



Debates

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Wednesday, 17 October 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.

Death of Dr Ken Fry
Motion of condolence

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): I move:

That this Assembly expresses its deep regret at the death of Dr Ken Fry, inaugural President of the ACT Branch of the Australian Labor Party and first member for the seat of Fraser, an honourable and highly principled politician, and tenders its profound sympathy to his family and friends in their bereavement.

A week ago today Dr Ken Fry, the Labor member for the seat of Fraser in the commonwealth parliament from 1974 to 1984, died at home at Broulee on the South Coast. The government extends its deepest condolences to Ken's family and friends. He will be sadly missed. Though his role as organiser of the ALP's left meant that he was never really likely to obtain a ministerial portfolio, Ken was the kind of rock-solid backbencher every party desperately wants and only sometimes finds. Decent, caring, principled and unerring, he was for many of his colleagues a valued moral compass. For the following generation of Labor politicians he was a genuine role model.

Ken is perhaps best remembered in the parliament for his courageous campaign for the cause of East Timorese independence, particularly in the hazardous days in the aftermath of the 1975 Indonesian invasion of East Timor. Fittingly, East Timorese President Jose Ramos-Horta recently said that it was Ken Fry who taught him about friendship, solidarity and compassion.

In a long and distinguished career, Ken steadily conveyed to those around him, either through an unswerving moral stand or determined action, the wisdom he gained through the coalface experiences of the Depression and war, bust, boom and, on occasion, bastardry. Ken was of the old school, someone who understood battler Australia. He never lost his sympathy for the underdog, the underprivileged, and he never lost the clarion voice to speak out when the issue demanded it.

The youngest of seven children, Ken Fry was a product of the Great Depression. Born in Inverell, he spent most of his early years in or around Ben Chifley's Bathurst. He graduated from Hawkesbury Agricultural College in 1938 but, like so many of his generation, he joined the Australian Army in the first years of World War II as the Japanese threat to Australia's north intensified. He was in an Army intelligence unit, where he met and befriended the Army boxing champion Tom Uren, another extraordinary individual of principle and passion destined to become, in post-war Australia, a leader of the Labor left. Tom and Ken would remain the best of mates for the rest of their lives.

The experience of conflict in some of the most desperate theatres of the Pacific war, such as the infamous Tarakan and Ambon, inevitably exerted a powerful impact on Ken. It was at this time, for example, that he witnessed firsthand the bravery of the East Timorese and their continuing quest for independence and autonomy, and he would not forget.

It was during the war that Ken met Audrey Clibbens, an Army signaller, and they married in 1946—the beginning of a joyous companionship that would thrive over the next 60-odd years and produce three children: Warwick, Kerry and Paula. During the early post-war period Ken was for a time involved in the poultry industry, but it was when he joined the commonwealth public service in Canberra in 1968 that the course of the rest of his life was effectively carved out.

In the late 1960s moral and humanitarian issues such as apartheid and Aboriginal rights stimulated his political consciousness, challenging him to seek a public career where he might have an impact. A member of the ACT Advisory Council from 1970 to 1974, he was elected as the inaugural president of the ACT branch of the Australian Labor Party in 1973. This was the springboard for his election to the federal parliament in 1974, the first member for the new seat of Fraser, a seat that he would hold with increased majorities in 1975, 1977, 1980 and 1983. During his decade in the parliament he reinforced his reputation as both conscientious worker and conscience on a variety of house committees and as a member of a number of influential overseas parliamentary delegations.

Not surprisingly, Ken viewed retirement as a new opportunity, and so it was. In his middle 60s he went to university, eventually gaining a PhD in Manning Clark's ANU history department with a dissertation that merged three of his enduring interests: early Australian white history, class, and rural development. He focused on the Bathurst area pre 1850, in a distinguished piece of scholarly work. Fortunately, Ken's quiet achievements have been given permanence, in his own modest voice, in the form of his 2002 memoirs *A Humble Backbencher*.

Throughout his fine and dignified life, Ken Fry changed for the better all with whom he came in close contact. Perhaps the last words should go to his parliamentary colleague during the later 1970s, John Haslem, the then Liberal member for the seat of Canberra. As John said in the last few days, "Ken was a wonderful, old-fashioned socialist and a great local member, one of the best, a man who would not move any distance from his principles."

It was a great privilege for me to know Ken personally and to enjoy his company in his stewardship of the Labor Party and as member for Fraser. Ken was the member for Fraser and President of the ACT branch of the Labor Party when I joined it in the early seventies. The government extends its sympathies to Ken's widow, Audrey, his children Warwick, Kerry and Paula, his grandchildren Zach, Holly and Dylan, to his extended family and friends and, indeed, to all his colleagues within the Australian Labor Party.

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra—Leader of the Opposition): Ken Fry was for some 10 years from 1974 a backbencher in the commonwealth parliament, ably

representing the seat of Fraser. Like the Chief Minister—although he would have had many more—I certainly had a number of dealings with Ken over the years and got to know him well.

He was the youngest of seven children and he grew up during the Depression. He was born in Inverell in 1920. He came from a family with an agricultural background dating back to his grandfather, who emigrated with his family to Australia in the 1880s, and they farmed an orchard near Bathurst. That served him well because Ken ultimately got a diploma from Hawkesbury Agricultural College in 1938.

But his life and values were dominated by service in World War II, where Army life embodied the ideal form of Australian mateship, a theme that he later explored as a mature student in Manning Clark's ANU history department. He completed a BA at the Australian National University in 1973 and a bachelor of letters in 1981.

He served with the 2nd AIF (Infantry) from 1939 to 1945, which included overseas service in New Guinea, Borneo and South-East Asia. The Japanese war left him with a very strong sympathy for the peoples generally to the north of Australia and that would make him a campaigner for the cause of East Timor. Of course the East Timorese assisted for quite some time—for many, many months, over a year, one commando company—in harassing the Japanese, and they paid dearly for that. Indeed it was a debt we owed them and which was not repaid until 1999. I think that would have made Ken very happy.

He married Audrey Clibbens in 1946 and pursued business and rural interests in the Bathurst district, farming poultry until 1967. That venture eventually failed and it came about at the time of a state by-election, which first brought him into conflict with the New South Wales Labor machine. In 1968 Ken Fry moved to the public service in Canberra, serving as an agricultural officer, and within two years he was a member of the fledgling ACT Advisory Council. In 1973 he served as a member of the Hughes panel reporting on governance of schools in the ACT, as a member of the Interim Schools Authority for the ACT from 1973 to 1974 and as a member of the Consumer Affairs Council of the ACT over the same period.

As has been stated, in 1973 he was also elected the inaugural president of the ACT branch of the ALP and in 1974 he became the city's second member of the House of Representatives, serving 10 years as the member for Fraser. He served on a number of parliamentary committees, including the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the ACT from 1974, including as acting chairman in 1981 and chairman in 1983, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Expenditure and the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence from 1974 to 1977 and from 1980 to 1984. He was also a member of several parliamentary delegations overseas.

As a parliamentarian he was struck by the fact that the ALP's ex-servicemen were almost all in the left faction of caucus, although their radicalism was definitely not shared by the RSL at large, and he became an organiser and conscience of the left and, as the Chief Minister has noted, a dedicated socialist of the old school, a man who certainly would not be moved in his principles. I must say on occasions I had a number of very spirited but always friendly arguments with him. Unfortunately, the

fact that he was an organiser and conscience of the left ensured that he never mustered the numbers to enter the ministry.

His involvement in the East Timor issue began with two visits to the island in 1975, the first as a member of the ALP delegation in March. Subsequently he addressed three international bodies on this issue: the UN Security Council in April 1976, the international conference on East Timor in Lisbon in May 1979 and the Permanent Peoples Tribunal hearing on East Timor in Lisbon in 1981.

Ken retired from politics in 1984 but not from life. He published at the age of 82 his memoirs, *A Humble Backbencher*. Pragmatic to the end, Ken said, when his daughter asked if he would like an email read at his funeral: “You can say what you like. I won’t give a stuff then.” Ken continued to be involved in Canberra affairs, coming up from the coast, and I saw him on a number of occasions. He always had a great interest in public housing and I think the last time I saw him was actually at a Christmas party at the ABC flats where we both attended a concert. He was a man true to his principles to the end and a great Canberran. On behalf of the Liberal Party, I extend my condolences to Ken Fry’s family and his many friends.

MR BERRY (Ginninderra): Ken and Audrey Fry have made a lasting impression on Canberra and on many, many Canberrans. Ken’s father was a very committed democratic socialist and was in the first intake of students to the Hawkesbury Agricultural College in 1890. Following in his father’s footsteps, Ken not only attended the Hawkesbury Agricultural College in 1938 but also carried on his political commitment. Ken was also a Second World War veteran, serving in the Army and the Air Force both in Australia and overseas.

Ken’s activities as a member of the ACT Advisory Council between 1970 and 1974 and his time as the first member for Fraser from 1974 to 1984 are well known and well documented and, indeed, legendary among many. He became a respected local member who was always open to all, and his dedication and commitment to principled causes are legendary. Ken was a loyal friend and a mentor to many. He has a special place in the history of Canberra. He will be missed by many. Many in the community will remember Ken—and Marvin Charchalis who worked in his office—who made a strong commitment to serving the people of the ACT as the inaugural member for Fraser.

History will record his good work over many years for the people of East Timor, from his visit in 1975 to his appeal to the United Nations Security Council, to his work with East Timorese here in Australia in the period from 1975 up to East Timor’s independence. But many other communities remember his work with them, including the many Central and South American communities who always found Ken a ready listener and an indefatigable activist. It is interesting to note that the Ambassador for East Timor was at Ken’s funeral on Monday and it was good to see the recognition for Ken of all the hard work that he did for the East Timorese cause. Without Ken I think it could be said that the successes that were later achieved in relation to East Timor would not have occurred.

Of course, politicians do not succeed without the support of their family, and Ken’s family have been a rock-solid support for him over many years. His wife, Audrey, of

course, has had to put up with the stresses and strains of politics and, my guess is, some of the seething over politics that can occur at home in your spare time. But Warwick, Kerry and Paula, of course, have also shouldered much of the weight throughout Ken's political career.

For me, Ken was the father of the ACT left of which I and many others are longstanding members. We hold him in high regard for his solidarity and, of course, his leadership in the early days of the development of a group of people around progressive policies. Over these years we have continued to campaign for these progressive policies and convince others of their righteousness, but always in the back of our mind we have had somebody like Ken Fry as a role model for us to follow.

He was the sort of politician held in high regard then and now by all of those who made contact with him—down to earth, hardworking, decent and with a great deal of common sense born of experience and a keen intellect. He accepted all he met with equanimity. He always focused on public service in the traditional sense of the word. I have heard it said that he was an old-fashioned socialist, but I have to say that each time that I bumped into Ken Fry the conversation, after greetings, always found its way towards fixing up modern issues in a progressive way. So Ken, right up until he left us, was on the ball when it came to modern politics and he always had a great interest in the class issues affected by modern politics. It was always a great experience to have conversations, short and long, with Ken and his family about these issues in later years.

Because of Ken's concerned and caring demeanour, many discounted his intellectual gifts. His academic record is, however, as shining as his record as an elected representative. First he gained his diploma from the Hawkesbury Agricultural College, then in 1973 he graduated from the ANU with a BA followed by a bachelor of letters in 1983. His thesis, an environmental study of the effect of 150 years of European impact on grazing between Boorowa and Cowra, written before environmentalism became trendy in history writing, is also notable.

He completed his PhD in 1988 which was published in 1993 as *Beyond the barrier: class formation in a pastoral society, Bathurst 1818-1948*. This, of course, continued his and his father's interest in class and its effects on communities. As you can see, Ken, among his many other activities, was a lifelong academic. Over the years since Ken retired I have bumped into him on occasions. On the first occasion I bumped into him after he retired I was with my family, visiting relatives in the area. I was swimming at Broulee, popped up out of the surf and Ken was standing beside me. There was a little bit of a conversation about how things were going up here, as always, and, as I said earlier, there was always a political content to Ken's words after the introductions.

I have since kept in touch, occasionally bumping into him and Audrey when shopping in Moruya or on his way to a swim in Shark Bay. He has had a long and productive retirement at Broulee and made many friends and continued many acquaintances, as was indicated by the many people and friends who came to the ceremony in Broulee on Monday. Ken's life is an example to us all and our community is the poorer for his passing but it is also the richer for his work. I would like to pass on my condolences to

Audrey, Warwick, Kerry and Paula and the extended family and friends of Ken Fry. Vale, Ken.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo): I do not think it was possible to be involved in progressive politics in the ACT without coming across Ken Fry. Only two or three weeks ago I was at a birthday dinner for Bill Tully where both Kerry and Warwick were guests. They were very concerned at that time that Ken had just become ill. In retrospect, it was clearly the last illness.

I want to congratulate Ken, wherever he is, on living a long life and remaining active throughout it, because he never stopped being an advocate of the causes that he believed in, and I believe that his life puts a lie to the fallacy that we get more conservative as we get older.

I first met Ken in 1982, I think it was; I was trying to rack my brains for the year of the ALP conference when I believe the ALP betrayed its principles and probably set in place the grounds for the birth of the Greens party. Certainly after that time there were all kinds of efforts to form progressive parties. At that time I was a co-convenor of a very small local branch in East Gippsland, which ceased to be after that conference because we could see the ALP was probably not going to save forests and do all the other things that we would have liked it to have done. But at that conference I heard Ken Fry speak passionately about East Timor, and he was accompanied by his son Warwick. From that time I have followed his career with a great deal of interest because I believe that Ken Fry was not a career politician—he was a politician of passion. He was there because he had issues that he felt would be best advanced through his being engaged in formal politics, and he put his mouth where his beliefs were.

The record indicates that he was part of a number of movements where people's action created change. I am thinking of the movement against apartheid, I am thinking about his defence of the tent embassy and I am thinking about his support for self-determination and independence for the people of East Timor. I can only imagine how he felt, with his concerns about East Timor, when the Balibo incident occurred during the Whitlam era and that his own party certainly did not acknowledge it; it has only recently reluctantly acknowledged its neglect during that time.

I thank Ken for showing the East Timorese that there was a compassionate side to the Australian people, that there were people who cared. We know that the activism of those people since that time was partly responsible for the fact that the Howard government actually went in after the terrible violence that followed the referendum on self-determination. So Ken's work had results, and I am sure he knew that. He lived long enough to know that and he was politically astute to the end, so he would have been well aware of that.

His children are still active in the community and carry on many of his campaigns and interests, and for that reason I am very proud to stand here as a Greens representative and thank Ken for the work that he did, which laid the ground for the work that the Greens and many in the Labor Party continue to do. I send my condolences to his family, even though at the same time they had a very rich time with Ken. Mercifully, he lived a good and long life and they can have the joy of knowing that.

Question resolved in the affirmative, members standing in their places.

Death of Mr Jim O'Neill OAM

Motion of condolence

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): I move:

That this Assembly expresses its deep regret at the death of Mr Jim O'Neill OAM, first Auditor-General of the ACT, an outstanding public servant who has made an abiding impact on our community, and tenders its profound sympathy to his family, friends and former colleagues in their bereavement.

It is with sadness and regret that I rise to record my memories of Jim O'Neill and to convey to his family and colleagues the condolences of the government. Jim O'Neill's contribution to this community was a proud and sustained one, encompassing public service as we more narrowly understand it and public service in the grander sense: service to the community of which he was a part. His formal public service came at a time of great change and challenge for the ACT: the advent of self-government. He was appointed the ACT's first auditor-general in 1990, after a distinguished career in the commonwealth public service, including a period as first assistant auditor-general with the Australian National Audit Office.

Having nailed his colours to the mast of the fledgling territory administration, Jim administered what was then known as the Government Audit Office and his steady professionalism and wise counsel did much to lend credibility to the new structures and processes. Jim's expertise and dedication were crucial in the establishment of the Government Audit Office. Within 12 months of his appointment he had created a fully functioning and highly productive organisation. In that first year he oversaw the administrative and management arrangements for the conduct of audits, developed audit standards for the ACT and issued six reports to the Assembly. His advice on difficult issues of prudent management and public sector ethics was sought and freely given long after his retirement. He was highly valued for his genuine voice of impartiality.

ACT governments of both political persuasions appointed Jim to senior roles in government tribunals after his formal retirement as Auditor-General. He was a member of the ACT agents board before being appointed to the Consumer and Trader Tribunal in 2002. During this time he presided over a number of hearings of the tribunal and earned respect for his learning and decisiveness.

But, if his public service career was exemplary, his contribution to his community in his private life, particularly in retirement, was extraordinary. Performing in an honorary capacity, Jim lent his considerable expertise as financial adviser and auditor to a vast and diverse range of community organisations. The Carmelite Sisters of Red Hill, St Patrick's church in Braddon, Ozanam home for the aged and St Thomas More's parish in Campbell were all beneficiaries of his honorary financial

management skills over a period of many years. Jim also chaired Calvary Hospital's audit committee for almost a decade, again providing his services without financial reward.

As an honorary auditor, he dedicated yet more of his time to the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia, the ACT Organ Donation Awareness Foundation, the Catholic Women's League, Swim Safe, the retired priests fund and St Christopher's parish. His expert advice and practical assistance helped all of these organisations conduct their affairs on the basis of sound financial and administrative guidance, freeing them to focus on their missions of charity, care and community service. Demonstrating a seemingly limitless capacity for selfless support of others, Jim somehow found time to volunteer at the ACT hospice, where his charisma and spirit of fellowship and friendliness provided tremendous comfort to the terminally ill and their families.

In 2006, Jim O'Neill was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to the community of Canberra as an honorary auditor and financial adviser—a thoroughly deserved and appropriate recognition of his extraordinary work. We have lost a passionate and committed Canberran whose unstinting and altruistic contribution to community service and public service was truly remarkable. He is remembered as a person of great learning, humility and humanity.

On behalf of the government, I offer my heartfelt condolences to Jim's wife, Elaine, his children, John, Mark and Haydn, and his extended family and friends.

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra—Leader of the Opposition): Jim O'Neill was born in 1931 in Sydney and he grew up in Sydney. I think he went to St Pat's in Fairfield, where he graduated in 1947. In those times nearly everyone just left school and went on to work. Jim was one of the best students in the school—an exemplary student there. He excelled even in those early days with mathematics, with figures. It was also going to serve him in good stead not only as an auditor but in one of his other great passions, which was having a flutter on the horses and a bit of a gamble.

Jim got top marks when he left school and his school report card reflected what a great student he was. He was a great participant in other things, so it was interesting to note that his principal recorded that he participated in all sports but did not excel in any. He was to find his niche, of course, through his love of figures, his appetite for numbers, and he went off and worked initially, I think, with the Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

In 1951, at 20 years of age, Jim decided on a career change. He wanted to be a pilot and he joined the Royal Australian Air Force and served for some 20 years in the Royal Australian Air Force, finally retiring with the rank of squadron leader. Jim met his wife, Elaine, and had a unique way of impressing her, which led to Elaine accepting his hand in marriage: Jim borrowed a plane from the airfield and buzzed Elaine's parents' property—fairly low actually. It certainly impressed his wife to be. It did not particularly impress his father-in-law, and the cows were dry for a couple of days after that. So it was not perhaps the best start with the in-laws, but certainly it was quite impressive and Elaine and Jim married. They celebrated many, many happy years of marriage, and of course the children followed.

Jim left the Air Force in 1971, having participated in some major events. He was instrumental in procuring and doing a lot of the legwork for the purchase of the F111—probably one of the greatest buys the Royal Australian Air Force has ever made. “The pig”, as it was affectionately known, is flying still and Jim had a lot to do with working out and dotting all the i’s and crossing the t’s in relation to the purchase of the F111. He left the Air Force, joined the commonwealth public service and, as the Chief Minister said, rose to be first assistant auditor of the federal public service. He was appointed in 1990 as the first ACT Auditor-General.

He was a man of great integrity, respected by both sides. He was instrumental in setting up a fine audit office and indeed in working on the finances to start giving the ACT some credibility. It was because of public servants like Jim, who put in so much in those early days, that we are in the situation we are today with a public service that is professional and with some good systems in place. That we have good systems in place, certainly in relation to the first audit office, is largely because of Jim O’Neill.

He was a great family man. He studied and obtained his university degrees in the 1980s. He would often be studying at home, sprawled out on the lounge with his books everywhere, keeping one eye on the TV to see what was happening with the races. Elaine would get the kids out so that Jim could study in peace. But being a great family man he would always make time for them on Sunday.

Jim, as the Chief Minister said, was involved in a large number of organisations, particularly organisations where he would be of great assistance, like the Carmelites, and he was a doyen of St Thomas More parish in Campbell. The funeral was held at Watson because the church at Campbell was deemed to be simply too small for the large number of people who turned out to pay their tributes to this wonderful Canberran and this fine public servant in more ways than one. He was actively involved right to his death with the Royal Life Saving Society and the organ donors and other organisations that the Chief Minister has mentioned.

Jim’s death was quite a shock. I knew Jim well. I would see Jim regularly—probably about once a month. On occasions Jim, Trevor Kaine, Greg Cornwell, Harold Hird and I would meet for lunch, probably a couple of times a year, and when our old former Chief Minister Trevor Kaine became very ill with his stroke Jim would regularly give me updates and he would pass on updates too to Harold and Greg as to Trevor’s progress. Indeed, it was only a couple of weeks ago that Jim rang me just to tell me how Trevor was travelling and I made a point of saying, “I must go and see him when I can at Mirinjani.”

Jim was having a beer with one of his sons down in Sydney Saturday a week ago. He had a couple of beers and actually fell off his stool. He got picked up, he did not think anything was remiss, they put on a few bets, they walked the short distance to his son’s home and it was there that he died. He had had some heart trouble about seven or eight years previously. This time, unfortunately, it was quick but it was fatal. However, he was doing something he thoroughly enjoyed—being with family, having a good yarn, telling a few jokes, having a punt—when he tragically passed away.

He was a fine man. He certainly gave me some financial advice from time to time, which has assisted me during my time in the Assembly. He was a great family man, a great member of his community, a great friend and one of the great architects of self-government, getting it up and running in the ACT in a practical way through his efforts as the ACT's first Auditor-General.

Farewell, old friend. On behalf of the ACT community, thank you for all you have done.

Question resolved in the affirmative, members standing in their places.

Leave of absence

Motion (by **Mrs Burke**) agreed to:

That leave of absence be given to Mr Smyth for today's sitting.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 46

MR SESELJA (Molonglo): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (performing the duties of a Scrutiny of Bills and Subordinate Legislation Committee)—Scrutiny Report 46, dated 15 October 2007, together with the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MR SESELJA: Scrutiny report 46 contains the committee's comments on two bills, 19 pieces of subordinate legislation and two government responses. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Anti-Poverty Week

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): I seek leave to move a motion concerning Anti-Poverty Week.

Leave not granted.

Standing orders—suspension

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) (11.08): I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Stanhope from moving a motion concerning Australian Anti-Poverty Week.

Mr Speaker, this week is Anti-Poverty Week. There is no more important issue, I think, in a social sense facing Canberra or the nation than the need for us to ensure that every one of our fellow citizens—that every Canberran and, indeed that every Australian—has the fullest opportunity to participate in the life of the community. It is the nature of the community which we within the Labor Party aspire to achieve that all Canberrans have that opportunity; that they have the capacity to meet their potential and to enjoy the benefits of a prosperous community such as ours and, indeed, a prosperous nation such as Australia.

It is only this week that NATSIM, in collaboration with ACTCOSS, released the latest analysis or assessment of the number of people within the ACT who live not necessarily in poverty but within straightened circumstances. The advice this week from no less than NATSIM and no less than ACTCOSS is that over 13 per cent of the people of the Australian Capital Territory live in poverty.

Mr Seselja: Point of order, Mr Speaker. What we are debating here is whether or not standing orders should be suspended. We are not going through the motion that Mr Stanhope was planning on moving, so I would ask that you call him to order and bring him back to the relevance of the motion being debated.

MR SPEAKER: Just make the connection, Chief Minister.

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The connection is, of course, that this week is Anti-Poverty Week within Canberra and, indeed, within Australia. This week we have received the latest information and advice from NATSIM and from ACTCOSS, in research partly commissioned by the ACT government, to actually further inform our understanding of issues around poverty, about the level and nature of poverty and the implications of poverty within the Australian Capital Territory, within our community, within our home.

It is important that we, as a parliament, address those issues. Is it seriously suggested by the Liberal Party—or is it simply an example of their lack of concern for people living in straightened circumstances, people living in poverty, battlers—that they do not care about these issues or do not want to debate them or do not want to know about them? Is it that the Liberal Party simply do not want to know about poverty or the people within our community living in poverty that they do not want to debate this issue?

Mr Mulcahy: Point of order, Mr Speaker: you were quite firm yesterday in your determinations that debate on suspension of standing orders ought to be confined to that issue. The Chief Minister is canvassing the subject matter in great detail, advancing his arguments about the issue and debating whether or not the opposition is concerned about poverty. I do not think that it is really focusing on the motion that is before the Assembly.

MR SPEAKER: I think the Chief Minister has made a connection to the reason for suspending standing orders, so I cannot rule in your favour, Mr Mulcahy.

MR STANHOPE: I am making the case for why standing orders need to be suspended to allow this parliament, this Assembly, to debate what is certainly the most significant social issue faced by this community—namely, the fact that somewhere in the order of 30,000 Canberrans live in poverty. On the basis of advice and information we received this year, 13 per cent of Canberrans live in what can only euphemistically be described as, if not poverty, straightened circumstances. Some 13 per cent of us in a population of 340,000 live either below or near the poverty line, and of that 13 per cent, of that 40,000 people, the vast majority are women and children.

This is an important issue; there is no more important issue. The government's preferred position was to debate this matter yesterday. As a result of spurious motions moved by the Liberal Party yesterday, it was not possible for this matter to be debated yesterday when it was scheduled. It was on the program for yesterday. The opposition came into the place with a stunt. You denied the Assembly the opportunity of debating this issue yesterday. Is there a more important matter to be debated this week than this matter? There is not. We sought to debate it yesterday. You prevented that possibility. Today—this morning—is the next available opportunity for this Assembly to debate what is certainly the most significant social issue facing this community—namely, the opportunity or potential for people living beneath the poverty line to participate fully in the life of this community, and the need and the importance of the Assembly to show leadership, to show its interest and to show its determination to deal with this significant issue.

We know the Liberal Party does not care about people living in poverty. We know you prefer to pretend that nobody lives in poverty and that is not an issue you have to worry about. So, today you actually move to avoid the possibility of this Assembly debating poverty in Anti-Poverty Week. (*Time expired.*)

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (11.13): Mr Speaker, I hope that we do not spend too much time on deciding whether or not we are going to discuss this motion. I am supporting the suspension of standing orders. I understand where the Liberals are coming from in relation to this. This is private members' day and, as Mr Stanhope indicated during the adjournment debate yesterday, there is an element of revenge in bringing government business on today. Nonetheless, it is Anti-Poverty Week.

