme as well. It is not enough to say that we are spending millions of dollars on something. Spending money does not automatically mean improvement. Nonetheless, I do not detract from the fact that I have always, in the end, had quality care at Canberra Hospital. I am very grateful for it. I expect I will use it again. I just want to say that money is not everything.

For the rest of my speech I want to focus on primary health care issues. I believe that there is an imbalance and a lack of vision in the way in which we are allocating our health expenditure. If we want to reduce the pressure on costly hospital services, we must direct more funding to primary care and community-based health care, including early intervention and prevention. In 2007 we are still seeing health funding primarily directed to costly acute care hospital-based services. I know that they are the pointy end of the budget. I know that they serve the sickest people and that our general triage system demands them. But we are investing in our population's health if we increase access to primary health care.

With the very low rate of bulkbilling and ACT GPs closing their lists to new patients, where will all the new public servants coming to fill positions in Canberra find GPs? I acknowledge the government's work on trying to attract GPs to the ACT, but so is every other municipality in Australia. More needs to be done or, quite simply, people coming to live in Canberra will up and leave, as they have in other jurisdictions that cannot provide quality health services, such as the Northern Territory. But even more importantly, easily accessible quality primary health care can act as a bulwark, helping to stop health conditions deteriorating to the extent that more costly specialist and acute services and hospitalisation are required. We need to do more to link our primary health, community health and social services. Creating pathways within the health system that are easy to navigate will go a long way to reducing the need for acute care services. Investing more of our health budget at this end, in keeping people well and out of hospital, will ultimately reduce our need for ever expanding hospital services.

The case is even clearer in mental health. The ACT government needs to invest more in providing both clinical and non-clinical mental health services that people can access before a mental illness becomes acute and hospitalisation is unavoidable. The Mental Health Council's *Not for service* report, released in 2005, rated the ACT as one of the poorest performers in the country, finishing seventh out of the eight states and territories in terms of per capita expenditure. The funding increases we have seen for mental health over the last two years have gone some way to addressing this poor rating. But, coming from such a low base, we have only just begun to address the significant unmet needs in mental health care in the ACT.

The ACT has a long way to go to honour its commitment to meet the national mental health reform targets set out in the 2006 COAG national mental health plan, and to meet the minister's pledge, made in August last year, that by 2012 the ACT's mental health expenditure will be 12 per cent of the total health budget, that is, proportional to the mental illness disease burden. This budget takes the proportion to around eight per cent. That is a good start. But, again, the funding increases for mental health over the last two years have been overwhelmingly directed to acute clinical services. Solving the ACT's mental health crisis is not about building prisons, prison mental health services or multimillion dollar psychiatric units. The solution lies in providing services to help people with a mental illness stay well, equipping them with basic living skills and helping them to reconnect to their family and community.

If the ACT government is to improve significantly its delivery of hospital services and to reduce emergency waiting times even further, it must also invest heavily in improving access to primary care, commit even more than is in this budget to managing chronic disease, and invest in linking primary care and community-based health services. I am also strongly of the view the best health policies and programs are consumer led; that is, where health consumers and their carers are engaged with governments as valued partners in the development of health policies and programs. Consumers and carers are best placed to let governments know where the gaps and wrinkles are in the system, and who is performing and who is not.

Consumer participation ensures that those working in the system remain patient focused. Their considered input is invaluable. So it is disappointing to see that very little funding has gone in this budget to increased consumer and carer participation in the ACT government's health policy development and implementation. I am aware that health consumers are actively engaged with some ACT committees, but health consumer representative organisations continue to be poorly funded, limiting their ability to provide advice to government. I urge the health minister, in future budgets, to direct appropriate funding to the various ACT health consumer organisations, to formalise the way in which government engages with health consumers, and to ensure that our health system truly serves those for whom it exists, the health consumers and their carers. In fact, I urge the minister to ensure that our health system serves all of the people of Canberra, regardless of income or where they live. It is not good enough for the government to say that it does not have enough money to deal with both acute care needs and preventative and community health programs. We do have enough money. It is where you choose to spend it that matters, and that requires vision. Sadly, I am afraid to say, that is lacking in this budget.

