



Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

SIXTH ASSEMBLY

4 DECEMBER 2007

www.hansard.act.gov.au

Tuesday, 4 December 2007

Public Accounts—Standing Committee	3811
Legal Affairs—Standing Committee	3815
Animal Diseases Amendment Bill 2007	3815
Personal explanation	3816
Standing orders—suspension.....	3816
Appropriation Bill 2007-2008 (No 2)	3816
Questions without notice:	
Australian public service—proposed cuts	3844
Battery cage eggs	3846
Hospitals—access block	3847
Hospitals—emergency medicine unit	3851
Alexander Maconochie Centre	3853
ACT Health—performance.....	3853
Alexander Maconochie Centre	3856
Water—Cotter Dam	3857
Alexander Maconochie Centre	3858
Crime—statistics.....	3859
Supplementary answers to question without notice:	
Hospitals—access block	3860
Dragway.....	3860
Paper	3861
Executive contracts	3861
Papers.....	3862
Financial Management Act—instruments	3862
Paper	3863
Emergency services—effectiveness (Matter of public importance).....	3863
Appropriation Bill 2007-2008 (No 2)	3880
Adjournment:	
Tharwa bridge	3904
Environment—climate change	3906
Federal election.....	3907
Death of Alma De Smet.....	3908
Gay and lesbian community	3910
Civil partnerships	3910
Tharwa bridge	3911

Tuesday, 4 December 2007

MR SPEAKER (Mr Berry) took the chair at 10.30 am, made a formal recognition that the Assembly was meeting on the lands of the traditional owners, and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

**Public Accounts—Standing Committee
Report 12**

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (10.34): Pursuant to order of the Assembly of 13 November 2007, I present the following report:

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Report 12—Appropriation Bill 2007-2008 (No 2), dated 3 December 2007, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to move a motion authorising the report for publication.

Leave granted.

DR FOSKEY: I move:

That the report be authorised for publication.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

DR FOSKEY: I move:

That the report be noted.

The Appropriation Bill 2007-2008 (No 2) was referred to the public accounts committee on Tuesday, 20 November, on motion by Mr Mulcahy. During the following week an inquiry was conducted which included three hearings at which the committee questioned four ministers on six portfolios. We heard from Mr Stanhope, Mr Barr, Mr Corbell and Mr Hargreaves. Questions were sent in writing to Ms Gallagher as the minister with responsibility for health and community services and answers were received yesterday, unfortunately not in time for inclusion in the report.

A number of other items requested by the committee were not received but given the short turnaround time of the inquiry this is hardly blameworthy. The committee thanks the ministers, their advisers and government officials for their time in attending the hearings and in responding to the committee's questions. Thanks must also go to the other members of the committee for the time and effort they put into this inquiry. To make room in the diary at such short notice at this time of the year is no mean task. We are pleased that we have emerged from the process with a consensus report which we are able to present to the Assembly today.

An enormous vote of thanks needs to go to the secretary of the public accounts committee, Hamish Finlay, who is not here today because Tuesday is his day off to do childcare. He really put an enormous amount into this report and made himself available over the weekend and so on in order to get it completed. Given that this was his first report from start to end, I think he has done a very commendable job. It is a report which is very easy to read and is very well presented. Lydia Chung has always had a great deal to do with presentation of reports, and I am sure that there are other secretaries in the committee office who also had some input into the report.

It is somewhat concerning that the debate on the bill will occur with few members, apart from those on the committee, having had time to digest the report. After all the work that went into it, we would have liked to know that there would be debate on it today. Of course, there would have been more chance that this would occur if the bill were debated on Thursday instead of today.

I will talk about the bill later today, along with everyone else. I would like to draw members' attention to some issues that stood out to the public accounts committee. The first question relates to the way in which government windfalls are treated—whether they should be regarded as a bonus for more spending, to be put aside for a rainy day, or to lead to a consideration of tax cuts. How prepared we are for organising the centenary of Canberra and the issue of security at bus interchanges and taxi ranks came up, as did the need to step up the implementation of a climate change strategy.

Other issues were accounting for and funding liabilities in the Department of Justice and Community Safety, providing language other than English programs that give real opportunities for children to learn another language, concern about retrospective approval of expenditure, the family and community picnic day, and the very large expenditure of about \$1 million for the one-day event of the Beijing Olympic torch relay next year.

All in all, though, the committee does recommend that the appropriation bill be passed, and I am sure members of the committee look forward to contributing to the debate later today.

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (10.39): Following on from Dr Foskey's remarks, I will have a more detailed response to or comment on the bill later in the day, as will my fellow Liberal members and opposition spokespersons for the various areas of government activity. It is important to note in particular recommendation 2 of the committee's report, which gives some attention to the issue of the substantial surplus funds that the territory has generated, particularly as a consequence of the new raft of tax measures brought in in 2006, together with the property boom which has delivered substantial revenues from conveyancing, as well as obviously the windfalls that the GST reforms have delivered to this territory since they were introduced by the former Liberal government.

Dr Foskey made the remark that some thought should be given to putting aside funds for a rainy day. Storms are forecast every afternoon this week and, as far as I am concerned, the rainy day is here and now. I firmly believe that the territory could fund

the additional services that they feel are necessitated by this bill and at the same time deliver tax reform for the people of Canberra. We will talk about that a little later in the day.

I would also, particularly for the benefit of our younger Canberrans, highlight recommendation 5. Whilst the Nightlink taxi scheme is an initiative that I think all members will be pleased to support, along with the provision of taxi rank marshals, the minister also alluded to private security being enforced to ensure the pre-payment of fares and the ability to be alert to antisocial conduct. This is a major issue for young people going out in the city. On Saturday night, I met up with a friend from overseas. When I went to go home from south Canberra, I waited for two hours to get a taxi.

I made repeated calls and was never able to make contact with an operator. When I eventually flagged down a cab, the driver said to me that the previous passenger had reported five assaults in the last 30 minutes on the cab rank in Civic and that he did all he could to avoid Civic at night, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights, because of antisocial behaviour, violence and what he called “runners”—people who absconded without paying their fares.

The minister contended in the hearings that taxi drivers do not drive at night for financial reasons. I asked the driver about this. I asked: “Is that the view of your colleagues? Is that why we can’t get cabs at night?” He said: “That isn’t the reason. You can make the money, all right, but the fact is that we don’t want to drive because of the trouble in Civic.”

As long as we continue to turn a blind eye, as long as TAMS say, “It’s not our problem, it’s policing,” while this quarrel continues on the front bench of the government, the people of Canberra will be disadvantaged. We want to see more visible policing in Civic so that people can go about their business with quiet enjoyment and not be disturbed by the minority of louts and intoxicated people who cause this violence and intimidate law-abiding citizens. The Nightlink taxi service is a step in the right direction, but we need to be confident that there will be a prompt police response to back up those people responsible for maintaining order. Without that, the system will be no better than what we have in place at present.

As Dr Foskey said, the committee is quite concerned about the costs associated with the Beijing Olympic torch relay. For that reason, we have appended the draft budget to the back of this report. It is an extraordinary budget. Despite the obvious television benefit that this event will create, we do note that this is somewhat ambit in that the commonwealth government, we understand, is likely to pick up half the tab. Frankly, I would not care if it was the Western Australian government paying for it.

Waste is waste, and I would raise serious questions about it. It was interesting that even the Chief Minister expressed concern about the money being spent on this torch relay—a one-day event costing \$1 million. When you look at the breakdown, you see things such as a pre-relay media event for \$28,000. That would have to be the most expensive media event ever held in the nation’s capital. When we look at route development—

Mr Hargreaves: It was a bit over \$24,000, I think, Chief Minister, wasn't it?

MR MULCAHY: I hope Mr Hargreaves will pay attention, Mr Speaker, because route development—

Mr Hargreaves: I'll pay attention to \$24,000, Mr Mulcahy.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR MULCAHY: Route development is very much in his area—\$220,000. I am sure members here will help you plan out the route if it is such a challenge. I find it absolutely extraordinary that nearly a quarter of the budget is going on this. We then see that three staff are required, at a cost of nearly \$170,000, to plan this one-day event. Some of the other aspects are reasonable—the three visits at \$8,500 does seem sensible. The customs and immigration charges at \$40,000 to process 150 people is probably a fee determined at the commonwealth level. But there are some standout figures that disturb me. I refer to the relay route activities costing \$103,000. As I said, the cost of staffing seems excessive.

The marketing promotion for this event is costing \$120,000. All of these things, when added up, total a bill of just under \$1 million. I would strongly urge the Chief Minister, even if we are only paying half of it, to take out the red pen and look at these things critically. This reads like a budget that has never been scrutinised by anybody who is particularly conscious of cost, and that is obviously a view shared by the committee having regard to the highlighting we are giving to this matter.

I would also draw members' attention to page 20 of the report. In particular, I refer to the amount of \$75,000 to fund a report on current and future event-related infrastructure capacities. All members are keen on the importance of tourism but it has to raise the question as to why, after six years in government, the territory now is having to embark on an exercise to work out what sort of events could be held in Canberra.

Either this minister is brilliant and his predecessors were far from it or the government has been sitting on its hands for an extraordinary period of time and neglecting a very important opportunity to bring extra cash in to the ACT economy. I think it is worth noting that whilst the concept may be in order, the fact that it has taken until now to even be addressed says a fair bit about the priority, particularly that Mr Quinlan obviously gave, to the area of tourism.

We see a substantial outlay in the area of ACTION. The public is clearly very unhappy with the way the minister is overseeing this agency. The timetable is still the subject of complaints. Whilst I realise you cannot run a bus for every single individual's needs, clearly the level of complaint suggests that the government got it wrong in a big way. I guess the minister acknowledged that on radio the other day. We can only hope and pray that the eight per cent of commuters that are committed to using public transport are not deterred further from using this service because of changes that are being imposed by the territory government.

The capital investment, whilst overdue, is a step in the right direction, but I think these measures will probably only go a very short way towards changing the level of uptake in terms of moving motorists onto public transport. I will confine my remarks to those points and talk in more detail when we discuss the bill.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 49

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 49, dated 3 December 2007, together with the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MR SESELJA: Scrutiny report 49 contains the committee's comments on nine bills and 21 pieces of subordinate legislation. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Animal Diseases Amendment Bill 2007

Mr Stanhope, by leave, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Minister for the Environment, Water and Climate Change, Minister for the Arts) (10.48): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

This bill proposes amendments to the Animal Diseases Act 2005. As part of the management of the current outbreak of equine influenza in eastern Australia, it has become apparent that the Animal Diseases Act in its current form overly limits the range of personnel available to perform functions required to manage the enforcement of quarantine arrangements. While the ACT is currently free of the equine influenza virus, should an outbreak of the virus occur in the ACT, this limitation could present a real constraint on the management of the outbreak.

The government proposes to address these operational constraints by making two minor amendments to the principal act. The first amendment would allow the Director of Animal Hygiene, commonly referred to as the chief vet, to delegate his powers not

only to ACT public servants but to police officers. The second amendment broadens the definition of “authorised person” to include police officers, to enable police to exercise the powers of authorised people. A further consequential amendment clarifies that police do not need to be issued identity cards under the act, as they are already required to identify themselves.

The proposed amendments are minor and non-controversial, but important. For example, should an outbreak of horse flu occur in the ACT, it is anticipated that the ACT police will be involved in the control of the outbreak, particularly in relation to the giving of directions to horse owners as to the movement of their animals or their vehicles. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Personal explanation

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo): Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation under standing order 46.

MR SPEAKER: Do you claim to have been misrepresented?

MR MULCAHY: Yes, I do.

MR SPEAKER: Please proceed.

MR MULCAHY: During the previous debate there was a level of interjection from Mr Hargreaves that I could not fully decipher but which was explained to me by my colleague Mrs Dunne. He made reference to some inappropriateness in relation to an amount of \$24,000 which relates to a newspaper article. I seek leave to table a media release that addresses the issue about which the minister made an interjection and a comment.

Leave granted.

MR MULCAHY: I present the following paper:

Mulcahy rejects inference in Canberra Times article re AHA—Media release by Mr Mulcahy, dated 29 November 2007.

Standing orders—suspension

Motion (by **Mr Corbell**) agreed to, with the concurrence of an absolute majority:

That standing order 176 be suspended to enable consideration of the Appropriation Bill 2007-2008 (No 2) to take place at this sitting.

Appropriation Bill 2007-2008 (No 2)

Debate resumed from 13 November 2007, on motion by **Mr Stanhope**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (10.52): Appropriation Bill 2007-2008 (No 2) appropriates some \$36.254 million for additional expenditure initiatives for the 2007-08 financial year. Although the bill appropriates money solely for the current financial year, the expenditure initiatives that are being funded have financial implications beyond this year.

It is, therefore, important to look not only at the actual appropriation in the bill itself but also at the financial commitments that will be required in the forward years and further into the future to maintain the programs funded by this bill. The implications of these expenditure initiatives over the forward years are set out in the supplementary budget papers to the bill. Over the current financial year and the next three financial years, the expenditure initiatives set out in the supplementary budget papers are budgeted at \$109.252 million. Approximately 74 per cent of this expenditure is to be for departmental and territory outputs, with the remaining 26 per cent being used for capital expenditure.

I do not intend to go into great detail on the specific expenditure initiatives for each of the various departments. I will leave this discussion for the various shadow ministers on this side of the chamber responsible for these portfolios. However, I would like to make some broad comments about this appropriation and go into some detail on certain items of expenditure that have raised concern both in the estimates hearings of the public accounts committee and elsewhere.

First and foremost, the advent of the second appropriation bill in this financial year, in light of excess revenues from taxation, has shown that the ACT government is firmly committed to a philosophy of big government and its increases in taxation. This bill, combined with the government's recent opposition to the repeal of its harmful utilities tax, has shown that the government has no intention of providing tax relief to Canberra families, regardless of the financial position of the territory. It has also shown that the alleged necessity for the government's tax increases was little more than a flimsy pretext to expand the size of government and the tax base in the ACT.

There are many initiatives in this budget that are valuable, and the government will no doubt explain the virtues of these initiatives at length. Unfortunately, although the bill provides for expansions in some useful services, this will be little comfort to those Canberra families who are under increasing financial strain because of the amount of money they are paying, because of their political masters, through rates increases and various other taxes and charges.

The additional money that forms the basis for the expenditure in this appropriation bill is a direct result of the introduction of increases in taxes that have been the policy of the ACT government over the last two years—these increases and charges that have been inflicted on what Labor loves to refer to as working families. It is those same working families that are being asked to outlay more and more to underwrite and fund the extravagant spending patterns of this territory government.

In the past two years, the ACT government has introduced the utilities tax and the fire and emergency services levy and has increased the level of general rates, amongst many other charge increases. These revenue measures were justified on the basis that they were required in order to ensure that the ACT government did not go into deficit. It was required, according to the Chief Minister, because we were living beyond our means.

What happens when all this flood of money comes into the territory? The government says, "Let us spend more; let us not live within our means; let us spend more; and let us not give back to the people who have been burdened with the tax increases these extra amounts when the government has had the opportunity to institute tax reform."