This is a really important issue, and it should have been discussed yesterday at the beginning of Anti-Poverty Week. I think it is churlish of the Liberals in this case to prolong the debate and to actually put off the time that we get onto their business. Let us just say that poverty is at least as important as health. Indeed, it is somewhat connected to it, and I am hoping that we get that recognition when we get onto the substantive debate. All I can say is bring it on.

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra—Leader of the Opposition) (11.14): This is not a stunt—I will start by simply saying I agree with the idea of debating the subject of the

motion. But the point that we are making, Mr Speaker, is that it is private members' day. The subject of the motion is a matter on which I would imagine a number of people would want to speak. The Chief Minister talks about yesterday. Yes, we brought on a motion to start with.

Mr Stanhope: And then at 5 o'clock you said you wanted five minutes to debate working families and took an hour.

MR STEFANIAK: There is no reason why this motion could not have been first up on the daily program.

Mr Stanhope: You asked for five minutes and took an hour.

MR STEFANIAK: That would have meant that when you shut down debate yesterday at about 5 minutes past 12—

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Mulcahy interjecting—

Mr Stanhope: You are the Liberal Party, Richard—you. You asked for five minutes and took one hour.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister, order, please.

MR STEFANIAK: When you shut down debate yesterday at about five minutes past 12, we would have debated your motion before lunch yesterday, Chief Minister. Because it is a motion by leave, you could have put it right up at the top of the list yesterday, and even after our so-called stunt—you cut it off anyway, our motion, at about five past twelve—we could then have debated this.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Stefaniak has the floor.

MR STEFANIAK: I actually do not know why it did not come on yesterday. It is beyond me, and really it is for the government to organise its business there.

Mr Stanhope: You weren't here, Bill. Ask your colleagues why it didn't come on.

MR STEFANIAK: I was attending to my sick wife.

Mr Stanhope: Ask your colleagues why it didn't come on, Bill. They know.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister.

MR STEFANIAK: As much as anything, if you had put this at the top of the list, it would have come on at five past 12 yesterday. Now, I would imagine a number of people want to speak to this. I actually do not know why we had a motion about

scrutiny report 46 of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs. At least that was brief, I suppose. But both of those motions would have been better off moved outside of private members' business, and that is what this day is.

Now, I have no problem—because you are going to stop private members' business at 6.00—if you want to stay and debate this at 6 o'clock. If you do not want to do that, you have my full support to put this on first up tomorrow before we do the bills. Let us do it then. Yes, it is important. We have a lot of important things on the agenda. Yes, this is something that should have been done yesterday, and, indeed, could have been done yesterday. I hear from some of my colleagues that you put it on today because of a fit of pique. Well, if that is so, that is not the right reason to do so. This is private members' day, and I would hope that all of our business is important here.

We will certainly be supporting the motion to be debated, and similar motions have been brought, I think, around this time each year, and they are important motions. But private members' day is also important. We have a number of notices of motion—I doubt very much if we are going to get to them all, and that is often the case. This Assembly, I think, has a pretty proud tradition in terms of allowing debate on private members' business, and it is only in fairly exceptional circumstances that we actually truncate that. I think we did that during the budget debate, for very good reason, but, in the normal course of events, private members' business should be allowed to run. That has been the tradition in this Assembly. There is no reason why this notice of motion cannot be done later today, if you want to extend the Assembly a bit at 6 o'clock, or, indeed, as I suggested just now, put it on first up for tomorrow, even before you do your bills, so we can have a good debate.

Mr Stanhope: Liberals refuse to debate poverty.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Stanhope: Liberal Party refuses to debate poverty.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister, order!

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Acting Minister for Health and Acting Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services) (11.17): Mr Speaker, it is very disappointing that the Liberal Party are not interested in debating a motion about poverty. This item has been on the agenda for a reasonable period of time. Notice has been given of this by the Chief Minister, and today is the key day in terms of the anti-poverty campaign. For the opposition to petulantly refuse leave is disappointing in the extreme. This should be an issue above politics; this should be an issue beyond petty manoeuvring in the Assembly. Why not allow this debate to come on? Why not allow this debate to come on now to give it the precedence it deserves, to give it the significance that it deserves in this place rather than try to manoeuvre for petty political advantage?

Mr Speaker, it is disappointing that what we have seen yesterday and now today is the opposition's refusal to allow this Assembly to be a workable legislature. We saw yesterday through their shenanigans and behaviour that executive business did not

commence until after 5.00 pm yesterday. Tuesdays are for government business—executive business—and what time did we get to executive business yesterday? I think it was not before 5.00 or 5.30 pm. In fact, I do not think we got to it at all. Not a single item of executive business was dealt with yesterday in the whole day that is supposed to be dedicated to executive business, including this item.

If we do not debate this motion today, we will be neglecting our responsibility to recognise the important efforts that many people in the community put in to addressing and alleviating poverty in our community. Why is the Liberal Party so afraid of talking about poverty? Why are they not prepared to engage in a debate which has been put on the agenda by the Chief Minister as one worthy of discussion and which is supported by the cross bench as being an important proposal? Why do you not do your business at 6 o'clock, Mr Stefaniak, if that is your view. Let us get this most significant motion on the agenda, and let us get on with it, Mr Speaker.

It is unreasonable on the part of those opposite to seek to delay and prevent this debate simply because they want to achieve some petty political advantage in terms of manoeuvring here in the Assembly. It is extremely disappointing that they have taken this course of action. I mean, imagine what ACTCOSS would think of this manoeuvre by the ACT Liberal Party. Imagine what the Council on the Ageing would think of this. Imagine what those organisations who are working every day on the issue of poverty in our community would think about the priority the Liberal Party are prepared to give to the poverty debate.

Why are you not prepared to give the poverty debate priority? That is the question. Why are you not prepared to accept what this side of the chamber and Dr Foskey are wanting to do, which is to see this proposal go forward, Mr Speaker. What is the problem with talking about poverty? What is the problem with talking about the significant issues faced by people in our community?

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8		Noes 5	
Mr Barr	Mr Gentleman	Mrs Burke	Mr Stefaniak
Mr Berry	Ms MacDonald	Mr Mulcahy	
Mr Corbell	Ms Porter	Mr Pratt	
Dr Foskey	Mr Stanhope	Mr Seselja	

The Speaker having declared that the motion had not been carried as an absolute majority of Members had not voted in its favour, as required by standing order 272—

Question so resolved in the negative.

Utilities (Network Facilities Tax) Repeal Bill 2007

Mr Mulcahy, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (11.26): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

It is my great pleasure to introduce into this Assembly the Utilities (Network Facilities Tax) Repeal Bill 2007, a bill to relieve a small part of the massive burden of taxation that has been imposed on ACT taxpayers by this government in its term of office. Despite the fact that revenues have been far above expected figures, the government has continued to show a substantial reluctance, indeed even obstinacy in the face of widespread complaints about the increasing levels of taxation in the ACT. It does therefore fall to the opposition to take the initiative and introduce a bill that would go some way towards reducing the tax burden in the territory—the tax burden on families and people on fixed incomes, ordinary Canberrans who have said that enough is enough.

By introducing this bill to the Assembly, I invite members of the government to reconsider their determination to tax away the incomes of Canberra families and instead join with the opposition in taking a first concrete step to smaller, less invasive, lower taxing government in the Australian Capital Territory—a position which the Liberal party in this territory is absolutely and solidly committed to.

The utilities (network facilities) tax, also known simply as the utilities tax, was introduced by the ACT government in the 2006-07 budget and came into effect in January 2007. The tax has applied to utility providers, including providers of water, electricity, gas and telecommunications services in the ACT. It is a clever tax, given the number of people who have now got internet connections and the like, and people are finding themselves hit on a whole manner of utilities when they receive their accounts.

The government conceded at the time that these costs would be passed on to ACT consumers. They certainly can be acknowledged as the initiators of that and their predictions have come to pass. However, the government have argued that the increased charges passed on to consumers as a result of this tax will better reflect the true cost of delivering services.

This is a meaningless argument. It is absurd for the government to talk about the true cost of services as they add a layer of taxation on top of the existing costs. Of course, as expected, this tax has increased the cost of utility services for ACT residents, adding more to their utility bills each year. This increase comes on top of the widespread increases in taxation introduced by the ACT Labor government, including the creation of the fire and emergency services levy and increases in the levels of rates and charges based on the wage price index.

In answer to a question on 31 May 2006, the Treasurer conceded that the introduction of the utilities tax would increase the costs of a range of services to ACT households. This included increases to the cost of water, sewerage, gas, electricity and telecommunication services, all as a result of the utilities tax. According to the Treasurer's figures, this has amounted to an additional \$131 in annual utility bills to the average ACT household.

It is only now that the people of Canberra are starting to work out what this tax is. I have been amazed at the number of people that have contacted my office, indeed the offices of my colleagues, who have said to us, "What is this? Is this a federal government tax? Is this something that Actew or Telstra have dreamed up?" When you tell them that it is the Stanhope Labor government dreaming up a new tax, people are just dismayed at the justification for this impost.

This came on top of increases in general rates due to changes in the 2006-07 ACT budget, which amounted to an average increase of \$97 per household in 2006-07 and \$141 per household in 2007-08. This also came on top of the fire and emergency services levy introduced in the 2006-07 budget, which amounted to an average of \$84 per household in 2006-07 and an average cost of \$87 per household in 2007-08.

The opposition has been critical of this government's philosophy of high tax and high spending. It has put a substantial burden on Canberra families. However, in addition to the fundamental problem of this big government mentality, there are also further economic inefficiencies in the utilities tax. By imposing this tax on the provision of particular services rather than spreading the tax over a wider base, this creates more economic inefficiency than alternate taxation schemes by changing the relative costs of services.

For individual consumers this change in relative prices creates what economists call a substitution effect in addition to the income effect of higher costs. This means that consumers change their behaviour in ways that are less preferable to them on the basis of the government's distortion of the market. There are many examples. People who may have multiple lines in their home will cancel a line and ordinary people who have anywhere to go in terms of reducing charges will start exploring those options.

The economic literature shows that this increases the distortionary cost or dead weight loss that results from such a tax even when compared to a broader tax that generates the same amount of revenue. This tax is clearly both excessive and economically inefficient and shows that the government has few standards in its insatiable grab from the wallets of ACT taxpayers.

It is revealing to contrast the attitude of the ACT government on taxation and the attitude of the Australian government. In a few years ACT residents, as well as Australians in general, have benefited from cuts in federal taxation. In particular, they have been able to keep more of their take-home pay as the Australian government has reduced the rates of income taxation and increased the brackets for assessment.

However, at a local level, the absolute opposite has been the case. ACT residents have been slugged with higher rates bills and higher bills for their utilities. Both the ACT

and federal governments have seen higher than expected revenues and better than expected economic performance, largely because of the important industrial changes undertaken by the Australian government. Earlier this week the federal Treasurer, the Hon Peter Costello, announced updated forecasts showing better than expected economic performance across Australia. His reaction to this new information has been the exact opposite—the exact opposite—of the reaction of the ACT Treasurer when he was presented with better than anticipated results at the end of the June quarter.

Far from ruling out tax cuts, as was recently done by Mr Stanhope under similar circumstances, the federal Treasurer announced that Australia's better than expected economic performance has given scope for tax cuts at the commonwealth level. He has announced a policy to reduce the rates of taxation over a five-year period and to increase the thresholds for tax brackets. This means that when the Australian government is re-elected in November, Australians will be able to look forward to tax cuts which will reduce the burden on their finances and allow them to take greater control of their own lives.

The pattern of management of economic matters under this government has been one of grab more and spend more. We see this in very, very sharp contrast to the actions of their federal colleagues. At the national level we have tax cuts worth \$34 billion for the next three years and a tax cut goal for five years which will see the top tax rate of 45 per cent on income above \$180,000 cut to 43 per cent on 1 July 2009, and then down to 42 per cent on 1 July 2010. Mr Costello has declared that he wants it eventually to fall to 40 per cent by 2012. It is interesting that the 30 per cent tax rate which applies for income between \$30,000 and \$75,000 will have its threshold changed to \$34,000 in 2009 and to \$37,000 by 2010.

All this is well and good, but it is a tragedy when the concessions that have been handed out by the Australian government under the Howard-Costello leadership are being eroded on a constant basis by the taxing mania of the ACT government: the utilities tax, the ambulance charge increases, the increases in rates, the increases in the fire and emergency services levy and the water abstraction charge. And the list goes on.

This is a situation that most Canberrans will find unacceptable, and I am confident that, come next October, when the people of Canberra have the opportunity to decide between the economic policies of the Stanhope government and the economic plan of the ACT Liberals, people will decide to go for the low taxing, prudently managed form of government as opposed to the high spending, wasteful and poorly managed style of government that has been a feature particularly of the last several years.

In the ACT where we have been fortunate due to the boom in construction, driven in no small way by the conduct of the commonwealth government and the developing of new departmental headquarters, this has created prosperity for numerous areas of activity in our city: architects, designers and those in the construction sector. It has created new retail opportunities that have enabled Canberra business entrepreneurs to develop new businesses. It has seen people come from interstate and set up business in Canberra, particularly in the Canberra Centre. All of these things are a direct consequence of sensible economic activity. But sensible economic activity also

recognises that the best spenders of people's money are those people themselves, not governments that are constantly wrenching dollars out of their pockets. We differentiate ourselves very clearly on this issue in the ACT.

The June quarterly accounts showed a \$90 million turnaround on the outcomes in ACT revenues, and the opposition made it very clear that we believe the additional funds should, in some part at least, be made available to the people of Canberra by way of tax reductions. They were told that the painful charges and taxes that came in in last year's budget were necessary because of the cost of services. We could not continue to deliver services at this level, Mr Stanhope said. People were expected to accept that with complete gullibility and buy the story that the territory, to function, to provide roads and hospitals and police could not operate without all of that extra money. Well, Mr Deputy Speaker, they were wrong. Mr Stanhope was wrong. His forecasting was wrong, and his forecasting has been wrong on every single budget that I have debated since being elected here in 2004.

You can live with a mistake here and there, but how can you be consistently wrong, consistently underestimating the taxation and therefore using that as a justification to put in more taxes and then, when your mistakes are constantly now a matter of public record, sit there and say "We're not going to pass back tax reductions to the people of Canberra"? It is a situation that I find indefensible. I find it quite shameful.

But we are not talking about giving money away here to a group of privileged people at the top end of the social scale. We are talking about ordinary people in Canberra. I have mentioned before that in this last period of holidays I heard the Chief Minister on talkback radio. He was really struggling to explain to a caller who came in and said, "My pension hasn't moved. Because of the low consumer price index my pension hasn't moved, but you, of course, have increased my charges." On top of that, they use a mechanism called the wage price index which means that your rate of charges are going up influenced by the overall average wages in the community, and in a city with the highest salaried people in Australia that will drive the wage price index up at a rate much greater than the CPI.

Now, I know that people on substantial six-figure incomes might say, "Well, who cares about \$130 here and there?" But if you are a person on a fixed income, if you are a family, particularly a single income family that is battling and struggling to make ends meet, all of these little outlays become quite significant. It may be the difference between them doing something with their children that they would like to do, something as simple as going out and getting them a bit of takeaway food on a Friday night. These are things that are important to ordinary people in Canberra, but not to this government. This government is saying, "We have made another windfall gain out of the tax regime. So what are we going to do? We are going to bring in another appropriation bill. When the ink is barely dry on the last budget, we are going to bring in another appropriation bill. We are going to spend more of your money." Why are they going to do it? Because they figure it is better for them to splash the cash around the city and spend it on programs that they can control in the best hope of rescuing this ailing government before the next election.

But the fact of the matter is that people are not as silly as this government would suggest. I think most people in this territory are becoming tired of poor management.

We are becoming tired of having a very, very significant tax burden thrown at our feet in the last year on the pretext that the territory needed the money. Well, we know from the outcomes and we know from the financial reports that this territory does not need this level of income, this level of revenue, and that it ought to be put back to the people who need it. There are people in this territory, many of whom I speak to, many of whom I deal with, particularly in the over 50 mark, who may not be cash rich, but they may be asset rich. The fact is that as their properties increase in value—and they have increased substantially in Canberra in the last five to seven years—many of those people are finding it a struggle to pay the rates bills because of the basis on which they are valued.

I am not suggesting that we completely upend the rating system. It is extremely complex and the various alternative approaches that are being put forward have left me unconvinced at this time. But one has to be cognisant of the fact that many people do struggle to pay those bills. You are not asking them, surely, at the age of 80, to sell off their home, pack it in and go somewhere else because their house has appreciated in value and they are struggling to pay their rates bills. I am aware that there are exemptions, but if you deal with older people in our community you understand that they have a fixation, in many cases, about leaving debt. They do not want to leave the debt for their children. They want to leave life with a clean slate, and whether or not that makes good economic sense, let us respect that individual view.

When we have got those pressures already on our senior citizens why go and make life worse for them by saying that for every utility you have got, Jon Stanhope's government is going to grab a bit more out of your pocket; he is going to apply a little bit more and make your life a little bit more difficult. Yes, I know that they can attach bills to the property and the like, but this is the distress that these taxes and charges cause people. You have to actually deal with older people on a regular basis to appreciate that those sorts of things become important issues.

I appeal to the government: go give back some of those surplus funds that they have at their disposal. They are aware that they have the capacity to redistribute some of this income that was inappropriately collected. This is a simple measure. It has been fully and thoroughly costed. It is within the capacity of ACT finances. It will not, as Mr Stanhope attempted to spin doctor yesterday, drive us into a state of deficit. It is, in fact, a measure that is quite responsible. It is in the order of about \$16.5 million in revenue that will be forgone, but what an enormous message it would send to the people of Canberra to say, "Look, we in this territory, we in this Assembly collectively are of the view that we should not be unreasonably taxing you. We should not be taking funds out of your pockets when we really do not need to."

Look at the revenue that has come in on conveyancing and the like. I know that there is a boom period ahead for the next couple of years in terms of construction activity. I have talked to property lawyers in this town and they tell me that right through until at least 2009-10 we will continue to see this level of economic activity. That is not to mention what the commonwealth government is doing in terms of job creation that the Howard government has committed to as part of its next forward program. When we have all these factors, when we have these positive indicators we know that there is a compelling and convincing argument to deliver tax relief for the people of Canberra.

I urge members opposite to think about this and think about what they could do in terms of the integrity of taxing and the budget process. Follow what has happened at the commonwealth level and hand back taxes to people. The Australian government announced \$34 billion in tax cuts this week. That is what it is about. Let people enjoy the benefits of economic prosperity. Let people enjoy the benefits that we are achieving with so many being in the workforce. The unemployment level is as low as 2.5 per cent in this city, the lowest level of unemployment of any centre in Australia.

This government purports to be concerned about all these people, the retirees, those on fixed incomes and the single families. It talks about a poverty trap and then the money is ripped straight back off them when interest rates go up. In fact, the poverty talk is rhetoric. It is nothing but rhetoric because when you get the chance to help people who are struggling, when you get the chance to support this particular bill, you run for cover because it is not your idea.

Mr Barr: Maybe the commonwealth could invest in health and education.

MR MULCAHY: It is not your idea and you would rather spend it on parties in parks and crazy and extravagant ideas such as million dollar icons and works of art on Northbourne Avenue. Labor purports to represent the ordinary battlers. They do not represent the interests of those people. They show no willingness to take up their cause. If you are concerned about poverty, go out to people who are unemployed, people who are struggling to make ends meet, people from split households. You say you are concerned about poverty, but you want to tax them all heavily on their electricity and their power and their phone. Mr Barr should have the courage to go to those people and tell them about his idea to tax their home with capital gains tax. In his first speech he declared that he wants to tax the family home. This is what Labor is about—high taxation, but little genuine concern for the disadvantaged.

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

Public Hospital Board Bill 2007

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

Title read by Clerk.

MRS BURKE (Molonglo) (11.47): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

It is my great pleasure to present the Public Hospital Board Bill 2007 today. The Liberal opposition at least is attempting to tackle very difficult issues within our public hospital system. By the government's own admission, and contrary to their original assertions that the woes of the hospitals are about money and, more lately, beds, the major issues facing our public hospitals are systemic management issues. Funny, that! I have been saying that in this place and publicly for months.

Mr Mulcahy: And acknowledged now by Mr Stanhope.

MRS BURKE: Absolutely, Mr Mulcahy. It has been acknowledged now in this chamber and more publicly. It is important that the people of Canberra can have faith in our public hospital system. They need to see successful outcomes when they visit the emergency department or have elective surgery or, more lately, have oral and maxillofacial surgery.

On 9 October 2007, the Chief Minister said:

There are clinical issues and staffing and systemic issues that we need to address—investigate closely ... These are the processes we need to go through. To get bogged down in a deep debate about, oh well, this is about bed numbers or money really belies perhaps some of the systemic issues that need to be investigated.

We totally concur with those comments. These comments actually go to the heart of my reasons for wanting to establish hospital boards in the ACT, in particular a board to oversee the running of the Canberra Hospital.

We can learn from past challenges. This bill is about trying to reverse the gradual decline in the overall management of the public hospital system here in the ACT, in particular at the Canberra Hospital. The Chief Minister and the Acting Minister for Health have now openly acknowledged the many problems that have emerged. The Canberra Hospital caters for around 520,000 people in the ACT and our region. They deserve better than to be constantly faced with systemic problems that are now threatening the very fibre of our hospitals and, worse still, threatening lives.

The current minister has been quoted as saying that “ACT hospitals had an independent board system in the 1990s but it was abolished because it did not work”. That is a total distortion of the facts. Let us have the facts. The fact is that Jon Stanhope abolished the board in 2002. Why? It is because he is an ideologue. His ideology opposed independence, and he also obviously wants his government and his health minister, Katy Gallagher, to be as far away from the coalface as they possibly can be. Who will they put on the front line—a senior bureaucrat? Now, that is brave.

The Chief Minister and the current health minister, Katy Gallagher, would rather let these bureaucrats take the fall for their inability to lead and manage. Jon Stanhope imposed a bureaucratic regime on the then Woden Valley Hospital, which ever since has proved to be a cumbersome disaster, wreaking havoc on helpless staff, from nurses right through to ancillary and auxiliary staff, and patients.

We are not just talking about the dedicated medical staff, surgeons, general practitioners, pathologists, VMOs and the like. We are talking about the very dedicated nurses that we all acknowledge in this place—the wardsmen, emergency support staff and administrators. These many ancillary staff contribute to the fine web that makes up an efficient functioning public facility. Sadly, the management is letting every one of these people down at every level. Of course, they are not just going to throw their hands up and run off.

Since Jon Stanhope stamped his ideology and bias on the system more than five years ago, there has been an unprecedented increase in waiting times, waiting lists for

elective surgery and an exponential tally of mishaps and inefficiencies. My office has received a steady stream of calls. My colleagues have received the same types of calls from friends and families documenting these problems. The most recent are some serious, serious issues raised in regard to the less than optimal surgical outcomes for oral and maxillofacial surgery. Three health ministers in this government have known all along about these issues. What have they done? Nothing!

In his political comment in a recent edition of *City News*, Michael Moore—

Mr Hargreaves: Ha, ha!

Mr Barr: He's really unbiased. There is an authoritative source—a former health minister in the Liberal government.

Mr Corbell: A former Liberal health minister.

MRS BURKE: Those opposite laugh and scoff. Mr Moore is a former health minister in the Carnell government. He writes:

The board was able to monitor hospital performance—

That is interesting. That is perhaps what you do not want:

and provide sound advice to the hospital executive on a wide range of matters.

You would rather have it so narrow, so enclosed, and so internally focused—

Mr Corbell: Nonsense.

MRS BURKE: It is not nonsense, and you know it is not.

Mr Corbell: It is complete nonsense. More bureaucracy from the Liberals.

MRS BURKE: They advised on a wide range of matters. Mr Moore goes on to say:

People of great talent and—

Mr Corbell: No new beds, but more bureaucracy.

MRS BURKE: Mr Corbell, if you would shut up and listen, the chief health officer—

Mr Corbell: No new beds, but more bureaucracy.

MRS BURKE: Mark Cormack was non-committal. If you read his transcript from ABC radio—

Mr Corbell: Just another layer of bureaucracy, Mrs Burke.

MRS BURKE: You will find out that Mark Cormack has not dammed this like you are doing.

Mr Corbell: Just another layer of bureaucracy—more public servants, more bureaucracy.

MRS BURKE: You are afraid of this, Katy Gallagher is afraid of this and Jon Stanhope is afraid of this.

Mr Corbell: Where are your extra beds? How many extra beds have you pledged to put into the hospital?

MRS BURKE: I take a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Corbell: How many extra beds have you pledged to put into the hospital?

MR SPEAKER: Order! Maintain order, please.

MRS BURKE: Thank you. Mr Moore continues:

People of great talent and wide-ranging experience—

Mr Corbell: How many beds are you going to commit to the hospital?

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Corbell: No more beds from the Liberals. Zero.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mrs Burke, resume your seat.

MRS BURKE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. They are very touchy at the moment.

MR SPEAKER: Members of the government will maintain order.

MRS BURKE: Mr Moore's article continues:

People of great talent and wide-ranging experience made a considerable contribution in a range of ways. These included health specialists as well as Peter McPhillips, then managing partner of Deloitte, who was chairman—

Are you going to laugh at him? That is interesting. Mr Moore continues:

former Tax Commissioner Trevor Boucher and one time nurses' union leader Pru Power.

Let us laugh at them:

Bureaucracy multiplied—

Mr Corbell: Yes, and what did Pru Power say about hospital beds? Did you read her article?

MRS BURKE: Well, she is on your side. She is bound to vote for you, isn't she?

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Corbell!

MRS BURKE: Mr Moore writes:

Bureaucracy multiplied when the board was closed down—

Fancy that:

cost increased and the quality of service deteriorated.

This is a critical point. Many observers and commentators are now agreeing with this view. We have become excessively bureaucratised in just about every area of government, as Mr Stefaniak pointed out this week, and no more so than in the health system and within the hospital system. You have just left the head of health to flounder. You have just pushed him out there into the front—

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Burke, direct your comments through the chair.

MRS BURKE: whereas a board would allow a range of people. Ultimately the problem is that the government do not want to take responsibility. They do not want to be held accountable. The establishment of a board to oversee public hospital budgets is essential to the delivery of a health system that will deliver on all fronts, both fiscal and medical. But at the forefront should be patient care. Fancy that. We seem now to be so bogged down in process and bureaucracy that patients seem to be the last people we think of. It is essential to have much tighter oversight of exactly where the money is going to ensure openness and accountability, rather than this somewhat opaque system that this government is now adopting.