MR MULCHAY (Molonglo) (5.51): I support the motion of my colleague Mrs Burke, who has raised some serious concerns about the state of the ACT health system. These concerns have been verified by the latest report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, released on 31 May. I do want to stress that they are problems that were around long before this report was released. These problems were highlighted by the Auditor-General's report into elective surgery waiting times as long ago as 2004. This issue, of course, is the subject of an ongoing inquiry by the public accounts committee, which will be reporting back shortly.

The problems are ones that had already been noticed by the people waiting in emergency departments in ACT public hospitals. They have certainly been noticed by the people waiting for elective surgery in ACT public hospitals. They have been noticed by their families and by their friends who have stood by them while they have waited and waited and waited. Indeed, my family's experience with our public hospital system was one of the factors motivating me to nominate for the 2004 elections. A life-threatening experience that we encountered in our health system left us with the clear impression that people were operating under unnecessary pressure in that environment.

The report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that if Canberra's public hospitals did the same job, on a casemix adjusted separation basis, that they are doing now, but at the same cost as other similar hospitals in Australia, then their costs should be \$61 million less; that is, \$61 million could be saved if Canberra's public hospitals could perform even at the average cost round the rest of Australia. If they could perform better than the average, we would save even more.

It is quite mischievous for the Chief Minister to be saying, as he said this morning, that the Liberals want to slash \$61 million off the health budget. That is misrepresenting a situation which was very clearly spelt out today and which I am again spelling out this evening. The fact of the matter is that what we are saying is that if things are run efficiently, if you can at least match the average performance of other jurisdictions, then it ought to cost us \$61 million less, which would free up funds for other functions of government. But we seem to have a situation where improvements and efficiency are resisted and the answer to every problem is to throw more cash at them. Throwing more money at situations does not always lead to improved results. It requires much more to be applied and it needs a strong commitment in terms of advancing efficiencies in the delivery of core services. That is what Mrs Burke said in public comment last week and it is what she has said today. It is what I am advocating and it has been a consistent position on this side of the chamber.

It is interesting that the report found that the administrative costs for Canberra's public hospitals were 26 per cent greater than the average of comparable hospitals in Australia. In fact, the report showed that the ACT had the most costly public hospitals in Australia. You can argue about time frames and whether things might have improved since the report was collated, but the fact of the matter is that since I have been in this place the reports coming out of AIHW, as they do become available, even when they are somewhat backcast on earlier years, do not paint the situation in the

territory in a particularly impressive light, certainly not of the standard that people in this city expect.

We pride ourselves on the education here, the income level, the capacity of people, the success, our low unemployment, and our booming economic performance, due in no small part to the federal government's generosity to the territory. We should have a health care system that equates with that level of expectation and that standard of service. Regrettably, we do not. There are so many stories that come back to me and, I know, other members that cause concern. One of my own staff took his daughter to hospital the other night and it was in the order of 15 hours before a medical practitioner was to see that little child, who was suffering from respiratory problems. They came to the hospital in the morning. In the afternoon they were sent to another part of the hospital and told that a doctor would see them. It was the next day before a doctor saw the six-year-old child. That is not a one-off example. Many members, of course, have examples that they hear about from constituents. That is just one out of my own office with one of my staff trying to ensure that his daughter received the appropriate level of medical care.

I have a neighbour who went in at Christmas and there was no one available to do surgery, other than a locum, and the locum did not want to do it. Then there was a misdiagnosis. That man has not been able to work a full week in the past six months, and he is one of Canberra's leading medical specialists. I am horrified each week when I see him because he is a man who suffered enormously from his experience there. I am not going to mention names, but it is no great secret to my colleagues who I am talking about and it worries me that the health system in this territory is not meeting the standards and expectations that people rightfully expect, that my constituents expect.