It was very interesting last night watching the new federal Treasurer, Wayne Swan, on television. And what was one of his selling features that he said was going to be an important feature of his government? It was actually keeping the tax burden down on lower and middle-income families in Australia. So whether you are on the Liberal side of the federal political scene or on the Labor side, it seems that getting taxes down and putting money back into people's pockets is the philosophy across the spectrum.

But not when you come to the ACT! The attitude is: increase the tax margins, put more into the government's coffers and, as you get within striking distance of an election, especially when you are falling in popularity, start spending up big and hope you can buy your way back into government. I think it is a recipe that will be doomed for failure, as we will see next October.

Looking at the quarterly reports, the September quarter 2007 consolidated financial report showed that the period to September 2007 has seen the ACT government receive \$92.425 million in excess revenue over and above the amount budgeted in the 2007-08 budget. Indeed, of this amount, \$46 million was due to tax revenues in excess of the budgeted amounts. In particular, the ACT government received \$19.8 million more than budgeted in residential conveyance revenue and received \$11.8 million more than budgeted in commercial conveyance revenue. It received \$7.4 million more than budgeted in stamp duty on shares and marketable securities, and it received \$6.8 million more than budgeted in general rates.

The story is very evident. This government is raking in taxes on all fronts, increasing charges on all fronts and swimming in money, but they will not give back to the people of Canberra some reduction in that burden. We hear the Chief Minister get up here and talk about six increases in interest rates impacting on some 70 per cent of the Canberra community. We hear of more interest rate increases likely in the new year—and the Chief Minister has been happy to take political advantage of those increases—but when it comes to him doing something to reduce the burden, forget it; all bets are off. We see here a government that is simply ignoring the pressures on Canberra households where they are paying more and more in terms of interest on their home loans, where they are going to be paying more and more on credit card debt, which is a significant issue in the ACT according to published statistics, but this government does not want to do anything about reducing the pressure.

Dealing with some of the specific expenditures—and I did speak briefly a moment ago about the Olympic torch relay—there are a number of specific expenditure initiatives that have raised concerns during the estimates process and elsewhere. As I have said, the bill provides for \$950,000 of appropriation for this torch relay and, whilst it is noted that the government is currently seeking commonwealth funding for half of this amount, the Assembly is being asked to approve the entire amount prior to any commonwealth assistance and any such assistance is, at best, hopeful rather than certain.

This is a large amount of money for a single event. We are talking about \$1 million in expenditure. It is worth saying again and noting that the Chief Minister expressed some surprise at the high cost of this event, and he made that expression of concern known in the estimates process. We are told that this expenditure will put the ACT on display and that there will be benefits from the exposure of our city. I do not doubt that; I am sure there is some advantage. Unfortunately, it is notoriously easy to point to some amorphous benefit without a rigorous assessment of costs versus benefits.

Indeed, we have seen in the Rhodium inquiry, in the recent scandal over excessive sponsorship agreements, the dangers of this vague methodology. That experience should have taught us that vague and speculative qualitative assessments of publicity benefits should simply not be regarded as sufficient cause for the expenditure of large amounts of public money.

Mr Stanhope: The big lesson was the V8 car race, of course—the \$14 million the Libs put into the V8 car race.

MR MULCAHY: In terms of other specific expenditures, another item of great concern is the appropriation of \$75,000 for Family and Community Day, a public holiday which has been an atrocious experiment.

Mr Stanhope: Feel the power. Remember that?

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR MULCAHY: Mr Speaker, I cannot hear myself. I do not know how you can you hear what is going on.

MR SPEAKER: Come to order.

MR MULCAHY: When I first saw this item of expenditure in the supplementary budget papers to the bill, I must say that I was a little annoyed that the government would be wasting even more money on this ill-considered public holiday. However, what has emerged in the estimates process in the public accounts committee is that this item of expenditure is actually for the Family and Community Day that has already occurred. Yes, that is right; we are being asked to approve an appropriation for money that is already spent!

Is this honestly the level to which parliamentary scrutiny of government expenditure has sunk? A retrospective approval of expenditure that we learn about after the event

has taken place! After the \$75,000 party has been held, the government then comes to this place and says, "Now we want you to approve it." Of course what it says is that they are using the Assembly as a rubber stamp. This is lip service by the government, coming to this place and saying, "Let us spend the money. We do not have approval of the elected representatives. We will do it anyway and we will use our numbers to rush it through and backdate it effectively."

Fortunately, it does appear that the government will relegate this wasteful and ill-considered public holiday to the dustbin of failed ACT government policies. Minister Barr was very keen to talk about the dustbin this morning. This one is going there too, apparently. Not yet willing to eat humble pie on the issue, the government is trying to set themselves up for an honourable retreat, claiming that the holiday was only necessary as a result of Work Choices and now, thank goodness, they are able to get rid of it. The fact is that they are embarrassed, but the truth is that this was always a poor policy; it is a policy which led to widespread business shutdowns, losses in productivity and a mass exodus of workers from Canberra, not only for the day itself but for the preceding work day and the preceding weekend.

I am sure the Chief Minister—and he would never admit it publicly—heard many complaints from people in business who said what a stupid idea this was. I have got hold of the letters under FOI. Not one single business organisation! Even people such as Prime Television wrote to them and told them it was a dumb idea. I think he now realises it was a dumb idea.

Andrew is trying to ingratiate himself with unions. Mr Barr is not really part of the union movement; he is very uncomfortable in that environment; but he thought, "Here is a giveaway. I will try to win myself some votes on the floor of the Labor Party conference. I will try to make myself look like a workers' representative." The Chief Minister is sitting there, holding his head, saying, "What a stupid idea this was for the territory. All we have done is cost a lot of people a lot of money; we have ruined the camaraderie in offices; we have ruined the office sweeps."

People had a good time on Melbourne Cup day, but Mr Barr cannot relate to that. He went and took a decision that is of course now deemed as fairly stupid, and the government is looking to dig their way out of it.

Another item of continuing concern to the opposition is the arbitrary allocation of money to the arts portfolio under the percent for art scheme. Because of an increase in capital expending under the bill, the percent for art scheme is automatically allocated additional money, one per cent of new capital works. The Chief Minister conceded in estimates hearings before the public accounts committee—

Mr Stanhope: The only shadow arts minister in the world who does not want arts funding.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR MULCAHY: The Chief Minister is the only arts minister in the world who wants to cut spending on the arts. The fact is that I actually believe in funding arts as

is appropriate, not just putting a bucket of money out there, not having any projects because it is beyond the creative capacity of the Chief Minister. He never goes to much in the arts field; so he figures he can buy over the arts community by having a lump of money there for people to build outdoor public art.

But the fact of the matter is that appropriate arts initiatives ought to be supported. Simply taking an arbitrary one per cent across the board on capital works, without even having the ideas worked out, to me, is indefensible.

Mr Stanhope: It is Gary Humphries's policy. I just adopted it.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR MULCAHY: I am not interested. Gary Humphries is not in this place. Last time I looked, Bill Stefaniak is running the show here.

The Chief Minister conceded in estimates hearings before the public accounts committee that this expenditure is not earmarked for any specific project. It only goes to show the arbitrary nature of the appropriation and, indeed, of the entire percent-for-art policy. Thus, we have the rather ridiculous spectacle of a second appropriation bill in a single financial year now asking the Assembly to approve extra expenditure. For what? For art! What kind of art? We do not know yet but for some kind of art, some time. Again I say, "Is this the level to which parliamentary scrutiny of government appropriation has sunk?" Here we are, we do not know much about the arts, but we will just put a lump of money out there and hope we can win a few people over.

Then we move to the OHS—

Mr Hargreaves: You will have to tell Mr Pratt about that.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR MULCAHY: We will get to you, Mr Hargreaves; just give us a little bit of time.

The bill will appropriate \$1,773 million over four years in order to retain the Occupational Health and Safety Commissioner. This is an item of expenditure that comes as rather a shock to me, since this cost was not revealed to the opposition in the course of briefings on the OHS restructure in the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Bill 2007. In fact, it is somewhat more than just a rude shock. It is a complete derogation of the responsibilities of the government to provide accurate costing information to the Assembly for the bills that Assembly members are asked to approve. For the government to push through its bill, without disclosing the costs to members of the Assembly and then, only a short time later, ask for funding for the scheme, which has now already been passed, is, in my view, quite duplicitous. So I say yet again, "Is this the level to which parliamentary scrutiny of government appropriation has sunk?"

We are linked with some areas. Although it is not a major area, the matter of ACT judges' pensions came up before the committee. The bill includes additional

appropriations for pension payments to ACT judges. We do not have an issue with the payment of pensions or long service leave to judges, but it is strange indeed that funding for eventual pension payments, which are well known in advance, are not provided for as part of the budgeted costs of employment.

The government is currently attempting to work its way out of the mess created by an unfunded super scheme for ACT public servants; so you would think that this would be an issue which was on its radar. This was an issue of particular concern in the estimates hearings before the public accounts committee. The Attorney-General sought to explain this appropriation to the committee on the basis that the retirement of a judge is a rare event.

How would you go—Mr Speaker, you know from your background in the union movement—if you went about your business, any business around Canberra, any small shop, and said, “I have only got four or five staff. Why do you want me to budget for annual holidays? Why do you want me to provide for long service leave? Yes, I know that is the law. I know that it says there are punitive measures, but what does it matter? I do not have the money at the moment.” That is what the Attorney-General of this territory wants this parliament to believe. Extraordinary double standards! Every organisation in the private sector provides for long service leave and all other benefits. Yes, everything is provided for.

Mr Stanhope: How does the AHA provide for separation payments?

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR MULCAHY: Mr Speaker, this is not relevant to this bill.

MR SPEAKER: Members of the government, there is a debate and you will have your chance to contribute to the debate later. Meanwhile, Mr Mulcahy has the floor. I have called you to order several times. Maintain order, please.

MR MULCAHY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I always know that I am hitting the raw nerve when the Chief Minister has to resort to personal abuse. That is his forte—personal abuse when he is under pressure. It does not work with me, as he knows. I do not know why he wastes his time.

Going back to the issue in question—judges pensions and long service leave—this was an issue of concern to our committee. As I said, the Attorney-General’s way of digging himself out was to say, “It is a rare event. It does not matter if you break a few rules of accounting standards.” This can hardly be an explanation for a failure to fully fund the cost of employment in the first place. We know that, when we employ a judge, the employment will eventually end and that money will be payable at that time. Surely this is something that the government should provide for at the time of employment. It is particularly outrageous that the minister responsible for overseeing law in this territory has another set of standards in relation to the application of law and the attitude towards employment practices when his agency would be the first to rush out and want to pursue prosecutions in relation to people who break the law.

We have been assured at estimates in the past that the territory government strictly adheres to these standards in terms of accounting. It is a matter which is on the record. Whilst there may be only four judges affected, I think it is a shameful reflection on the administration of his department that they in fact have dropped the ball in this area. It is worth public noting, and that is what our committee has resolved to do.

In terms of other areas, I want to speak in the remaining time about increases in construction costs. I know Mr Seselja will get onto this. Two of the appropriations in the bill have been due to cost overruns for capital projects. The bill provides for \$2.54 million in capital expenditure to complete the Alexander Maconochie Centre, and this additional cost overrun is on top of a previous reduction in the scope of the project which saw the number of beds in the facility substantially reduced. Thus, at the end of the project, it appears that we will have a substantially smaller facility for more money than was first budgeted.

This is how the minister tried to get around the fact, by saying, “The budget is fixed and firm and we will not overrun it.” In fact, they are now overrunning it and they have reduced the project. Of course, on all counts, he has failed.

The bill also provides \$1.42 million in capital expenditure for cost overruns in the construction of Harrison primary school. The cost overruns include landscaping work which will be almost \$1 million over budget. Thankfully, these overruns in cost pale in comparison to the GDE. However, this does appear to be an area which is an ongoing problem for the government because of their failure to lock in appropriately in contracts that inflation costs should be taken into account, not just variations initiated by client. But it seems the territory government is a poor negotiator when it comes to settling contracts in terms of keeping within budgets.

In terms of ACTION—unfortunately, Mr Hargreaves will limit what I can say—I know Mr Pratt will say something. I have to say that the performance of Mr Hargreaves is now becoming something of interest both in estimates and again in public accounts. The way in which he sought to berate members of the committee in their legitimate questioning, I thought, was appalling. I was almost of a mind to make mention of it in the report because I am sure my fellow committee members were equally appalled by the aggressive and uncooperative attitude. I would urge the Chief Minister to try to address this because it is doing him no favours in terms of the appropriate forums of this parliament.

ACTION, of course, has seen a sudden catch-up in outlay of funds. Whether this will satisfy community outrage over the shambolic effort in relation to ACTION’s timetables, we will wait and see. But any attempt to improve public transport in a sensible direction is something that I would be supportive of.

I am concerned at the issues of accountability. There are examples here of where the Assembly has not been given much regard at all in terms of a method of scrutinising the government’s operations, and those concerns are now on the public record.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (11.12): On the whole, the appropriation bill was very welcome for many of its items of expenditure. But I note that in the tabling speech Mr Stanhope said very strongly:

... you will see that this is not about winding back the stringencies and efficiencies we imposed on ourselves last year.

In a way I think that statement was a fatal flaw in the way that the budget was put together. One of the things that are not clear in the appropriation bill—and it was not very clear in the budget we debated earlier this year—is the rationale on which some of the funding decisions were made. It is very important, I think, that people can see the basis for expenditure on various items, especially when that expenditure is unseen.

For instance, why is it that the \$1 million for a one-day event for the Beijing torch ceremony in the ACT is more sacrosanct than \$1 million being put into homelessness services, the much-less-than-that amount that was denied the Griffith Library to stay open, the closing of shopfronts because they were considered too expensive and, of course, the cost of running some neighbourhood primary schools which were closed because they were seen to be too costly per student? It is an interesting issue, I think, that \$1 million for some events is subject to a whole different justification than the \$1 million that is considered too much to put into essential community services.

You will understand, of course, the committee is very concerned about that particular item when it seems to us that there is so much that could be done. It is true that, as members, we probably would not agree on what that extra work that could be done is. Some would go for tax cuts; some would go for additional services; and some would possibly be more supportive of the government.

Those are real issues, and the reason why we included recommendation No 1 was that there should be some analysis and that the Assembly should really be given the benefit of knowing what the government is thinking because the Assembly represents the community. The community is concerned about last year's cuts. Many people are still reeling from those. They were certainly very concerned about outlays that they normally do not see that they get the benefit for.

The Youth Coalition was the only committee organisation that had time to get a submission together on this bill, and I thank the Youth Coalition for that. But they felt that this was an appropriation bill that really affected that sector of young people. Of course, we know that everything that improves public transport is such an expenditure, because it is young people and elderly people on the whole that rely on our bus services.

I welcome the changes to our bus services but I think the community would be quite happy if we saw the ACTION bus services restored to what they were prior to the cuts and changes last year. I do not actually remember getting too many complaints before the cuts; so there must have been a level of satisfaction pre the 2006 budget of the services. We also know that there was at that time an advisory committee, a committee of bus users, that could inform the government about what bus users wanted.