This bill will emphasise the contributions that could be made by not only medical professionals but other experienced and concerned citizens from every level of the community. Members will be appointed by the minister—perhaps that is what he does not like; perhaps he does not want to have his hands near this—and comprise the following members: a visiting medical officer, a member of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and a member of the medical training sector.

It will also variously have a member with substantial experience from each of the finance, business and legal sectors, to be appointed by the minister. In addition, it will have a pastoral care worker and a representative of the consumers' health forum. The Chief Executive Officer of ACT Health will also be a member of the board, although he or she would not be entitled to hold the office of chair. The chair will be appointed by the minister for a period of 12 months and the board members will be appointed for a period of three years.

I agree with my federal Liberal party colleague, Tony Abbott, who sees that in most states and territories public hospitals are run directly by state bureaucracies and report to head office, usually through a convoluted public service hierarchy. As I have said in this place, we have seen every state and territory take an absolutely ham-fisted approach to managing public hospitals. I do not know what it is and I do not know why, but clearly we are coming up with a solution to try and tackle some of the major

systemic problems in our public hospital system. All this lot opposite can do is scoff. They have got absolutely no answers at all.

The Liberal opposition prefers an approach that devolves the management and governance of a hospital from that of bureaucratic oversight to an appointed board of management with a balance of necessary administrative and clinical knowledge and skills from across the community. Public hospitals are for the public. Why, then, should not the public have more of a say and be more represented? The hospital, through its chairman, will report directly to the minister, who will remain ultimately politically accountable. That is the thing, because currently they are not. Currently, these ministers, Katy Gallagher, Jon Stanhope and Simon Corbell, simply refuse to be held accountable for anything.

The CEO of the hospital will report, first and foremost, to his or her board and it is the board that will take key decisions in the policy and financial framework set by government, thus ensuring good and safe clinical practice and good patient outcomes. A board based approach will promote better decision making and a greater level of scrutiny and accountability. It will bring those who run the hospital much closer to the community that it serves and whose lives its decisions affect. Is that not what you want? Clearly, it is not.

I want to see our hospitals run well. We have more money in our health budget since self-government and yet we do not see the consistent improvements that should be made with the amount of money going into the system. Why not? Clearly—and it has been admitted by the government—it is a management problem, so we need to fix that. A board-based approach will bring those who run the hospital much closer to the community that it serves and whose lives the decisions affect. That can only improve patient care and community satisfaction. I commend the bill to the house.

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

Education—senior secondary system

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (12.01): I move:

That this Assembly notes:

- (1) the ACT's senior secondary system has a high success rate in delivering quality educational outcomes for the young people of the ACT;
- (2) the review commissioned in 2005 by the ACT Government conducted by Atelier Learning Solutions Pty Ltd into Government Secondary Colleges, specifically:
 - (a) that consultation was undertaken in all colleges and three high schools including forums, meetings and surveys;
 - (b) the review made 14 recommendations over a wide range of areas impacting on colleges; and

- (c) that the review acknowledges the strength of the ACT college system, but highlighted the challenges that face students, teachers and principals in our changing society and the need to work to address those challenges to provide the best possible future environment; and
- (3) that as a result of the Atelier Review, the Government will be releasing a business plan to take the ACT's colleges forward.

In the 2005-06 budget, the government announced that it would undertake a review of the ACT college system. The review was asked to identify opportunities and strategies to ensure that the system is well placed to address the educational and welfare needs of students in the 21st century; investigate current practices in the ACT secondary colleges in relation to the suitability and relevance of courses and evaluate approaches and provide a range of options for future practice; and examine the extent to which effective teaching strategies and student support structures are used by colleges and college teachers in meeting the full range of student educational needs. The review was to be informed by current system data and contemporary literature.

The January 2006 report of this review made a series of recommendations about how the system could be improved. Interestingly, the report noted that much of the philosophical underpinnings of the Campbell report, which had been the original shaper of the college system, remained current. The minister instructed the Department of Education and Training to facilitate a series of meetings with an advisory group of interested stakeholders so that this group could provide advice about the implementation of the report.

The advisory group provided findings in May 2006 indicating that they supported all but two of the 14 recommendations made in the report. These were recommendation 4, which called for the establishment of a post-compulsory advisory board, and recommendation 8, which called for significant change in the way semester 1 in year 11 operates in colleges and the subjects available to year 11 students. The department was then directed to implement the remainder of the recommendations.

One of the key comments in the review was that a business or strategic plan should be developed. This is picked up in part by recommendation 1. Throughout the latter part of 2006, the department and college principals worked together to develop the ACT college business plan 2007-09, which responds to the recommendations of the report and maps them against the department's strategic plan. The ACT college business plan 2007-09 has been a significant driver of planning in and across ACT government colleges since late 2006.

Key targets have been identified within the plan which will allow the implementation of the review's recommendations. These are that students who are at risk of non-completion of secondary education are identified early and have case management; that student pathway planning is embedded across the curriculum; that the ACT college system contributes to the achievement of the ACT social plan goals for retention; that quality learning and teaching are evident in all classrooms; that college and high school teachers teach across the sectors; that high school teachers are involved in college course development; that all courses delivered in the college

sector are challenging, engaging and connected to students' needs and interests; that action inquiry and learning, connected to systems priorities, is a focus of professional development for college teachers; that executive teachers see educational leadership as their primary role; that an operational agreement is drafted between the CIT and the department to identify and articulate opportunities and define procedural arrangements; that opportunities to enhance the relationship between the college system and broader educational and business communities are identified, fostered and acted upon; that all colleges maintain registered training organisation status; that students complete their year 11 and 12 courses in flexible ways and in flexible locations; that colleges are driven by a systems approach under the umbrella of the ACT colleges plan; and that colleges work collaboratively to market public education across the ACT.

These targets are supported with action plans which spread responsibility for the supervision and implementation of the activities across the whole college sector. These plans identify activities for principals, school leaders at bands B and C and level 1 teachers. Progress towards achieving the outcomes of the ACT colleges business plan is monitored on a monthly basis at college principal sector meetings and through principal professional appraisal.

There have been a number of significant achievements already enacted throughout 2007. A transitional officer position has been trialled at the Canberra college and its cluster high schools to assist the movement of students between years 10 and 11. The transitional officer is a high school teacher from one of the priority enrolment area high schools attached to the college. This teacher works with students from the high school in their year 11, making links between them, their teachers and their new environment.

High school teachers comment that this has broadened their understanding of the college sector and allowed them to take their new knowledge back to high school settings to share with their colleagues. In terms of the impact of students so far, the evidence suggests that this program is working effectively to reduce the dropout rate between years 11 and 12 for those students involved in the trial project. This is also being trialled in Copland college and its cluster high schools, and an evaluation of the pilot program is being finalised.

The review noted the need for students to make a seamless transition between school and the broader community. The department is working with the University of Canberra to identify areas of innovation which will be of benefit to college students. This will build on the strong collaboration that already exists between Lake Ginninderra college and the university.

Three colleges in southern Canberra have formed the Brindabella collegiate and are developing a number of collaborative strategies, these reflecting the desirability of flexible opportunities for students, greater consistency and understanding about teaching and learning, and system-wide initiatives focused on renewal and improvement. A common timetable has been introduced and staff have met for professional development. Principals and executive staff of the collegiate meet regularly and an executive conference was held at the beginning of 2007.

A deputy principal coordinator has been appointed to manage the program. This position is jointly funded by the colleges involved. The colleges are currently mapping their staffing needs for 2008 with a view to offering more flexible cross-campus opportunities for staff and students. Canberra businesses, through the chamber of commerce and the master builders association, have strong partnerships with the department and its schools.

In addition, and as a result of the capabilities being rolled out through the government's upgrade of ICT facilities in schools, the collegiate has undertaken an innovative learning project. This has allowed for an exchange of resources via myclasses and online lessons and for multimedia to be shared using ClickView. Teachers are using the quality teaching framework and are collaboratively designing units for maths, science and English.

The ANU secondary college program continues as a successful opportunity for students in years 11 and 12 across the whole of the ACT. The program is in its second year and delivers highly challenging maths, physics and chemistry courses for gifted students enrolled in both government and non-government schools. The courses are delivered on the ANU premises by teachers employed by the ACT government school sector. This is a unique program across Australia, because it delivers to both government and non-government students in the same classroom.

The government is also addressing other report recommendations. The third annual all-colleges professional development day will be conducted in February 2008, addressing recommendation 2. A revised approach to the development of courses has been adopted in 2007, which ensures the participation of staff from all colleges, addressing recommendation 6.

Colleges across the ACT are beginning the implementation of a tool called transformation of learning. This is a student feedback mechanism which identifies for teachers areas in which they might improve their practice to ensure greater student engagement. This explicitly addresses the part of the report which reflects on the relevance of courses and course delivery to students.

The report gives considerable attention to vocational education and training. One of the first steps that the minister has undertaken is to ensure that the department's structure reflects the importance of VET in the college system. Recommendations 1 and 7 propose the development of a career and transitional framework. I am happy to report that this is underway.

The department has been working closely with the CIT to promote more extensive and effective collaboration as outlined in recommendation 7. Significant work has occurred in the past 18 months. Early this year a joint professional development activity was conducted. College and CIT teachers travelled to Newcastle to view WorldSkills mock international competition and Try'aTrade event. It is hoped that schools will begin to be involved in the WorldSkills program in the future. A new certificate IV in training and assessment has been introduced which involves college and high school teachers attending CIT to gain this qualification. Additionally, a certificate III in plumbing has been introduced for students in 2007.

The Breakthrough 500 Conference on Australian school-based apprenticeships was successfully run in May 2007, with the aim of creating 500 new apprenticeships in 2007. Through 2007, the ASBA reference group has continued to meet and monitor the progress towards this target. As part of the community engagement, ASBA OnLine was launched in 2007.

As part of a comprehensive approach to VET in secondary schooling, high school VET course development will involve colleges and, where appropriate, CIT representatives. High school teachers have been encouraged to engage in college course writing. College VET course development processes have been amended to align with mainstream course writing processes. A combined colleges VET forum has been established for VET coordinators from each of the government colleges to meet and share strategies and issues associated with training organisation registration. This enhances collaborative practice and understanding across colleges as recommended in the review's text. In addition, Canberra businesses have been working with us on these matters.

It is clear that this government is committed to the ongoing renewal of our college system and is taking active steps to ensure that we maintain and improve the college system. I urge the minister to fully implement the ACT college business plan 2007-09 and I call on all Assembly members to support this motion.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo) (12.13): Firstly, I would like to flag that my colleague Vicki Dunne will be moving an amendment to this motion when she returns. In relation to the motion generally, it is an okay motion, I suppose, as far as it goes, but Mrs Dunne will be moving some substantive amendments that we believe will improve the motion. I will flag some of those in a moment.

The first thing I would say is this. Ms Porter touched on the words "ongoing renewal" of the college system in the territory. I believe that similar words were used by Mr Barr when he decided to rip the heart out of the ACT government education system.

When we talk about education in this place and when the Labor Party brings forward motions on education, we need to cast our minds back and go to the record of this government on education—the record of what it says and what it in fact does. We know that this government—the Labor Party—hates non-government schools. It does not support the non-government system; we have seen that at its conference.

We know that there is only one side of politics—the Liberal Party—that supports both government and non-government education. That is crystal clear. There is only one side of politics in this place that supports government education and non-government education. We know what those opposite think about non-government schools; we saw that at their conference. No doubt at the next conference the motion will be successful and we will see further de-funding of non-government schools by the ACT government.

The great betrayal came from this government in relation to government education. The Labor Party went to the last election promising not to close any schools. The

education minister at the time said to the people of Canberra that there would be no school closures in this term of government.

Mr Gentleman: No, she didn't.

MR SESELJA: Through a spokesman. Mr Gentleman interjects—but through a spokesman, uncorrected ever.

MR SPEAKER: Never mind the interjections; make your comments through the chair.

MR SESELJA: Uncorrected ever. The minister, through a spokesman, said, “We will not close schools; it is those Liberals who will close schools. Don't worry. Vote Labor and we won't close any of your schools.” We saw what a complete lie that was. Eighteen months after the election they turned around and announced plans to close 40 schools, with an eventual decision to close 23 schools. That was one of the great betrayals of the people of the ACT.

When we talk about credibility on education, we have to start with that. We have to start with this promise by the ACT Labor Party, going into the last election, that it would not be closing any schools in this term of government. It turned around and betrayed that promise—betrayed the people of Canberra, betrayed the government education system in this town and turned around 18 months later with a decision for massive school closures and the massive disruption that goes with that.

Those opposite did not even have the decency to put that plan on the table before the election and allow people to decide whether they wanted massive numbers of government schools closed in the ACT. They did not have the decency to do it; they did not have the courage to do it. Everything they say on education and every promise that they make on education in the future need to be seen in that light—in the light of that massive betrayal, that massive fraud that was perpetrated prior to and after the 2004 ACT election.

The opposition acknowledges the need to pay careful attention to the results of this review, particularly to the 14 recommendations. It is worth going through some of those recommendations. Recommendation 1 is:

That the Department of Education and Training develops a strategic agenda for continuous improvement across colleges that incorporates a career and transition framework, with relevant targets and accountability processes.

That recommendation in particular and many other recommendations seem like commonsense recommendations to me. We would expect that many of them would be taken up by this government. You would think that much of this would be there already, particularly in relation to recommendation 1. Recommendation 2 is:

That the Department of Education and Training ensures that colleges are engaged in system-wide initiatives focused on renewal and improvement processes.

That seems sensible. Recommendation 3 is:

That the Department of Education and Training establishes appropriate structural linkages between high schools and colleges in order to improve the quality of student transition.

Once again, that seems like common sense. Recommendation 4 is:

That the Department of Education and Training works with other providers to establish a post-compulsory advisory body as a basis for strategic advice to Government on developing seamless educational provision in the post-compulsory years.

Recommendation 5 is:

That the Department of Education and Training develops a systemic approach to the range of provision across colleges to ensure that students are able to undertake specialist studies through flexible arrangements.

And it goes on. Recommendation 6 is:

That the development of all courses be undertaken by expert teacher teams, accessing a wide range of understanding about students' educational needs, and available for use in all colleges.

Recommendation 7 is:

That the Department of Education and Training identifies and addresses systemic impediments that may prevent more extensive and effective collaboration between the ACT college system and CIT in developing and developing VETiS programs, as an essential part of strategic career and transition initiatives.

Recommendation 8 is an interesting one, an important one. It is:

That:

- semester one in Year 11 engages students on a full-time basis, and addresses "essential areas of learning" comparable across colleges
- Year 11 becomes a foundational year which students choose from groupings of subjects, with Year 12 enabling increased capacity for further study in specialised areas.

Recommendation 9 is:

That there be a re-conceptualisation of Accredited courses, such that they:

- have the strongest possible "authentic" learning component
- meet the learning needs of students taking career and transition pathways that do not immediately include university study
- complement Vocational courses.

That is particularly important—that we see the complementation of vocational courses. We need to move to a model where vocational training is valued more highly than it has been in the past. That is now starting to be acknowledged at all levels of government. That is an important initiative that we need to continue to build on. We do not want to see a situation where the overwhelming emphasis of years 11 and 12 is on kids who go on to university. That is going to be an extremely important part of it—we want to see high levels of university entrants from the ACT; I am sure we will continue that—but for many of our students that is simply not what they want; that is not the career path they want. It is just as legitimate for them to seek a trade or other technical qualifications with which to pursue their career.

I note what the federal government has had to say on this issue, but it is important that we continue to emphasise that we value vocational training and technical training, and that we do not see them as somehow lesser than a university education. A university education is very important, but technical training is increasingly important. We want to see that enhanced; and that recommendation is important to that end. Recommendation 10 is:

That approaches to assessment in the senior years curriculum give greater emphasis to comparability and to reliable, rigorous and innovative moderation processes.

Once again, that is very important. It is something that the Liberal Party has been talking about for some time. We need to have some comparisons—some objective comparisons. That is an important recommendation. Recommendation 11 is:

That consideration be given to structural arrangements that will enable greater continuity of curriculum provisions for students in ACT schools and colleges.

Once again some of these are fairly commonsense. Recommendation 12 is:

That the Department of Education and Training facilitates and supports an action research model, professional learning for college teachers and executive staff.

Recommendation 13 is:

That the Department of Education and Training develops a high school-to-college transition program that provides for the case management of students at risk of not completing a full 13 years of schooling or its equivalent.

Once again, we would need to look at some of the costings in that. Recommendation 14 is:

That the Department of Education and Training establishes explicit targets in relation to the implementation of pathways planning in colleges to ensure that students' educational needs are appropriately met.

Many of these are commonsense recommendations. Most, if not all, should be considered by this government and taken forward.

As I said, Mrs Dunne will be bringing forward some amendments in relation to some of this. I note that, while the government motion highlights the proposed business plan to take the education system forward, the recommendations ask for a strategic agenda, as I have outlined. I think that the implementation of a strategic agenda is necessary. Unfortunately, that has not been the case with much of the way education has been handled in the territory in recent years, in particular when we talk about a strategic agenda—

Mr Barr: If you had paid any attention, you would have noticed that it was released some time ago, but never let the facts get in the way of a bit of rhetoric.

MR SESELJA: Once again, we have Mr Barr getting a bit sensitive on this. There was the *Towards 2020* proposal, which was dreamed up in five minutes after he became education minister and was adopted holus-bolus. The decision to close 23 schools was clearly not strategic; it was reactive. It was a reaction to the functional review. It was not well thought through. They did not think through all of the consequences. What they did was react to a situation where they had allowed spending to get out of control in areas. The knee-jerk reaction in that case was to close many of our schools.

I reiterate that the decent thing for the Labor Party to have done in that situation would have been to level with the people of Canberra, be honest with the people of Canberra and take to an election their plan to rip the heart out of the ACT government education system. If they had done that and they had won an election on the back of that, we would have had to respect that as being the will of the people of Canberra. But they did not give the people of Canberra that opportunity.

All we hear from Mr Barr on this is: “Well, we had this many meetings and we had consultation.” It is well and good to consult, but there is only one real way of consulting, and that is at an election. That is the only way that the people of Canberra can actually have a say. It is well and good for them to have a say and for the government to reject it, but an election is where they get to decide. We, as major parties, have a responsibility to be honest with the electorate when we go—

Mr Barr: Would you apply that criterion to the WorkChoices legislation?

MR SESELJA: Mr Barr always likes to refer to federal issues when he is under a bit of pressure.

Mr Barr: All right; I’ll give you a local example.

MR SESELJA: He is somehow justifying the lie of the last election by pointing to other levels of government.

Mr Barr: Let me give you a local example.

MR SESELJA: Stand on your record, Mr Barr; stand on your record. Don’t try and shift blame somewhere else.

Mr Barr: Bill Stefaniak: Charnwood high closed on a month's notice. That is my local example—from your leader.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR SESELJA: Do not try and shift blame.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Barr, cease interjecting, please.

MR SESELJA: Mr Speaker, he is sensitive on this issue, because he had to perpetrate the fraud with the closure of the 23 schools. We had the previous education minister—

MR SPEAKER: You should withdraw that.

MR SESELJA: Sorry; I withdraw that, Mr Speaker. The misleading of the people of the ACT in the 2004 election was completed by this minister, who came in and was told, "You've got to go and close the schools, Mr Barr. You need to go and close the schools." Mr Barr can try and shift blame elsewhere, but the reality is that it was this government that misled the people of the ACT. They misled them on one of the fundamental areas of alleged concern that the Labor Party talks about. If there is anything the Labor Party claims to stand for, it is the area of public education. And on that core issue—where, over time, many in our electorate did trust the Labor Party, did believe the Labor Party—people were betrayed.

When the issue of whether or not there would be any school closures was publicly canvassed, Mr Pratt, to his credit, put it out there and said, "Yes, there may need to be some mergers. Yes, it is possible that you could see some school closures." What did the government say to that? "We won't be closing any schools. We won't be closing any schools—not in this term." The next day an article went on to suggest that it would not happen in Ms Gallagher's time in politics. Some five, 10 or 15 years down the track, who knows? But they had the gall to go to the electorate on a falsehood—an absolute falsehood—saying that they would not close schools.

Anything they do on education now and any promises they make on education need to be seen in that light. They need to be seen in the light that they misled the people of the ACT. They did not have the courage to tell them the truth prior to the election, and they stand condemned for that. No amount of consultation, no amount of weasel words and no amount of "We need to do this" protestations from Mr Barr can change the fact that they fundamentally misled the people of the ACT on a massive area of public importance. They misled them.

We know that they do not support non-government education. We have now seen their contempt for government education. Only one side of politics in the ACT is committed to both government and non-government education, and that is the ACT Liberal Party.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.28 to 2.30 pm.

**Questions without notice
Health—oral and maxillofacial surgery**

MR STEFANIAK: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, in 2002, in your capacity as health minister, you commissioned Mr Mick Reid, the immediate past Director General of Health for New South Wales, to undertake a major review of the delivery of health services in the ACT. On page 25 of his report on the review, Mr Reid stated:

There are no arrangements in Canberra for oral maxillofacial surgery, often resulting in less than optimal management of trauma cases.

Chief Minister, in light of Mr Reid's comment, what action did you take at that time to fix this problem.

MR STANHOPE: I will take the question on notice, Mr Speaker.

MR STEFANIAK: We talked about this yesterday. Supplementary—

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question?

MR STEFANIAK: You might take that on notice, too, then. Chief Minister, while you are taking that on notice, would you indicate what follow-up action, if any, you have taken since 2002 to ensure that appropriate access to oral maxillofacial surgery is available in the ACT?

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think, first and foremost in relation to follow-up action, what this government has done is correct the negligence of the previous government in relation to the provision of appropriate funding for health care. And that, of course, is reflected in the fact that since we took government six years ago we have increased funding for public health in the ACT by in excess of \$300 million across the board.

One other area, of course, in relation to dental care and mouth care and issues around oral maxillo is that we have sought to redress the shocking circumstance that Canberrans, particularly those that rely on public health facilities in relation to dentistry, faced. As I have said, I think the most mean-spirited, if not vicious, action the Howard Liberal government have taken in their 11 years in government was to completely slash funding for public dentistry.

Mrs Dunne: I have a point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR STANHOPE: Mean spirited is too nice in the context of what it was that the Liberals have done in relation to dental health.

Mrs Dunne: I now have two points of order, Mr Speaker. One is about the behaviour of the Chief Minister who will not take his seat when people take points of order, in

contravention of the standing orders. I would like you to draw his attention to the standing orders in relation to that because he is a serial offender.

More to the point of the question, the question was: what action have you taken since 2002 to ensure that appropriate access to oral maxillofacial surgery is available in the ACT? So to wax lyrical and wide about what the commonwealth has done is not appropriate.

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

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am more than happy to do that. For the Liberal Party to suggest that issues around dental care and dental health are irrelevant to any discussion around oral maxillo really illustrates the level and the depth of the embarrassment that the ACT Liberals have in relation to the actions of their colleagues in the federal parliament. In their first budget, back in 1996-97, John Howard and Peter Costello slashed funding for public dentistry across Australia by, I think, of the order of \$200 million.

Mrs Burke: I have a point of order.

MR STANHOPE: We, as the government, have sought—

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

Mrs Burke: Again, I remind the Chief Minister, through you, Mr Speaker, that he must observe the standing orders, like all of us in this house. The point of order is under 118 (b) as well: the relevance of the matter. We asked the Chief Minister what he has done, follow-up action post 2002, to ensure that appropriate access to oral maxillofacial surgery is available in the ACT.

MR SPEAKER: And the Chief Minister was drawing a connection between dental care and that sort of surgery.

MR STANHOPE: And that is a very legitimate connection to draw. The Liberal Party now, because of their embarrassment in relation to the savage cuts by their colleagues federally in relation to public dentistry, are embarrassed to have the question answered. They are embarrassed because of their complicity in the most mean-spirited, if not vicious, decision taken by John Howard and Peter Costello in relation to healthcare delivery in Australia—the slashing. I think in the first budget it was of the order of \$200 million that was taken out of public dentistry by the Howard government.

The states and territories had sought to close the gap. Indeed, in our last budget, as we continue to seek to close the gap in relation to available care and facilities for people on the dentistry list, we provided an additional \$1.7 million. That was just in this year's budget, seeking to close the gap in another area of health care completely abandoned by the federal Liberal Party.

In relation to this particular issue of oral maxillo, the shadow minister for health, of course, provided some information in relation to Mrs Burke's press release. In relation

to the press release, it must be said—and one regrets the need to have to say it—the shadow minister for health felt the need to rush down here during the adjournment debate last night to put something on the public record, because she knew what she was saying was defamatory. I think, Mr Speaker, in the context of an abuse of the standing orders and an abuse of privilege, the efforts of the shadow minister for health last night, rushing in here after 6 o'clock, to lay on the record—

Mrs Burke: Oh, we are touchy, aren't we?

MR STANHOPE: I am not touchy about it, but I do have a serious issue about the extent to which members, Mrs Burke most particularly in this case, seek, through parliamentary privilege, inappropriately to cover themselves against defamatory statements which they then go out into the public, outside this place, to make in relation to medical practitioners. I would be extremely surprised if there is not a note in the mail to Mrs Burke and perhaps to the *Canberra Times* in relation to the, quite clearly, defamatory imputations—

Mrs Burke: Of whom?

MR SPEAKER: I warn you, Mrs Burke.

MR STANHOPE: that are contained in some of the remarks that have been made by Mrs Burke in relation to alleged incompetence by identifiable specialists at the Canberra Hospital as a result of the remarks she made in this place and outside this place yesterday. (*Time expired.*)

Health—oral and maxillofacial surgery

MRS BURKE: My question is to the Acting Minister for Health, Mr Corbell—or should I say minister for health, as there is nobody acting. I am advised that 14 cases where patients have alleged they received less than optimal oral and maxillofacial surgery outcomes at the Canberra Hospital have now been investigated by an ACT health committee. Minister, will you now advise the Assembly of the outcome of that investigation? If not, why not?

MR CORBELL: As the shadow minister should be aware—and I am surprised she is not aware—clinical privileges committees are protected by privilege. They have limited privilege given to them by legislation. That is to ensure the confidentiality of the proceedings and to enable matters to be investigated promptly and thoroughly. I am not at liberty to disclose the proceedings of clinical privileges committees which have privilege attached to their operations, and that is why I am unable to provide further information to Mrs Burke.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mrs Burke?

MRS BURKE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, why is there still no oral and maxillofacial surgeon at the Canberra Hospital and what exactly is the hold-up in appointing one?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mrs Burke for the supplementary. The government has been working consistently on this matter for a number of years, in particular since a report into oral and maxillofacial and plastic and reconstructive surgery was provided to the government in January 2006. Work that has occurred since that time has been to deal with a number of issues: first of all, to do with issues around the physical infrastructure and service capacity of the hospitals to ensure that this type of surgery can be provided; and second in relation to the work that is done by either plastic and reconstructive surgeons or by oral and maxillofacial surgeons.