The AIHW report showed that Canberrans waiting for elective surgery in ACT public hospitals faced the longest waiting times in Australia. As Mr Smyth pointed out, the patients needing elective surgery waited for a median of 61 days in 2005-06, compared to the 45 days wait in 2004-05. Jest was made of the fact that I cited the 25-day wait in Queensland. It was trivialised. There was a dreadful response from the Chief Minister, who said, "The Liberals want Dr Death." What a shameful comment when we are asking for decent health care for our citizens, particularly in the orthopaedic area, where a lot of the older people in Canberra are needing hip replacements and the like. We have a critical shortage of orthopaedic specialists. We are asking for those people to get faster treatment and we are told, "What, you want it to be like Queensland, you want Dr Death on the loose in the place!"

I take offence at that, Mr Speaker, because members on this side of the chamber take the matter of public health as a matter of very high priority, probably the most important part of this territory's budget. The government says it is. They are putting \$800 million plus into this budget. Let's make sure that we are getting the level of service that the people of this city expect of us and let's not be contemptuous when another state is able to manage its elective surgery processes in a far more expeditious fashion than we have achieved. Any form of surgery which a patient's doctor or health professional believes to be necessary but which can be delayed by at least 24 hours fits into the definition of elective surgery. This is surgery the patients'

doctors consider necessary. This is not cosmetic activity. Whilst delays can occur for more than 24 hours, a median of 61 days, two months, is unacceptable.

We have had mention of emergency departments. The waiting times are also far too high in emergency departments. According to the report, only half of the patients received timely treatment in ACT emergency departments, the worst performance in the country. Again, Mr Speaker, I would guarantee that every member of this place has had stories raised with them of people who have been distressed by personal experiences, especially those with children who have had encounters with the hospital. I am not being critical of the people that work there. As Mrs Burke's motion mentions, these people are doing their best. But you only have to talk to them and they will quietly tell you about the pressure they are under and the difficulties they are facing. If you talk to those who are older in the nursing profession, the same thing applies. They just want out of the place. They do not like the morale, they do not like the atmosphere, and they are under too much pressure. Those are things that we are asking this government to address. Do not simply think that a cheque book will solve every problem. Let's understand from the people in the front line what is needed. Instead of just listening to the thousand or so bureaucrats employed in health, let's talk to the people who are administering health care. Let's talk to the people who have experienced—

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

Adjournment

World Environment Day

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (6.00): This being the week that had World Environment Day in it—yesterday, though it was somewhat eclipsed in this place by the presenting of a certain document, which was presented on lots of trees, no doubt—I thought that I would draw attention to a couple of events that have happened in this place this week.

On Monday, I hope you were all invited to a World Environment Day celebration that was organised by young people under the imprimatur of ACT OtherWISE. Mr Gentleman came along, and I was very glad to see him, and a number of members of staff either walked through or dropped by. I found it a very inspiring event, not just because it was so well organised but also because of the things that some of the young people were doing.

ACT OtherWISE is not really an organisation; it began with a couple of workshops that were organised by Julia Collin and a young man called Cameron. At those workshops, young people who attended learned ways in which they could reduce their environmental footprint; a number of them went away to set up projects. These projects include a sustainable music group, which plans to run a musical event on a sustainable theme—an event that is both carbon neutral and waste free. They have applied for funding; they are waiting to hear whether they got it or not. A young woman called Elspeth Blunt came down from Bathurst to do the workshop; she has gone back to Bathurst and set up an environmental network at her university. They

have swapping and free cycle activities; they are lobbying councillors. They are the equivalent of ANU Green on their campus.

Sarah Davies spoke of how she was inspired and said that her household have reduced their ecological footprint by 25 per cent. Maiy Azize, who is currently working in my office, incidentally, has a project there. She has taken as her project organising a national day of action by young people—on 8 August, I believe, when young people will go to Parliament House. Their slogan is “rescue our future; we don’t want to clean up your mess”. That was the major message that came out of this day. Young people do not want to be left with the burden of our affluent lifestyle in the circumstances where many of us refuse to believe that we have any obligation to the future. They are telling us that we do.