I will be very interested to find out more about the consultant that was called in, no doubt at some expense, to create and draw up the new network that ACTION has

announced and is consulting on at the moment because, unless that consultant had some local knowledge, then he really needed a great deal of community input. That is the community input that we lost with that committee, which was cut last year, which was an ACTION bus advisory committee.

Again yesterday, we had the announcement about free travel on buses for people with bikes. But it has been raised by people with me and other members that it is great that you can put your bike on the bus but how do you know which bus is capable of taking your bike? If you are sitting there waiting for a bus to get to work, how can you know? There are real issues about this. It also raises a problem about people in wheelchairs. We know there is a problem with wheelchair-accessible transport at the moment.

Members interjecting—

DR FOSKEY: I am going to keep speaking because I have got a bit to say and I do not want to wait for everyone to have their little jokes. It actually is not a laughing matter. If you want to get to work and you want to take your bike because you have ridden to the bus stop, you want to know that a bus capable of carrying your bike is going to come along at a time that will get you to work. So we need to know the predictability of buses. We need a way that people can find out.

Mr Hargreaves: Ultimately there will be bike racks on all buses.

DR FOSKEY: If the minister for buses is not interested in hearing this, then I am not quite sure how the consultation on buses is going to go.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Dr Foskey has the floor.

DR FOSKEY: The other issue is people in wheelchairs. This has been brought to me by that sector. We have got huge problems with taxis. I know that there are real efforts going on in TAMS to deal with that because I have had a briefing about it, but until the issue with taxis—and remember it is still going to cost a certain amount of money—is fixed, people need to know they can take their wheelchairs onto buses. At the moment, it is not predictable when a wheelchair-accessible bus will come along.

We have a text messaging service that tells people the timetable but it does not tell people what kind of bus is going to come along. So it seems to me that we should make more use of our websites, our modern technologies and the transit text messaging service so that the bus services can be really helpful to the people who need them most.

The other issue that I wanted to raise about buses is that, while the community bus is a really good initiative, that seems to me to need a lot more fleshing out so that we know how much it really is going to help people. Remember that the level of patronage before those budget cuts was much higher than it was after them. We were actually running a bus service as part of a sustainable transport plan and we have to get back to that. I welcome Mr Stanhope's statement in his tabling speech:

I am determined that this will be the government that finally and comprehensively meets the challenge.

That challenge is designing an efficient, effective and affordable public transport system in a town that was designed for the car.

A lot of other issues on the appropriation bill have been given comprehensive attention by Mr Mulcahy, but there are issues I would like to highlight. I am interested in the amount for the centenary of Canberra scoping. The centenary of Canberra events in 2013 are going to be the most major events in this city since the city was founded and it is really important that we are on the ball there.

Perhaps now that we know which federal government we have got we can really set up a process for working with the federal government. We were told in the hearing by Mr Stanhope that efforts to contact the federal government had not been successful and, therefore, there was a bit of stonewalling going on there. I am not sure about that. Of course I do not know the full story, but that is an issue of concern because Canberra does not necessarily belong to the people who live here, it belongs to the whole of Australia.

We need a world-class series of events and programs for that year because we are acting on the world stage and, if we are going to have that kind of program, then we need to be organising now; we need to be lining up world-class events now. I welcome the fact that there is some money put aside for scoping. I am not entirely sure what scoping means but it is the implementation, I think, that we need, not the scoping. So we look forward to seeing what comes out of this.

Another thing—and this is something the Youth Coalition had something to say about—is that at the end of the day young people are particularly dependent on not just public transport but also the taxi system. The Youth Coalition's submission raises the issue of safety at the taxi ranks and welcomes the fact that there will be a low-cost service provided by larger taxis. They are interested in that because they want to improve safety in Civic at night. They say, "Involve young people in the further development of this model and future innovations in ACT transport."

This also applies to the issue of safety at bus interchanges, which came up. Young people did mention this again. They said, "It is not just security cameras we need. We need appropriately trained people." Appropriately trained people may not be just security guards who stand there. And people who are qualified for employment as security guards are not necessarily people who know how to work with young people or offenders or anyone else. So it is really important that young people are consulted about what they actually need. Remember that some of the danger that comes to them is from other young people. So this is an area for consultation.

While the Youth Coalition welcomes drought proofing in parks and open spaces, because they see that these are places where young people take recreation, I also remind them about the government skate parks and pools. I guess the loss of the Phillip pool would be a real issue to young people in the south. It is thinking

broad—talking to young people, talking to the people who are affected by the changes that the government makes.

In relation to the construction cost overruns—and this is probably not just peculiar to the ACT government; I am sure the private sector is also experiencing these construction cost overruns—it is very difficult to see how this would not occur in a place where accommodation is so difficult to find that currently a huge number of our motels and other places that are meant to be for tourists and visitors to the city are actually occupied by construction workers who cannot find anywhere else to live. I imagine that this adds to the construction bill quite considerably because it is not going to be the employers who cover those costs; they will be passing those on.

The committee also looked at the Commissioner for the Environment. It soon becomes a sustainability budget. We were very pleased there were adequate resources. We were told that the scope of that position would expand very, very considerably. It is not just one extra portfolio with the sustainability added, which means responsibility for the climate change strategy implementation; it may also mean responsibility in relation to water catchments and other water issues and perhaps the conservator.

This is becoming a position that may be more than a full-time position. There is already a full-time position after it was a part-time one. Now that it is full time it might be a double full-time position. We would be very concerned that the position is not loaded with too much work and, if it is, it always has adequate resources.

On the whole, though, there are some good measures in this budget. I hope the network consultation on ACTION takes into account what it has been told because it is very apparent there are still quite a lot of holes in that network and they are still not providing the service that people want.

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra—Leader of the Opposition) (11.27): This bill can be summarised quite simply. It is just another example of the Stanhope Labor government's inability to manage its finances. It seems only yesterday—I think it was about 12 weeks or so ago—that we were debating the 2007-08 budget. That was at the sittings in late August. And here we are some three months later—barely three months later—debating a second appropriation bill.

This government has a somewhat unenviable record of an abject inability—indeed, infamy—in revenue forecasting. Again this is brought out in the estimates report. The government has raised infamy to an art form. It is infamous for getting its budget hopelessly wrong each year; its budgeting is way out year after year. It is infamous for raising taxes and cutting services. It is infamous, too, for crying poor. We have seen that in the last few years—and suddenly all this extra money appears. It is also infamous for wasting money on self-indulgent icons and for cutting infrastructure projects to make them fit their original budgets. It is also infamous in its refusal to put any of these revenue windfalls back into the pockets of ordinary Canberrans through tax relief. And it is infamous for getting its priorities wrong on many fronts on a regular basis.

But this government's refusal to release the Costello report, the report that was the premise for last year's horror budget, is the act for which its infamy will live on in the minds of the people of the ACT for many years to come. The report still has not been released. We are still seeing the effects of it despite the government's horribly incorrect forecasting of actual revenue into the territory.

It is painfully obvious. This second appropriation bears testimony to what we were talking about in estimates earlier this year when we were quizzing the government on why its estimates were so wrong. The government was denying some of that. It denied and tried to make fools of the Property Council and certain other groups who were saying, "You are going to end up with about an extra \$200 million more than you have budgeted for." Guess what: that is exactly what happened. The horror budget of 2006-07 was horribly wrong. Is there any relief in sight for the people of Canberra? No, there is not, because this government's horribly wrong budget for 2006-07 and its revenue forecasting failures have done little more than just feed what is an indulgent spending frenzy in some instances.

There are some good points in this budget.

Mr Corbell: You supported them all.

MR STEFANIAK: I will come to that soon. Mr Corbell, there are some good initiatives in your portfolio which I will come to. I will give credit where credit is due. But let us go to page 4 of the estimates report. I thank the public accounts committee for a pretty thorough report in a very quick series of hearings. I say well done to that committee. There are some good recommendations.

On page 4, at 1.8, the committee makes the obvious note that the bill was introduced approximately 2½ months after the first appropriation bill was passed. The Treasurer stated that this bill was possible because of changes to revenue that became apparent after the budget process had been finalised. For about the last five years we have said that the budget constantly underestimates how much it gets. Even if you are conservative—and I do not mind that at all—you are still grossly underestimating what you get. I do not know if you will ever get it right. The report goes on to say:

This revenue included an estimated \$20.1 million in additional GST revenue due to population increases and an increase in the overall size of the GST pool.

Further, it says in relation to additional revenue from conveyancing fees that the June year-to-date actual revenue was \$231 million compared to the estimated outcome of \$198 million, and that that was also available due to a buoyant housing market. We have had a buoyant housing market for several years. It looks as though it may continue. Watch out for the Rudd government cuts to the public service, but it still looks as though it could continue. It is not rocket science to listen to groups like the Property Council—people who are in the business, who know what they are doing and who can make these estimates a lot more accurately than the ACT government can.

There have been some significant amounts of money coming into the territory as a result of the government not being able to forecast that property revenue. Despite that, there is not a shred of tax relief for the long-suffering people of Canberra—who have filled the government's coffers thanks to the increased taxes we had to have because last year we were in such dire straits.

I welcome the recommendations on page 5 of the committee's report. The first is:

... that the ACT Government undertake systematic analysis of major budget expenditure as a basis for supporting expenditure in future appropriation bill documentation.

The committee also recommended:

... that the ACT Government give consideration to saving a portion of future windfall revenue—

and guess what: I think you will probably get a bit more—

for a future contingencies fund and/or tax reform and report to the Legislative Assembly on this consideration at the time of the next Appropriation Bill.

I certainly hope you do that. It is a very sensible recommendation and something that you need to take on board.

Thankfully, in this second appropriation bill at least there is some recognition of the people of Canberra who have carried the burden of closed schools. Guess what, guys: you do not save too much by closing a school—if you have not worked that one out already. There were closed shopfronts and libraries. There were savage cuts to bus services: there is now an attempt to rectify the absolute disaster that you put in place in November last year. I will say a little bit more on that later, and Mr Pratt will certainly elaborate.

There is a failed hospital system. There are water restrictions that we may never have needed to the same extent if sensible policies had been put in place—indeed, if sensible restrictions had been carried forward when, in 2005, we had some reasonable rain. And some of the emergency services reforms are incredibly problematic, to say the least.

I mentioned bus timetables. The government has finally recognised that the service needs improvement. There is some funding for some additional measures as well. I hope that your consultation process is a fair dinkum one. Even though you have made some improvements, there are some bus services in Belconnen, for example, and Tuggeranong which will cause real problems if you axe them, especially the 30 and the 47 service in Kaleen and Giralang. That is causing a lot of angst for constituents in my electorate, and my colleagues Mr Smyth and Mr Pratt have indicated that they have caused some concerns in their electorate as well.

My colleague Mr Mulcahy has already referred to the Beijing Olympics torch relay. That will be a great event. But even the Chief Minister was surprised at the cost. Good

luck; I hope that you can get some money out of the commonwealth. It is a national Australian team going to Beijing to represent their country. We are honoured to have the relay here; that is a great thing for Canberra. But there seem to be some pretty amazing elastic estimates there which I think are far in excess of what you actually need.

Another matter is of great concern to me. There is a line item for \$75,000 for the family and community fun day. Page 9 of the report says:

The Committee notes that this expenditure is for an event that took place on 6 November 2007. It is of concern that this funding was not sought in the 2007-08 Budget and that instead the Legislative Assembly is being asked to retrospectively approve already committed funding.

Kate Carnell lost her job in a similar situation to that, but because you are a majority, arrogant government you think you can get away with it. You think you can get away with it. That is appalling.

Mr Corbell: It is not true at all, Bill, and you know it. Secret overnight loan—that is what Kate Carnell did.

MR STEFANIAK: Mr Corbell interjects.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR STEFANIAK: At least, Mr Corbell, when you announced some of your initiatives in the budget, that was in a slightly more traditional sense in that it was dependent on the budget being passed. It was like a budget preview. We are now going to do that; we are now going to pass those and other initiatives. But this is amazing. This is money already spent for an event. Spending money before the supply is passed is a demonstration of this government's arrogance. I am pleased to see the committee making note of that fact.

A number of line items in this second appropriation bill should have been picked up in the budget before. Surely the government knew about things like the need for extra buses and the need to drought proof sports ovals. All of these things have been on the cards and on the table for many, many months. They should have been put in the budget we passed in August.

I will come to something I am quite pleased to see. I questioned the Chief Minister about it at the hearings last week. I refer to the \$600,000 provided for the Civic petrol plume. That problem has been around for years. In answer to a question, the Chief Minister stated:

The plume has existed for years and years. The Department of Territory and Municipal Services, the Department of Urban Services ... has sought to manage this plume in all that time. The point has arrived, through the second appropriation bill, where, for the first time in all those years, we have decided to seek to deal with the plume in a concrete, significant and final way.

Well done on that. I understand that the plume has been there for about 22 years. TAMS and Urban Services managed it as best they could. But if you had known about that, and you have had 6½ years, and you now have the money to fix it, then, whilst it is a good initiative, it is another classic case of “why on earth could that not have gone in the budget that we passed in June?” Anyway, I think it is a good initiative so I give you marks for that. But a lot of things in this budget seem to have been included as though they were afterthoughts in the second appropriation bill—afterthoughts that should not have been afterthoughts but should have been in the first bill.

In terms of some initiatives, I come to JACS. I have already commented on these. This is a portfolio I have responsibility for and it is worth noting that I welcome the initiatives. I am concerned, however, about the initiative to fund police to support a multi-agency pilot project aimed at addressing crime and antisocial behaviour in high-density public housing. That is a real problem; Mrs Burke and I get a number of complaints about that problem on a regular basis. It is a good initiative but you will not know what role the police will have until early February, and that is of concern.

If you have an initiative, and you have it in a second appropriation bill, surely you have worked out what your initiative aims to do. That is a problem—although, if you get it right, it has the potential to deliver a good service to a section of the community that goes through a lot of hell from incredibly disruptive tenants and other people who come in, cause havoc and commit crime in these complexes.

I applaud your initiative to fund 5,000 engine immobilisers—that is a good initiative—and to trial anchor bolts in public motorcycle parking bays. As well as that, there are your initiatives in relation to sexual assault reforms. I have already spoken on those. They are good initiatives save in one aspect. From page 24 of the report, I am pleased to see that the committee welcomes the program but notes that aspects of it should have been delivered earlier.

Those aspects include the need for law reform. They are funded—you are doing it in a slow way—but other states and territories already have significant legislation on the books to protect victims of crime, to ensure, for example, that victims of sexual assault have to give evidence only once and be cross-examined only once. We still do not have that protection in the ACT. It will still take at least until next year—midway through next year at the earliest. There will still be victims. We have seen two or three in the last couple of months who have suffered as a result of our laws not being up to date with other laws. I commend the rest of your program there, though. It will greatly assist. So there are some good initiatives in relation to that area.

I talked about afterthoughts. Another afterthought is the allocation to implement the climate change strategy. Here we have an afterthought with a total cost of \$836,000. The government has known about its climate change strategy for months—probably years. It has taken long enough to deliver—and what an absolute fizzer it was when that happened. Yet its implementation has to be an afterthought in a second appropriation.