In relation to the first point, the government has implemented a large number of the recommendations in that review. For example, we have committed to upgrade Calvary's intensive care department. That was funded in the most recent budget. That was a recommendation of that review—to ensure that there was improved intensive care capacity at Calvary Hospital. That has been funded.

We have also appointed two additional plastic surgeons. Those have been funded. We have completed the role delineation, which is a service planning activity, of intensive care unit services at our hospitals. We have done partial completion of role delineation of surgical services. And we have established the surgical services task force, which is a high level forum of clinicians and managers.

The sticking point on this issue is the ongoing disagreement that exists between the two subspecialties involved in this particular matter. There is not clear delineation between what oral and maxillofacial surgery specialists believe is work that they should undertake and the work that the plastic and reconstructive surgeons believe that they have the responsibility for undertaking. If you like, there is a demarcation dispute between these two surgical specialties.

Mrs Burke: It's taken you six years to find that out. You've just let it roll for six years.

MR CORBELL: The government is working hard to resolve this dispute. Without agreement between the two surgical subspecialties we are not in a position to have an appropriate level of oral and maxillofacial surgery at the Canberra Hospital. We need the agreement between the surgical specialists. To address this issue, we have brought in professional mediation to try and broker agreement on role delineation between the various surgical specialties.

Mrs Burke: This is outrageous.

MR CORBELL: We are continuing with that work. We have achieved in-principle agreement with the two surgical specialties but we are now at a level of detail around role delineation. Regrettably, that is taking time.

We simply cannot impose a solution from above on these matters. We need agreement and consensus amongst the surgical specialties involved and we need to work to achieve that. We and ACT Health are providing a leadership role to bring those parties together and to reach that agreement. That is the issue at the Canberra Hospital.

Mrs Burke: Outrageous.

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, I note that Mrs Burke thinks that this is unacceptable, but less than a couple of hours ago we had Mrs Burke saying, "Listen to the experts. Work with the doctors and nurses."

MR SPEAKER: Mr Corbell, direct your comments through the chair.

Mrs Burke: Thank you, Mr Speaker; relevance.

MR CORBELL: That is exactly what we are trying to do. We are not going to impose solutions on the medical specialties from above.

Mrs Burke: Oh!

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR CORBELL: We need to work with them to achieve these outcomes.

Mrs Burke: I am trying not to listen, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mrs Burke, take a close look at standing orders 39, 61 and 202 (d) and (e), and take note.

MR CORBELL: Whilst the opposition may consider that this answer is not satisfactory, it highlights the contradictions in its position. A couple of hours ago we had Mrs Burke proposing all these wonderful new mechanisms to engage with doctors and nurses in decision making in the hospital. But when I say to Mrs Burke, in my answer to her question today, that that is exactly what we are doing to try and resolve this problem, she thinks it is unsatisfactory. It just shows the hypocrisy of the Liberal Party's position on this matter.

Albert Hall

DR FOSKEY: My question, Mr Speaker, is to Mr Stanhope as the minister responsible for heritage matters, and it relates to the nomination of Albert Hall to be placed on the National Heritage List. Has the government prepared a nomination for Albert Hall to be heritage listed; if so, which heritage values have been included in the nomination, and would the minister please table the nomination in the Assembly?

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank Dr Foskey for the question and, indeed, her continuing interest in issues around heritage and the Albert Hall. It is relevant that we proceed as we have indicated that we will with the nomination of the Albert Hall. This follows, certainly, announcements made by the NCA and the commonwealth in relation to their determination to develop a new overarching plan for the Albert Hall precinct, which did fall with some surprise on to the table in relation to their DA53, which proposed a range of developments within the precinct of the Albert Hall. On first blush, that caused some significant angst within the

community to the extent that, certainly, the NCA has now drawn back, to some degree, from the type of development they would support in relation to the Albert Hall.

Just by way of some other immediate background, as members would be aware, my colleague, the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, who is responsible for the management of the Albert Hall, has announced in the last week that, as a result of the non-identification of a tender to comply with requirements regarding the medium or long-term management of the Albert Hall, the tender process has determined that the government, through the Department of Territory and Municipal Services, will now accept responsibility in the interim for the management of the Albert Hall. Immediate restoration which has been identified as most urgent will be completed, and the government will continue to consider a long-term management structure that ensures that the heritage values of the Albert Hall are protected and that an appropriate level and degree of restoration is pursued and achieved.

In the context of that, the government has also announced that it will proceed with a nomination for the National Heritage List of the Albert Hall. Nominations for 2006-07 closed, in fact, prior to the decision that the government took to seek to nominate the Albert Hall—that is, nominations for this year. The nominations, in fact, closed in April. It was only in June that I took the decision that the ACT government would seek to have the Albert Hall nominated for the National Heritage List. In the meantime, however, officers from the ACT Heritage Unit have maintained contact with the Department of Environment and Water Resources, which is responsible for heritage matters under Malcolm Turnbull, to actually discuss the nomination process. We are now in the process of completing the application forms, the documentation, that is required in order to ensure that a nomination is drafted and is ready before nominations close for the 2008 round of nominations. So, we are going through the process: we have the forms, we are in consultation with the commonwealth. At this stage, our advice is that nominations for 2008 will close in February 2008.

The Albert Hall conservation, management and landscape plan, which has been endorsed by the ACT Heritage Council at its April meeting, assesses the heritage values of the hall against both ACT and national heritage criteria. That is the criteria that will form the basis of our application. The analysis and statements of claim contained in the conservation, management and landscape plan will be used, as I say, for the basis of our argument that the Albert Hall should be listed on the national heritage list.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question from Dr Foskey.

DR FOSKEY: What will the government do to meet its responsibilities in terms of management of the hall in the interim? Will there be community consultation in the formation and implementation of the necessary management plan for Albert Hall?

MR STANHOPE: Dr Foskey, thank you for the question. As I indicated just briefly by way of preamble, the current management arrangement that is with the current manager has been extended to 30 November this year. That was an extension of a pre-existing contract which we agreed to some time ago, and we are very grateful to Mr McLachlan, the current manager, for his patience and his forbearance in relation to the

tender process whilst we sought to establish a long-term secure management framework or arrangement for the Albert Hall.

The decision that Mr Hargreaves announced within the last week was that at the conclusion of that particular extension on 30 November—that is, from 1 December 2007—the government, through the property group, will accept responsibility for the management of the Albert Hall. We are, of course, in discussion. The Chief Minister's Department, the heritage unit and territory and municipal services are involved in giving consideration to the process that should now apply to determine a long-term management arrangement for the Albert Hall.

The property group within Mr Hargreaves's department is developing the processes and the procedures that will apply during its stewardship of the management of the Albert Hall. Indeed, we are working with Mr McLachlan to ensure that there will be a seamless transfer of responsibility between Mr McLachlan and Territory and Municipal Services in relation to the management by the government of the Albert Hall.

Those arrangements, as I say, are currently being developed. I must say that I have not discussed with Mr Hargreaves the arrangements that TAMS may have in place for consulting on those arrangements. That is something that I would have to take up with him. But I guess the fundamental position at this stage and some of the certainty that the Friends of the Albert Hall and other users of the Albert Hall have been looking for is a certainty that events that they wish to pursue post 1 December can be made. Bookings will be taken and at this stage bookings should, until formal arrangements are formalised, be pursued through Canberra Connect.

Those are the interim arrangements. We are working towards a long-term management structure involving the Department of Territory and Municipal Services as the manager, and we are putting in place a process for determining an appropriate long-term management structure for the ACT.

I think it needs to be said, Dr Foskey, that we have accepted, rightly, responsibility for the management of the Albert Hall post 30 November, but we have not at this stage suggested that that will be a long-term or permanent arrangement. We have not abandoned the possibility that other management arrangements will be decided upon. But if they are—and I say if—it will only be through a very open, transparent and consultative process.

Health—oral and maxillofacial surgery

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Acting Minister for Health. Minister, in December 2005 an expert review team reported to ACT Health on the provision of maxillofacial and plastic and reconstructive services by ACT Health. You have just said that you received that report in January 2006. In that report the review concluded:

If high standards of health care are to be delivered in the ACT and Capital Region, it is both urgent and essential to re-establish the proper direction and balance of service commitments in the specialties of oral and maxillofacial surgery and plastic and reconstructive surgery.

Minister, why has your government not treated this conclusion with more urgency than the long drawn out process that you previously described?

MR CORBELL: The government has treated it with urgency. As I have indicated to members previously, we have undertaken a range of steps to implement those measures that are possible to be implemented urgently. I would draw Mrs Dunne's attention to other elements of that report—clearly she has a copy—where it also indicates that it is recognised that, because of the large number of individual surgeons involved in this matter, it will take time to reach agreement on role delineation within the hospitals. The report is quite clear on that point. I would draw Mrs Dunne's attention to it. The report recognised and the reviewer recognised that there were areas of dispute between the surgical specialties, and the report concluded that these matters would take time to address.

I have previously outlined to members the efforts that we are taking as a government, though ACT Health, to address these matters, including bringing the surgeons together through mediation to seek agreement in principle and in detail on the appropriate role and delineation of oral and maxillofacial surgeons and plastic and reconstructive surgeons in the Canberra Hospital, and we continue to work on those issues with them.

MR SPEAKER: Do you have a supplementary question, Mrs Dunne?

MRS DUNNE: Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker. Why has it taken so long, given that you had already had a previous report, the Reid report, which pointed to these problems? Over the period of six years this government has done nothing, and in the past 18 months, a period in which you were the minister responsible, almost nothing has been done. Didn't the alarm bells ring when you had a second report that said you had a problem?

MR CORBELL: I refute Mrs Dunne's assertions. It is not the case that nothing has been done, and indeed if she had been paying attention to my earlier answers she would have heard that. I refute any suggestion that the government are not treating this matter with significant seriousness; we are. I have already answered the substantive part of Mrs Dunne's question, which is that without the agreement of the surgeons involved we are not going to be able to achieve the level of service delivery that we believe, and I think we all agree, is required. The surgical specialties need to reach agreement. If they do not, we cannot simply impose a solution from above. That will not work in these circumstances.

Budget—June 2007 interim result

MS MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr Speaker. My question, through you, is to the Chief Minister in his capacity as Treasurer.

Mr Mulcahy: Here we go.

MS MacDONALD: Would you like to ask the question for me, Mr Mulcahy?

MR SPEAKER: Order! Come to the question, Ms MacDonald.

MS MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Chief minister, in light of the release of the government's June 2007 interim result for 2006-07, can the Treasurer, advise what budget pressures the ACT is facing, and is the government considering any adjustment to taxes?

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank Ms MacDonald for the question.

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: my recollection is that Mr Mulcahy asked at least the second part of that question in the last sitting period and, therefore, it has probably already been fully answered.

MR SPEAKER: Nice try. I don't think you have ever accused the Chief Minister of fully answering anything before. I call the Treasurer.

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The interim result for 2006-07 reflects the government's prudent financial management. Speaking of budget pressures, of course, Mr Speaker, members are well aware that if the population is ageing, our health care costs will continue to grow and the cost of delivering government services will also continue to grow here, as everywhere else around Australia. It is not a problem unique to the ACT, although, of course, our population is ageing faster than anywhere else in Australia, except the Northern Territory, and that has implications of its own.

We are all aware of the potential risks, or we should be—although we do not see that in the behaviour of the Liberal Party lately—of the costs associated of impending climate change and the continued drought. Once again, of course, these are not issues that are unique to the ACT. It would be an imprudent government, to say the least, that was not mindful of these emerging pressures and the potential risks to the budget of these sorts or this range of pressures—health, climate change, the drought and the continuing cost of delivering government services.

That is why the government has adopted a fiscal strategy of maintaining reasonable surpluses to guard against emerging pressures and unforeseen fiscal shocks and to provide capacity to make investment in social and physical infrastructure in our public health facilities and in our schools. The size of the current surplus is appropriate for that end. That is particularly the case given that it reflects a number of one-off factors, such as the recent, unexpected increase in activity in the housing market, which cannot be sustained forever. It also provides appropriate coverage for a number of the risks currently facing the ACT, including the possibility of stage 4 water restrictions some time in the next six months.

Mr Speaker, I have to say that some of the recent commitments—and we dwelt on this over the last week—from the Liberal Party are deeply worrying. On quick figuring, the cost of commitments in this last week from Mr Mulcahy and the Liberal Party are in the order of \$90 million.

Mrs Burke: Table the evidence.

MR STANHOPE: \$54 million for 100 beds immediately.

Mrs Burke: No, you have just blown your health budget.

MR STANHOPE: \$54 million; a reduction in revenue of \$16.5 million, and the not yet quite abrogated promise in relation to the fire levy.

Mrs Burke: You should read your budget papers.

MR STANHOPE: It needs to be understood in the context of discussions of these issues that the 2007-08 budget forecast operating balance for the next financial year—and this is the point—is \$52 million. It is only \$64 million for 2009-10, and it only goes to \$100 million in 2010-11.

Mr Mulcahy: You've never got it right yet.

MR STANHOPE: The shadow Treasurer interjects, "Well, you've never got it right yet". So, here we have it; a \$90 million hit by the shadow Treasurer in one week, and his response to the budget forecast is, "Well, you've never got it right yet. We'll promise \$90 million on a wing and a prayer".

Mrs Burke: You haven't.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister, resume your seat. Mrs Burke, I have called you to order three times.

Mr Stefaniak: That was me, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: No, I have been watching. I have called you to order three times. I have drawn your attention to the standing orders. What am I to do to get you—

Mrs Burke: I was just talking loudly, Mr Speaker, and I apologise.

MR SPEAKER: No, you were not. You were interjecting; so I am going to name you. You leave me no—you just leave me nowhere else to go.

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

That Mrs Burke be suspended from the service of the Assembly.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 6

Mr Barr
Mr Berry
Mr Corbell
Dr Foskey
Mr Gentleman

Mr Hargreaves
Ms MacDonald
Ms Porter
Mr Stanhope

Mrs Burke
Mrs Dunne
Mr Mulcahy
Mr Pratt
Mr Seselja

Mr Stefaniak

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Mrs Burke was therefore suspended at 3.02 pm for three sitting hours in accordance with standing order 204, and she accordingly withdrew from the chamber.

MR SPEAKER: Ms MacDonald, do you have a supplementary question?

MS MacDONALD: Yes, please, Mr Speaker. My supplementary question is: Treasurer, can you advise the Assembly on the government's approach to budgeting in maintaining the territory's financial position in the future?

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, the government's approach to budgeting is based on a disciplined, focused approach that has regard to both short and long-term objectivities. It is also based on some integrity, not like the position we see from the shadow Treasurer in relation to pure GFS as against AAS, depending on what you are doing.

It is quite interesting to refer to the budgeted surpluses that are incorporated within our budget papers. As I said before, they reveal an operating balance of around \$52 million under GFS, as adjusted appropriately, for 2008-09 and a surplus of \$64 million under GFS, as adjusted appropriately, for 2009-10. Of course, this is the system that the shadow Treasurer refuses to accept as legitimate, until, of course, he decides he needs to spend or cut revenue.

It is interesting to go back and actually have revealed starkly in *Hansard* and in Mr Mulcahy's press releases his humbug and his hypocrisy on this issue of GFS accounting and the surplus. With the promises which the Liberals have announced in the last week amounting to \$54 million for 100 immediate acute care beds, revenue cuts of \$16 million in relation to the abolition of the utilities tax and the \$22 million now in the grey area as Mr Mulcahy repudiates a promise made by Mr Pratt, we would, on Mr Mulcahy's accepted pure GFS accounting standard, be plunged into an enormous deficit.

So what is it now? Now that Mr Mulcahy is involved in making his first expenditure promise—\$54 million straight up on beds and a revenue cut of \$16 million—if we just take those two that you have actually owned up to, the \$54 million on beds and the \$16 million on utilities, totalling \$70 million, and ignore the \$22 million for the fire levy, which Mr Pratt accepts and Mr Mulcahy does not so let us ignore it for the point of this argument and go to \$70 million, Mr Mulcahy is out there.

Go to Mr Mulcahy's press release of June 2006 in which he poured scorn on the surplus delivered through the budget. "The ACT today," Mr Mulcahy says, "accused the government of reverting to an abandoned account presentation format." He goes on to say, "The reported surplus of \$176 million is achieved by relying on a system that was abandoned by the territory government." "The GFS deficit," Mr Mulcahy goes on to say, "is actually minus \$123 million, or minus \$92 million if one wants to take into account long-term gains on superannuation investments."

That is what Mr Mulcahy says as he comments on our surpluses. But as he spends his \$70 million, as he takes his \$70 million hit on the budget, all of a sudden the current accounting system utilised by the government is okay; it is legitimate. It has to be legitimate because if it is not legitimate, if we go to Mr Mulcahy's pure GFS, the \$70 million takes us immediately into a \$70 million or \$60 million deficit. There is no escape for Mr Mulcahy. He has owned up, through his leader and his deputy leader's—

Mr Mulcahy: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR STANHOPE: promises of a \$54 million spend on health. I am not surprised that he stands up and objects.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Mulcahy.

Mr Mulcahy: As entertaining as this inaccurate representation is—

MR SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Mr Mulcahy: The question was: what are the principles under which the government is operating, not what were my views about the accounting system, which I stand by.

MR STANHOPE: There we go. Then, of course, we can go to Mr Mulcahy's media release of 8 March 2007. Mr Mulcahy says, "If you look at his budget papers"—that is, my budget papers—"it is interesting to note that under the GFS system," the one that the government was driven into accepting because Mr Mulcahy trotted off to New York to visit them—

Mrs Dunne: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. Mr Mulcahy took a point of order, which you did not address, and the Chief Minister has just continued in the same way. It relates to the question.

MR SPEAKER: Ms MacDonald, just read out your question again, please.

Ms MacDonald: Treasurer, can you advise the Assembly on the government's approach to budgeting in maintaining the territory's financial position into the future?

MR SPEAKER: Stick to the subject matter of the question.

MR STANHOPE: I will, Mr Speaker. I will conclude on this remark. In March this year, Mr Mulcahy stated in this place that the true position this year was a negative \$80.3 million outcome. That is what he said.

Opposition members interjecting—

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

MR STANHOPE: Two sides of the street, Mr Mulcahy.

Canberra Hospital—emergency department

MR SESELJA: My question is to the Acting Minister for Health. On ABC radio last week, Dr Peter Collignon, referring to Canberra Hospital's emergency department, said:

We have a ward there of 20 beds designed for people to stay 4 or 5 hours but probably a third of these people are there for 20 hours or more. Now that is not good medicine to be treating people in places that are not designed for that.

Why are a third of patients in the emergency department waiting more than 20 hours for a bed in a ward?

MR CORBELL: There is no doubt that we face periods in the hospital when there is what is called access block or bed block. That is the issue that Mr Seselja is referring to in his question. But there is good news on the performance of the public health system in the latest quarterly performance report, which I released today. The report indicates, amongst other things, that access block through the emergency department is now 19 per cent lower than it was at this time last year. We are working on addressing these issues.

Why is that happening? The reason it is happening is that we have put more beds into the system so that we have more capacity to meet demand when it occurs. If you have more beds available, you have less access block and you have fewer occasions on which people are waiting for access and admission into a ward. Bed block through the emergency department is down by 19 per cent.

The report also reveals that the other very significant change that we have seen over the last financial year is that our bed occupancy rate is now down to 91 per cent. The best practice model is between 85 and 90 per cent. You do not want more than 85 to 90 per cent of your beds used at any one time; you need the surge capacity to deal with busy periods.

We were previously at bed occupancy levels of 97, 98 and 99 per cent, which put the hospital and its staff under very significant pressure. The average bed occupancy rate is now down to 91 per cent. We are heading towards that benchmark figure. That means that we are working to reduce the occasions when people are waiting for admission into a ward.

That is my answer to Mr Seselja. Yes, these instances are occurring, but at the same time we are taking steps to address the issue. There have been 147 extra beds put into the public hospital system since this government was elected; bed block through the emergency department has dropped by 19 per cent; and bed occupancy rates are down to 91 per cent from a high of 97 per cent, freeing up capacity and allowing us to deal with those busy periods.

Emergency Services Agency—management

MR MULCAHY: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, the headquarters communications and operational management capability in the Emergency Services Agency has been split for approximately 18 months between Curtin and Fairbairn. On 4 October, the first day of total fire ban for this season, it was necessary for significant elements of the RFS headquarters operational and communications staff to relocate from Fairbairn to the ESA communications centre at Curtin. Minister, why was it not possible to manage the total fire ban with RFS headquarters staff located at Fairbairn?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Mulcahy for the question. This was a very deliberate decision on the part of the ESA, and the reason for it was to ensure that the RFS duty officer was talking face to face with the fire brigade and Comcen officers to ensure that we respond the best available unit in the event of a fire in the ACT. The reason we have done this is that one of the complaints I have heard time and again from volunteers in the Rural Fire Service is that they make their time available, they stand up at their sheds or wait in their vehicles on a high fire danger day, they hear a fire called in over the radio, they know it is near their shed, and they know they can respond quickly, but in the past what we have seen is other units responded further away because the call goes to the fire brigade rather than to the rural fire service.

The whole point of bringing the RFS duty officer and some other personnel into the Comcen and into Curtin is to short-circuit that process, to deal with that issue and to ensure that RFS units, where available and the most appropriate units, are despatched. That is what we are doing, because I want to make sure that we are using our fire services most effectively, most responsibly. I want to see volunteers, where they are available, being deployed to the nearest fire if it is close to their location. We have volunteers who put in a lot of time and a lot of effort into training, but they need to be given the practical experience of responding to fires as and when they occur. If they are the closest available unit and the most appropriate unit they should be responded, and that is the purpose of this change in procedure.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Mulcahy, do you have a supplementary question?

MR MULCAHY: Yes. I thank the minister for the answer but I have a supplementary question. Why have you allowed crucial elements of the Emergency Services Agency's headquarters staff to remain separated for so long, and how much has been expended to maintain both facilities?

MR CORBELL: I have answered that question previously in answers to questions on notice provided to Mr Pratt. I draw Mr Mulcahy's attention to those.

Schools—capital expenditure

MS PORTER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. My question, through you, is to the minister for education. Can the minister please inform the Assembly of the capital upgrades that are being undertaken in ACT public schools?

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I again thank Ms Porter for her question and for her ongoing interest in public education in the ACT. Mr Speaker, can I say from the outset that the Stanhope government strongly believes in a vibrant, quality public education system and that we are committed to providing quality schools for all students in the ACT, no matter where they live. That is why the government is investing \$350 million in upgrading existing schools and providing state-of-the-art new schools around our city. This is a significant investment in quality education and an investment in the future of Canberra.

I had the great pleasure at lunch time today to announce a \$6 million investment in the new Melba-Copland secondary school, which will commence in 2008. This school will cater for about 1,000 students from years 7 to 12 and comes together as an amalgamation of Melba high school and Copland college across two campuses. The \$6 million investment will see improvements to a variety of teaching facilities such as science labs, PE and sport facilities, administration areas, upgrade of student bathrooms and change room facilities, as well as a \$1 million upgrade to the creative art centre on the Copland site.

Mr Stanhope: What did Mrs Dunne call this?

Ms MacDonald: “Good money after bad”.

MR BARR: Good money after bad, allegedly. These upgrades will ensure that students have the opportunity to learn in high-quality environments and that they are given the best opportunity to maximise their potential at these wonderful new facilities.

Over the October school holidays, a wide range of capital works were completed around a very wide number of ACT schools, and students returned from the school holidays in October to find a range of newly renovated facilities. For example, the students at the Black Mountain school returned to find a brand new home science and canteen area, enabling students at the Black Mountain school to participate in life skill classes, with fantastic new facilities. This work consisted of combining the space of two small classrooms and the installation of height adjustable cooktops and benches.

These upgrades are designed to provide maximum flexibility in the classroom and to improve accessibility for students with a disability. As part of the government’s commitment to the provision of quality facilities for students with a disability, works have also commenced on new classroom facilities for special need students at Melrose high school.

Canberrans continue to see the tangible outcomes from this government’s investment in public education. We are committed to improving facilities within schools but also are looking at the external appearance of our public schools. So we have undertaken a major landscaping program to improve the look and feel of our schools. Some examples of schools that have recently received upgrades are Dickson college, Curtin primary school, Duffy primary school, Stromlo high school, Melrose high school, Hughes primary and Fraser primary school.

The school communities of Lake Ginninderra college, Melba high school and Copland college are also benefiting from an extensive external painting program to improve the look and feel of their schools, and these programs and these projects are improving the look of our outdoor environments and are promoting pride in our public schools. To improve the infrastructure of our schools and to ensure that they are of acceptable comfort levels within our classrooms, many schools are also undertaking major upgrades of their heating, ventilation and cooling systems.

The government is committed to encouraging the use of school facilities by the general public outside the school hours and, in line with this commitment, works have been undertaken at Lyneham high school to upgrade the surface of the external playing courts. Continuing with Lyneham, stage 1 of the upgrade of the gymnasium has also commenced.

I am also very pleased to note that work is progressing well at the new schools in Harrison and West Belconnen and that the design phase of the Gungahlin college is under way in earnest. The size of these investments is large. However, the Stanhope government believes it is not just an investment in bricks and mortar; it is an investment in the future of our children and of the Canberra community. This refurbishment program will see every public school benefit from record levels of investment in schools over the next four years and it is, of course, accompanied by the opening of four new schools in Harrison, West Belconnen, Tuggeranong and Gungahlin.

The government is very proud of its record investment in public education and we believe the entire Canberra community will reap the full benefit of these capital works upgrades.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Porter?

MS PORTER: Minister, you mentioned Melba-Copland secondary college. Would you be able to inform the Assembly what other projects are taking place in the Belconnen area?

MR BARR: I again thank Ms Porter for her continued interest and for accompanying me today to the launch of the new Melba-Copland secondary school. I know that Ms Porter has a very keen interest in quality education and the importance of quality education in her electorate of Ginninderra. Her interest stands in marked contrast to that of another member for Ginninderra, whose only comment on the improvements from the \$350 million that the government is investing in public education is to describe them as throwing good money after bad. That is the policy position of the shadow education minister—that \$350 million worth of investment in public education is throwing good money after bad. There it is. It stands as a stark comment—

Mr Mulcahy: Mr Speaker, a point of order. I do not believe that the question asked Mr Barr to analyse the opposition policy on education. I would be interested in him answering the question that was asked.

Ms MacDonald: It's not your question. What is your point of order?

Mrs Dunne: Relevance.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Just stick to the subject matter of the question.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am very happy to inform the Assembly that families in the Belconnen area will benefit from over \$80 million of funding on public education: \$35 million on upgrades in existing schools in addition to the \$45 million west Belconnen P-10 school.