Finally, in that group there was a young woman called Michelle who is teaching the old skills of sewing that so many of us girls liberated ourselves from in our school lives. She is now trying to get young women out of the fashion cycle—the expense of it. They are learning how to fix zippers, how to go to op shops—which I could teach them a lot about—and how to put up hems, and providing other advice. And they are also swapping clothing among themselves.

This event took place in the exhibition room. People will have noticed an exhibition put up there by Wildart from the south coast. They are people who have been painting and doing art for over a decade, usually on the theme of forests and woodchipping. They have presented this exhibition on the theme of climate change—“atmosphere of hope”. The major question that they ask the viewer is “Can you look your grandchildren in the eye? Will you be able to look your grandchildren in the eye when they ask you, ‘Hey, mum and dad, hey, granddad, what did you do to make the world a better place for us?’” That is the message of the painting that grabs you as you come up the stairs. It is something that some people here could start asking themselves about now.

Some very lovely things happened. A young man called George Bishop sang a song that he had written about the forests. A young woman talked about a documentary she is making about uranium mining; she is concerned that many young people do not know the impacts of uranium mining and nuclear power.

Minister for Education and Training

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (6.05): Last week we witnessed the unedifying spectacle of the opposition using a very serious issue facing our community for base political advantage. We all know that such tactics are par for the course for those opposite. However, during this staged attack on Mr Barr an extraordinary thing happened. Mr Pratt stood in this place and actually advocated bullying. Speaking to the censure motion, Mr Pratt demanded that Minister Barr bully his department into submission. Mr Pratt harangued the minister:

You are not on your game. You have not struck the fear of God into your department ...

That is somewhat incongruous, one might think, when earlier Mr Pratt had said:

Mr Barr has a duty of care and responsibility for the students to ensure they can be educated safely and calmly in a secure environment.

What kind of management strategy is Mr Pratt advocating? Is the strategy in line with his federal colleagues' policy on bullying? Is this the kind of philosophy and practice we should expect from those opposite should there ever again be a Liberal government foisted on the people of the ACT? Will our public service face a workplace environment of fear? Will every government department be subject to standover bullyboy tactics? Will Mr Pratt and his fellow Liberal ministers "put the fear of God" into their departments? Is that what Mr Pratt is advocating? Is that how he believes a department should be managed?

How many of us here believe that such management practices would result in a safe, calm and secure environment? I would have thought that, following his years of military service, Mr Pratt would know that the most effective way to achieve the results you are seeking from those who you work with is to model the behaviour and attitudes you expect—in other words, lead by example. To put the fear of God into them is leading by fear; it is bullying staff into submission. Mr Pratt's preferred management style would result in the creation of a climate of fear. Is that really what we want in our education department? Such a climate would resonate through the whole department and inevitably into the places where we all know that the most beneficial environment for our young people is one that fosters positive reinforcement and is led by positive example and role modelling.

That is the type of environment we want for our departmental officers, our teachers, our support professionals and, of course, our students—not one that is based on fear, as Mr Pratt would have it. Let us hope that Mr Pratt is never given the opportunity to impose his draconian management practices on the ACT education system—or, indeed, on any other area of our administration—and that Mr Pratt never has the opportunity to put the fear of God into those whose role it is to serve the public of the ACT.

Malaysia—trade

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra—Leader of the Opposition) (6.08): Ms Porter, I think Mr Pratt was actually saying that the minister should make sure his department lifts its game. What nonsense.

Anyway, I want to talk about doing business with Malaysia. I was pleased to see the Chief Minister report on his trip to China and I certainly encourage visits like that. I am pleased he went to India and I am pleased he went to China. It is crucially important that we explore these links for the benefit of the ACT.

Malaysia is Australia's second-largest trading partner in ASEAN. In 2006 Australia became the third-biggest investor there after Japan and Holland. It is often overlooked, however, as a good place to do business. Malaysia is expecting a record growth of six per cent this year, but it has been in the shadow of its mighty regional neighbours, India and China, because of its size.