I note that water demand is dealt with at page 18 of the report. I am pleased to see the plan to put some funding into retro-fitting dual-flush toilets and low-water-use urinals

in ACT government-owned commercial buildings. I am pleased to see that at least we are starting to have an audit. I have been pushing for that for ages, but you are now having an audit, which is partially done. That is good. And you are going to put some dual-flush toilets in housing. But we are still miles behind other schemes—even schemes in the area such as WaterWise, which has done such sterling service for our neighbours in Queanbeyan. Again, we have an afterthought there.

Afterthought is a hallmark of this second appropriation bill. Many of the expenditures could have—indeed, should have—been picked up in the main budget. Why weren't they? Was the government too afraid to take a more robust, aggressive approach? Was it its intention just to wait until there was another bucketful of money? Or was the government simply playing catch-up and out of its depth in terms of how it runs its finances?

Some of these measures are good. But let us not forget that this Stanhope Labor government put the people of Canberra through considerable pain in its 2006-07 budget. The Chief Minister lamented that we were living beyond our means. We could not sustain our spending, he cried. We needed to rein in those expenditures, he said; we needed to increase taxes and cut services. What for? So this government could spend and this government could continually, as it still seems to do, get its forecasting so horribly wrong? We do not mind if you are a little bit out, but to be consistently so is an indictment of your ability. That is why we have had this second appropriation bill.

There are good initiatives, some worth supporting, but this is something that should have been dealt with in August.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (11.42): In hearing the comments of those opposite, one could almost believe that they were opposed to almost every element of this budget, this second appropriation, despite the fact that they have already endorsed almost every initiative that has been announced in the lead-up to the appropriation bill in November.

We have this strange contradiction from the opposition. On the one hand, they cannot resist criticising for the sake of criticising; they cannot resist picking at small issues. But when it comes to the big picture, when it comes to the major initiatives—in justice and community safety, in public transport, in health and in education—they have supported all of the key initiatives.

That is because this is a good bill. This is a good Labor government agenda designed to deliver to the community the benefits of strong financial management and the benefits of effective and restrained expenditure, but target the support in areas where it makes a difference for people in our community.

The government is very proud of this bill. We are very proud of the initiatives in this bill and we are proud that they are delivering the services that Canberrans need. I take the challenge to Mr Mulcahy in particular. I do not think he speaks for everyone in the Liberal Party—in fact, we all know he does not—but he does speak for some of them, and he speaks for some of them when he says that he wants to see lower taxes. But I

think Canberrans want to see better services. They want to see improved support for people with disability. They want to see better support for our public schools. They want to see better public transport. They want to see a safer community. They want to see a helping hand offered to victims of crime. These are all initiatives that this bill puts in place.

I and my colleagues believe that Mr Mulcahy has it wrong. People do not want to see dramatic tax cuts. They do want to see better services. They do want to see a more caring, more compassionate, fairer community. This bill delivers on those very important commitments.

The standing committee's report on this appropriate bill makes a number of comments in relation to my portfolio of Justice and Community Safety. Some of these strike me as a bit curious. One recommends:

... that the ACT Government consider reinstating the Occupational Health and Safety Commissioner as an independent statutory officer.

They always have been independent statutory officers. There has been no change to the status of that position. It strikes me that there seems to be some confusion on the part of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in relation to that matter.

Mr Mulcahy also took me to task for the issue of the provision, or lack thereof, of payments for pensions for judges. We have four resident judges in the ACT Supreme Court. Their retirements are quite infrequent. The practice of this jurisdiction—indeed, before we came to government—was for there not to be specific provision made within the justice portfolio for payment of pensions to retiring judges or their dependants.

Instead, the approach has always been for the money to be allocated as and when those obligations on the part of the territory fall due. These are not incredibly large amounts of money in the scheme of the territory's budget; they are easily managed within the context of the territory's cash reserves. Mr Mulcahy's pedantry on this matter highlights his failure to understand some of the practical issues that you have to take into account when it comes to managing the government's finances.

This budget provides for a wide range of new initiatives in the area of community safety. The objective is all about making our city a fairer and safer place. Whether it is victims of crime, people with older motor vehicles or people who ride motorcycles in our community, the government is keen to address issues around crime, in particular property theft. The crime reduction initiative outlined in this budget is one that I am particularly pleased to see supported by all members in this place.

The provision provides for 5,000 new subsidies for engine immobilisers across our community. We know that the older motor vehicles—those built prior to the mid-1990s—are those most likely to be stolen through opportunistic theft. We also know that those types of motor vehicles are most likely to be owned by people on lower incomes who cannot afford to get a new-model car, who cannot afford to replace their car regularly.

This measure helps in two ways. First of all, it helps people on lower incomes who would really struggle if their car was stolen. And it provides assistance because their vehicles are the ones most likely to be stolen. The \$200 immobiliser subsidy will be available to around half of those 5,000 subsidies made available first up. That is a full subsidy—no cash up front whatsoever. It allows pensioners and other Centrelink concession holders to receive that subsidy in full.

The part-subsidy will go to other people in the community who are not on a pension of some form or another but who nevertheless own an older motor vehicle. That will again extend the number of vehicles in the ACT's private motor vehicle fleet that have immobilisers fitted. That will further drive down car theft in our community. Motor vehicle theft in our community dropped six per cent over the last 12 months. We want to see motorcycle theft drop even further. The immobiliser program is a very effective way to do it. We will be one of the leading jurisdictions in the country when it comes to applying this type of initiative.

Another very important initiative which I am very keen to see the results on—and again I welcome members' support—is the trial of motorcycle anchor points in public car parks around the ACT. We have seen an increase in the level of motorcycle theft; and when a motorcycle is stolen, it is less likely to be recovered. Motorcycles are simply broken down for parts or they disappear onto a private property somewhere where they do not need to be reregistered. This is a real concern for the government and I know it is a growing concern for Canberra's motorcycle community.

The provision of anchor points at public car parks will allow private motorcycle owners to chain or bolt their motorcycle to these anchor points. It will assist with preventing theft. We know that it is very easy for two people to come along with a utility, pick up a motorcycle, throw it in the back—and away you go. If there is some ability for the motorcycle to be chained to a particular point, it may assist in reducing that level of opportunistic theft. The government will be trialling the anchor points to see whether they have the effect that we are hoping they will have.

Another very important initiative announced in the appropriation bill is the government's sexual assault reform program. This is a very significant program, with \$4½ million being allocated—a mixture of capital and recurrent expenditure—to deal with support and the infrastructure to support victims of sexual assault in our community. Sexual assault is one of the most insidious types of crime in our community and it is one of the most difficult to prosecute because of the deeply personal, confronting and invasive nature of the crime.

The government is providing funding for closed-circuit television cameras to be put into our courts and is establishing an off-site remote witness facility so that a witness or a victim can give evidence to a court without even having to go into the court building. That minimises the risk of them or their family having to come face to face with their alleged perpetrator or members of the alleged perpetrator's family or friends. This again helps to reduce the trauma associated with giving evidence in court. So we will have that off-site facility.

We will also have state-of-the-art television monitors and closed-circuit cameras in two courtrooms, one in the Magistrates Court and one in the Supreme Court. That will give us the capacity to properly convey the victim's evidence to the court—to the judge, to the jury and to others in the courtroom.

We know that one of the big limitations with our technology at the moment is that it is of poor quality and does not properly convey the evidence that is being given by the person who is using the closed-circuit television relay. That diminishes the weight of their evidence in court, so we need to improve that; this will provide us with state-of-the-art capacity to do so.

Another very important reform funded in this budget is more support for our DPP and our police—an additional prosecutor for the DPP to assist with sexual assault matters and an additional person, a police officer, for the sexual assault child offenders team, which is designed to provide more resources for our police and the dedicated police team that deals with sexual assaults against children.

There is also, very importantly, funding to provide for the development of a major legislative reform package. The government is on the record as saying that our existing law is inadequate. Our existing law does not properly provide for the needs of victims who give evidence in sexual assault matters.

There is a whole range of other provisions that also need to be addressed in terms of court procedure and practice as part of this reform package. The government is committed to a holistic and comprehensive law reform package; this funding gives the government the capacity to do that work. I look forward to bringing those provisions to the Assembly next year and for their passage so that we can deal with some of the structural legislative issues around supporting victims of sexual assault in the court.

This is a very important budget for the justice portfolio, focused on providing for a fairer and safer Canberra. The provision of the closed-circuit television network and the extension of that across public areas of the ACT—our CCTV network for public safety and security—are another element being funded through this appropriation. This provides us with the capital to upgrade the CCTV network in a number of public places around the ACT. This is stage 1. Stage 2 will involve the further expansion of the territory's public CCTV network to include our bus interchanges and a number of other public places, including Manuka Oval and potentially including other town centres.

I am particularly keen to see its application in other town centres. We know that the city is not the only place where people gather late at night or that are places of mass gathering generally. Our town centres—Belconnen, Woden, Tuggeranong and Gungahlin—are all important centres as well. Public safety and amenity would be greatly improved by the use of CCTV technology in those locations, and the government is keen to progress that. This funding will enable us to get a good head start on this work and allow us to follow it through.

The committee's report basically endorses the government's appropriation bill. Yes, there are some quibbles, and there are some points of political point scoring along the

way; but at the end of the day this is a bill which the Assembly should support. I think that members have already acknowledged that. They do support it; they support it because it delivers better services for the Canberra community. That is what the community wants: it wants better services; it wants the delivery of services that make our city a fairer place, a safer place, a more accessible place and a more sustainable place. That is exactly what this bill delivers. I commend it to the Assembly.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (11.57): This is an important bill. I think that there is a certain sensitivity on the government benches because Mr Corbell was so quick to rise to his feet and say, "Gee whiz, it sounds like you don't support anything in this bill." Obviously he did not listen to anything that Mr Stefaniak said in the preceding speech where he pointed to places, particularly in Mr Corbell's portfolio, and praised what was going on, saying that he was looking forward to particular initiatives. But we do not hear that from Mr Corbell; he just has to have an opportunity to jibe.

There is opportunity in these debates to point to the way that we would do things differently. It is not to say that there is anything necessarily wrong with some of these initiatives but in many ways it is the difference between the way a Labor government would do something and the way a Liberal government would do something; we have different approaches to providing services for the people of the ACT. Mr Mulcahy addressed that in some way by pointing out that we would have a different taxing policy.

We would be more inclined to leave the money in the pockets of the people of the ACT so that they can provide the services for themselves. That is not to say that there are not essential services that must be provided by a government, and those things are about how a government sets its priorities. What the Liberal opposition has been saying for a substantial number of years is that the ACT government, the Stanhope government, has got its priorities wrong.

An example is the one that Mr Mulcahy used, which is the proportion of public works funding that goes to public art. We see this every day we are on Gungahlin Drive as we are starting to use it more and more. We have got the bogong moth sculpture. I know where it is and I have been told that if you look at it from above you can see that it is a bogong moth, but there is very little on the ground to distinguish the bogong moth from any other random pile of rocks.

Then we have the scrap metal confusion of the overpass on Gungahlin Drive over the Barton Highway, which I draw to the Assembly's attention because I am concerned about the traffic safety issue. We have got a whole lot of steel girders jutting out at random angles and there is no traffic barrier between those steel girders and the road, and the distance between the edge of the road and these steel girders is very small indeed.

We saw in the past how the South Australian government had to do away with the Stobie poles and phase them out because of the impact of having steel girders close to the side of the road; when cars run into them they cause considerable damage, and more damage than you would normally expect in an accident of that magnitude. I draw the attention of the minister to the proximity of this steel girder configuration to

the road and the fact that there is no crash barrier between the two. I am sure that a crash barrier would upset the artistic integrity of this piece of public art but I am really more concerned about the safety of the drivers who may come into contact with it.

I would like to spend most of the time allotted to me on looking at the initiatives in the Department of Education and Training. I suppose here again it is one of those mixed bag things; it is a curate's egg. We welcome the student welfare package. I have had some things to say about the student welfare package, although I was actually overseas on CPA business when the package first came out. It is interesting to see that this is pretty much what the Canberra Liberals proposed at the last election, so I suppose Mr Pratt must be feeling pleased to see Liberal policy being introduced by the Stanhope government.

The student welfare package is good enough as far as it goes, but it needs to be put in the context that this was a commitment of roughly \$14 million over the outyears. This is roughly the commitment that the Stanhope government made at the last election, and we are getting to the very death knell of their term in office before we actually see it come. We also have to take into account that, in the time that we have been waiting for these extra 17 teachers to come on board, the ACT government has taken in excess of 25 teachers out of the government high school system, so we are still behind where we were a few years ago in relation to the staffing establishment in the government high school system.

There is a lot that needs to be done in relation to student welfare and it is one of the areas that I think—and I am saying I think because I do not know, because no-one in the ACT has done the research—that separates government high schools from non-government high schools and is one of the things that I think causes people to choose non-government high schools over government high schools. It is in relation to student welfare and the perception that if you are going to a government high school you are more on your own, there is less supervision of you as a student, and especially in those vulnerable years 7 to 10, than would be the case if you were going to a non-government high school. Sometimes that perception is unfair but also from time to time there is a falling down in the government high school system in relation to truancy, behaviour and some of the issues that go with this.

Over the last five or so years we have seen a winding back of a lot of the programs available for people in the government school system or in the school system generally who have difficult and challenging behaviour. It really is the case that if you have got a troublesome child they just have to keep going to school and into a conventional classroom, and sometimes that conventional classroom is not the place where a troublesome child with challenging behaviour needs to be. Sometimes these children with challenging behaviour have a range of problems; they may have mental health problems as well as having not been appropriately disciplined and given some rigour, structure and substance to their lives. They present to teachers, to the school authorities, to their parents and to the wider community a whole range of troublesome issues.

There are many people who say that the school is not supposed to be a social worker. But there are things that have changed in the structure of our society, and for some

people school is the only place where they can come in contact with people who can provide them with the strength and the capacity to turn their lives around. The pastoral care initiatives are good as far as they go but they do not go far enough. I want to see more provisions to address truancy problems up front.

I will relate briefly a conversation I had with a parent the other day who was talking to me about the problems she was having with one of her children who had essentially run away from home. She was having contact with the ACT Office for Children, Youth and Family Support, and she said to me, "It is three weeks and I am still waiting for the school to ring me and tell me that my son is not at school." This is a major falling down, and if it is happening once in this school it is possibly happening more than once. I know that that boy from time to time turns up to school, gets his name marked off the roll, wanders in and out and leaves again. This is a child in year 9. He should not be able to wander in and out and leave again and not have anyone say: "Hey, you are at school today. We haven't seen you for two weeks. Perhaps we should sit down and see if we can work through some of these problems." They need to help the parents, be in contact with the parents.

One of the things I am particularly concerned about is the truancy system. Parents are apparently contacted by SMS. Technology is a great thing. As Dr Foskey said, it is great for the buses: you can find out when the buses are coming. But when we are talking about truancy we are talking about our children. They are people and it seems to me that it is a means by which the school authorities can avoid the difficult conversations that they need to have with parents if a child is truanting. They have met their absolute minimal responsibility by sending someone a text message but they never have to have that difficult conversation: "Mrs Smith, why do you think that your son or daughter is truanting? What can we do to help? Is there anything that we can do to help?" Instead it is: "No, we have met our responsibility, we have told you and we move on."