School communities will see a range of major improvements occurring: significant environmental upgrades to improve energy and water efficiency; landscaping and playground improvements; upgrades to science labs and art rooms; and, as I have indicated, much needed improvements to internal and external painting and floor coverings—the entire look and feel of our schools. Access for students with disabilities will be improved. Where needed, heating and cooling is going to be upgraded to ensure that staff and students have the best possible facilities in which to teach and learn.

Seventeen primary schools in the electorate of Ginninderra will receive upgrades worth more than \$15 million, including Fraser primary, Charnwood-Dunlop primary, Mount Rogers school, Macgregor primary, Evatt primary, Latham primary, Southern Cross primary, Florey primary, Hawker primary, Macquarie primary, Maribyrnong primary, Kaleen primary school, Giralang primary school, Miles Franklin, Gold Creek, Aranda and Weetangera—\$15 million worth of upgrades across 17 schools and, according to the shadow minister, one of the local members, throwing good money after bad.

Four high schools and three colleges will receive upgrades worth more than \$20 million: Kaleen high; Belconnen high; Canberra high; as I have indicated, the Melba-Copland secondary school; Lake Ginninderra college; and Hawker college—\$20 million worth of upgrades shared across those senior secondary schools.

There is no question that families in Belconnen will benefit from these upgrades and that educational environments will be improved to give students in Belconnen the best opportunities possible.

Unfortunately, as I say, the opposition does not see this improvement in public education as a priority. It says that it is throwing good money after bad. Mrs Dunne is on the record as saying that. She has repeated that assertion in this place. We will continue to remind her time after time—every time—

Mr Mulcahy: Mr Speaker, a point of order. You have already directed the minister to stay in the subject area. He is going back into his tirades again.

MR SPEAKER: It is reasonable to contextualise these things.

Mrs Dunne: It is all context and no answer, Mr Speaker.

MR BARR: You are just embarrassed by your comment.

MR SPEAKER: Order! I have ruled on it.

Mrs Dunne: I am never going to be embarrassed by being verbally by Andrew Barr.

Ms MacDonald: Mr Speaker, can I draw your attention to the fact that the opposition continuously put up spurious points of order, which are continuously being knocked down, in order to run the time down when they do not like the answer to the question.

MR SPEAKER: If I sense that, I will deal with it. Mr Barr—to conclude on the subject matter of the question.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As I have indicated, this government is getting on with the process of investing \$350 million in public education to ensure that all schools in the ACT receive the upgrades they need to ensure quality teaching and learning environments. There is a marked contrast between the positions of the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal Party when it comes to investment in public education. As we have seen and as we will continue to see—we will remind Mrs Dunne of this statement from now until election day and beyond, whilst ever she remains in this place, particularly as education spokesperson—she opposes this investment and describes it as throwing good money after bad. What an indictment of the Liberal Party in this place. (*Time expired.*)

Department of Territory and Municipal Services—surveillance of employees

MR PRATT: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, the Department of Territory and Municipal Services acknowledged in a media release on 3 October—by the way, it was surprisingly put out within one hour of my letter to your minister raising questions about this matter—that it had conducted secret surveillance of some of its employees.

Chief Minister, why was it necessary for your government to conduct secret surveillance of these employees? What instructions did you give to officials, the minister, Mr Hargreaves, or ministerial staff in connection with this surveillance?

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank Mr Pratt for the question. Of course, it is appropriate, if not a little ironic, that Australia's most infamous spy since the Second World War should ask questions about spying. In fact, Mr Pratt's reputation as a spy—

Members interjecting—

MR STANHOPE: is a result of being caught.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Mulcahy: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Mulcahy: Mr Speaker, I do not think that his dissertation on Mr Pratt's life is relevant in any way to the question asked.

MR SPEAKER: Just come to the subject matter of the question.

Mrs Dunne: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Government members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Mrs Dunne: Mr Stanhope has made a serious imputation about a member of this place. It needs to be withdrawn. There have been a number of occasions when Mr Stanhope has made this—

MR SPEAKER: I did not hear it.

Mrs Dunne: He said that Mr Pratt was Australia's most infamous spy. This is an imputation about somebody who was an aid worker. It is an absolutely and utterly inappropriate imputation on Mr Pratt's character. What Mr Stanhope said should be withdrawn and Mr Stanhope should be not allowed to make these imputations again.

MR SPEAKER: I hear no protest from Mr Pratt, I have to say.

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Anyway, I do find it a rather humorous irony, but we will move on.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Pratt is not protesting.

Mrs Dunne: On the point of order, Mr Speaker, yesterday, when I was required to withdraw the word "boondoggle" in relation to Mr Gentleman, it was not Mr Gentleman who made the complaint. It was another member of the government. I am making a complaint on behalf of one of my colleagues because his character has been impugned. I think that you should address that matter.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Pratt.

Mr Pratt: On the point of order, Mr Speaker, in relation to what you have just said, I have chosen to allow my colleagues to raise the point of order. It does not mean I do not take the issue seriously. There are ways and means by which I will tackle the issue. In response, Mr Speaker, to what you have said, I have allowed my colleagues to speak for me and on my behalf.

MR SPEAKER: In that case, I will rule that it is offensive and order it be withdrawn.

Mrs Dunne: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, I withdraw. It was a poor attempt at a joke. I apologise.

Mr Mulcahy: Mr Speaker, it is not to be qualified.

MR STANHOPE: I did not qualify it. I said I withdraw it. It is unequivocal. I then acknowledged it was a poor attempt at a joke. I thought it was quite humorous. I withdraw.

I would actually also like Mr Pratt to withdraw the allegation he has made, both inside this place and outside this place, unequivocally that I ordered this surveillance, which I did not. Mr Pratt has been informed in writing by the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services that I was not involved, that I did not know, I had no pre-knowledge and was in no way involved or associated with the surveillance.

Mr Pratt: Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. I think the Chief Minister is misleading this place. I have not accused him of—

MR SPEAKER: Just withdraw.

Mr Pratt: I have asked the question, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Withdraw that, first of all.

Mr Pratt: I have merely asked the question.

MR SPEAKER: You impute that the Chief Minister has misled the house. You cannot do that except by a substantive motion. Just withdraw that and get on with your question.

Mr Pratt: I clarify the point. I have not accused him of ordering surveillance.

MR SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Mr Pratt: I am asking the question.

MR SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, the bottom line is that Mr Pratt has been out and about in the public on the media alleging that Mr Hargreaves and I were complicit, were implicated, knew and gave orders that the Department of Territory and Municipal Services undertake surveillance. Mr Pratt has been informed by the Chief Executive of the Department of Territory and Municipal Services, Mr Mike Zissler, that neither the Chief Minister nor the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services were consulted, advised or had any pre-knowledge or information about the surveillance which the department undertook in relation to certain issues that the department felt inclined to investigate through surveillance.

Mr Pratt has been told that in a letter signed by the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services. He has been told that through media pursued by the Chief Executive of the Department of Territory and Municipal Services, but he chooses not to believe it. He stands here today in angst that I actually repeat old allegations about a previous life of Mr Pratt's, with indignation that he had been maligned and his reputation impugned.

In this very question, in the very instance in which he reacts with mock horror, he does the same to me. What hypocrisy! I did not know. I was not advised. I was not consulted. The first I knew about, and I should perhaps acknowledge this, was through Mr Pratt's press release. (*Time expired.*)

MR PRATT: Mr Speaker, my supplementary to the Chief Minister is this: Chief Minister, why did your office conduct a search on 4 October for records or notes in connection with the decision to undertake the surveillance?

MR STANHOPE: Whenever I am challenged by outrageous, false, defamatory allegations such as those being pursued by Mr Pratt I take the obvious question of having the record searched to see what information there is, and on the basis of inquiries that I have taken I can confirm my initial response: under no circumstance was I involved, was I consulted, did I have any pre-knowledge, did I give any instructions, did I have a single conversation, with anybody. In that regard Mr Pratt has indicated in all of his utterances that he has unimpeachable evidence of my involvement. I invite Mr Pratt to table his evidence today, by close of business.

Mr Pratt, you are on the public record as saying that you have evidence of my involvement in this matter. Table it. Table it now. Table it before 6 o'clock today. You haven't got it, have you? You haven't got it. You made it up. I had no involvement in this matter. I had no pre-knowledge. I was not advised. I was not consulted. I gave no instructions. The first I became aware of the matter was when my office showed me a copy of your defamatory press release on the matter. Mr Pratt, I invite you here and now to table your evidence today. Put it to bed; show us your evidence. Put up or shut up. Show some courage. Show some integrity. Show some honour. Do the right thing.

Mr Pratt: I think you and I both know about this, Jon.

MR STANHOPE: Table the evidence.

Mr Pratt: I think we both know about this, Jon.

MR STANHOPE: Table the evidence.

Criminal justice statistics

MR GENTLEMAN: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, could you please update the Assembly on the latest quarterly ACT criminal justice statistics?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Gentleman for the question. I am pleased to advise members on some of the matters that are highlighted in the latest ACT criminal justice statistics, which I tabled in the Assembly yesterday. The latest ACT criminal justice quarterly statistics contain information on police, courts and corrections data. Most pleasingly, these latest statistics have highlighted a significant drop in the number of assaults and sexual assaults in the ACT. Crimes against the person, which include assaults and sexual assaults, have dropped in the territory during this quarter. Assaults in the three months to June decreased by 16 per cent, or 89 offences, compared to the previous three months to March 2007.

Mr Stefaniak: Yes, the police have done a good job.

MR CORBELL: Yes, I'll get to that, Mr Stefaniak. The statistics also show a decline in sexual assault offences reported to police, with a drop of 13 per cent, or 11 offences, reported for the June 2007 quarter. These are excellent results for the ACT community—fewer crimes against the person—so excellent work by ACT Policing. That shows that we are resourcing the police to do the work that they need to do.

In particular, Mr Speaker, we have also seen changes in a number of other offences. For example, burglary and break and enter offences fell by 12 per cent, or 588 offences, in this quarter; and motor vehicle offences fell by seven per cent, or 143 car thefts, in this quarter. These are year-to-year comparisons, so they are indeed very timely and very appropriate to quote. Robbery offences have fallen by one per cent, property damage has fallen by four per cent, or 357 offences against property—very pleasing news—and weapons offences have also fallen.

Mr Speaker, what is the reason for this decline? Clearly, the answer is the very good work by ACT Policing focusing on these issues and targeting, through intelligence-based policing, the people who are committing and perpetrating these crimes. They are preventing and arresting these people who do commit these crimes. But it also reflects the fact that this government, unlike those opposite, has made a serious investment in the ACT police force. We have increased ACT Policing just this year by an additional 47 officers. By the end of next year, the additional police provided to our police force will be 107—that is 107 extra police.

I know that Mr Stefaniak cannot make the same boast. When he was in government and when he was minister for police, we saw nowhere near that level of increase in police numbers. I can remember when they were proud to make the boast that they were increasing police numbers by six, and there is a media statement from a Carnell government budget to prove it.

We treat seriously our commitment to proper policing in the ACT. We have made a very significant investment—43 extra officers hitting the front line this year, an extra 107 positions by the end of 2008-09 financial year, and an extra \$34.6 million invested into better policing services for the Canberra community. We are seeing the results of that with these latest criminal justice statistics.

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

Department of Territory and Municipal Services—surveillance of employees
Statement by member

MR PRATT: I seek leave to make a statement.

Leave not granted.

Standing orders—suspension

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (3.38): I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Pratt from making a statement.

Mr Speaker, what I would like to say in response to the Chief Minister's call to me to table evidence by 6 o'clock today is this—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! You have to speak to the motion to suspend standing orders and give reasons why.

MR PRATT: Mr Speaker, the reason I seek leave to suspend standing orders is to be given the opportunity to react to the Chief Minister's challenge. If the government is not going to provide leave to me to make a reasonable response to the Chief Minister's call, then clearly the government does not want to hear what I have got to say. Now, what I have got to say is a very, very clear statement in relation to the matter, and it is simply this: I do not have documentary evidence. The information that I have is by telephone call; it is very, very reliable information provided to me by an impeccable source, a senior official, and I do not intend to make that person—

MR SPEAKER: Come back to the motion.

MR PRATT: Therefore, I have no documentary evidence to table by 6 o'clock today. The information is verbal; it is from an impeccable source, and I stand by that source's information.

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) (3.40): Mr Pratt has been going around the place telling the whole world that he had unimpeachable evidence of my complicity in a departmental decision. We now discover that the unimpeachable evidence is an anonymous telephone call—an anonymous telephone call.

MR SPEAKER: Order! We are not debating the issue. There has to be an attempt to connect this to the question that is before the house: that the standing orders be suspended.

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, the government will not support a suspension of standing orders to allow Mr Pratt to tell us about an anonymous telephone call he has had.

Mr Stefaniak: It wasn't anonymous to him, pal.

MR STANHOPE: Actually, an anonymous telephone call from an obvious political enemy of the government. When Mr Pratt has some evidence—

Mr Stefaniak: Some official doing their job and frightened of being sacked if he comes out! There are a lot of people like that.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Stefaniak.

MR STANHOPE: When his anonymous friend has the integrity and the courage to put his name on a piece of paper—

Mr Stefaniak: What are you going to do? So you can sack him?

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Stefaniak.

MR STANHOPE: When that happens, of course we will accommodate Mr Pratt.

Mr Pratt: What? So you can bully him?

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Pratt.

MR STANHOPE: But we are not going to subvert the processes of this house to allow Mr Pratt to stand up in this place and slag off on the basis of an anonymous, cowardly telephone call from an alleged ACT public servant. This is just Mr Pratt saying, "I have a contact, a public servant, impeccable source, but I am not going to tell you who he is." Mr Pratt is not going to tell us where he works, what he knows, what sort of credibility he has, whether or not he is a member of the Liberal Party or whether this person actually exists or is just a figment of Mr Pratt's imagination. We are not going to subvert the business of this Assembly to allow Mr Pratt to go off on some frolic. I must say, it does put in some relief now the nature of the comments in the press releases and the interviews that Mr Pratt has done in the context of this unimpeachable, incontrovertible evidence he has that I was involved in a departmental administrative decision. It is a lie. It is an absolute lie.

MR SPEAKER: Withdraw that.

MR STANHOPE: Mr Pratt's peddling of this lie has gone far enough, and I am not going to—

MR SPEAKER: Withdraw that.

MR STANHOPE: No, no, I meant that the allegation by the nameless, anonymous person is a lie. I was not suggesting Mr Pratt was lying. I am saying that anybody who

claims that I made a decision or that I was involved in a decision that surveillance be undertaken is a liar.

Mr Pratt: They're more bloody trustworthy than you, Chief Minister.

MR STANHOPE: They are a liar. They are trustworthy, but they will not name themselves. That is how trustworthy they are.

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra—Leader of the Opposition) (3.43): I will contribute to this debate. Mr Pratt has indicated to the Chief Minister—to the house, actually—his source. He has indicated that the reason he wanted to suspend standing orders was because he cannot table documents. But, in terms of what the Chief Minister says, there are a growing number of people I speak to out there who are public servants and who are frustrated, we have discovered, and also terrified that they will be punished and that they will be sacked. So lift your game.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Stefaniak, if you do not stick to the subject matter of the question, I will order you to sit down. Do you want to continue?

MR STEFANIAK: Mr Speaker, given that Mr Pratt has actually said what he intended to say, I do not think that we need to suspend standing orders.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Housing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (3.44): I do not think the Assembly should support the motion to suspend standing orders so that Mr Pratt can, in fact, continue in some form of debate to insinuate that either the Chief Minister or I had anything to do with an issue on the basis of putting forward somebody's word—it is hearsay. Mr Speaker, these are almost grounds for a motion of grave concern, that this parliamentary process is being abused. A member can get up in this place and try to suspend standing orders so that they can continue a spurious attack on another member. I do not think that is on. I think Mr Pratt ought to have the courage to stand up now in the context of this debate on the suspension of standing orders and apologise, one, for wasting its time and, two, for not being able to produce a shred of evidence.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (3.45): It is ironic, Mr Speaker, but I am going to speak about the government's propensity in this sitting period—

Mr Stefaniak interjecting—

MRS DUNNE: Bill.

Mr Stefaniak: I was just explaining something.

MR SPEAKER: No violence in the chamber, please!

Mr Hargreaves: Smack him, smack him! Give him a smack.

MRS DUNNE: I am going to speak about the propensity of the government in this sitting to waste time. We saw it yesterday when, rather than let someone finish a

five-minute speech, we went into a long, drawn-out process. What we have had today is Mr Pratt seeking to make a brief statement. Of course, with the lack of grace that we have seen from the Stanhope government we cannot have Mr Pratt making a brief statement, so we have to go through this 15-minute rigmarole of seeking to suspend standing orders.

It is a normal courtesy of this place that when a member stands in their place and seeks leave to make a statement they are afforded leave. But what we have seen here with the Stanhope government this week is an absolute abuse of the normal courtesies of this place. That ends up wasting the time of the Assembly. It could have all been over, red rover, except that the government will not afford the opposition the courtesies of this place, and this is why we have to suspend standing orders and cut into the time, as we did yesterday, that the Chief Minister thinks is so precious for executive business.

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (3.47): Mr Speaker, I am pleased to speak in support of this motion. Here we have a situation where a member is being accused of defaming people. He has been told he has been threatened with a motion to force him to table documents, and he is seeking to use the procedures of the house to address the matters raised. They would go beyond, I suspect, the simple case of misrepresentation, although that has also appeared to have occurred, but I think it is not unreasonable that Mr Pratt should be allowed to put forward whatever information he has.

The Chief Minister says that unless there is documentary evidence then there is no evidence. But Mr Pratt may have other information, and documentary evidence is not the only form of evidence that is available to support the view that he is putting. I am certainly very keen to hear what he has to say. I think the house ought to allow him to have that opportunity, and then we can get on to the other issues that the Chief Minister seems so determined to pursue today.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 6

Noes 8

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

Question so resolved in the negative.

Personal explanation

MR PRATT (Brindabella): Mr Speaker, I want to make a statement under standing order 46, for clarification.

MR SPEAKER: In what respect?

MR PRATT: An explanation; an explanation under standing order 46.

MR SPEAKER: As long as it is—

MR PRATT: I do not need leave. I just want to make a statement, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Well, you will need leave from me.

MR PRATT: In which case, Mr Speaker, I seek leave.

MR SPEAKER: Have you been misrepresented in some way, Mr Pratt?

MR PRATT: Correct, Mr Speaker. The Chief Minister, in this last little debacle of a debate, indicated that I have been running around the ACT stating that I had “unimpeachable evidence” going to the heart of the claim that he had committed certain offences. Mr Speaker, that is not correct. The explanation of these circumstances is this: having been advised by a senior official that there strong allegations about a secret surveillance matter in the Department of Territory and Municipal Services, I put out a press release which stated that, given the strong allegations made about such matters and the strong allegations that the Chief Minister had participated in that approval process, the Chief Minister should confirm or deny that such things had happened. That was the nature of the press release. That is the nature of the things that I have said about this matter. Given the strong allegations from the sources about this matter, the Chief Minister was asked to confirm or deny.

MR SPEAKER: Resume your seat. You have made the point.

Mr Stanhope: I deny it, Mr Speaker, and I have done it on a number of occasions. I guess I will keep on having to do it because Mr Pratt chooses not to believe or accept my denials.

Mr Pratt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: are we still continuing with a debate?

MR SPEAKER: No, we are not.

Anti-Poverty Week

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) (3.52): I seek leave to move a motion concerning Anti-Poverty Week.

Leave not granted.

Suspension of standing orders

Motion (by **Mr Stanhope**) put:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Stanhope from moving a motion concerning Australian Anti-Poverty Week.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9		Noes 5	
Mr Barr	Mr Hargreaves	Mrs Dunne	Mr Stefaniak
Mr Berry	Ms MacDonald	Mr Mulcahy	
Mr Corbell	Ms Porter	Mr Pratt	
Dr Foskey	Mr Stanhope	Mr Seselja	
Mr Gentleman			

Question so resolved in the affirmative, with the concurrence of an absolute majority.

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) (3.56): Mr Speaker, I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) unanimously support the aims of Australian Anti-Poverty Week to:
 - (a) strengthen public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and hardship around the world and in Australia; and
 - (b) encourage research, discussion and action to address these problems, including action by individuals, communities, organisations and governments;
- (2) reaffirm its commitment to reducing poverty and the negative impacts of poverty on individuals and families; and
- (3) undertake opportunities to engender a stronger understanding amongst citizens of the ACT that it is a community responsibility to work to continuously reduce the social, economic and health-related causes of poverty.

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I raise this motion today to reaffirm our collective commitment in continuing to address the causes and impacts of poverty on a significant number of Canberrans. In a wealthy community, poverty disadvantage may be well hidden. The 2006 census data confirm that ACT residents have the highest median family income of any jurisdiction: \$1,773, compared to the national average of \$1,171. ACT residents are also better educated and generally healthier than other Australians. But, in the midst of our relative wealth, there are members of our community who suffer.

We need to think about what poverty means in the everyday lives of people who are not able to participate in the activities that most people take for granted. Poverty

means hard choices, not just juggling to pay bills but deciding to skip a meal in order to pay for petrol or to pay for a prescription at the chemist. Families in financial stress may be unable to heat their house and cannot pay bills in time or be able to provide a school lunch for their children. Even getting children to school can be restricted as parents are not able to afford the transport costs to get there.

The reality for Canberrans living in poverty is that their disadvantage is compounded by the wealth of the ACT. It means that, as a result of inadequate income and resources, they may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society. The ACT's highest cost of living, lack of access to everyday commodities such as internet and transport, and safe and secure housing increase social isolation and alienation, particularly for young people.

The 2006 census data show that there are pockets of disadvantage and poverty within the ACT. In 2002, the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling identified approximately 24,000 people living in poverty in the ACT. This data continues to drive our policy and service provision reform.

The ACT marks Anti-Poverty Week with a range of local events, all of which highlight our work in alleviating poverty stress experienced by Canberrans. Anti-Poverty Week was established in Australia as an expansion of the United Nations annual International Anti-Poverty Day on 17 October. The main aims of Anti-Poverty Week are to strengthen public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and hardship around the world and in Australia, and encourage research, discussion and action to address these problems, including actions by individuals, communities, organisations and governments.

The government is committed to addressing the causes and effects of poverty in a rigorous and sustainable way. The Canberra social plan is the government's comprehensive and accountable policy agenda of addressing disadvantage in partnership with the community. Specifically, the social plan is committed to reducing long-term unemployment, decreasing income inequality, reducing homelessness and increasing educational attainment, all targets aimed at addressing disadvantage.

In the context of today's motion, there are two particular flagships under the social plan that are important to highlight as we plot their progress over the last three years. Firstly, I would like to talk about the Community Inclusion Board, established as part of the social plan in 2004; and, secondly, I would like to highlight the success of the two ACT child and family centres as an example of how we are working strategically and collaboratively across government to deliver more holistic, client-focused services.

The Community Inclusion Board's mandate has been to provide an additional source of high-level advice to me on social exclusion issues and to commission research into priority areas identified by the government. How we strengthen public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and a commitment to research, discussion and action to address them are a key focus of the work of the board. As the Assembly is aware, ACOSS president, Lin Hatfield Dodds, chairs the Community Inclusion

Board. The board, throughout both of its terms, has overseen a number of key projects and a research program aimed directly at reducing poverty.

The board's seminar series provides an opportunity for community sector stakeholders to present their views on social inclusion issues and hear from government agencies about their policy responses. Recent seminars have included "Dropping off the Edge", which analysed locational disadvantage, by Professor Tony Vinson, which was released in February 2007. The seminar enhanced the level of knowledge of the distribution of disadvantage in the ACT and discussed approaches to improving service delivery to people who are disadvantaged.

The board will also host the community wellbeing seminar, providing opportunity for participants to understand the practical application of community wellbeing indicators in addressing individual determinants of health and wellbeing. Other seminars being progressed to be held in the near future include a seminar on prison support services pending the opening of the Alexander Maconochie Centre mid next year, an early intervention seminar to report back on a meta analysis of ACT early intervention programs to further develop the ACT's early intervention policy, and a seminar that focuses on sharing best practice in working with and in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

In its first term, the board has commissioned a substantial body of research work that gives us a more comprehensive understanding of the social factors that influence individual disadvantage and how we as a community have a role in supporting the disadvantaged and marginalised. The long-term unemployment project will undertake a demographic analysis of the ACT's long-term unemployed and will include a calculation of the implications of long-term unemployment in the ACT. This work will inform subsequent work on investigating and analysing the range of long-term unemployment assistance programs, with the aim of advising the ACT government on areas where they can play a positive role.

The government is also supporting the development of better information about the experience of poverty in the ACT through the Community Inclusion Board's contribution to the ACTCOSS-NATSEM research project that is updating the analysis of ABS data related to households in the bottom 20 per cent income bracket in the ACT that was published in 2002. This research will assist stakeholders to better understand and respond to the needs of these households.

The Community Inclusion Board has initiated a number of projects to reduce the burden of poverty and debt in the ACT. The community inclusion and household debt pilot project was released in August 2007. The project achieved outstanding results, with more than 40 per cent of participants increasing their earnings, including five who returned to part-time paid work, and more than 90 per cent reporting that they had changed their behaviours in relation to how they manage their finances. Many of the project recommendations, including boosting the dental scheme, reviewing debt and fine collection arrangements and enhancing the school bursary scheme, have been adopted across government and will continue to inform policymaking.

The government has committed to trial a draft poverty impact analysis framework developed by the board. The ACT is the first jurisdiction to do this, and there are three areas to be examined:

- Climate change—the board and the department will conduct a social impact analysis of climate change and mitigation strategies on low-income, disadvantaged and vulnerable households. This will include a poverty impact assessment on selected actions to identify areas where the government can further mitigate the impact of climate change response measures.
- Debt management—as I have indicated, an interdepartmental committee will use the draft poverty proofing framework to inform any recommendations it may make to government on options for collecting debt from members of the ACT community. One aim is to address the lack of flexibility of existing arrangements for persons to repay outstanding traffic and parking infringement penalties. The household debt project recommended providing more flexible options.
- Homelessness—the government is currently evaluating its homelessness strategy and, as part of this process, a poverty impact analysis is being conducted to assess the impact of the strategy on the level of poverty in the ACT.

The board has identified affordability and homelessness as priority areas in their work to address the causes of social exclusion in the ACT. The government also continues to strive to improve access to services for the homeless. Recently Housing ACT has:

- reviewed its procedures to ensure that the top priority applicants are housed within three months. The multidisciplinary housing panel has consistently exceeded its target of housing applicants with highest needs within 90 days;
- continued the restructuring of housing stock to better meet the needs of Housing ACT clients and will purchase up to 20 new affordable house and land packages in the new estates, as well as participate in new demonstration villages;
- announced the introduction of eligibility reviews to encourage tenants with sustained incomes over \$80,000 to purchase their home or consider buying or renting in the private market; and
- commenced a pilot for a youth stairwell model whereby tenants with similar backgrounds in multilevel complexes receive appropriate levels of support.