I went there with the Malaysian high commissioner and several other people in a short but very productive visit to investigate and study the potential links between Malaysia and ACT businesses. I came away realising that it is a place with a lot of potential for us here in the ACT. There are a lot of synergies, but in terms of investing it has some obvious advantages. We have historical ties with Malaysia that go back to before World War II, and after World War II Australian troops were fighting there against the communist insurgency during the emergency and then in confrontation.

The population is very similar, and that is a real plus for Canberra's small to medium-sized businesses. In larger countries like China, by contrast, such a business would find itself routinely dealing with mega corporations 50 times its size, but when the parties are well matched individual firms have a lot more bargaining power or leverage. Everyone speaks English in Malaysia, and that is another big positive. Malaysia is also a very important hub for the Muslim world and all the trade that that brings which you would not find in other places.

Last year there was a huge jump in Australian investment in Malaysia, with two Australian resource companies setting up headquarters there. In 2006 there was \$11.5 billion in trade between Malaysia and Australia, with some \$5.8 billion in merchandise exported from Malaysia to Australia and \$3.1 billion from Australia to Malaysia. They have a very strong manufacturing sector. Imports from Australia are predominantly in agrifood-related trade, followed by metals and resources. There is also \$2.6 billion trade in services between the countries.

Recently I held a media conference here. The Malaysian trade commissioner and the Malaysian investment consul came to that, along with Mr Chris Peters from the chamber of commerce. The next step will be a meeting, which I think will be hosted by the Malaysian high commissioner and organised by Mr Chris Peters, by way of a follow-up. I have included the list of business contacts I made in my study report and sent copies to the ACT government. I would be delighted if the government's agencies followed up those contacts and progressed any good opportunities for the ACT that may have arisen from the trip.

Several of the companies I talked to there, and several of the businesspeople particularly, were interested in investing in Canberra. They were interested in all sorts of things—even major investments like potentially the construction of a new dam and major buildings that might be occurring in the ACT. We have some very good opportunities there. There are some particular areas where ACT businesses can follow through in Malaysia. In certain areas they are very keen to do business with us.

All in all, there are some great opportunities there for the ACT. I encourage the ACT government to follow up the contacts I made. Obviously there will be further contacts made as a result of Mr Peters and the Malaysian high commissioner hosting a number of Canberra businesses as an initial follow-up to the benefits which I hope will flow from my trip.

Rally of Canberra

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (6.13): Tonight I would like to talk about the Rally of Canberra, a topic that I am very passionate about, as I am sure my fellow Assembly

members will be aware. I will start by saying that I had an unusual perspective on proceedings this year. Instead of competing, I took up a position launching the event, and then assisted Greg Bayliss with some of the on-course commentary. I thank Greg for allowing me to be involved.

I would like to boast that this year's event showcased the first-ever Australian night stage in a rally, something I know the whole rallying community was very pleased with. I could say a lot of great things about the rally, but I would like to use this time to talk about the change in rallying in the ACT. I would like to talk about the past, present and future of this iconic event.

The Rally of Canberra was until recently the last major motor sport event ever funded by the ACT government. That is not to say that it had to remain that way. Times have changed, circumstances have changed and government priorities have changed. As we heard earlier today, the ACT government has negotiated an agreement with the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport to hand over control of the rally to the CAMS for private sector running. This is supported by the ACT rally community. They are very happy with the decision that the event will continue in later years.

While we are in this transitional period of rallying in the ACT, I would like to call on the government to assist in kind, to ensure that the future of the event is secure. The rally community, I am sure, will get behind CAMS in their management of the Rally of Canberra 2008. The combined efforts of CAMS, the Australian motor sport group, and government will go a long way to ensuring the future success of the event.

In light of the announcement of the \$103 million surplus budget, I call on the government to provide in-kind support to the rally community. There are many ways in which this can be done. With the boost in funding to the emergency services department, including \$6.5 million for 32 new firefighting vehicles and four new ambulances with 16 new staff, emergency services support would be most welcome. Forestry and road management assistance from TAMS, and promotion of the event by Tourism ACT, would also be of great benefit. These are just a few suggestions that would go a long way to making next year's event an even bigger success.