I want to see much more, much better pastoral care. This system is the beginning but it does not go into the college system—once you graduate from the high school system your problems are not solved—and it does not address the emerging problems in our primary school system. This is a start but there is much more that needs to be done.

We have the issue with Harrison primary school and the \$1.4 million cost overrun which is well addressed by the appropriation report. It does beg the question that we have a whole lot of other schools coming on line—the Gungahlin college, West Belconnen high school, a superschool being built in Kambah. How much are we going to see the cost overruns and how good are the cost estimators at getting this right? I think the minister said, "It's a \$28 million budget so \$1.4 million isn't very much." But it is, and when you replicate that in every project that this minister is talking about—we are having \$2 million spent there, and \$2 million spent elsewhere—it all adds up to \$300 million on capital upgrades. If we get it that wrong for every one of those, we are going to end up with a lot less or it is going to cost us a lot more. The minister and his department need to be much better attuned to the actual costs of things.

One of the issues that is of particular concern to me is the amount of money spent on curriculum support. This has to again be put in the context of the fact that during the 2006-07 budget considerable numbers of staff were taken out of the curriculum support unit. We have now through this budget the injection of three new PE teachers, which is suddenly going to turn around the health and fitness of a whole range of pupils; it is quite magical. On top of that, a certain amount of money—it is unclear exactly how much money—will be allocated to language teaching. We think that money in this financial year will be in the order of \$100,000.

Some of the initiatives which were spoken about by the minister and his officials were quite good. It is about better coordination, better online material and the quality of online material. The quality of online material for language teaching in this day and age is extraordinarily good and there is potential to really improve children's outcomes. It is laudable that the government should be trying to introduce language teaching other than English into every non-government school by 2010 because at the moment only about a bit over half the schools do it.

But what are we going to get for that? Those in years 3, 4, 5 and 6 are going to get 60 minutes a week, nothing for those in kinder, first and second grade, and 150 minutes a week for students in years 7 and 8. So there is no real effort at producing a quality outcome. It is going to be another thing of saying, "We have X number of students learning a language." But there will be no qualitative measure to find out at the end of primary school how proficient they are at that language, whether they have progressed the way they should have and how we are actually teaching languages.

In Australia generally, in the ACT, we are appalling at teaching languages. We waste the resources. What we have seen here today is the potential to waste yet more resources. There is nothing in what was said by the officials or by the minister that shows that they are taking language teaching seriously. It is not some vague, elitist thing. Language teaching is extraordinarily important. It is good that children undertake language learning, and if you are going to have full effect you start them as young as possible.

If we are going to have the great Barr dream of integrated preschools and primary schools, we should be starting them in preschool and it should be continuing, with a consistent language, all the way through into at least year 8, and preferably higher, so that the children have something to show for it. What we see now is that a child gets to the end of year 6 and has learnt very little language. They go to another school and say: "Why should I continue to do this? I have nothing to show for it." The minister must do better in future.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Housing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12.12): I thank the committee for the report. It is all the more valuable for what it does not say than for what it does say. I thought there would have been more emphasis on some of the significant funding initiatives in there in terms of their dollar value, but the comments do show the predilection of members on the committee. I am particularly grateful for the last recommendation of the committee—that the bill be passed—because I think that is the sign of maturity of this place.

The second appropriation provides for a number of road safety initiatives, including a road safety advertising and communication program. Funding will be provided to enhance awareness of items under the ACT road safety action plan, with particular reference to measures to support the ACT traffic camera program and integrated transport strategy. Road safety is an important issue for the community. There are nearly 30 crashes every day in the ACT. The economic cost of crashes in the ACT is some \$180 million per year.

A proactive media strategy to support the ACT road safety action plan is being developed and this will need funding to implement. In particular, part of this increased funding will be used to upgrade advisory signage for the fixed-speed camera program to counter public perception that these cameras are for revenue-raising purposes. This additional funding will allow awareness, or encouragement, elements of the road safety action plan to be managed in a more proactive and effective manner. Road safety advertising campaigns will be highly visible to the ACT population. Targeted education and publicity programs are crucial in engaging the community to share responsibility for road safety in partnership with government actions.

As a further safety initiative the government will be introducing the Nightlink taxi scheme. Funding will be provided for security cameras and security guards at two special Nightlink taxi ranks in Civic. This is for those people fixated on security around Civic. We will have security guards at the taxi ranks. There will be a subsidy for the first 12 months to taxis providing the Nightlink service to ensure minimum earnings for drivers and operators. Funding will also contribute to the cost of providing nightly marshals, who will collect fares and coordinate ride sharing for people travelling in the same direction, and will provide improved lighting and signage at the Nightlink ranks. The scheme will be highly visible to clubbers and other young people out in Civic late at night, as it will have its own taxi ranks that will operate differently from standard taxis, using flat fares rather than metered fares and no exclusive use of the vehicle.

Funding is also provided to install electronic signs at several ACT government service car parks in Civic to advise motorists of the number of parking spaces available in the car park, to save them driving around car parks that are full. Directional signage will also be installed, which will make it easier for motorists to find government and non-government parking areas in Civic. Parking signs will help reduce motorists' frustration associated with the pressure on parking availability in some parts of the city.

Motorists will have access to real-time information on the number of spaces available in surface car parks and better directions on the location of parking facilities. This initiative will provide improved access to unused existing car parking spaces. The electronic signs will be installed at the two surface car parks on either side of Northbourne Avenue, at the intersection of that road and London Circuit. A third sign will be provided at the large long-stay surface car park on the east side of London Circuit close to Constitution Avenue. It is expected the work will be completed by June 2008.

This bill also includes a number of initiatives to further improve the ACTION bus network. Funding is provided to increase the level of service, in particular frequency and span of hours, of ACTION bus services across Canberra with the introduction of a new network, Network 08, and to market and communicate the bus network effectively. The funding sought in this proposal will achieve an average of 20-minute frequency in the peak and 30 minutes in the non-peak. The current network, Network 06, operates on an average peak service of 30 minutes and non-peak service of 60 minutes.

The Network 08 communication strategy will include the supply of new timetables; improved DDA compliant signage at interchanges and bus stops, which is what Dr Foskey was talking about—how you know when a wheelchair-accessible bus is around; an upgrade of ACTION's scheduling system to allow real-time route-finding information; an upgrade of the ACTION website to deliver to customers, via the internet and the call centre, detailed bus information, instructions on alternative routes, directions for walking between points, real-time changes in timetables in the instance of changed or cancelled routes, and search by landmarks; and provide ACTION information officers in interchanges every weekday for 10 hours.

Seniors are also provided for in this appropriation bill. Funding is provided to allow ACT seniors to travel on ACTION buses for a concession fare and to provide alternative community transport services for people who have difficulty accessing ACTION's regular route services. It is proposed that ACT seniors be permitted to travel at concession fare from February 2008, to allow time to advertise and implement the new fare arrangements.

It is also proposed that six regional community service organisations each be supplied with a fully-maintained minibus, and funds to employ a driver, to deliver community transport services to people who have difficulty in accessing ACTION services. The transport service will fill an existing gap in the transport system, particularly for the aged and the disabled with limited mobility.

It will also support changes to be made as part of Network 08 where better service options for non-peak travel on regular routes can be supported by flexible on-demand community transport options for the less advantaged in our community. The fares proposal supports the government's commitment to ACT seniors for fares parity with age pensioners. The community transport proposal is innovative and provides a low-cost high-value service that meets the needs of the less mobile and socially isolated members of the community.

Funding of \$1 million is also provided to repair and clean up the unattractive Belconnen interchange, install CCTV at the Belconnen and Woden interchanges to improve security, and implement bus stop improvements including additional seating to support the introduction of Network 08. The Belconnen interchange is in very poor condition. It has not received the necessary maintenance over a number of years because a new interchange was planned as part of the Westfield redevelopment. A new interchange or some other alternative is at least three years away. In the meantime we cannot expect the Belconnen community to use the public transport

system when a significant piece of transport infrastructure is in such a rundown and unattractive state. It needs to be spruced up.

Safety needs to be improved with lighting, and broken and unsafe walkways need to be fixed. The perspex covers on the interchange and bridge need to be fixed and cleaned. Electrical work needs to be undertaken. Painting and signage need to be upgraded. Platforms need to be repaved for safe passenger movements. This work can be undertaken quickly and real and noticeable improvements realised, and the work will cost \$450,000. There are security issues at the Belconnen and Woden interchanges that must urgently be addressed. The installation of CCTV cameras is proposed for a cost of \$200,000 and the security of the Civic interchanges will be addressed as part of the security precinct planning through the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

Some changes to existing bus stops will be required as part of Network 08 to be introduced in April 2008. It is proposed to establish small-scale interchange facilities on the street in Dickson in the north and Erindale in the south. These facilities will cost \$100,000. It is also proposed to continue to roll out up to 100 additional seats, at a cost of \$250,000, at existing bus stops. The provision of a seat at each bus stop is a simple but nevertheless welcome improvement to the public transport system. Again this work can be undertaken quickly and real benefits realised immediately the seating is in place. Some of this funding may be used to decommission a limited number of stops affected by the introduction of Network 08.

As part of the implementation of the climate change strategy, funding of \$70,000 is being provided to equip a further 50 buses with bike racks to improve service reliability. Ultimately we will have every bus in town with a bike rack on it; that is the intention. Bike racks on buses and free travel to bike users using bike racks is an action item, No 14, in the climate change action plan.

Funding of \$205,000 has been allocated to improve the look and feel of the city through an upgrade of street and park furniture, installation of "Welcome to Canberra" signage and cab spot signage, and removal of pine wildings from Narrabundah Hill. As part of the city centre refurbishment project being undertaken in early 2008 street furniture is being relocated from the city to replace aged and unsafe furniture in urban parks and shopping centres. This funding will enable the furniture to be relocated and installed directly to the new site in order to avoid additional storage and transport costs.

Residents and tourists will be able to view new integrated "Welcome to Canberra" signage as they enter Canberra along our major roads, instilling a sense of ownership and pride in our city. This will incorporate the "Welcome to Ngunnawal Country" message, reducing the proliferation of signage at Canberra's entry points. Cab spot signage will also be visible in highly visited areas and tourist destinations and will assist taxi patrons to easily identify the locations in order to book a taxi, hence improving taxi services for residents and interstate visitors.

In regard to the removal of pine wildings adjacent to residential areas on Narrabundah Hill, these wildings can easily be removed at relatively low cost while still small.

However, any delay in removing these weeds will result in a significant increase in cost and will increase the fuel load and fire hazard in the area.

This bill builds on the work already undertaken by this government to provide an efficient, effective and affordable public transport system; enhances a range of road safety initiatives already being undertaken through the ACT road safety action plan; and further enhances the look of the city.

Turning to housing, there are two items in the bill that I am particularly focused on: improvements in energy efficiency and water demand management in public housing. I am pleased to say that these initiatives continue the commitment the government has made to water and energy savings in public housing. This is not an ad hoc initiative. In 2005-06, for instance, the government provided \$1 million for water and energy improvements to public housing and the work that was undertaken as a result forms the basis for the new initiative.

The ACT government has identified \$20 million over 10 years to improve the energy efficiency of public housing properties. Housing ACT is developing a 10-year action plan to deliver the energy efficiency program, and the action plan is centred on building fabric improvements and improving the energy efficiency of hot water systems and heating appliances. Building fabric improvements include works such as wall and ceiling insulation, draught sealing and pelmets. When completed these improvements are less prone to failure and maintenance. More importantly, they lock in energy savings regardless of the tenant's behaviour. Draught sealing of all single unit houses built before 1997, except those identified for disposal, will be carried out over the first five years. Approximately 4,000 properties will be affected. Wall insulation will be installed in high occupancy dwellings; that is, houses with four or more bedrooms. It is expected that approximately 800 properties will receive wall insulation.

Water and space heating and heating account for over 60 per cent of all energy used in houses. Improvements to hot water systems and heaters will make significant contributions to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and approximately 600 energy-efficient hot water systems will be installed per year over the term of the program. These will be either five-star gas storage, instantaneous hot water systems or electric-boosted solar hot water systems. I should make it clear that many of the properties in the multi-unit complexes owned by Housing ACT are not suited to the installation of gas or solar hot water systems. Large homes that have had building fabric improvements and have electric heating will be the first properties targeted for heating system upgrades. Hot water systems and heaters will be replaced either on failure or on long-term vacancy, when the opportunity is taken to carry out major upgrades.

I am pleased to say that Housing ACT will be introducing other measures. These include increasing from three stars to four stars the energy efficiency rating target on homes purchased. If the property purchased does not reach the rating, improvements will be made to the building. Approximately 50 properties per annum will be improved. A photovoltaic electricity generation system will be trialled at one Housing ACT complex. Subject to the actual outcomes, more systems may be installed. A total

of 30 to 40 energy audits will be carried out on a sample of Housing ACT properties. The output from the audits will be used to refine the program of works for the outgoing years. A brochure will be sent to all the tenants on actions they can take to reduce the use of energy. This follows up on information provided to tenants in 2006.

On the question of water demand, the government has identified \$500,000 over two years for water efficiency improvements. The improvements will include dual-flush toilets, cistern inlet valves, dust valves and water-efficient showerheads. Housing ACT properties make up nine per cent of the total residential properties in the ACT. These measures will make a significant contribution to reducing the use of energy and water. They also continue the government's commitment to support people in our community who are on low incomes.

Again I thank very much the work of the committee. I also appreciate the input the community had into the deliberations of the committee. I would like to put on the public record that I do appreciate that. I am particularly interested in the interviews with the youth coalition around our Civic safety program and ACTION bus improvements. It is often very, very difficult to talk to everybody but we do try to do the best we can. If you have a look at the initiatives in this particular supplementary appropriation, Mr Speaker, you will see we have the safety of our citizens at heart and want to make sure that our young people have the best opportunity to travel safely on our public transport system and within the taxi system. I do thank some members, even for their interjections, around the state of the wheelchair-accessible taxi system and I continue to battle that one.

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 12.27 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice

Australian public service—proposed cuts

MR STEFANIAK: My question is to the Chief Minister. Prior to the federal election on 24 November this year, the leader of the Labor Party, Kevin Rudd, made several references to implementing cuts to the Australian public service, with the potential to slash thousands of jobs in the ACT. Chief Minister, what conversations have you had or intend to have with the Prime Minister to impress upon him the importance of the commonwealth public service to our ACT economy and the effects that the federal government cuts to the Australian public service will have on our economy?

MR STANHOPE: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. It gives me an opportunity to congratulate Kevin Rudd and the Labor Party generally on a historic victory. The people of Australia, 10 days ago, spoke decisively about their absolute determination to rid the nation of Howardism—a dark period in the history of Australia. The long and hard job of repairing the damage started decisively yesterday, with the decision to ratify the Kyoto accord—something that should have been done 10 years ago, and something that John Howard, the world's great climate change sceptic and denier, refused to do. We saw the response of the people of Australia to

John Howard and the Liberal Party. So thank you, Mr Stefaniak, for the opportunity for me in this place to publicly congratulate Kevin Rudd and the Labor Party. The long journey of repair has commenced, and commenced most decisively yesterday, with the first action of Kevin Rudd, immediately upon being invested as the 26th Prime Minister of Australia, when he did something that John Howard did not have the moral courage, foresight or capacity to see as vital for the future of the world—namely, ratifying Kyoto.