These initiatives highlight the government's ongoing commitment to house the less well off in our community. The ACT government is acutely aware of the importance of addressing the problem of housing stress in order to improve the wellbeing of all Canberrans. It is for this reason the government introduced its affordable housing action plan in April 2007. The government's affordable housing action plan is bold, innovative and far reaching. We have accepted all the recommendations of the affordable housing steering group and have moved rapidly into the implementation of the steering group's recommendations.

Key initiatives in the plan include a significant increase in the supply of residential land; new house and land packages priced between \$200,000 and \$300,000; regular englobo sales; over-the-counter sales of affordable housing blocks; a major expansion of community housing that will deliver an additional 480 affordable dwellings over five years; an initiative to increase the supply of private rental dwellings by 200 to 400 homes in the first instance; additional support for tenancy advocacy; the introduction of a homeshare program; land rental and shared equity schemes, including for public and community housing tenants; and targeted stamp duty concessions. The significant boost to community housing, the additional support to tenancy advocacy, strategies to increase the supply in private rental stock, the shared equity schemes and the introduction of the homeshare program are all initiatives of particular relevance to people on low incomes.

In its first term, the board has successfully piloted new approaches to service delivery to improve social inclusion through the Community Inclusion Fund. The fund has provided support for 25 community organisations working with government partners, helping the most vulnerable members of the ACT community to improve their social and economic circumstances. To date, \$4.4 million has been committed to locally driven initiatives such as the early morning centre in the city, providing the homeless with breakfasts and referral services enabling them to re-engage with society.

The two child and family centres in Gungahlin and Tuggeranong are examples of successful implementation of new approaches to service delivery. The centres are providing universal health, early-years development and parent support services to local families with young children. These universal services are of particular benefit to more disadvantaged and vulnerable families, providing easily accessible services in a way that welcomes all families and provides the support families need.

The child and family centres are showing early signs of success in engaging more marginalised groups. The child and family centres' prevention and early intervention framework reflect their mandate to provide integrated services along the spectrum, from prevention through to early intervention services. This means providing both universally available as well as targeted programs. It means being available to all children and their families as well as proactively targeting those with vulnerability factors that are known to be at risk for poorer developmental outcomes.

Universal access programs such as paint and play, as well as the full-time intake service, have a good representation of more marginalised families. This allows for earlier identification of support needs and a coordinated approach to programs that support the diverse needs of families.

Targeted programs have also been developed for groups known to have vulnerability factors for poorer developmental outcomes in children. Some members of the community will not access mainstream groups for fear of being judged, not understood or not having their additional needs met.

Parents with a diagnosed mental illness can access a facilitated playgroup, with facilitators having both adult mental health and early childhood expertise. This was

offered for southside parents in 2006-07, with 24 sessions held and 100 attendees over that time. This was in partnership with the YWCA and Carers ACT. Parents who are under 25 can access a facilitated playgroup. Thirty-eight sessions were held for young parents, with 331 attendees in total. This was offered in partnership with the YWCA. Consultation is under way with the ACT Indigenous community about what services would effectively meet their needs, through a grant from the Australian government.

Targeted programs such as triple P, the positive parenting program, are for families with early signs of problems in dealing with children's behaviour. More recently, participants included parents from the Karralika Drug Rehabilitation Centre. These participants commented that they did not feel that they stood out—again, testament to the inclusive practice of the Child and Family Centres teams. The design of the centres has been important in taking on board community input so that the centres are welcoming places for all families. Marketing the centres to all families means families do not feel stigmatised by walking into them. Having a range of integrated services also means families experience a coordinated service system.

Families can come in and chat with a trained professional during business hours, without having to make an appointment. Staff place a high priority on customer service, with a focus on conducting generalist needs assessments, thus listening to what families have to say even if their presenting issue is not something the centres can offer ongoing service for.

All families registered with the centres are contacted following case closure, for the purpose of gauging client satisfaction. In 2006-07, 96 per cent of clients reported feeling satisfied about the services they received. Clear themes in what clients liked were that they felt listened to, that staff were genuinely interested in helping them and that they followed through on any commitments they gave.

The government reaffirms its strong commitment to ensuring improved outcomes for people experiencing poverty. The above examples show that this is happening in a rigorous and sustainable way, and we continue to look at ways to improve the quality of people's lives and to reduce poverty and disadvantage in the ACT community. Mr Speaker, I have asked my colleagues to share with us specific reforms, and, indeed, my colleague Karin MacDonald will particularly address issues around homelessness.

I say again, as I have said this morning in relation to our attempts to ensure that this most important issue was debated and discussed within the Assembly today, that it is at the heart of the role and function of government to ensure that those most disadvantaged within our community have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of the community. There is no more important issue facing government than this issue, and it is vitally important that we debate it today.

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra—Leader of the Opposition) (4.09): I will come to the Chief Minister's last point first. As I said earlier, we actually support this motion. What we do not support is digging into private members time, as we are now doing—and now we are going to have a number of speakers—when we could have done this at 6 o'clock this evening and when it could have been done at about 5 past 12

yesterday. Indeed, we could have devoted from 10.30 onwards tomorrow morning to do it, because it is not going to go away. What is said will be said, and it could have been said yesterday. And now we are going to have Ms MacDonald talking—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Stefaniak, come to the motion, please.

MR STEFANIAK: I wonder whether this is just some sort of stunt to bite into private members business and actually not deal with matters which might have some real effect on poverty, such as the bill introduced by the shadow Treasurer today; such as, perhaps, a motion I have got in relation to an inquiry into the hospitals to make them better, which will obviously benefit everyone, including people who suffer poverty.

Ms MacDonald: What a load of rubbish, Bill! Take your hand out of your pocket; it is distracting.

MR STEFANIAK: That is lovely, Karin. Despite everything the Chief Minister has said today in relation to this, which is an attempt at self-congratulation for his government, the fact does remain that there is poverty in our community and the fact does remain that there is poverty, despite the fact that we have full employment—not thanks to you but thanks to a very effective federal government.

Whilst that has helped alleviate a lot of poverty—and a lot of people have been struggling in what is normally the lower end of Australia's economic society—and whilst a lot of those people have never have had it as good, there are still elements of poverty in our community and obviously there are still things we need to do to address that. That is why the opposition has no problem at all in unanimously supporting the aims of Australian Anti-Poverty Week.

There are a number of things I think this government can do to be a lot more user friendly. Let us look at rents and rates. In terms of rents, we do have very high rents here because, as much as anything else, there is not much of an incentive for people to invest in the ACT, with the tax structure we have. We also have a realisation, which only dawned on the government I think a few months ago, that we do need things like a land act, we do need to be able to ensure we can release land so that there is land coming onto the market, so that there is, in fact, the possibility to drop the cost of housing in the ACT to a more sustainable level. That, obviously, will have an impact too in terms of poverty.

One of the areas, too, which no-one, I think, has really come to grips with effectively in terms of reducing poverty is the impact of family break-up, the impact of problems actually in the home, the impact of the difficulties single people, be they single women or men, have in bringing up children, and the impact of drugs and other substance abuse in terms of families and the great problem that causes and the poverty that causes. That is something that no-one has really completely come to grips with yet, and I think a number of the government's policies simply ignore that.

There are ways, I think, in which we can perhaps make it a bit easier for people to actually get the necessary assistance, perhaps indeed to take some responsibility too for their own lives, to be given the opportunities to actually do that. Clearly, if that is

done to any great degree we will see, certainly, a number of improvements in terms of even fewer people in poverty than we have at present. Clearly, whilst no-one has ever quite got that right, I do not think too many of the actions that we have seen by this government have actually assisted in terms of coming to grips with some of the very real problems there.

Nevertheless, probably in terms of where we were 30 or 40 years ago, there is considerably less poverty and fewer people close to the poverty line in Australia than there have been. There have been some significant advances, I think, made in terms of just ordinary people and people who normally would be struggling and who are battlers in terms of the finances they have, in terms of the ability they actually have to cope. For many, many people in our community, life is certainly a lot easier and not nearly the huge struggle that it was for our parents' generation. That is, indeed, a plus but there is obviously a lot more we can do.

There is a lot more I think we can do here, as a territory. Playing silly games in terms of whether we debate this motion does not help, because there is a fair amount of substantive business this week in the Assembly, some of which I think could have a real effect in terms of addressing some of the issues that lead to poverty in our community.

The opposition supports the motion. I commend the government on bringing it on this week, but we are absolutely appalled at the games they have played, and bringing it on now in the middle of private members business is quite unnecessary. The motion itself is worthy of support and, of course, I hope everyone here supports the aim of Australian Anti-Poverty Week.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (4.14): It is infuriating that Mr Stefaniak used five of his 15 minutes and I have a 15-minute speech that I have to cram into 10. This is a timely motion in Anti-Poverty Week, when community organisations go to enormous lengths to make politicians aware of the people not doing all right in this Howard-Stanhope world of the ACT. While the ACT community is fairly prosperous when compared with the rest of Australia, too many of our residents remain in poverty.

This is also, incidentally, the first week of an official federal election campaign, and the response of all the parties really matters. Words will become policy. In its desperate scrambling to regain government and strengthen its economic credentials, the federal government's first promise is a round of income tax cuts. How cynical to cut income taxes knowing that it can claw back lost dollars through the GST, on the consumer goods and restaurant meals bought with the bounty. Tax cuts have been disproportionately aimed at high-income earners, including people likely to spend their extra dollars on making an already comfortable lifestyle more salubrious, while those who need more pay in the packet to pay the rent and put food in the table are caught by the inflation caused by more spending and, with their small windfall, may be able to purchase only a few more bananas.

We have not heard from the ALP yet. I hope they show their economic credentials and indicate that they stand for the needs of the little people in our society. If I hear another "Me too", I will see that, while we are being offered a change in leader, the leader lacks the policies to address poverty in this nation.

Surveys indicate that people want social investment—in public health, education and community services. They want money spent on infrastructure to reduce greenhouse emissions—infrastructure such as rail, public transport, cycling and walking paths, renewable technologies and community amenities.

The Greens' response to the federal government's tax cuts is indicative of the Greens' approach. The \$34 billion should have gone to hospitals, schools, carers, housing and public transport. The Greens would have put Australia's two million pensioners first, with a \$30 a week rise, costing \$3 billion per annum. Ten billion dollars a year could employ an extra 140,000 teachers, nurses and other professionals. Ten billion dollars a year could provide three million solar hot water systems. In three years all Australian households could have a free solar hot water system.

Ten billion dollars a year could make public transport free, with enough money left over to invest in a massive expansion of the existing public transport network, with a huge savings bonus in greenhouse gas emissions from Australia. Or \$10 billion a year could pay for a \$60 per fortnight increase in the age pension, with money left over to reintroduce the commonwealth dental scheme and invest significantly in improved aged care, including assistance to Australia's forgotten carers. Doubling the carer allowance to \$197 per fortnight—a measly \$197 per fortnight—would cost \$927 million, but it could make a big difference. And \$10 billion a year could raise Australia's spending on education to the top of OECD rankings and allow for the abolishment of the HECS fees which at the moment confront the nation's tertiary education students.

What is required is a partnership between governments. The Greens believe that a rich society like Australia can afford to maintain services which will benefit everyone and that, if we do not do that, we will have to spend a larger amount on policing, courts and prisons. That is the sum. People are our greatest resource and cultural asset. Every ACT child should have access to the high-class public health and education services that they need to lift them out of disadvantage and provide the skills we will need if we are to remain a sustainable society.

Moving us out of poverty requires us to invest in our children. We can start there and we can move our skills base up as well. If each child was given access to the excellent education that we know we are capable of providing here and given access to excellent health services, we could mitigate the effects for disadvantaged families to some extent while also providing families with improved levels of housing and services.

Mr Stanhope referred to the poverty data that ACTCOSS has been able to procure. I went to the launch of that this week. The data can be used to assist in planning where Canberran services are targeted, including in health, public transport and education. But I am wondering why the ACT government did not take the initiative to acquire this data and why it was left to ACTCOSS to purchase it.

The ACT government appears to haphazardly publish ACT demographic profiles every few years, like the one provided to the Community Inclusion Board in May. But

I understand that this data is mainly obtained from the ABS, and caution should be exercised in its interpretation as the survey sample size is small and can lead to inaccuracy. I believe that the ACT government itself has found the data to be flawed and that this has led to some short-changing. Some of the ABS data is flawed and inadequate in calculating our population numbers for receipt of federal grants.

I would like to suggest that the ACT government should continue to support ACTCOSS, if that is the way it needs to be done, or take up the carriage of this project itself, so that we can update this data on a regular basis in order to acquire accurate longitudinal data on the ACT population, to see how it is faring and to direct us in where services should be targeted in the future.

Dealing with poverty is a win-win situation. It builds economic resilience in the ACT by ensuring access to a well-educated, skilled workforce through working with people to improve their lives. From the crossbench the Greens have put the issue of poverty on the Assembly's agenda. Kerrie Tucker's work is on the record, and in the last two years I have moved two motions in the Assembly specifically focused on poverty, both of which were supported. The first examined the link between employment and poverty; the second examined the provision of ACT government concessions to the community.

The government supported both these motions, and I know that follow-up action is occurring. I gather that the Community Inclusion Board has begun an investigation into ways to assist the long-term unemployed to give them the opportunity to move out of poverty. I look forward to that report. I note that the government's concessions policy is currently undergoing public consultation. I look forward to seeing the results of that. Ensuring that concessions are well targeted and providing horizontal and vertical equity is not an easy task. Even so, I am disappointed that the government is not conducting a whole-of-government concession policy review but is narrowly focusing on only the DHCS concessions. This limits the scope of analysis and diminishes the effectiveness of this work.

The climate change action plan states that the ACT government, with the Community Inclusion Board, will undertake a social impact analysis of climate change, including an assessment of the current concessions regime. As our climate changes and our utility bills inevitably rise, the social plan's intention to develop and implement measures to increase the water and energy efficiency of residential buildings is a key component of alleviating poverty. Current government programs like the Essential Services Consumer Council, home audits and public housing retrofitting are all good measures, but more can be done. I look forward to hearing from the government just how this study will be conducted, including whether energy advisers, as well as social experts, will be employed. I assume and hope that ESCC will be asked to join the project team or otherwise inform it.

I turn to the poverty-proofing trial. Action 8.2 of the social plan is a trial poverty-proofing process based on the successful Irish model. The ACT government has used the process in its mid-term review of the ACT homelessness strategy. I appreciate the briefing that the government gave me on this issue. However, I note from the ACTCOSS response to the June 2007 progress report that the ACT government is yet

to respond to the Community Inclusion Board's report on poverty proofing. And the future of the board itself is unclear, as noted in the budget this year. Mr Speaker, I seek leave for an extension of time. (*Extension of time not granted.*)

MS MacDONALD (Brindabella) (4.24): The Chief Minister has clearly outlined the government's work in addressing the causes and impacts of poverty. Our government has a robust and sustainable policy framework, has a commitment to receiving high-level information from the Community Inclusion Board and has made a significant investment in the provision of holistic, client-focused services such as the ACT child and family centres.

Both the Community Inclusion Board and the child and family centres are flagship initiatives under the Canberra social plan. As flagship initiatives, they clearly demonstrate the government's commitment to working in best-practice ways to ameliorate the impacts of poverty for our constituents. However, I would like to draw attention to the significant work our government agencies do each day through delivering a raft of services and programs that specifically target poverty and disadvantage. In describing this work I would like to specifically outline the ACT government's efforts to alleviate housing stress for people experiencing poverty and disadvantage. Of course, part of this work is evaluating the services and programs that the government delivers. I would like to stress that we work constantly in reviewing services to ensure that service delivery is based on a comprehensive understanding of local needs.

The ACT's high cost of living presents significant barriers for those experiencing the stresses of poverty. To assist with some of these stresses, the government provides a comprehensive emergency relief and concession program. The ACT government currently gives approximately \$823,000 to welfare agencies such as the Salvation Army and the St Vincent de Paul Society to distribute to people in financial crisis. Services include food relief, household goods, clothing, utility payment assistance, financial information, advice and referral.

In addition, the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services administers the ACT concessions program, which aims to improve the affordability of essential services for low-income earners. The concessions program currently provides assistance with energy, water and sewerage, general rates, public transport, student transport, motor vehicle registration and drivers licences, the ACT spectacle subsidy scheme, the ACT seniors spectacle scheme, the low-vision aids scheme and life support. The total amount for concession payments in 2006-07 was in excess of \$18 million. The program aims to achieve a balance in the standard of living and access to essential services for all members of the ACT community.

Homelessness in the ACT affects approximately 1,200 people each night. The experiences of these people, and the many more who are at risk of homelessness, are complex, unique and personal. Multiple factors contribute to homelessness. Domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse, physical and mental illness, relationship breakdown, unemployment and poverty are all primary causes of homelessness. The responses and strategies required to alleviate its impacts, reduce its likelihood and support people to transition from homelessness are complex. This in turn requires

commitment from a range of support services and the need to recognise and respond to individual experience and circumstance.

The ACT government's response to improving this situation is comprehensive. I would like to share with you some of the areas of this response. In April 2004, the ACT government released *Breaking the cycle: the ACT homelessness strategy*, providing 82 specific actions to reduce homelessness in the ACT. Implementation is overseen by the ACT Homelessness Committee. To date, 56 of the actions have been implemented, with another 26 underway to be finalised by December this year. The ACT Homelessness Committee will continue to oversee implementation of the remaining 26 actions, as well as monitor evaluation of the strategy.

In July 2007 DHCS launched the Institute of Child Protection Studies research report *Finding their way home: children's experiences of homelessness*. The work involved engaging 25 children and young people to explore their experience of homelessness. The research was commissioned by the ACT Homelessness Committee and the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support to inform policy and practice and improve the service responses and outcomes for children and families across DHCS.

Eighteen children aged six to 14 and seven children aged 15 to 21 participated in the study. Eight participants identified as being from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background. All had experienced homelessness with their families, with periods of homelessness ranging from four months to 10 years. Parents and key stakeholders were also interviewed about how children experienced and were affected by family homelessness.

The final report relies strongly on the voices of the children and young people involved. It was reported that children in this study felt that homelessness was a subjective experience that was determined more by their level of connectedness to family and to community and the absence of fear, instability and insecurity than by their housing status. When housed, they stressed the importance of having adequate space; having a sense of control over their environment; housing stability and predictability; and feeling connected to friends, supports and opportunities. Children's experiences of homelessness were often precipitated and exacerbated by parental conflict and family violence; poverty; parental, alcohol or other drug misuse; and other related personal and family issues.

Children's experiences were characterised by high levels of family separation; exposure to violence; poor health outcomes; feelings of stress, anxiety, loss and grief; social isolation; and difficulties in attending and achieving at school and making and keeping friends. A number of young people in the sample experienced intergenerational homelessness and were now parents whose own children had accompanied them during periods of homelessness. Of particular concern was the report's finding that children from families experiencing homelessness often experience other problems at school, with their health, and in making and retaining friends. This may put them at an even greater risk of experiencing disadvantage and social exclusion later in life.

DHCS will work with the supported accommodation assistance program, SAAP, and other services to implement responses to the findings of the report throughout

2007-08. Responses will include the development of a tool kit for service delivery staff to develop skills and consistency in engaging and supporting children and young people. The tool kit will be developed in collaboration with the Institute of Child Protection Studies and its implementation will be accompanied by a training and awareness raising program.

In the 2004-05 budget, DHCS received \$100,000 capital funding to undertake a feasibility study for a drop-in centre for people experiencing homelessness in the ACT. In December 2004, the Canberra City Uniting Church, in partnership with DHCS, received community inclusion funding of \$254,000 over three years to establish and operate a small drop-in centre in Pilgrim Place for people experiencing homelessness. The drop-in centre is open from 7.00 am to 11.00 am on Monday to Friday and provides breakfast, office facilities, mail collection facilities, and general support and referral.

The operation of this drop-in centre provided the opportunity to test the demand for the service in the city centre. Currently, Purdon Associates are undertaking a feasibility study to identify strategies to ensure that the government is adequately responding to the needs of people who are homeless. It will include the development of a service model for addressing the needs of rough sleepers. This will include continued funding for the Uniting Church early morning drop-in centre under SAAP. A reference group comprising representatives of government and non-government organisations has been established to oversee the feasibility study. It is anticipated that the study will be finalised by November.

Reform of Housing ACT and homelessness services is creating an integrated service system that addresses clients' needs along their pathway from homelessness to independent living within the community. The reform process identified the need for more exit points for SAAP so that clients could move through crisis accommodation as their circumstances improved. The transitional housing program utilises vacant Housing ACT stock to provide short-term accommodation for people exiting crisis accommodation. Properties are available for periods of three to six months, to encourage clients to achieve their goal of independent living. This requires better utilisation of the housing stock.

This innovative program contributes the equivalent of an additional \$6 million of capital funding into homelessness service provision. The transitional housing program commenced on 1 October 2006. The Anglicare housing program manages 15 properties as part of its existing contract with DHCS. Clients in the program receive support from the homelessness service that referred them.

That is just some of the things we do. I also have some information about SAAP, but I do not have time for that. (*Quorum formed.*)

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (4.36): It is ironic that the government insisted on bringing this matter on today and then could not actually have any of their members present for the greater part of the debate.

Mr Corbell: The glass is always half empty for you, isn't it, Mrs Dunne? It must be a miserable world.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MRS DUNNE: Not nearly as miserable as yours, Mr Corbell.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order, everybody! Mrs Dunne has the floor.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Speaker, it is important that the government has moved this motion. It is always the responsibility of elected officials—indeed, for society in general—to be conscious of those who are less fortunate than others. The main aim of Anti-Poverty Week is to strengthen public understanding of the changes and consequences of poverty and the hardship around the world and in Australia and to encourage research, discussion and action to address these problems, including actions by individuals, communities, organisations and governments.

I am glad that these aims have been put in a motion. I am glad in particular that they draw attention to the work of individuals and the role of community organisations in addressing poverty. As members of the Legislative Assembly—this is probably the lot of most legislators—we have the privilege to come into contact with organisations and individuals who put their time and their reputations on the line day after day, making real and substantial differences to the lives of people who live in poverty in a way that the cold hand of government and government instrumentalities can never do.

There is a difference in emphasis between those of us in the Liberal Party and those from the Labor Party in relation to this. Those opposite think that collective action is the answer to almost all these problems, whereas for the most part we believe that the actions of individuals and communities are more effective in addressing the needs of people in need. Programs like the night patrol and the soup kitchen—which is the work of one person, working almost single-handedly—really make the difference on the ground to people in poverty. It is the work of volunteers that support organisations—for instance, “Community House”, an organisation that I am a patron of—that addresses poverty in this town in a way which is most important: addressing really fundamental needs for housing and ensuring that young women in stressful situations can find employment, which is the sure ticket out of poverty.

Whilst trying not to be partisan about this—because this is an important issue and we should not be too partisan about it—we have to draw attention to the gains made by Australia in changing the fundamentals to address poverty more effectively in the last few years. Sometimes I think that there are a lot of people in the ACT and Australia for whom poverty is very much removed. They do not experience it in their own life, they do not come into contact with people who experience it and they find it very hard to comprehend that there are people in poverty in Australia.

I suppose that poverty is relative. In Australia people are really struggling. As Mr Stanhope said, sometimes they find it difficult to provide a school lunch for their children or to ensure that they have a meal for themselves, because of so many demands upon their limited resources. But for people in other countries, especially

Third World countries, what we would consider poverty would be considered considerable luxury. We need to keep all of this in perspective. This is not to say that we should ignore people in Australia who are in particular need.

Over the last 10 or 11 years, we have seen a significant turnaround in economic fundamentals, which will create a situation where fewer and fewer people should be living in poverty. We should be looking at the underlying economic strength and foundations of our society. We need to keep in mind that in 1990 our per capita income in Australia was in the bottom third of OECD countries; it has now recovered and our per capita income is in the top third of OECD countries. This is no accident; this is the result of the extraordinary hard work and commitment by the commonwealth government and of not taking our eye off the ball. It is no accident that we have shored up the foundations of our economy—the best possible way to find a way out of poverty for most people—so that we now have living standards that are unsurpassed except perhaps by the United States.

These are the basic foundations. Another sure ticket out of poverty, as I said, is to ensure high employment and good employment prospects for people. In the past few years we have seen unemployment fall, from 8.2 per cent in 1996 to 4.3 per cent—and falling. In the ACT it is down below three per cent; 2.4 per cent is the last figure that I recall seeing. These are substantial improvements. Back in 1994 and 1995—when I was a commonwealth public servant working in the department of employment, looking at the Keating government's Working Nation projects and the work done by the then minister for employment, Kim Beazley—there was a level of despair which I had never encountered before. I recall a speech made by the then minister saying that Australia could never again get its employment down below five per cent—that we were committed to continual high levels of unemployment. The lie has been put to that with 11 years of hard work by the commonwealth government. These are the fundamentals that underlie our fight, in the ACT and Australia, against poverty.

It was interesting to listen to the Chief Minister and Ms MacDonald talk about what is happening in the ACT. There are some good things happening. I recall recently complimenting the minister for family services on some of the programs that are being used to address poverty by early intervention and ensuring that families do not fall into neglect and their children are not neglected. They are very laudable programs, and much of what is done by the family centres is laudable.

But it was interesting that Mr Stanhope skated over some other things. He mentioned—I think he thought he got away with it—some of the issues that really do compound poverty: things like access to transport and access to education. What a fine history the Stanhope government has, especially over the last year or so, in those two areas! We have seen people in the ACT who are genuinely socially disadvantaged having their schools closed. When you look at the work done and the decisions made to close particular schools, what did those opposite do? For the most part, they attempted to close schools in areas with low socioeconomic background.

We have seen the closure of West Belconnen high school, and now the closure of Holt and Higgins; we have seen the downgrading of Southern Cross primary school in my electorate. These are all areas with low socioeconomic background where access to

education around the corner is imperative, because many of these people do not have transport to get their children to school. That is mainly courtesy of the Stanhope government, which has cut back transport services. It is extremely hard—and Dr Foskey made this point the other day—for people without a car to get to work.

It affects all sorts of people. There are people who are poor in a transitional way—people like students. They do not have a prospect of remaining poor for a long time, but while they are students they are poor. They cannot get around on public transport and they cannot get to their jobs because of the failure of the Stanhope government and its transport services.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Housing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (4.47): I want to briefly touch on something Mrs Dunne has raised. She says that young people cannot get to and from school very easily. We recognise that in the context of the bus service review. We need to put on the record, however, that 50 per cent of student travel to and from school is on ordinary route services; the other 50 per cent is on school bus services. We know that historically the school bus runs do not settle themselves down until mid-February, but they are revised in about November, depending on enrolment shifts.