I send a great thank you to the previous management team for their time and effort over the past few years. The 2007 event attracted increased spectator numbers on the year before, bringing renewed interest in the sport here in Canberra.

I am pleased to announce that community support for this year's event has increased, with a greater number of volunteers than in previous years. This can be put down to the work done by Wayne Kenny and the previous management team. These volunteers could not have been coordinated, and the smooth running of the event would not have been possible, if it was not for the excellent organisation by Ian Hill, Jenny Boyd and the rest of the team at Australian Capital Tourism. The contributions to the rally's success—including, as I mentioned, the announcers: Greg Bayliss, Darryl Judd and Paul Loughan—by all the volunteers should be acknowledged. A new team will lead the charge next year. Again I stress the important role that the government still has to ensure the future success of the event.

I would like to congratulate some of the winning teams from the Asia-Pacific Rally Championship—Cody Crocker with Ben Atkinson; Katsu Taguchi and Mark Stacey; and Dean Herridge and Bill Hayes—and the Australian Rally Championship side—Simon and Sue Evans; Neal Bates and Coral Taylor; and Spencer Lowndes and Chris Randell.

I look forward, as I do every year, to the next rally, Rally of Canberra 2008, and a new era of motor sport in the ACT.

Budget—accounting standards
Environment—water treatment plants

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (6.16): Earlier today we were enthralled to hear a new approach to ACT economics by extrapolating our surplus figure to that of the federal government. Mr Stanhope said, “If you took that and quoted it to the federal government, we would be seen in most spectacular terms.” We did the mathematics. Fortunately, I have got somebody in my office who has just finished a PhD on statistics and who loves numbers. I said, “Look, just do a bit of work for me on this, will you?” He said that if you had an alleged surplus—I think members know my views about the application of that surplus—of \$103 million for the ACT government, and that was deemed as equivalent to a surplus of \$9 billion for the federal government, then, by the same multiplier, which is 87.37864—I will say it slowly for the benefit of Mr Gentleman: 87.37864—the \$9 million in spending by the ACT government for the army of 22 policy advisers would, at the federal level, be equivalent to \$786.4 million in federal government spending.

If we want to take on board Mr Stanhope’s view about how wonderful his surplus is, we have to apply the same principle to the team of advisers he is putting around, which in federal terms equates to an outlay of three-quarters of a billion dollars. I know the federal government spends a bit too much sometimes, but I do not think that John Howard, Peter Costello or even Kevin Rudd would be game to make that sort of outlay. Before we go down this road of federal equivalency, we need to think very carefully about what we are walking ourselves into.

I turn to another matter. The other night I spoke briefly on my visit to Singapore to look at water treatment plants, but I ran out of time. The Chief Minister talked on that issue today. It was an interesting experience to examine these plants, though after some days of looking at recycling plants and desalination plants I think I have had my quota of exposure for some time. But whatever you think about the approach to opposition and the like in Singapore—which is in itself an interesting debate—one has to give credit to the fact that the people in that country are very competent at getting things done and very careful about looking after the health of their population. I was left with absolutely no doubt in my mind that the systems in place in their water supply are safe. They are going to be substantially increasing the use of recycled water in their water supply over the next four years.

As I mentioned earlier, I had the benefit of a specialist on waste water, who is continuing to examine issues for me, at no cost. She was very impressed. She went

through all of the plans. She inspected some aspects of them and was impressed by the systems in place and the safety mechanisms there.

In the last few days, I have had several letters and emails from people who are blindly telling me that they are opposed to recycling because of the dangers. I am afraid that I am unpersuaded at this point. Whether or not that ends up becoming one of the options, there is still a debate going on in the city. But on the basis of the evidence I have seen to date, I remain completely unconvinced that there are public health risks associated with this technology. The Singaporeans said that even the ultraviolet process was superfluous; it was just an added precaution.