The attitude which the Labor Party and Kevin Rudd take in relation to climate change is the same as ours. We are not interested in empty gestures. Indeed, on the last sitting day, we all remember Mr Stefaniak standing up and confirming that Gary Humphries's last budget as Chief Minister included \$180,000 for greenhouse gas initiatives—namely, funding to change the light bulbs at Macarthur House. That was the climate change strategy of the previous government.

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

MR STANHOPE: In relation to cuts, certainly Kevin Rudd and Lindsay Tanner have given an indication that they will establish an expenditure review committee; that the expenditure review committee will look at all government expenditure within the territory; and that they will, of course, respond to the priorities of a Rudd federal Labor government. And of course they would; it is what every government does. They look at their priorities, they look at the priorities of the people of Australia, they look at the significant mandate they have from the people of Australia, and they will, of course, adjust their public service in order to be able to meet their particular priorities.

We know that the promise to instigate an education revolution, 12 years overdue, will require resourcing. Those promises to reinvigorate federalism and to deal with the issues, particularly in relation to health, disability services and housing, will require a refocus of priorities. I have absolutely no doubt that those areas of most significance to the people of Australia, as expressed through the ballot box just 10 days ago, will indeed receive additional and significant funding.

The other point in relation to which I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question is the opportunity to remind the opposition in this place and the people of Canberra of what John Howard did when he came to government in 1996. How many jobs were lost in the ACT? The only real or genuine recession suffered since the Second World War in the ACT was precipitated by the Liberal Party in 1996, with the wholesale slashing of the commonwealth public service and the belittling ever since that day of the ACT by the Liberal Party. Certainly, it is an issue that we will watch. I have been in touch with Lindsay Tanner. I have indicated to Lindsay Tanner the importance of maintaining a strong and healthy commonwealth public service and Canberra, and the need to devote attention to the welfare and wellbeing of this particular town. I will continue to have those conversations. But I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Stefaniak.

MR STEFANIAK: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Chief Minister, what modelling has your government done on the potential impact of \$10 billion in cuts to the commonwealth public sector on the ACT economy?

MR STANHOPE: As I indicated, I have already been in touch with Lindsay Tanner and corresponded with him in relation to these issues. I have actually put to Lindsay Tanner some priorities of the ACT government in areas in relation to which we believe there is a necessity for continued commonwealth support; for instance, in relation to the NCA. I believe the NCA is a vital organisation, and I have put the point strongly to Lindsay Tanner and, indeed, to some of his colleagues that it is important that the NCA be supported, that it remain strong and that it continue to receive the support of the federal government.

Indeed, I have indicated the extent to which my government has enjoyed exemplary relationships with the chairman, Michael Ball, and that it would be my hope that Michael Ball would be reappointed to the position of chair of the NCA because of the sterling job that I believe he has done, because of his very obvious commitment to Canberra as the national capital of Australia and because of the essential and vital role of the NCA to advocate for Canberra as the national capital. So I have been in touch.

We are, of course, aware of the need to stay across all the implications for the ACT, the ACT government and the people of the ACT as a result of the change of government. Indeed, just yesterday the cabinet was briefed in detail on the implications to the territory of a change of government. So these are obviously very important issues, and we take them seriously.

Battery cage eggs

DR FOSKEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. It is to follow up on his undertaking that the ACT would no longer purchase battery cage eggs. Chief Minister, when I last asked you about this issue, you said: "There are certain investigations that officials will have to take in relation to existing contracts, et cetera, et cetera, but we have started the process of ensuring that the ACT government will, in future, not use battery cage eggs." I am interested to know how that process is going. Exactly when will it be that the ACT ceases to buy battery cage eggs?

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Dr Foskey. I fear that I do not have the answer to that specific question. I must say that I have not received a recent briefing in relation to that particular issue. I regret that I will have to take it on notice. This is an issue that we continue to pursue. I am very aware of the level of interest within the community in relation to the issue of the cage production of eggs.

I note—in decisions taken in the last two to three weeks in the United Kingdom in relation to the phasing out of the cage production of eggs, at the heart of the bill, Dr Foskey, that you have sponsored and at the attitude that the ACT government has taken to this issue—that there is a changing mood around the world in relation to the cage production of eggs. It was interesting to reflect on the decision taken—I am not sure whether it is the whole of the United Kingdom, but certainly in England—to begin the progressive phase-out with an end date.

The ACT government remains committed to the strategy that I outlined. But in relation to the specific question you asked, I will have to take it on notice. Hopefully, I will respond within the next day or so.

DR FOSKEY: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question nonetheless. Do you still stand by the commitment to revisit the ACT's legislative options if negotiations with COAG, the primary industry ministerial council and Pace are unsuccessful?

MR STANHOPE: Thank you Dr Foskey. I have written to the Prime Minister, the premiers of each of the states and the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory. I have sought their support in having the issue of cage production placed on the COAG agenda. I have written to every agricultural minister in Australia and similarly asked that the issue of cage production of eggs be placed on the agenda of agricultural ministers for consideration in the context of the phasing out and banning of cage production. I have kept the faith with the commitment I outlined in relation to all aspects of that strategy.

The COAG agenda is set by the Prime Minister. Under Mr Howard as Prime Minister it was set and it was essentially non-negotiable. At this stage I am not quite sure whether the operation or administrative arrangements in relation to COAG that Mr Rudd will put in place will mirror those of Mr Howard. I have written to and sought the support of all the premiers and the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory.

As I said, I similarly have asked for the matter to be addressed by agricultural ministers. It is a collegiate process. These ministerial councils do not operate on the basis of "I hereby nominate this item for discussion as an agenda item" and therefore it is a given that it will be treated; it is a decision taken by consensus. I need the support of others. I am doing everything within my power.

I remain in touch with the egg industry board and with Pace Farm. You have asked about one other aspect of the strategy. I will take that on advice. Certainly, Dr Foskey, as I have indicated, if at every stage the ACT is thwarted or cannot receive support, we will keep alive our options.

Hospitals—access block

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Health. The target set by you and the department under the access improvement program for people having to wait more than eight hours for admission through accident and emergency is 25 per cent. Recent information provided to the opposition under the Freedom of Information Act reveals a worsening outcome, at 30 per cent, or the fact that access block is 5.6 per cent worse than your target. Why is the access improvement program not working?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mrs Dunne for the question. I welcome the opportunity to again place on the record that the access improvement program is working and access block is down. Access block, I think, for the final quarter of last financial year was down to 28 per cent. That is coming down from a peak of about 42 per cent three years ago. It has come down every single quarter since then, and it is continuing to decline. In the first quarter results, you see that those results have been maintained.

In some information that the opposition gets every month under FOI, they were provided with some preliminary data on these figures—a month of preliminary data

which indicated some early results which we believe show that access block was at 30 per cent. Before those numbers have been finalised, as they are when we report quarterly—and we check this data over and over again because this is the data that we are required to report nationally against—it is extremely important that there is an opportunity given to finalise that data to make sure it is correct.

In fact, the final data for the July figures show that access block was at 28.1 per cent, despite the six per cent increase in activity at the emergency department for that month alone. That means that we are seeing more patients than ever before, more patients are coming through the emergency department, and we are still maintaining a decreasing level of access block.

What does that show? The extra investment in the emergency department, over \$1 million in extra resources and extra staffing, shows that the opening of the MAPUs is working and that we are getting people out of the emergency department faster than we have over the last three to four years, particularly for people over the age of 75 where the access block being experienced was around 42 per cent some two or 2½ years ago.

We are seeing a continuing decrease in the level of access block. We have set ourselves the target of 25 per cent. That target has never been reached. That target was set when access block was 40 per cent. This government set that. That is not good enough, and we need to reduce that. What do you do? You set yourself a target to reduce it. Then what do you do? You put in processes to make sure that target is reached. What have we seen ever since we set that target? Ever since that target there has been consistent decline in the levels of access block being experienced at the hospital.

Mrs Burke: That is not true.

MS GALLAGHER: Mrs Burke says, “That is not true.”

MR SPEAKER: Ignore her; it is an interjection.

MS GALLAGHER: I would have thought that Mrs Burke would have learnt from recent experience how embarrassing interjections can be; namely, booing and hissing senior journalists during the press club speech, the dying speech, of a prime minister on the way out. What do we have? We have Bill and Jacqui booing and hissing up at the back of the press club. It made the national media.

Mrs Burke: What has this got to do with waiting times?

MS GALLAGHER: It is relevant to the interjections that I am experiencing and the accusation that I am not telling the truth, because that is what Mrs Burke is alleging.

Mr Smyth: Can't you answer the question about access block?

MS GALLAGHER: I have answered the question. I cannot make it clearer. Access block is declining. It has been declining consistently. Poor Mrs Dunne has been made

to ask a question and made to look like a fool because it is essentially a dorothy dixer and I have been able to put on the record what the government is doing. Access block has declined. You cannot argue with it. The information is provided nationally.

Mr Smyth: You can.

MS GALLAGHER: You can if you are Mrs Burke, who would argue her way out of a coffin or would try to. There are no indications that the work we have put in place to deal with access block and to deal with the performances in the emergency department is not working.

Mr Smyth: Go and talk to the nurses.

MS GALLAGHER: Mr Smyth would know this. Every single measure of the performance of the emergency department shows the figures are going the right way. That does not mean that the emergency department is not under pressure. It says that the systemic changes we have made are working. They are delivering, and patients are not experiencing the levels of access block that they have experienced in the past.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mrs Dunne?

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. On the basis that the minister thinks that this is a dorothy dixer—

MR SPEAKER: Come back to the question, please.

MRS DUNNE: can she please tell us what she is doing to free up emergency beds for those people who are still waiting on waiting lists?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mrs Dunne for the dorothy supplementary. For the benefit of the Assembly, I can explain what the government has been doing. We have boosted staffing with over \$1 million extra to employ more nurses and more doctors in the emergency department. We have established the medical assessment and planning unit, which provides for a quick transfer of more complex patients arriving at the ED.

Mrs Burke: Is MAPU working? I don't think so.

MS GALLAGHER: Mrs Burke says that that is not working; I would ask her to go and visit that unit and see it not working.

Mrs Burke: It is not about that. I am talking to the nurses.

MS GALLAGHER: Go and talk to the nurses in the MAPU and say that this is not working. Go on. Go and talk to the patients in the MAPU and say that this is not working.

Mrs Burke interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: Well, that is what you have just said. You have said that the MAPU is not working.

Mrs Burke: I did not—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mrs Burke.

MS GALLAGHER: That is what you said—that the MAPU is not working. We have established new fast-track systems at the emergency department to provide quicker access. We have got a new registrar review clinic which ensures that patients who need to return to the emergency department for follow-up treatment do not have to wait for long hours of care. But the most significant investment that this government has made to reduce access block has been 147 extra beds in the hospital—147 extra beds to replace the 114 that that lot took out of the system: 114 beds that went under your administration. We have put 147 extra beds—funded—into the system. That is—

Mr Smyth: Acute care beds?

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Smyth.

MS GALLAGHER: Mr Stefaniak needs to come up with some evidence around the 200 beds. I have searched for any evidence of Mr Berry cutting 200 beds from the health system. There is absolutely no evidence to support that claim. I challenge you, Mr Stefaniak. I know that your deputy does not do this; your deputy just makes allegations and then leaves them out there without any evidence to support them. But as leader—come on, Bill: if you are going to say that Mr Berry cut 200 beds from the system, prove it. Show us all where those beds were cut.

Mr Stefaniak: It is in *Hansard*.

MS GALLAGHER: Oh, it is in *Hansard*! Mrs Carnell—

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MS GALLAGHER: Are you going to table the *Hansard* now like Mrs Burke tabled her media releases? You cannot keep saying that the Labor government cut 200 beds from the health system when there is no evidence other than a line that Mrs Carnell gave in question time. That is it. That is all you've got.

We have had a good look at this, Bill, because it would be a bit of a weakness in our argument if we were beating you up for cutting 114 beds and then it turned out that Mr Berry cut 200. I accept that that would be a bit of a weakness in our argument. But there is no evidence; in fact, the evidence is to the contrary. All you have to do, Mrs Burke, is go and have a look at the AIHW reports of that time: you will see that there were not 200 beds cut out. But don't worry. Don't worry about the AIHW. Don't believe them either. It is a big conspiracy, Mrs Burke! Nobody publishes accurate data in the health system!

Mr Smyth: Are you comparing like with like?

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Smyth.

MS GALLAGHER: Obviously I have answered Mrs Dunne's question to her satisfaction, as she has left her chair. We have done a number of things in the emergency department. The figures are declining. I am very pleased with how the figures are going. I do not stand here and say that there is a perfect system. We are constantly looking at ways to improve the system. In fact, the second appropriation has some more money for the emergency department, to increase our responsiveness there. But in terms of health performance—and I am happy to keep talking about this through question time—and the emergency department access block, the extra beds are all reducing patients' length of stay in the emergency department. There is absolutely no way that you can twist that and come up with a different scenario.

Hospitals—emergency medicine unit

MRS BURKE: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, is it true that you are proposing to transfer patients from the acute ward to the emergency medicine unit in the emergency department of the hospital? If so, how will this change the way in which the EMU operates now and into the future?

MS GALLAGHER: I believe the question is around acute in-patients in the hospital.

Mrs Burke: The acute ward of the emergency department.

MS GALLAGHER: I see. I am not sure from the question whether it is about patients coming into the emergency department who may be seen—

Mrs Burke: The acute ward.

MS GALLAGHER: There are acute beds in the emergency department. That is part of the bed profile in the emergency department. There is not necessarily an acute ward but there are beds there for acute patients. The emergency management unit is, as you would know, part of the emergency department and from time to time people will move to the emergency management unit based on clinical decisions. There are different reasons why people go there, but I imagine that, if we are experiencing pressures in the acute area of the emergency department and we need more beds freed up for more patients, an obvious place to look is right near the emergency department, where there are more beds. I do not have a problem at all, at times of pressure and based on appropriate clinical decisions, with the beds that are provided in the emergency management unit being used if required. It makes sense. Are we meant to have people not being able to get into a bed whilst leaving beds vacant because they are there for a particular purpose?

I thought you would have supported flexible use of beds, depending on the patient profile that was coming into the emergency department. It seems common sense to me and pretty straightforward. I understand there is ongoing dialogue with the clinicians about this, but for me, as health minister, if at times of need there are patients that are suitable to go there for a period of time whilst waiting for a bed in the hospital or a transfer to another unit, I would have no problem with that.

One of the issues we have been working on in terms of dealing with access block, and which I did not mention in my previous answer, is to make sure our bed occupancy levels are not at the point where they have been in the past, which has been at 97, 98 and 99 per cent. The latest figures I saw showed bed occupancy averaging out at about 91 per cent. We are heading for a target of 85 per cent, but I should say it is a target. We have not reached that yet. But this is part of the process of making sure we have beds available in the hospital for people to travel through, leave the acute area of the emergency department and go into the hospital. That is something in which we have been seeing pleasing results.