The challenge before us is to make sure that the services provided to students travelling actually get them to the school on time and home again afterwards. We recognise that. That is why two initiatives have occurred. The first one is that we have reinstated the committee which examines the school bus runs. Once upon a time—I think it was probably in Mr Stefaniak's days as minister for education—there was a committee made up of the P&C councils, the schools and ACTION to examine the enrolment shift to make sure that those bus routes were responsive as much as possible. That committee ceased to exist some time ago. I have reinstated that committee.

Secondly, the review of ACTION bus services and networking has taken into account the imperatives of people who are travelling who have no alternative but to travel by public transport. We accept that. We have had an unprecedented positive response—some negative, but unprecedented positivity—in helping us reconstruct a network. That has been to the extent where, when I was speaking to him just the other day, the network designer said that he wished to congratulate the government on the data that he had available to him in designing the new network. He had been involved with the Graham report. When the Graham report was commissioned, it was done with very little data. There was very little information from the travelling public, let alone from people who should travel and did not. That is always the most difficult question to answer. I am sure that Dr Foskey would appreciate this in an academic sense. It is very hard for us to work out why the public are not travelling on the bus. Unless they tell us exactly, we can only speculate, and that is not a very good basis on which to make decisions.

We also know—this is right across the country and across the world—that there is very little reliance on people who say, “Well, you know, if I had this service I would use it.” They actually do not. It is the difference between “would like” and “really need”. We have this conundrum.

In the context of poverty, we recognise that there are people who are suffering social isolation. What we need to do is get those services out there so that these people do not suffer social isolation—so that they do not have the imperative to stay in their own home. But I reject Mrs Dunne's assertions. As I said before, 50 per cent of our students travel on route services. The challenge for us is to make sure that the school bus runs and the route services actually work in concert—that they do not work independently of one another, which has been hitherto the case.

We recognise that in our attack on poverty. This government is fully aware of it. In Anti-Poverty Week we, in each of our portfolios, are addressing issues to do with poverty. In mine I have two areas of absolute concern. One is the public transport issue. I have impressed upon our ACTION people that that is a priority for the government. The other one is in multicultural affairs. Do you know who suffer poverty the most? Refugees.

The Sudanese refugees are the most recent bunch of people from overseas who have been targeted for vilification, discrimination and all manner of other things—put up before the rest of the community as something different. This is absolutely unacceptable. These folks are running away from violence. They come to our shores; they come to our welcoming city. We try to extend a helping hand and the hand of welcome through places like Companion House, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the ethnic school languages program, the migrant resource centre and our health services. We do a great job, only to find the federal minister plucking them out of the air and suggesting that they cannot assimilate into our society.

The federal minister's political predecessors did the same thing in the 1850s with the Chinese. They have done the same thing with the Iraqi and Iranian refugees, the Pakistani refugees and the Vietnamese boat people—all in their turn. What was the most recent group before the Sudanese? Muslims. They were held up as pariahs. They were held up and vilified by this federal government. This particular government—the Jon Stanhope government—went in to bat and fought for this thing in ministerial councils. We thought we had got somewhere with Minister Andrews, but clearly we have not.

Now we find we have the battle again on another front because there is an election. We have got Mr Howard, Mr Andrews, Mr Abbott and the rest of the gang of four saying, "We have to keep this nation in a state of fear; therefore the populace will depend upon us to protect them from this horrible bunch of people." I am reminded of the numbers of Vietnamese boat people and Afghan boat people. I think that in one of the years when the John Howard fear campaign was at its height we had something like 4,000 people come to our shores—4,000 people, two-thirds of whom were adults. You do not have a family putting a kid on a leaky boat and coming to our shores unless they are really running away from something. The numbers are terribly small.

The same thing is happening with the Sudanese—because they look different and because a lot of them are Muslims. They have committed two crimes. They have come from North Africa and they look different from everybody else; and they are Muslims. Therefore they must be a threat to this country! What an appalling state of

affairs. In the context of Anti-Poverty Week, we need to understand that the policies of the federal government in respect of refugees are about keeping these people in poverty. The Stanhope government is about lifting people out of that poverty. I urge the Assembly to support the motion.

Motion agreed to.

Education—senior secondary system

Debate resumed.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (4.55): Mr Speaker, senior secondary colleges are an important issue, and it is a shame that Ms Porter has put forward such a paltry and insubstantial motion to address this very important issue. I will be asking the Clerk to circulate an amendment to the motion as soon as he is able to. In the meantime, I will dwell on the motion as it currently stands.

This is not quite a self-congratulatory motion; it is a sort of “gonna” motion that has come from Ms Porter. The Stanhope government is under considerable pressure in the area of education because of its lack of performance, and that was exemplified today in question time. I wonder how many times Ms Porter can ask the same question and Mr Barr can answer it about how much money they have spent on bricks and mortar. Mr Barr thinks that I am terrified of this. A principled and well thought out education policy—the sort that he will see from the Liberal Party, in our own good time—will, in fact, be much more than the mere bricks-and-mortar approach that we have had from Andrew Barr.

Let us go back to the “good money after bad” comment that Mr Barr thinks that I am so frightened of and which Mr Barr insists on verbalising on a regular basis. Mr Stefaniak and I were taking bets as to how long it would take in the answer to a particular question before Mr Barr managed to say “good money after bad”, and then we were taking bets on how many times he would say it. You have to have more arrows in your quiver than that one if you are actually going to run a reasonable critique of educational policy.

What has always been said—and I said it to Mr Barr at the War Memorial on the day that he announced the policy—is that I do not have a problem with the capital injection of funds into education. I said to him personally at the War Memorial at the post-budget function that I did not have a problem with the capital injection, as long as we knew what we were doing with it and why. I have said this consistently. Until we know why children are leaving the ACT government education system, we cannot make a proper investment. Unless we know why people are leaving, much of the investment will be just putting good money after bad.

When you look at the education budget over the last two years, the criticisms that have arisen about it—apart from the horrendous issue of school closures—have been about cutting back the number of teachers. If we are going to have an effective teaching and learning environment, which Mr Barr says that he is producing, why are we cutting back on teachers? The most effective way of improving your teaching and

learning environment is to ensure that our schools are properly staffed. What do we see here? We have got Ms Porter coming in here today with this pseudo-laudatory motion about the ACT college systems. But what do we actually have today? We have a minister for education who, by his own admission, has cut 21 teachers—21 teachers—out of the college system this year alone. He says it is 21; many of the people in the college system and some of the evidence indicates to me that it is a much higher figure than that and that it may be in excess of 30.

What we have here today is Ms Porter's pseudo motion of congratulations to the government. She talks about the Atelier report of the review of government secondary colleges on behalf of the ACT government. This report was published in December 2005. And what is the main thrust of this motion today? It is to note that pretty soon, as a result of this review, the government will be releasing a business plan.

Mr Barr: Well, if you had paid attention, you would have noticed that it happened two months ago.

MRS DUNNE: What are we actually doing?

Ms Porter: It's been released. That's not the point.

MRS DUNNE: We are actually noting that pretty soon, two years after the process, there will be a business plan; a little bit of something that might get us underway and might get some of these recommendations implemented. Interestingly enough, when this minister was so busy closing schools, he was ignoring the recommendations of this report. He kept saying in published documents, on the web page and at public meetings how what he was doing was supported by this report. He did that until I had the temerity and the audacity to stand up at one of those public meetings and quote a statement that showed that he was ignoring everything that was in those reports.

We have got the minister here today saying, "We're spending lots of money in my electorate in Melba in relation to Melba high school and Charnwood and Copland college," but was that spending informed by this report? No, it was not. It may, in the long run, be good money; it may be a good investment. But at this stage we are working on a wing and a prayer. We do not know whether it is good money or not and whether it is a good investment or not. It certainly is not an investment that is informed by this report, which was commissioned, quite rightly and as it should have been, by the minister's predecessor. This minister has done nothing about it, except have Ms Porter come in here today and move this motion.

I note that my amendment has been circulated, Mr Deputy Speaker. I move:

Omit all words after "Assembly", substitute:

"(1) notes:

- (a) the high success rate of the ACT secondary college system since its inception;

- (b) the recommendations and directions coming out of the review of Atelier Learning Solutions Pty Ltd of the ACT secondary colleges which was published in December 2005;
 - (c) the failure of the Stanhope Government to implement those recommendations so far; and
 - (d) the reduction in staffing of at least 21 teachers from the ACT college system as a result of 2006-2007 Budget; and
- (2) calls on the Stanhope Government to immediately:
- (a) implement the recommendations of the review of ACT secondary colleges;
 - (b) reinstate the 21 staff cut from the ACT college system; and
 - (c) desist from moving self-congratulatory motions as a substitute for actions.”.

Ms Porter should be on her minister’s case and saying, “In my electorate, minister, in the electorate of Ginninderra, there are colleges that are doing it tough because you have cut teachers out of it.” There are colleges out there that have lost substantial numbers of teachers, and it is having an impact on a daily basis on the teaching and learning environment. It is having a daily impact on the learning capacity of students; it is having a daily impact on the quality of the teaching that goes on in our senior secondary colleges.

All the extra bits have been taken away because these teachers are working so hard. They are taking on an extra load; they are taking on extra lines. As a result of this, they do not have the time to stop in the corridor or remain behind in a classroom and talk with a student and value add to that student’s learning. All the extra bits—all the bits that are intangible and cannot be measured by some time and motion expert with a stopwatch—have been taken out of the ACT college system by this minister stripping the staff out of the system.

The teachers union, the college principals and the students told him what would happen if he cut the staff. He went ahead and he cut the staff, and, as a result of that, today there are students in our college system who are doing it tougher than they need to. There are teachers in our college system who are doing it tougher than they need to, and the proud tradition of 30 years of an exemplary college system—probably the best in the country, the one that, by the minister’s own admission, other states want to emulate—has been undermined in just over a year by this minister with his parsimonious cutting of teacher numbers and his lack of attention to the policy.

Look at some of the recommendations in the report. The recommendations are about ensuring that when kids leave year 10, they transition smoothly and without disruption to their learning and unnecessary repetition in their learning. These things are not happening because this minister and this Chief Minister and this government collectively have cut the heart out of every ACT college by taking out any excess staff

that there may have been. Any little bit of fat anywhere has all gone in the approach of “we won’t kill you, but we’ll cut you till you bleed”, which has been adopted by the Stanhope government. This motion is a disgrace. If Ms Porter is so interested in education, she should be more assertive than she has been. Therefore, I commend my amendment to the house.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (5.05): I was going to support Ms Porter, but I think that Mrs Dunne has given me a better offer! In fact, her amendment covers most of the issues and concerns that I would have raised. While Ms Porter’s motion is open ended and indicates that there is a sort of approval by the government of the Atelier Learning Solution’s report, we are yet to see the government’s response to that report, and the business plan is still being anticipated.

Mr Barr: It was actually released a month ago, Deb, but that’s okay. Don’t worry about the detail. It’s on the website; I put the media release out.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Dr Foskey, do not respond to Mr Barr’s interjection.

Mr Barr: You’re not interested enough to pay any attention.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Dr Foskey.

DR FOSKEY: Thank you very much. I look forward to reading that, and, no doubt, Mr Barr will comment on it and Ms Porter will summarise it in her closing speech. It is interesting the manner in which information like that is offered to members. I just do not know whether that kind of “gotcha there” approach is really helpful.

Mr Barr: Well, I put a media release out, and it’s been on the website for a month.

DR FOSKEY: Thank you very much.

Mr Barr: And then you make inaccurate statements.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Barr, Dr Foskey has the floor; you can speak later.

DR FOSKEY: Yes, and Dr Foskey is one member who currently does not have an education adviser and tries very hard to keep on top of things and will very definitely go and read the government’s business plan. However, there are issues in Ms Porter’s motion which can be addressed, I believe, without reading the business plan. The first one is the assertion that the ACT senior secondary system has a high success rate of delivering quality educational outcomes to the young people of the ACT. Well, that does depend, does it not, on how one measures success?

I will not go into details about concerns that have been raised about the UAI, because it is fairly clear that the government does not plan to respond to those in this term. In fact, it has turned a deaf ear to them, which is a little odd, because, in fact, I think we would probably have a higher success rate if we looked at the way the UAI was calculated. I am convinced by assertions that our students are actually disadvantaged by the way we calculate the UAI. I do not feel it has ever been dealt with adequately, despite the fact that there have been a number of reports and inquiries and responses.

A quorum not being present and the bells being rung—

DR FOSKEY: The clock keeps ticking, does it? Am I to cease giving my—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, you are.

DR FOSKEY: Right. We don't stop the clock, do we? That's an issue around standing orders.

Mr Barr: She's just cut off five minutes of your time.

DR FOSKEY: I have attempted to get standing orders changed.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: You may as well relax, Dr Foskey.

DR FOSKEY: I am relaxed. Alert, but relaxed. (*Quorum formed.*) Thank you, Mrs Dunne. I am not quite sure what your aim was in calling the quorum there, but, of course, all members should be present at all times, and listening eagerly.

In terms of our colleges performing better than others, I think that while our high achieving ACT students do well, I am not sure that they do better than we can expect. We are aware, of course, of the socioeconomic factors that lead to the success of students. But, really, the concern should always be about those students who are not performing well and have not performed well. Their performance is really how we should measure our system, not the performance of those who do exceedingly well, even though, of course, when we are parents, that is what we want.

I do not believe that any school is any better than its teachers and the time that it has for its students. I am concerned about the morale of teachers, especially in colleges after the changes this year. I did ask a question of Mr Barr yesterday; I am awaiting eagerly the data that he has said he will see if he can collect on issues relating to teachers retention. It is fantastic we have so many applicants for our jobs, but I do not think that we can be complacent if we are losing teachers. I think we are always going to need that balance between the new and the experienced teachers.

It is very interesting that the ACT government has paid great respect to this review and that it took its time in replying to it, which I do not necessarily think is a bad thing. But I would really like to have seen a similar exhaustive effort and a report responding to the documents or whatever it was—the evidence—which led to the closure and downgrading—that is my opinion—of 23 public schools in the 2020 process.

There are many, many issues raised by the Atelier review, and many of them, of course, have been self-evident for a while—the issues of transition between high school and college, for instance, and the fact that some students fall through that net simply because of the freedom and the changes that are so different. I think there are issues that could be considered about whether college-type education could start at year 10, given that the college system began in the late 1970s and it has not been

upgraded, even though most of us acknowledge that students reach a certain kind of maturity earlier these days. Certainly in high schools year 10 can be a very difficult year to teach.

I am very interested to see the business plan. I do feel, of course, rightly, that I am unable to respond in full to that, and it probably would have been quite good if the motion had been updated to reflect the fact that the business plan had been produced. In terms of Mrs Dunne's amendment, I think that pretty much everything that she says in the first part is an accurate reflection of what has occurred. I think that it is important that we implement the recommendations of the review and that we reinstate the 21 staff cut from the ACT college system, because the value of the college system was based on the time that teachers could spend with students. I am being told that finding that extra hour or so that is required actually means that teachers have got less time to speak to students. Their workload in every other regard has not decreased; it is mandatory. The discretionary part is the time the teachers spend just talking to students between classes and after classes. The nature of college systems is that students are not there all the time and able to do that. (*Time expired.*)

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, Minister for Industrial Relations) (5.15): I indicate from the outset that the government will not be supporting Mrs Dunne's amendment, mainly because it contains a large number of factual errors. Most notable is the reference in paragraph 1 (c)—the failure of the government to implement the recommendations.

I would like to present—and I will table it at the conclusion of my speech—the ACT college business plan, but for those who are watching in their offices, if they go to the department website, www.det.act.gov.au, they will find it there on the front page, where it has been for the last month. I released the ACT college business plan 2007-09 more than a month ago. Just to provide some background on that, the government did commission the review from Atelier Learning Solutions late in 2005, and the report was presented to the government at the start of 2006 and made 14 recommendations.

This report was then referred to a representative group of stakeholders, including university academics, educational practitioners and administrators, the Australian Education Union, the Canberra Institute of Technology and parent groups, for comment. This representative group supported all but two of the 14 recommendations. I then accepted the advice of the representative group and referred the other 12 recommendations to the Department of Education and Training to develop a plan of action in collaboration with the college principals.

That work commenced in the second quarter of 2006, just after I became minister. It commenced then and continued throughout 2006. During this time, departmental officers and college principals met regularly to discuss the ACT college business plan. The plan that I released last month represents the outcomes of those discussions. It identifies the connection between the ACT Department of Education and Training and the strategic plan for DET 2006-09 and the recommendations from the review, and it incorporates targets, strategies and performance measures for achieving those things required by the review.

So the ACT college business plan 2007-09 identifies activities which affect all players in college education. It focuses squarely on improving teaching and learning and ensuring that there are pathways for all students in colleges in their journey through the post-compulsory education years. This business plan provides us with the framework for ensuring that our already high quality system of education continues to lead Australia into the future. So it is important in responding to Mrs Dunne's amendment and the comments of Dr Foskey to note that this report has been available for more than a month. It was worked on diligently by my department and college principals throughout 2006. It has had involvement from key stakeholder groups, including the Australian Education Union, the P&C council and a variety of other stakeholders, in its development, and it does represent a significant response to the issues raised in the college review.

So to suggest that the government has not responded is factually incorrect and reflects poorly upon the shadow minister particularly. I will excuse Dr Foskey, as she has advised she does not have an education adviser in her office at the moment. But you would like to think that the shadow minister for education would be paying attention. It was not as if this just snuck out; I did issue a media release, and the report has been on the website for more than a month. It has been talked about and it has been the subject of a motion that Ms Porter put on the notice paper some time ago. When Mrs Dunne said, through a series of interjections, that it was important that the Assembly debate this matter, I agreed with that. I indicated that I would be releasing the business plan, and I did so more than a month ago.

As far as the other aspects of Mrs Dunne's amendment are concerned, particularly in relation to staffing arrangements within colleges, it is again worth reminding members that the outcomes of the EBA were as the result of a private arbitration process between the Australian Education Union and the government in relation to the way the last EBA went. The government put forward five offers during the EBA negotiations. Had the AEU accepted any of those offers—and I believe they should have accepted many of those offers—then we would not be in the position that we are in in terms of an imposed outcome of 19 face-to-face hours.

The difficulty that we are noting in the college sector, particularly in relation to the requirements around auditing of face-to-face teaching hours, is that, although the previous EBA had a requirement of 18 face-to-face hours per week—so, to put this in some context, that is less than two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon over five days of the week, noting, of course, that colleges have 26 fewer teaching days than high schools and primary schools—teachers in the college sector were not, in fact, working the 18 hours face to face. As a result of various trading of staffing points and line allowances and other matters, it was clear that there was a problem in terms of meeting the previous arrangements as far as the previous EBA was concerned. So the requirement to move to 19 hours in the college sector, as agreed to by the private arbiter and by all parties bound to that process, was for these face-to-face teaching hours to be audited.

The government has shown flexibility in the implementation of section O of the EBA, and we continue to have discussions, following this year's experience, in relation to

aspects of the detail of that in seeking to address some issues that have arisen around walking time and also test week, where different colleges have applied differently the face-to-face teaching requirement. We continue to work with college principals to resolve those issues, and I am confident that the work that my department, particularly the HR section, has been undertaking, will address those concerns.

Fundamentally—and this perhaps goes to the point of earlier motions and debates this week in this place—through this motion Mrs Dunne has now committed the opposition to a further amount of expenditure.

Mrs Dunne: I'm calling on you to do it. You didn't have to do this.

MR BARR: An additional 21 teaching positions in the college sector would be in the order of about \$2 million a year recurrent, perhaps slightly over, depending, of course, on what pay point those staff were at. If they were teachers at the top of the classroom salary rates, then their base salary would be in the order of \$75,000 or thereabouts. That would be additional expenditure that we would have to find. The question, of course, is, given that face-to-face teaching hours in every other jurisdiction in Australia are higher than in the ACT—

Mrs Dunne: You decided to make the budget cuts.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Mrs Dunne.

MR BARR: Given that face-to-face teaching hours in the ACT are lower than in any other jurisdiction—

Mrs Dunne: The lowest common denominator.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Mrs Dunne.

MR BARR: Given that face-to-face teaching hours in the ACT are lower than in any other jurisdiction, and given that ACT college teachers teach fewer hours and have fewer teaching days than any other system in the country—

Mrs Dunne: You can't walk both sides of the street, Mr Barr. Which side of the street are we on now?

MR BARR: Given that, the government felt that it was appropriate to pursue productivity efficiencies through the latest EBA round.

Mrs Dunne: Mediocrity in the colleges.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Mrs Dunne.

MR BARR: We put a position of, in fact, 20 hours with a combination of face-to-face teaching and pastoral care in our final offer to the AEU prior to entering arbitration. Now, in the end, the arbiter split the position and went for 19 hours.

Mrs Dunne: And they told you it couldn't be done, and the students told you it couldn't be done.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Barr, resume your chair. Mrs Dunne, I have called you to order three or four times.

Ms MacDonald: Try five or six.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: I do not need an interjection from you, Ms MacDonald. Carry on, Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The government sought through the latest EBA appropriate productivity gains in the teaching profession. As I indicated in my answer to Dr Foskey's question yesterday, we still have the lowest face-to-face teaching hours, we have the highest paid teachers, and we have record amounts of interest in terms of teaching in our system, with more than 1,000 applicants for this year's round. Like all jurisdictions in some specialist areas, we can always do with more teachers. I table the following paper:

ACT College Business Plan 2007-2009, prepared by the Department of Education and Training.

(Time expired.)

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (5.26): I thank members for their comments. We will not be supporting the amendment, but I must say that I was surprised at one of the arguments the opposition used earlier today to undermine the positive motion in relation to college education, and that was the unfounded accusation in terms of this government's commitment to non-government education.

We all know the strength of conviction the shadow minister for education, Mrs Dunne, has for public education. She is all but absent in her contribution to these matters in this place, unless, of course, she is making outrageous statements about throwing good money after bad or going back to the future with her federal colleagues and today labelling a motion about the implementation of the review of college education as "paltry". Listening to Mr Seselja earlier, we could have been forgiven for imagining that we were on a totally different motion. Never mind, the opposition is stuck in negative gear and is totally unable to get out of it. As Mr Corbell commented a little while ago, the view of the world from the opposition is always that the glass is half empty.

Where is the opposition's positive policy? Where are their positive remarks? Where is their acknowledgement of what this government is doing in providing fantastic college education through the implementation of the recommendations already? I did say earlier, even though Mrs Dunne was not able to listen because she was not here, that all but two recommendations have been agreed to, as Mr Barr has already said. All we heard this morning in response to the motion was a regurgitation of the opposition's version of history and one should not be surprised.

As Mr Barr said just a little while ago, I accompanied him to the new Melba-Copland secondary college for the unveiling of the new school logo, the announcement of the newly appointed principal, Mr Bob Ross, and the announcement of the significant upgrade to the school at both campuses. I am pleased to say that students from both campuses were present. Their presence, the way they spoke and the way they conducted themselves are all ample proof of the fruits of the implementation of the recommendations of the review. It was obvious from this visit and others that I have had to campuses that our public education is in good health. The value of the government's initiatives, the government's investment, was demonstrated over and over again today.

I spoke earlier about the transitional program that is being trialled at two college clusters this year. Today I heard from three young people from the Melba campus and the Copland campus who addressed the value, in their eyes, of the transitional opportunities open to them through this government's policies and decisions which are responsible for providing their learning environments. Already, as I said, the policy as recommended in the review and outlined in the college plan has borne fruit.

I was proud to be standing there, listening to these young people, seeing how pleased they were and how pleased their fellow students were too, and to see the positive way that this reform is embraced by the staff. When Mrs Dunne says this government is throwing good money after bad, she is letting down all those in our public system big time. I am sure she would rather the hundreds of children at this public secondary college alone just go without the best ICT possible and have poor learning environments. Is that what she wants? Today Mrs Dunne ignores the needs of our students for improvements in their learning environments.

I am disappointed that Dr Foskey is unable to support the motion. I do not intend to read my speech again to reiterate all the points I made about the government's response and the business plan. I am aware Mrs Dunne was not here this morning. If she wants to move amendments to motions, she should at least try to be here when we talk about them. However, as Mr Barr has pointed out time and time again, Mrs Dunne is not really interested in public education but rather in criticising it. However, I do appreciate Dr Foskey's interest.

Question put:

That **Mrs Dunne's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 5

Noes 7

Mrs Dunne	Mr Stefaniak	Mr Barr	Ms MacDonald
Dr Foskey		Mr Berry	Ms Porter
Mr Mulcahy		Mr Gentleman	Mr Stanhope
Mr Pratt		Mr Hargreaves	

Question so resolved in the negative.

Motion agreed to.

Paper

Mr Barr presented the following paper:

ACT College Business Plan 2007-2009, prepared by the Department of Education and Training.

Hospitals—proposed inquiry

Pursuant to standing order 128, Mr Stefaniak fixed the next day of sitting for the moving of his motion.

Australian electoral system

Debate resumed from 30 May 2007, on motion by **Ms MacDonald**:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the amendments made to the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 by the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Act 2006 will disenfranchise thousands of eligible voters in our community;
- (b) the Howard Government's enrolment changes are unnecessary and are likely to weaken Australia's electoral system;
- (c) the direct impact these changes will have on the ACT's electoral roll; and
- (d) the importance of a strong electoral system which has as many eligible voters enrolled as possible in order to maintain trust in the electoral system by the electorate; and

(2) requests the Chief Minister write to the Federal Minister, Gary Nairn MP, expressing the concern of this Assembly at the negative impact these changes will have.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (5.36): Here we have another motion that was put on the notice paper some months ago. I do not know that this one really needs updating but now we are in the throes of the effects of those changes to the electoral act so we can comment on them. The effects are visible today; so I will be referring to some of those. I will of course be supporting Ms MacDonald's motion. I am very well aware of the changes that have been made by the federal government to the Commonwealth Electoral Act.

It does appear very much as though the government has sought to diminish the ability of people to enrol once the election has been announced. Voters now have only until

8.00 pm of the day that the writs for the election are delivered to finalise their enrolment. I think that is something that people did not understand when the changes were first made. I think people felt that the rolls would close the day the election was called, so it was with some relief that we found that there were three or four days to do that.

As usual the incumbent government has the advantage. I note that everybody in the ACT has received a letter from Mr Humphries which gives them a form and advises them that they can do a postal vote—no doubt preferably for him and other Liberal candidates—and post that back to him. So there is every indication that these changes were made because the government had done the research and found out that it would be advantaged by these changes.

It is an unreasonable expectation, given that the mass of people are only reminded to enrol after an election has been announced. There has been a very big—and no doubt an expensive—campaign by the electoral commission, which has been diligently doing its job, to inform people about the changes. But we know that many people would not have even been alerted to the fact there was a federal election coming up until the day it was called and, sadly, many will not even realise it until a day or two beforehand.