The Singaporeans' main interest in water purity is for their computer industry. It has a higher requirement in terms of water purity. They are taking precautions on a range of fronts to ensure that what they call their four taps are all solid and reliable. You would understand that, particularly in a country that imports a substantial amount of water from its neighbour. They have desalination in process. They are damming a river in the middle of the country. I could only imagine what would happen if one tried to do that in this country, but they do not seem to have much of a problem with opposition political groups in that country, so things happen. They have a desalination plant and they have a recycling plant. As I think I mentioned the other night, one thing that amazed me was that a recycling plant which has been contemplated to be of possible use in the ACT had a construct cost of \$27 million. Even if you substantially increase labour costs for here, the figure is not astronomical.

It was an interesting experience. I need no convincing about the safety of it. I know that many other experts in Australia have the same opinion.

Lyons primary school—open day

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (6.22): On Saturday I had the privilege, along with Ms MacDonald, to attend the Lyons primary school open day. I thank Ms MacDonald for her interest in Lyons primary school. I put on the record yet again that I am a parent at Lyons primary school. I chose Lyons primary school for my youngest son because it is the only Australian government school to offer bilingual education. As advocates for public education, that is something that we should be extraordinarily proud of. Under Ms Gallagher's supervision, when she was the minister for education, Lyons started as a fifty-fifty bilingual school three years ago.

The school should be going great guns. Much of what it does it does extraordinarily well—with a huge amount of support and enthusiasm from the parent body. But like all the schools that were subject to upheaval as a result of *Towards 2020*—I note we mark its first anniversary today—Lyons primary school is struggling to come to terms with where it might be in a few years time. I will dwell on that in a moment.

At the showcasing of Lyons on Saturday, our sausage-o-meter hit 350 free sausages given away on the day or sausages given away with a gold coin donation. My daughter, who assisted with the face painting, said that the face painting was up on last year. All in all, it was a very successful day, with a large number of people coming through the school and looking very seriously at the prospects for education for their children in Australia's only government bilingual Italian school.

Canberra already has a proud reputation with bilingual education, through longstanding arrangements instituted by the commonwealth government and the French government in relation to Telopea Park, which is a school which has a fine national and international reputation. I have said in this place and elsewhere to anyone who cares to listen that, if Lyons primary school were given a chance, it would be for the Italian bilingual system what Telopea is for the French.

As an advocate for language teaching, I think that it is an opportunity this government may pass by. It would pass by because the future of the bilingual program at Lyons primary school is uncertain—not the future of Lyons primary school, just the future of the program. The government wants to turn the school into a P-2 school. Although I am open to persuasion about the value of P-2 schools, I still am sceptical. I have not heard anyone outside the education bureaucracy who has a good word to say for it, and most parents think that it is impractical.

The real problem, which this government has not faced, is this: if it turns Lyons into a P-2 school, what will it do with the bilingual program? It says, “We will find another home for it.” But if it goes to another school—just pick a school, any school: Torrens, Duffy, Garran or any of the schools in that area—what will happen? It will become a stream inside a bigger school. The problem with that is that it will become an elite thing. It will be a thing for “bright” children.

Lyons primary school is a school of great equity, with children from a vast array of socioeconomic backgrounds—people who live in the suburb, people who travel long distances to come to that school because of what it does and what it is beginning to do very well. If the program goes to another school, it will become an opt-in and therefore an elitist thing. That will be the death knell of bilingual Italian education in the ACT.

Between now and when the government makes up its mind about what to do with the Italian bilingual program, I will spend my time advocating that they keep the school at Lyons doing what they have been doing well for the last three years. Give it a chance. Give it five years. In five years time, if they have not increased their enrolments, all of the parents will say, “Yes, okay, we have not done it well enough,” and will walk away. But do not kill the Lyons bilingual Italian immersion program before it has a chance to succeed in the same way as the French immersion program has succeeded at Telopea. This is what the parents are saying to me—parents who, for instance, drive 70 kilometres a day to take their children to that school because they value language education. It is not some elitist thing. These are not the brightest of the bright. These are just our kids.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.28 pm.