The hospital is busy—Canberra Hospital particularly, but Calvary is not an exception in that regard. At times when bed occupancy levels have risen and we have not been able to have the amount of free beds in the other part of the hospital, it will place pressure on the emergency department. If that can be alleviated by using some of the EMU beds, under appropriate clinical guidelines and processes, I do not have a problem with that.

MR SPEAKER: Is there a supplementary question?

MRS BURKE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the minister for the answer. Given that the EMU beds are for 23 hours or less, what impact will changes made to both the acute care area and the EMU have on the collection of statistical data in relation to access block and fast track?

MS GALLAGHER: I think, reading behind the lines, the question is: are we fudging some of the data around access block because we are shifting people into the EMU and therefore they are not part of the access—

Mrs Burke: You said it, not me.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MS GALLAGHER: No, I am getting to the point of your question. You could have asked, “Are you fudging the figures, minister?”

Mrs Burke: I have before.

MR SPEAKER: It is not a conversation; it is questions without notice.

MS GALLAGHER: I have now got the point. I thought Mrs Burke was actually interested in how it all operates, but it is not that at all.

Mrs Burke: Of course I am.

MS GALLAGHER: It is not that at all. The reports that we provide around access block are nationally consistent. We take reporting very seriously indeed, Mrs Burke, in making sure that our reports are accurate. So I totally reject the underlying insinuation that we are fudging the figures. Unless she can come up with anything

better, I would suggest she be a little more cautious about how she raises those allegations.

Calvary, for example, operates a similar EM unit. It has a different name; I am just trying to recall it. That has 23-hour short-stay beds as well. These areas are not unusual; they have been set up in most emergency departments to deal with patients, particularly those short-stay patients who can be dealt with in a quick fashion. That is why we have our EMU operating. I do not imagine that it impacts on the collection of statistical data. I reject your allegation but I will take further advice on it, Mrs Burke. To my knowledge, it has had no impact on the statistical collection of information.

Alexander Maconochie Centre

MR SESELJA: My question is to the Attorney-General and is related to the prison project. Minister, on 11 May 2006, you said in the Assembly:

The bottom line is that the project will not cost more than the budget provision. That is the requirement the government has put in place, and that will be the way it is delivered.

Your government is now seeking to fund the prison with an additional \$2.5 million in the second appropriation bill. How do you reconcile the inconsistency between your statement of May 2006 and the provision of these additional funds?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Seselja for the question. Shock, horror, construction costs increase! That results in a need to meet the increasing construction costs. These are not factors entirely within the control of the ACT government. Indeed, it is well accepted that construction costs have risen dramatically in the past six to 12 months. A budget variation of less than five per cent is a very minor variation in the overall context of the budget.

MR SESELJA: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Minister, which of the requirements that you claim to have put in place on 11 May 2006 did you fail to put in place, leading to the budget being exceeded?

MR CORBELL: We did not fail in any regard.

ACT Health—performance

MS MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr Speaker. My question, through you, is to Ms Gallagher, the Deputy Chief Minister in her capacity as Minister for Health. Minister, could you update the Assembly on the performance and achievements of the ACT health system this year?

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to inform the Assembly of the numerous—many and varied—achievements of the ACT health system. In fact, when researching the answer to this question, I actually had to cut this down from 17 pages to a more reasonable amount because we are only allowed 10 minutes to answer questions. Well, it is 10 minutes with the supplementary. I can

see that those opposite are very uncomfortable with this. This is the sort of stuff they do not want to hear about. They do not want to hear about how well ACT Health and the public health system are performing.

In the past year we have reached collective agreement with collective parts of our workforce—nurses, midwives, clerical, technical, professional, health services officers and visiting medical officers—without any days lost to industrial action. This is the first time that this has ever been achieved. ACT Health also received full accreditation from the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards. The ACT Health incident management project, known as Riskman, won the national award for organisational change management project of the year for 2007 at the Australian Institute of Project Management awards ceremony.

The average cost per cost weighted separation for ACT public hospital services has dropped to 115 per cent of the national average cost in the latest available data published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. This is down from 130 per cent of the national average cost in 2004-05. In just one year we have halved the variation between the ACT and national average costs for hospital episodes.

During 2006-07 our public hospitals responded to higher than anticipated demand for care. Inpatient episodes of care were up six per cent in cost weighted terms compared with the previous year and double the estimated growth in services. Outpatient services posted a four per cent increase in activity over the year. The biggest area of growth in terms of outpatient care was in cancer services where our radiation oncology service managed an 11 per cent growth in occasions of service during 2006-07.

As we have already talked about today, the level of access block at our public hospitals has fallen again during 2006-07. Access block measures the proportion of people who are admitted to a hospital from the emergency department who spend more than eight hours waiting for transfer to a hospital bed. In 2004-05 the level of access block across the two hospitals was 41 per cent. This dropped to 33 per cent in 2005-06 and to 28 per cent in 2006-07.

This improvement is a clear demonstration of the effectiveness of a range of government initiatives to reduce pressures in the emergency department. They include establishment of the medical assessment and planning unit, MAPU; an extra \$1 million allocated for more staff; the establishment of new fast track systems; a new registrar review clinic; and more beds in the hospital.

In elective surgery in 2006-07, 9,326 patients received elective surgery and were removed from the waiting list. This was 206 more than in the previous year. During 2006-07, 93 per cent of all category 1 elective surgery patients were admitted for surgery within 30 days. The number of people waiting longer than one year for surgery has dropped by 21 per cent in 2006-07.

The demand for elective surgery continues to increase in the ACT, with additions to the waiting list jumping by eight per cent in 2006-07 to 11,458 from 10,602. To meet the demand for elective surgery the government has provided another \$2.5 million in

the 2007-08 budget for an additional 300 elective surgery procedures. The tenth operating theatre at the Canberra Hospital will be fully operational for the first time in 2007-08 to assist in meeting the increased demand for both additional emergency and elective surgery.

The number of people who have had their elective surgery cancelled has been cut by almost 50 per cent during a period of increased demand for surgery. There has been a nine per cent increase in emergency surgery being performed at the Canberra Hospital and still we have halved the cancellation rate for elective surgery. That is not an insignificant achievement.

These achievements have been delivered by the staff in our hospitals who work every day. Mrs Burke sits there and snipes and underestimates the achievements that I am reading out. These achievements are in recognition of the staff in the hospitals who deliver this every single day, and you sit there and snipe at them. We did not perform 9,326 operations; the doctors and nurses did. This answer actually deserves encouragement from those opposite. (*Time expired.*)

MS MacDONALD: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Minister, could you provide details of any further excellent achievements?

MS GALLAGHER: I can continue with a whole range of further achievements. Bed occupancy is down. Most national and international advice on bed occupancy suggests that an occupancy rate of between 85 and 90 per cent provides for the optimum for maximising access to care and efficiency in hospitals. Just two years ago, our hospitals were reporting bed occupancy levels for overnight hospital beds of 97 per cent. In 2006-07 our hospitals averaged a bed occupancy rate of 91 per cent.

This considerable improvement over the last two years also shows up in the improved access block figures reported over the last few years. The result for the first quarter of 2007-08 was 90 per cent—right on the government's target for this year, which is three per cent below the target set for 2006-07.

There are more beds. The reduction in the bed occupancy rate is just one measure that demonstrates the improvements in access to care possible due to the funding of an additional 147 beds for our hospital system over the past four years. These beds comprise an additional 60 general ward beds to meet the increased demand for inpatient services, particularly referrals from our emergency departments; and 51 additional beds as part of the new sub and non-acute service, which as I said earlier provides a better care environment for older people who need those services.

They also include 17 observation units next to our emergency departments, which provide emergency department physicians with the capacity to monitor patients while freeing up emergency department resources for more acutely ill patients; 15 community-based intermittent care beds that free up acute hospital resources while providing a better care environment for older people between hospital and home or community care; and four additional intensive care unit beds at the Canberra Hospital over the past two years, which has increased the capacity of that unit by 40 per cent—a 40 per cent increase in intensive care beds.

The last report from the AIHW released in May shows that the average number of beds available to our public hospital system jumped from 679 beds in 2004-05 to 714 beds in 2005-06—a 5.2 per cent increase. This increase came at a time when the national figure for available beds dropped by one per cent. Nationally we dropped one per cent, and locally we have invested an additional 5.2 per cent in our bed capacity. This has been as a direct result of 114 beds being ripped out of the hospital system by the previous government.

There have been improvements in emergency department waiting times, with the waiting times improving for category 2, 3 and 4 patients. All category 1 patients continue to be seen on arrival. Ninety-three per cent of all people arriving by ambulance at our hospitals were off-loaded within 20 minutes of arrival, which is three per cent better than the target of 90 per cent.

In radiation oncology, 76 per cent of new radiation therapy patients were seen on time during 2006-07, a slight drop from the 77 per cent—a one per cent drop—reported in 2005-06, despite an 11 per cent increase in demand for services during the year. Most importantly, 94 per cent of all urgent radiation therapy patients received their care within the standard two-day time frame.

We have more than doubled mental health spending since coming to power. We have cleaned up the mess of the previous Liberal government. When we took office, we had the lowest per capita spending on mental health in the country—the shame of your legacy—the lowest level of mental health spending per capita in the country. We have invested—from \$27.4 million in 2001-02 to \$57.4 million in 2007-08. We funded two separate facilities: one for adults and one for youth. We are consulting with stakeholders on the new Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act. The mental health services plan will also guide future development.

The new sub and non-acute facility was opened at Calvary Public Hospital in February 2007. This facility expands the range of services provided by the aged care and rehab service. People with longer term rehab needs will now be able to receive that care in an environment that is more conducive to rehabilitation care. The new facility also provides services such as geriatric evaluation and, very importantly, older persons' mental health inpatient care in a purpose-built facility for the first time in the ACT. All up, the new service has up to 60 beds.

Over the next few months, we will also be implementing a new ED paediatric waiting area at a cost of \$250,000 over four years. We will enlarge the Canberra Hospital emergency waiting room to provide a separate area for use by parents and children awaiting treatment. The current waiting room will be redesigned to incorporate a children's—(*Time expired.*)

Alexander Maconochie Centre

MR MULCAHY: My question is to the Attorney-General and is related to the prison project. Minister, in answering a question during the annual reports hearings on the cost per bed of the prison, you said to my colleague Mr Seselja: “We do not cost this

prison on that basis, Mr Seselja. I think you are the only person who does. No other jurisdiction and no other government in the country cost prisons on that basis.”

Minister, during the recent estimates hearings, you were asked the same question and answered: “The current projected cost is \$374,000 per bed.” Minister, this was an acknowledgement of an increase from \$303,000 per bed. What is the reason for the discrepancy between your answers at the annual reports hearings and during estimates?

MR CORBELL: I will need to review the transcript to understand the issues Mr Mulcahy has raised.

Water—Cotter Dam

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Treasurer. On 23 October this year, you announced a range of initiatives to provide security of water supply to the ACT. Included in these initiatives is a proposal to spend \$145 million to increase the capacity of the Cotter Dam. In regard to budget funding of this project you said:

No utility or no government in Australia funds infrastructure in that way. There’s a recognition of the need for intergenerational equity in relation to the provision of major infrastructure or projects.

Treasurer, how will your government fund the capital required to expand the capacity of the Cotter Dam?

MR STANHOPE: It is proposed that it will be funded by Actew.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Smyth?

MR SMYTH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Treasurer, what advice will you give Actew on how they will fund the building of the extra capacity for the dam?

MR STANHOPE: I have had many discussions with Actew on these matters. I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Stanhope: I withdraw that. My apologies.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order, members! That has been withdrawn. Mr Pratt.

Mr Stanhope: I am so unused to the silence. I was not aware that Mr Pratt was here.

MR SPEAKER: I could get used to it.

Ms Gallagher: He is the one sleeping up the back.

MR SPEAKER: I do not think that will happen here.

Mr Stanhope: I beg your pardon, Mr Pratt.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Pratt, do you want to ask a question?

Alexander Maconochie Centre

MR PRATT: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, in a question on notice taken during estimates regarding the reduction of facilities in the ACT prison, you provided details of the facilities that were being cut from the project. You also said that \$14 million would be saved through these cuts. In addition, the prison project will now officially blow its budget by \$2.5 million. Attorney, why has your management of the prison project resulted in both a budget blow-out and cuts to the scope of the project?

MR CORBELL: I have noticed that Mr Pratt has a particular tendency, which is that the less he has to go with the bigger the story is.

Mr Hargreaves: And the bigger the headline.

MR CORBELL: The less he has to say the bigger the headline and the deeper the voice. I do not think that anyone could characterise a budget variation of around two per cent a budget blow-out. Indeed, it just makes me think that in the next media release I am going to see from Mr Pratt the headline is going to be on half the page and then there might be one paragraph of text about the actual story.

The answer to the question is quite simple. A variation of around two per cent is far from a budget blow-out. The real challenge is for those opposite to accept that that facility is going to open next year and that we are going to take responsibility for our own prisoners, people sentenced by our courts. What is going to be their approach to the management of an important facility designed to rehabilitate prisoners here in the ACT? Will we have serious and credible policies or will we simply have bigger headlines and deeper voices?

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Pratt?

MR PRATT: Let me say, in a normal voice—

MR SPEAKER: Just in a supplementary questioning voice will do.

MR PRATT: In my lilting voice: attorney, how does the ACT prison compare on a cost per bed basis with other facilities across Australia?

MR CORBELL: I think I answered that question during the appropriation bill hearings—and, indeed, the annual report hearings. If I have not, I am happy to take the question on notice.

Crime—statistics

MR GENTLEMAN: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, can you advise the Assembly about the latest September quarterly criminal justice figures and what they mean for the Canberra community?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Gentleman for the question.

Mr Stefaniak: Did he give you some pictures too?

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Members interjecting—

MR CORBELL: Isn't it great? A third of the page is taken up by the headline. I have never seen a media release like it! I want to see one where the headline takes up the whole page and then there is a second page for the text. I can't wait for that one!

With respect to Mr Gentleman's question, I am very pleased to advise the Assembly that the latest criminal justice figures released by the government show that a range of criminal offences in the ACT continue to fall. In fact, we see the lowest recorded level of crime in a range of categories for the last five years. They reflect the lowest year-to-date figures in five years for burglary, sexual assault, motor vehicle theft, property damage and weapons offences. I repeat: the lowest figures in five years.

It is very pleasing to see the results that have been achieved against a backdrop of resource-intensive policing in the capital. Of course, it has been aided by the fact that this government has put in place funding for an additional 107 police in the ACT—the largest contribution ever made by an ACT government. In real terms, the impact on the community should be very reassuring. The September 2007 results mean that there were over 1,000 fewer households that encountered a burglary compared to the same period last year. So 1,000 fewer households have been burgled because of this significant drop—this 21 per cent drop—in the number of burglaries recorded over the last 12 months. At the same time, motor vehicle offences fell by 17 per cent in the year to September. This represents 382 fewer cars stolen here in the ACT.

Mr Pratt: There's nothing left to burgle.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Pratt.