Unfortunately, not everybody in our community is engaged in the political process as we are. The legislation gave three days for voters who are already enrolled to update their details if they have moved or their circumstances have changed. Interestingly enough, I moved into a different rental house in May this year and I have received a letter—from Gary Humphries, of course—inviting me to vote. But clearly the person who lived in my house a number of years ago is still on the electoral roll at that house.

That is a random sample but it indicates that there is a problem. As well as this, people expecting to become Australian citizens by election day are also subject to this three-day rule. This greatly restricts the capacity of new voters in particular to prepare for an election. So these changes are particularly significant to those planning to travel, young people, new citizens or anyone unfamiliar with the changes. At the time this speech was written, according to the AEC approximately half of 18-year-olds were not enrolled to vote.

The homeless are also disenfranchised by these changes. Homeless people are often unable to access news till days after the rest of the community, if they have access at all, and so by the time they hear that the election has been called it may be too late to enrol or to update their details. This further alienates the homeless community from the political process—and they are a group that the government should be making strong efforts to support. We should be trying to make it easier, more flexible and more straightforward for those who want to participate.

We have also noted that the vote has been removed from prisoners serving a full-time sentence. I believe they are citizens like anyone else and may have very good reason and a very strong desire to vote a certain way. There is an increase in nomination deposits for candidates, the removal of requirements for publisher and broadcaster returns, and deregistering of political parties without current or past representation in

the commonwealth parliament. We note that people had three days to enrol after this election was called. Apparently something like 143,000 voters, including 3,000 in the ACT, were removed from the electoral roll in the last six months as a result of these changes, so potentially 3,000 people have been disenfranchised by this. Even with the best efforts of the electoral commission, they cannot communicate with everybody.

All in all, this is an important motion. It is a pity we did not debate it earlier—not that it would have made a great deal of difference, but it does indicate that tomorrow's discussion on amendments to the ACT Electoral Act will be interesting. I do have some amendments to put to that. If we are interested in elections remaining fair, we should make sure that what we say about the federal we are also prepared to follow right through so that we have here the fairest possible electoral legislation.

MR GENTLEMAN (Ginninderra) (5.43): We are a democratic nation that should encourage each and every eligible citizen in Australia to exercise their right to vote for a government that they believe will serve the best interests of themselves, their family and Australia as a whole. While I do agree that ultimately it is the responsibility of the individual to enrol themselves to vote, it is certainly the responsibility of a democratically elected government to do all it possibly can to assist those individuals to exercise their democratic right to vote.

Ms MacDonald mentioned earlier in the debate a point that I wish to reinforce now, which is that Australia does not have a fixed date for federal elections. The Prime Minister of the day is able to call an election without any warning to the people who should elect the government. Why is this an issue? Because when the writs are issued and you are not enrolled, bad luck—you are not allowed to vote for the government that will lead the nation, your very nation.

It is timely that the front page of the *Canberra Times* today ran a story about the number of voters that were wiped off the electoral roll because of Mr Howard's amendments. A government should not introduce amendments to an act that restrict people's ability to vote. It just reinforces the fact that Mr Howard and his team are afraid. And why wouldn't they be? The polls, which coincidentally Mr Howard has publicly chosen to ignore, show that the Liberals are in trouble and that the more people vote the more chance Mr Howard has of losing his job. It is the poor governance by Mr Howard and his team that has caused so many people to become detached from politics in this country.

Ms MacDonald alluded in her speech to the fact that in the 2004 election 79,000 first-time voters enrolled to vote in the seven days after the election was called—79,000 eligible voters that Mr Howard would have liked to stop from exercising their democratic right to vote, because he is afraid. He is afraid because many of those 79,000 would have heard that the election was being called and thought that now was their chance to do something about it. Before these amendments came in, people had the chance to enrol to have their right to vote. That right has been stripped away. Mr Howard knew he would be in trouble and it had become more important than ever for him to ensure that these amendments came into effect before this coming election. I am certain Mr Howard knew when he called this election that many first-time voters would come running to get their chance to vote for a government with fresh ideas that would look after them.

Some of the massive impacts that the amendments to the voting regulations have had on this upcoming election were outlined in the front page of the *Canberra Times* today. According to the electoral commissioner Ian Campbell, an astounding 143,000 voters have been wiped off the electoral roll in the last six months or so. In Canberra, the number was 3,000 in total.

One of the more concerning aspects of this impact on voter eligibility has been the disadvantage suffered by young people. One way this is done is through what is called the objection process. People are knocked off the electoral roll if they move residence and do not inform the Australian Electoral Commission. Young people are particularly vulnerable to losing out this way on their right to vote because they generally rely more on renting and tend to move around more as a consequence. Keeping the commission up to date with the details of living arrangements that fluctuate only piles more demands on those already under great pressure.

The new changes to the electoral act also discriminate against those who move around within the same electorate. Previously, such people could cast a provisional vote on election day. Now such people will be ineligible to vote. This is totally unfair and is a disgrace. Another group of people in the community that have suffered the loss of their right to participate in the upcoming election is prisoners. There is no intrinsic rationale that justifies depriving people in jail of their right to vote. In fact, alienating a group of people vulnerable to social dislocation by stripping away their right to vote will not in any way, shape or form help reintegrate prisoners back into society in general when they return.

We all know of Mr Howard's justification for this, claiming that these new measures will minimise the chance of electoral fraud in this country. That is odd. By his own admission former Special Minister of State Eric Abetz said that there had never been any evidence of fraudulent activity affecting any election in this country, and the statistics bear this out very clearly. The report by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters shows that between 1990 and 2001 there were 71 known cases of electoral fraud out of a grand total of 72 million votes cast. Is one case of fraudulent voting for every million votes a good reason to disenfranchise people of their right to vote? I think not.

The changes to the electoral laws are draconian and over the top. But Mr Howard and his power-hungry government do not agree with this, and nor did Mr Smyth in his previous comments on this matter. Mr Smyth dismissed this notion previously as "a motion that really lacks intellectual substance", saying that the whole case was predicated on the words "may", "could", "potential" and "likely". Well, if Mr Smyth is here he will have seen today's *Canberra Times*: 143,000 people ended up not being able to vote. There is no "may", "could" or "potential" in that number. It is real and it is on the front page of today's *Canberra Times*.

Mr Smyth went on to say that nobody is being denied the right to vote. But 143,000 people have been denied the right to vote. Mr Smyth in his continued rant against this motion came out with a corker of a line:

I have not heard a concrete argument from those opposite that says that it will do anything at all concretely to undermine democracy ...

But 143,000 eligible Australians have been denied their democratic right to vote. If that is not concrete evidence enough for Mr Smyth and the opposition, I think they are deluded.

MS MacDONALD (Brindabella) (5.50), in reply: Mr Speaker, in closing the debate, I would like to begin by thanking members for their contributions to this debate, which has gone over several months. I first brought this on in May, and a lot of things have happened since then. I acknowledge that there have been some things which have changed.

Mr Speaker, as we know, those eligible to vote only have until 8 o'clock this evening. In just over two hours the rolls will close. Despite a number of awareness campaigns and educational programs, thousands are expected to miss tonight's deadline and therefore lose their right to vote. As Mr Gentleman mentioned, on today's cover of the *Canberra Times* it is estimated that nationally 143,000 voters have been removed from the electoral roll, including more than 3,000 from the ACT. These residents were removed from the roll because they have moved address and have not alerted the Australian Electoral Commission. However, as Andrew Fraser reported, it is understood that up to 1,000 of those removed in the ACT will turn up to the booths on election day only to discover that they incorrectly used an old enrolment form to enrol or update their details.

While it is still too early to know how many people will miss tonight's deadline, the number of people removed from the roll may have a decisive effect on a marginal seat such as the seat just across the border in which Special Minister of State Gary Nairn currently is the member. Mr Nairn claimed that the enrolment law changes were necessary to prevent electoral fraud, but, as I said in my original speech, Australia has a level of electoral integrity which few other countries in the world can match.

When we look at exactly what changes these new laws have made, the Howard government's motivation becomes clearer. It simply wanted to disenfranchise thousands of eligible voters for its own partisan self-interest. However, I am pleased to say that since the motion was first debated on 30 May the High Court of Australia has ruled against the federal government's amendment to strip all prisoners of the right to vote. The court ruled that the amendment was unconstitutional and that the pre-2006 laws barring anyone serving a jail sentence of three years or longer from voting should remain. This ruling has opened the way for some inmates to vote at this year's election, which is a just result.

It is right that people who commit crimes who have gone through a trial process and been convicted should go to jail. But it is my understanding that we are trying also to reform people who go to prison. How do we expect to do this if we disenfranchise them from society altogether? I am extremely pleased that the court ruled in this way.

I would also like to clarify some points which were made during the debate, particularly those raised by Mr Smyth on 30 May. Despite Mr Smyth's claims to the

contrary, this year's enrol to vote week held from 28 May to 3 June was, in fact, the first national enrol to vote week. While in the past the Australian Electoral Commission has run education campaigns, a specific enrol to vote week had never been held before. Due to its success, enrol to vote week will be held in future. Of course, that is only a good thing, given that if these laws remain in place I imagine that we will be seeing people being disenfranchised further and further.

It seems to be Mr Smyth's habit—and I am sorry that he is not here to actually hear this—when he does not have a substantive argument, to attack the person, which is what he did in the discussion in May. For 10 minutes we heard from Mr Smyth no argument, rather the blah, blah, blah conversation, which basically had a go at me rather than actually looking at the argument that I was putting forward and coming up with alternative proposals.

Mr Smyth made the comment that people would be flocking to get their names on the roll and making sure that they were enrolled; nobody would be disenfranchised; there would not be any problems at all; and there was nothing wrong with the legislation at all. I have to say that if that is what Mr Smyth believes he is not living in the real world. He must be living in playschool Smyth land if he believes that people will be like him and champ at the bit to get their name on the electoral roll. As I said on the day, most people are not interested in politics and they will not be aware of the changes to the legislation, so they will not be making sure that their names are up-to-date on the roll.

While driving in this morning, my husband and I were having the conversation: "Are you sure your name is up-to-date on the roll?" Yesterday I got a thing from Gary Humphries in the mail and my husband Brendan did not. So we both started panicking. If Gary Humphries is sending me something but my husband is not getting something, is it going to be the case that we turn up to the polling booth and I can vote but he cannot?

I think that Mr Gentleman made a good point about young people being particularly at risk because they are inclined to rent rather than own property and are more inclined, therefore, to move more regularly. I think that most of us have been in a situation where we have rented, and the vagaries of renting mean that you do not necessarily get to determine when you are going to move on to another property. Let us face it, when you are a young person you are not necessarily focused on making sure your name is on the electoral roll. So I think there is a real concern there.

In conclusion, as I said in May, I believe that these law changes were completely unnecessary and were brought in by a government that will do anything to win the election. We know the Howard government is in a desperate position. Mr Howard and his colleagues appear more than happy to disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of eligible voters to give them an advantage in the election. But I am hopeful that not just Canberrans but all Australians have heard the comments and have got their names on the roll so that they can demonstrate their right to vote for the people that they believe will best represent them. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

Motion by **Mr Hargreaves** proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Hindu temple and cultural centre

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (5.58): I rise to mention a function that I was able to attend last Saturday on behalf of the Chief Minister. Mr Stefaniak was there with me. It was the Kalash Yatra, which is the walk for peace organised by the Hindu temple and cultural centre in your electorate, Mr Speaker.

The procession started down at Macdermott Place on the edge of the lake. It went to Joynton Drive, along Coulter Drive, then to John Cleland Crescent and Connah Street and ended up at the Hindu temple and cultural centre in Ratcliffe Crescent in Florey. It was led by 108 saris. In the Hindu culture the number 108 is the chosen number. It is divisible by itself and, in turn, reflects the divine nature of the ceremony. I congratulate the Hindu temple and cultural centre on the walk. There was chanting along the way, of course, and the reason for the walk is so that obstacles can be removed and to establish a new foundation of strength for the coming year.

I would like to congratulate Prakash Mehta, Kanti Jinna and Bill Stefaniak for coming along, as well as the representative of the high commissioner and all who took part in the procession. It was a wonderful event.

Ride to work day

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra—Leader of the Opposition) (5.59): First of all, I would like to congratulate Hanna Jaireth on organising the ride to work day which a few of us participated in, including Dr Foskey and me, Amy from Brendan's office and a few other staff members, although not as many as I had hoped. I thank you for arranging a bike from the ANU for me. I have not ridden from McGregor to Civic before and it was an interesting experience setting off down the cycle path through Umbagog Park. I can say that it is not flat along Ginninderra Drive. There is a slow uphill climb until you get to Bruce. There was a significant easterly blowing so I was riding into a head wind. But it was a great experience going through the academy of sport and down through O'Connor and Lyneham into Civic. It was a most enjoyable day.

Several thousand Canberrans availed themselves of that opportunity. I do not know if it is something I will be doing particularly regularly. The demands of this particular job make it somewhat difficult to do that regularly in the morning. But certainly we are lucky in Canberra to have a lot of natural beauty and good cycle paths. The roads are not too bad. Basically, I think Hanna did a wonderful job in highlighting the benefits you get from exercising and cycling to work. I am pleased to see that there are a few Assembly staffers who live fairly close to the Assembly who ride to work.

Once again, Hanna, thank you very much for organising that, and I thank the ANU for the loan of the bike. I think we made a contribution to encouraging people to cycle to work. Thank you, Tom for, those little gifts that you gave out. It was well done by Tom and Hanna. I certainly appreciated the experience. I do not think I overtook anyone. I would have been overtaken by about 50 different cyclists at least. I certainly did not put on lycra or anything like that, which would have been quite scary.

Canberra Hospital

MS MacDONALD (Brindabella) (6.02): Yesterday, during one of the debates Mrs Burke made a comment about Canberra Hospital along the lines that we all know that Canberra Hospital has the second highest rate of MRSA in Australia. I found that quite astounding because I was not sure that was the case and I was curious to know where Mrs Burke got that idea from. I actually asked for some advice on that, and I received the following information:

In the ACT, at both Canberra Hospital and Calvary hospital we have lower rates and numbers of MRSA than what is seen in most hospitals in the Eastern states of Australia. However, lower rates than the ACT are seen in Western Australia and in Hobart. We believe the ACT has similar rates to South Australia and some Queensland hospitals. Most major hospitals in Victoria and New South Wales looking after adults are likely to have much higher rates than seen at Canberra hospitals.

The problem is that there is almost no data available in the public arena with which one can compare hospitals or even states. WA is the only state where MRSA is a notifiable disease (and that state appears to have the lowest number of Healthcare associated MRSA infections).

Professor Collignon and many colleagues from here and interstate have been involved in national studies, a number that have been published on MRSA. The attached study published in *Emerging Infectious Diseases* (a US peer review journal from the CDC) with the Australian Group Antibiotic Resistance (AGAR) group, shows the rates of MRSA blood stream infections (ie septicaemias) in 17 hospitals across Australia. This remains the only published data available in Australia that looks at many hospitals for blood stream infections. Hospitals are ranked by size. Hospitals were de-identified ...

We know that Canberra Hospital is the largest in the study. It goes on:

As can be seen the rate of the hospital-onset MRSA bacteraemia at Canberra Hospital was 0.26 per 1,000 admission and this compares to the national average of 0.32 per 1,000 admissions (and this average included much smaller hospitals with expected lower rates. Only hospitals collecting data were included which were also likely to be biased to those performing better than the national average as they at least had a programme in place to measure what was happening).

A study from Melbourne in the *Med Journal of Australia* in 2005 showed that at the Austin Hospital there rate of MRSA was 0.6 per 1,000 admissions ...

I remind members that it was 0.26 per 1,000 admissions for the Canberra Hospital. It goes on:

TCH and Calvary are among a small number of hospitals in Australia that have collected all data on all their MRSA and other Staph Aureus blood stream infections as part of a quality-improvement program for many years. Data from 1998 onwards show that there are times when numbers have increased. Such an increase occurred in 2006 (the rate doubled with 25 episodes compared to 12 the year before). After concerted efforts by Infection Control and others, the rates have now again reached baseline levels (a 50% reduction so far year to date in 2007 compared to 2006).

The issue of MRSA is now more complicated because there are increasing numbers of strains of MRSA in the community (that are different to health care related strains) that also cause bloodstream and other infections.

It is not clear where that statement that “the ACT has the 2nd highest rate of MRSA in the country” has arisen. We suspect it from an article in a recent Australian Infection Control journal where a first attempt was made to estimate a population risk for MRSA by states. The NT and the ACT were calculated to have the highest rates. However we believe these comparative rates to be erroneous. The rates were calculated by dividing the number of episodes by the population, so does not take into account that about 25% of our patients are from surrounding NSW. In addition in New South Wales in particular many major hospitals with large numbers of MRSA infections per year did not submit their data to be included.

The information goes on, but I am going to run out of time, Mr Speaker. I do think that it is important that we be careful when we make these statements. Mrs Burke, you might keep that in mind.

Canberra Hospital Health—oral and maxillofacial surgery

MRS BURKE (Molonglo) (6.06): I thank Ms MacDonald and I apologise to members for getting that wrong. So thank you for putting the record straight.

Mr Corbell today admitted that the ACT government has known about the problems of maxillofacial surgery at the Canberra Hospital for years. He told the *Canberra Times* today that he was aware of longstanding concerns about oral surgery. However, Mr Corbell has now appealed for more time to fix the situation. He said that appointing an oral surgeon was a complex matter.

How much time does this government need to respond to the report of one of its own agencies, ACT Health, which stated that the present situation is “insufficient and inappropriate” and that this essential service was warranted by the size of the population of the ACT and should be urgently set up? What is the hold-up, minister? It is almost two years since the report was released. How much longer will this take? How many more lives will be affected through needless pain and suffering owing to botched surgery or through misdiagnosis?

How is it acceptable that anyone who is assaulted or suffers a bad fall on the sports field or at home, for example, and is rushed to hospital with severe facial injuries does

not have the benefit of a dedicated oral and maxillofacial surgeon? There are oral and maxillofacial surgeons working in Canberra, though not at the Canberra Hospital. Have they been approached to work at the Canberra Hospital? If they have not, why have they not? What is the situation at the Canberra Hospital that is so complex of resolution that patients are not getting best practice service, to use the terminology of the ACT Health report?

I would like to take a minute or two to flesh out the details of a couple of complaints from some of the patients who are complaining of botched surgery or misdiagnosis at the Canberra Hospital. A man with multiple sclerosis was left with a weakened jaw after an attack and the jaw was subsequently dislocated during another attack. The jaw was corrected by an oral surgeon at a private hospital. However, when it was again dislocated one night, he was taken to emergency at Canberra Hospital. A plastic surgeon managed to reduce the jaw with sedation and with some difficulty, according to the parents. As the jaw kept dislocating they ended up visiting emergency between 30 and 40 times. The man's wife asked why plastic surgeons were dealing with her husband and why she had never been told the hospital has no oral and maxillofacial surgeon on staff.

Before the man could be seen by a private oral surgeon he had to be admitted again to emergency, where he was, according to his wife, totally ignored by doctors and left with his mouth hanging open due to the dislocated jaw, not able to eat or talk properly. The problem was finally corrected when he was operated on by an oral surgeon in a private hospital several days later. His wife wrote in complaint:

It would seem only a matter of time when this appalling situation will lead to someone's death—our experience was terrible but we were fortunate to have already found an oral maxillofacial surgeon on our own and therefore had someone to turn to. What would have happened if this had not been the case? How long would our son have been left in that state with no one making any attempt to do anything?

Mr Speaker, I think this shows the tragedy of what is going on. We are talking about very inadequate treatment and, at worst, gross negligence. This is totally unacceptable. Tonight I call on the Acting Minister for Health to have an oral surgeon appointed at the Canberra Hospital by 1 December this year. I think that is adequate time.

Telecommunications—Fadden and Macarthur

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (6.10): Mr Speaker, tonight I refer to the Fadden-Macarthur decision by ACTPLA, on behalf of Telstra, to site the 3G tower on the rocky knoll some 100 metres south of the water tower on Fadden Ridge as an act of bastardry. The Fadden-Macarthur community have been talking with Telstra for 18 months about preferred locations for a 3G tower in the Fadden-Macarthur area. They had agreed to three or four alternative sites, including one about 300 to 500 metres north of Karalika on Fadden Ridge. That site would have been technically supportable to Telstra; they could have achieved their objectives. The residents were absolutely in agreement with that option, but instead Telstra pushed through to site this tower within 150 metres of houses in an area which is so close to the residential landscape that it is simply unacceptable.

ACTPLA have simply rolled over and made a decision on behalf of Telstra instead of the residents for whom they are supposed to be providing a service. Today's decision by ACTPLA is an act of bastardry. I feel quite disappointed and very, very sad for the Fadden-Macarthur residents group who have fought very hard and for a very long time to see that this tower is not put in an inappropriate place. It could have been put out of sight and out of mind and still met the technical aims of Telstra. I really urge the Stanhope government to intervene in this matter, to talk to ACTPLA and reverse that decision.

Schools—closures

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (6.12): I would like to take his opportunity to refer to a media release that was issued today by Save our Schools. It is based on data that has recently become available about the condition of the school sites. People will know that this is an issue that I have followed with great interest. The Greens have said that we do not believe that any of these sites should be sold until after the election because we believe that the government should go to an election on this issue. People did not know they were voting to have schools closed and sold when they voted the government in last time.

There is special concern because Mr Hargreaves has maintained a number of times, any time he has been asked, that the Mt Neighbour primary school is in poor condition and claimed that the site is too expensive to bring up to standard. But what we find now is that, of the 10 primary schools up for possible sale, Mt Neighbour primary school actually has the third-best condition rating and the third-lowest total figure for critical, essential or important costs required to bring the site up to standard. In fact, Mr Hargreaves declared the Mt Neighbour primary school site condition to be so poor that it will not be retained for community use. It is one of the schools that are not being consulted on for community use because it is going to be sold. That decision has already been made.

Of course the parents are very concerned that in a way they have had the rug pulled out from underneath them. They never felt that there was any real consultation about their school staying open in the first place. They could not see what the problem was with it, and now the government's own report has come out and said it is actually in quite good condition.

Another school has also had a notable safety issue, but it turns out that issue is not the school itself. It is the ceiling and roof on an external walkway. Rivett also has a major roof replacement expense listed. However, in the condition report this is not noted as a building safety issue, and in fact was tacked onto the end of the report. The community cannot be sure that there really are substantive safety issues around Rivett either.

The government's claims, says Mrs Tullis of Save Our Schools, regarding school closures have repeatedly been proven to be ill-based or incorrect. What SOS is concerned about and what I am concerned about is that these schools had to be closed because of that projected budget deficit of \$80 million, and now that \$80 million

deficit is a surplus of almost \$200 million. The ACT public was told that these sites would cost too much to bring up to standard, yet the total maintenance cost currently rated critical, essential or important for the primary school sites under consultation is less than \$2.6 million, or \$3.75 million, including discretionary costs.

Compared with the \$110 million allocated to refurbishment of the remaining sites, as well as \$175 million for building new schools, it becomes very difficult to believe the government's claim that these 10 schools could not have been retained due to cost factors. It would be wonderful if the government would admit that it has made a mistake and take Mt Neighbour and Rivett off the for sale list. Save Our Schools—incidentally, the Greens will back them in this—is also calling for the ACT government to place a three to 10-year moratorium on all former school site land sales, as communities have requested, during the current consultation process.

Canberra Hospital Gungahlin

MR SESELJA (Molonglo) (6.16): I apologise to the Assembly ahead of time if I am repeating myself. I cannot remember whether I had the opportunity to do this in the September sittings and I felt it was important enough, if I had not, to get it on the record.

I just wanted to express my thanks and my wife's thanks to all of the staff at Canberra Hospital following the birth of our youngest, Olivia. It was quite an amazing service that we had. Dr Annual Snedden looked after Ros during the birth and Kylie was the midwife. I never found out her last name, unfortunately, but Dr Snedden and Kylie in particular were just brilliant. The care that Ros had all through the pregnancy, right up until the birth and after the birth, was outstanding.

To all of the staff there, we really were treated very well. Ros was treated very well, Olivia was born healthy and it was a fantastic experience. We have now had four children through the Canberra hospital system, three at Canberra and one at Calvary. Each time the experience has been excellent. The staff have been professional and caring. We have really never had any issues with the birth of any of our children and we are both very grateful for the service that we get. When we criticise very real problems in the health system, it needs to be put in the context that many of us in the Canberra community do experience very good service at various times. I really wanted to get that on the record and to thank particularly Dr Snedden, Kylie and all of the other staff who looked after us.

I also just wanted to also say a couple of words about my recent community consultation out in Gungahlin. I regularly try to get out to the shopping centres in the various parts of my electorate. Gungahlin is one of the most important in terms of the needs of the area. I do take very seriously the needs of Gungahlin residents, as I do all residents in Molonglo and Canberra generally.

One of the issues that people had concerns about when they came to my shopping centre stall was public transport links. Some of the cutbacks in ACTION buses in recent times have affected Gungahlin. Some of the off-peak service cutbacks have

particularly affected Gungahlin. It is pretty poorly serviced generally in terms of getting into the city from Gungahlin in comparison with a lot of other parts of the ACT, and that continues to be an issue.

A constituent raised concerns about education. They felt that they had to move their teenage sons to St Edmund's from the Amaroo school. They felt that they had no other choice, for various reasons. I want to put it on the record on their behalf that they felt that their sons were not getting the kind of discipline that they needed and they took their kids to St Edmund's instead.

The lack of service station facilities in the area continues to be a strong area of feedback, as well as the lack of the promised pool that Gungahlin residents have been waiting for for some time. That has been a consistent source of angst for Gungahlin residents.

Another area of concern is parking. Parking on the weekends is becoming a bit of an issue in the Gungahlin town centre. The traffic management there is not particularly well laid out, especially, I think it must be said, at the intersection near the Raiders Club and the exit from the car park. During the week it is not too bad.

But the bigger concern of Gungahlin residents, because they are so car dependent, is the lack of available parking in the city. So many Gungahlin residents, because of the poor public transport links, do rely on their motor vehicles to get to work, and those who work in the City are finding it harder and harder to find a park. This has been an area of feedback that I have had about all parts of Canberra, but Civic, in particular, and Woden are the real hotspots. It is a real concern. It really affects family life when one is unable to find a car park in close walking distance from the workplace. It adds to the commuting time of families. There are safety issues after hours for some people who have to walk a fair way from their office.

These issues are consistently raised with me. I think it is important that we respond to these concerns, in particular this squeeze on car parking that we have seen in recent times, which is part of the government's deliberate policy, really, to limit the amount of available car parks. So that was a real issue. They were some of the main issues that were fed back to me at the Gungahlin shopping centre stall. I would like once more to put those concerns of the Gungahlin community on the record.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.22 pm.