MR CORBELL: These are very significant statistics. It is disappointing that Mr Pratt, who is the shadow minister for police, does not give higher regard to the work of ACT Policing.

The number of sexual assaults is also down. They have reduced by five per cent. Property damage has fallen by six per cent, and weapons offences have also fallen by five per cent. These are some of the best crime statistics we have seen for many years. They are a vindication of the government's efforts to improve resourcing for ACT

Policing and to have a coherent property crime reduction strategy that does not just focus on tougher penalties but on preventing the crime from occurring in the first place. We will build on this record with the 5,000 engine immobilisers funded through our subsidy scheme over the next 12 months to reduce the level of car theft further. Car theft has reduced by six per cent in the last 12 months, and we expect that to fall further. We will continue to build on these results with the community policing initiative we are putting in place for high-density housing complexes. We will build on these results further with the motorcycle anchor points to reduce motorcycle theft in our community as well.

Crime clear-up rates also continue to improve, including a 34 per cent increase in the clear-up rate for burglary, a 28 per cent increase in the clear-up rate for offences against property, and a 35 per cent increase in clear-up rates for property damage. Only ACT Labor and the Stanhope Labor government can say that we are serious about reducing crime in the community. There is no other party in this place that can do so, because we have the results on the board. We have improved funding for the police, crime rates are down, and we have a proactive property crime reduction strategy designed to make sure that our community becomes a fairer and safer place for all Canberrans.

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

Supplementary answers to question without notice Hospitals—access block

MS GALLAGHER: Mr Speaker, I have a couple of matters arising from question time. There was a question about access block, and the questioner indicated that the data quoted was preliminary data obtained as a result of an FOI application. A page is provided in response to FOI every month. That page states that there may be some minor changes to some numbers as a result of updates to data over the year. It is on the front page of FOI material that is provided every month.

Mrs Burke: It is elective surgery. You know that.

MS GALLAGHER: It does not relate to elective surgery. In relation to the emergency management unit, my early advice on this is that it is a ward like any other ward. It is for short-stay patients. Every hospital in the country stops the access block clock at the point that someone is transferred to the emergency management unit. If I need to provide anything further on that, I will. That is the advice I received during question time.

Dragway

MR BARR: During the November sittings Mr Stefaniak asked me a question about an approach to the government in relation to the dragway by the owners of the Wakefield Park lease near Goulburn. I indicated in my answer that the government had been approached by the owners of the lease. I have since been advised that the lease changed hands earlier this year. To clarify the record, we have been approached by the former owners of Wakefield Park who own the lease adjacent to Wakefield Park.

Paper

Mr Speaker presented the following paper:

Auditor-General Act—Auditor-General's Report—No 7/2007—The Aged Care Assessment Program and the Home and Community Care Program, dated 29 November 2007.

Executive contracts Papers and statement by minister

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): For the information of members, I present the following papers:

Public Sector Management Act, pursuant to sections 31A and 79—Copies of executive contracts or instruments—

Contract variations:

Joy Vickerstaff, dated 16 and 19 October 2007.
Liesl Centenera, dated 1 November 2007.

Long-term contract—Michael Vanderheide, dated 28 September and 9 November 2007.

Short-term contracts:

Bronwen Margaret Overton-Clarke, dated 26 October 2007.
David Matthews, dated 22 October 2007.
Helen Child, dated 24 October 2007.
Martin Hehir, dated 27 October 2007.
Meredith Lily Whitten, dated 22 October 2007.
Sarah Jane Lynch, dated 23 November 2007.
Sharon Nelson-Kelly, dated 23 October 2007—

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

Leave granted.

MR STANHOPE: I present another set of executive contracts. These documents are tabled in accordance with sections 31A and 79A of the Public Sector Management Act which require the tabling of all chief executive and executive contracts and contract variations. Contracts were previously tabled on 13 November 2007. Today I present one long-term contract, seven short-term contracts and two contract variations. The details of the contracts will be circulated for members.

Papers

Mr Stanhope presented the following papers:

Remuneration Tribunal Act, pursuant to subsection 12 (2)—Determinations, together with statements for:

Chief Justice of the Supreme Court—Determination 17 of 2007, dated 28 November 2007.

Chief Magistrate, Magistrates and Special Magistrates—Determination 19 of 2007, dated 28 November 2007.

Children and Young People Official Visitor—Determination 24 of 2007, dated 28 November 2007.

Master of the Supreme Court—Determination 20 of 2007, dated 28 November 2007.

Part-Time Holders of Public Office—Determination 22 of 2007, dated 28 November 2007.

President of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal—Determination 21 of 2007, dated 28 November 2007.

President of the Court of Appeal—Determination 18 of 2007, dated 28 November 2007.

Sentence Administration Board—Determination 23 of 2007, dated 28 November 2007.

Travel Allowances for Full-time and Part-time Holders of Public Office—Determination 16 of 2007, dated 28 November 2007.

Financial Management Act—instruments Paper and statement by minister

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): For the information of members, I present the following paper:

Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 16—Instrument directing a transfer of appropriations from the Department of Territory and Municipal Services to the Department of Justice and Community Safety, including a statement of reasons, dated 22 November.

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

Leave granted.

MR STANHOPE: As required by the Financial Management Act 1996, I table an instrument issued under section 16 of the act. The direction and associated statement of reasons for the instrument must be tabled in the Assembly within three sitting days after it is given. This transfer of appropriation under section 16 of the act reflects a government decision to transfer responsibility for the closed circuit television project from the Department of Territory and Municipal Services to the Department of Justice and Community Safety. The detail of the instrument can be found within the tabled package. I commend the paper to the Assembly.

Paper

Ms Gallagher presented the following paper:

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Annual Report 2006-2007—ACT Health—Corrigenda, dated November 2007.

Emergency services—effectiveness Discussion of matter of public importance

MADAM TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Dunne) (3.26): Mr Speaker has received letters from Mrs Burke, Mrs Dunne, Dr Foskey, Mr Gentleman, Ms MacDonald, Mr Mulcahy, Mr Pratt, Mr Seselja, Mr Smyth and Mr Stefaniak proposing that matters of public importance be submitted to the Assembly. In accordance with standing order 79, Mr Speaker has determined that the matter proposed by Mr Mulcahy be submitted to the Assembly, namely:

The effectiveness of our emergency services.

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (3.27): I am pleased today to have the opportunity to discuss this matter of public importance. Events of recent years, most recently and vividly in 2003, have shown just how important an effective emergency services organisation is to this town. I will say at the outset that I have got considerable respect for the front-line men and women of our emergency services. Theirs is a difficult and dangerous job and one that they execute with courage and for the benefit of others. It is important that we have this debate today because there is considerable evidence that under the government's watch the ESA is not performing as effectively it should.

It is the nature of emergency services that their effectiveness is only really tested when there is a real-life emergency, from common emergencies like house fires, car accidents and so on, to more serious incidents, in terms of impact and breadth, like bushfires, severe floods and potential terror threats. A lot of good work is done by our firefighters, ambulance drivers, paramedics and others. They respond well and effectively to incidents that occur each and every day and deserve our congratulations.

It is logical, however, that our emergency services be geared beyond isolated, everyday-type emergencies and that the capability of our emergency services organisation should be configured towards dealing with the most serious and major incidents. The ACT needs an emergency services organisation that is capable of

responding to major incidents. An ability to respond to everyday emergencies—house fires, car accidents and so on—is crucial but should not be the sole task of emergency services.

Our emergency services need to be geared towards being able to respond to major incidents. I have been informed by experts in the field of emergency response planning and management that this is the focus of almost every other emergency services organisation both in Australia and indeed throughout the developed world. It is interesting that the national security website, which deals with the threat of terrorism, states that it is the responsibility of state and territory governments to “maintain policies, legislation and plans within their jurisdiction” and to “determine prevention strategies and operational responses to threats, including seeking assistance from other jurisdictions”.

Although these responsibilities deal with just one specific area of emergency response—namely, terrorism—they indicate the breadth and seriousness of incidents that emergency services organisations need to be able to deal with. I am not confident that under the current minister’s watch this configuration in the ACT is seriously being contemplated, let alone achieved.

It is not good enough for emergency services to be configured for the routine. We need to have the ability to respond to major incidents. I will use this opportunity to touch on a couple of examples of areas of significant concern that demonstrate that the current configuration of our emergency services has drifted from major, serious events to a satisfaction with being able to respond to daily, isolated emergency incidents.

The first example and one that has been discussed at length in this place, of course, is the FireLink system. We have seen under this minister the FireLink system cast aside. The cost of this now abandoned project to the ACT taxpayer is a separate issue, but I will take this opportunity to note that the circumstances around any project that costs \$4.5 million and is scrapped on the whim of a new minister and new management needs to be thoroughly examined. It is a frightful waste of taxpayers’ money and a waste that should never have been allowed to occur.

I must say at this point that I have been quite dismayed at the willingness of those opposite, and the minister in particular, to attack the reputations of the previous management of the ESA and of the company that produces FireLink. The government is the first to jump up and cry foul when it suspects that the opposition or anyone else is criticising a public servant. Yet Minister Corbell has, in this place and publicly, sought consistently to tarnish the reputations of former employees of the ESA and the company that produces the FireLink system. It speaks volumes about a minister and a government that hides behind public servants and seeks to lay the blame for its own decisions at the door of others.

During this Assembly we have already seen the Chief Minister squirm away from his ministerial responsibility in relation to emergency management. Mr Corbell’s behaviour suggests that a repeat would, if the situation arose, be forthcoming. I have no hesitation in placing on record in this place my belief that both the company that

produces the FireLink system and the former commissioner and his team deserve the thanks and appreciation of the people of the ACT, not to be made scapegoats by the government, and this minister in particular.

Unlike many in this place, I have twice been to the headquarters of the company that produces the FireLink system twice and I have seen it in operation. Although I would be the first to admit that I am not a technical expert, I have been taken through the system and had it explained to me. The capabilities that it offered seemed to fit the bill of what is required to deal with a major emergency.

It is fairly common knowledge that during the trial period in a live operation during the Lone Pine fire the system successfully operated for eight days. I am also aware that a number of successful joint activities and extensive testing under the hand of the ESA steering group occurred after the procurement of FireLink, including successful live exercises involving the RFS and SES and including connection to ACT Fire Brigade officers in the ESA communications centre.

This successful testing was designed to validate the full operational introduction to service of the FireLink system. It is interesting that the Auditor-General does not appear to have been made aware of this additional testing at any stage of her investigation by the government or the ESA. Instead of an operational system that would have assisted with the ability of our emergency services to effectively respond to major incidents, we are left with nothing. Certainly the system's replacement for the current fire season—something akin, I believe, Mr Pratt, to a whiteboard and some markers—does not inspire confidence.

Another example of the failure of this government to maintain an effective configuration of the ESA to deal with major incidents is the debacle over the planned new headquarters at Fairbairn. This move was developed and organised by the previous management of the ESA under the previous minister following one of the recommendations set out in McLeod. The ACT needs a headquarters and communications centre to meet the surge in demand that can be experienced in major operations. The previous minister did at least recognise this and announced publicly that the move would be completed by July 2007. I am advised that the buildings are still vacant as of this day.

Another example of the benefits that the new headquarters were to have provided was a training facility for all services. Without such a facility I understand that the fire brigade, for example, still has to travel to Sydney for specialist training in urban search and rescue operations. The government seems to have abandoned this project for a headquarters capable of providing all facilities needed to prepare, plan and respond to crises. It is another example of the government reducing the effectiveness of our emergency services in dealing with major issues. I also understand that the Incident Control Centre East that was developed at Fairbairn for the RFS has recently been closed down. This centre was to provide a capability for the tactical command of incidents by the RFS. This communications capacity is apparently no longer available.

The list goes on and on and, unfortunately, my time is somewhat limited. Suffice it to say that it is amazing that so many projects that were initiated in the aftermath of the

2003 bushfire disaster to ensure that the ACT emergency services could meet the demands of a major incident have now been deemed to be unnecessary or superfluous to requirements. Is it not amazing how quickly our memories fade and how quickly this government has abandoned the prudent measures that were taken after that horrendous experience that impacted on the people of Canberra? The fact of the matter was that this city was caught off guard by the 2003 bushfires. It is eminently naive to think that further incidents similar in scope to that fire could not happen again.

We have debated the preparedness of the ACT to respond to incidents in 2003 before. All subsequent inquiries and reports have shown the need for an emergency services organisation that is capable of responding to major incidents. The government itself, in fact, acknowledged this need and instituted many changes. That was the stimulus for many of the reforms introduced into this place and into the agency over the last few years. The departure from these reforms is extremely worrying and suggests that our emergency services are not as effective as they need to be.

I am also concerned—and my colleague Mr Pratt will go into more detail on this—by reports of dissatisfaction within the rank and file of the ESA with senior management, which has now stretched back for some months. These reports have reached the ears of a number of members of the opposition. They are cause for grave concern, especially as we go into what may well be a very dry summer.

Serious issues have been raised, and I will leave the detail to my colleague Mr Pratt, but it is important to note that, as with any organisation, if there is a want of confidence in the leadership, that organisation will not perform effectively. I would suggest that the level of confidence in Mr Corbell's oversight of this agency is one that has continued to deteriorate, as he is quick to pass the buck and blame all manner of people, engage in stunts, as he attempted to here when the protestors were outside some time ago, and, in every way possible, try not to make himself look like he is the one who should be taking responsibility for the management of these agencies.

This policy of blaming people who have worked there in the past, blaming the suppliers of technology and attacking opposition members who raise legitimate concerns to me are all indicators of a minister who is not on top of his game. Apparently, as happened with planning and as has happened in other portfolio areas, the responsibility for the tough decisions is simply not accepted and, for expediency, blame is moved onto other people who are less able to put forward their own position and less able to defend themselves publicly because of their professionalism and their commitment to the tasks to which they have been assigned and appointed.

I reiterate that we must have an emergency services organisation that is capable of dealing effectively with major incidents. I, like many members of this community, am worried that we have the real capacity to experience the same sort of disaster that we had in 2003. From the things that I have heard in this place over the past three and a bit years, I remain quite unconvinced that we have in any way moved forward to prepare ourselves for the possible attacks that we may have from the summer period fires at a level that would cause us all to be very satisfied and comfortable.

We must have an emergency organisation that is capable of dealing effectively with major incidents and it is a matter of utmost public importance that this place discusses

these issues. I certainly welcome the opportunity to have this discussion today. I would welcome, more importantly, the minister stepping up to the plate, taking responsibility and ensuring that these areas that I have identified and that my colleague will identify are, in fact, addressed proactively and that the minister does not simply hide his demonstrated reluctance to tackle these issues.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (3.39): I am interested that, so searing was Mr Mulcahy's critique, he fell three minutes short. I think the last couple of minutes of his contribution involved a summary of points he had made earlier. So the opposition is struggling to make an effective critique of this issue. It is quite clear that Mr Mulcahy was the one who, unfortunately, had his name pulled out of the hat but he did not really have his heart in it.

Let me start by addressing the key issue that Mr Mulcahy raised in this discussion. He said that this government has failed to put in place the appropriate structures to provide for effective emergency management in the ACT. Let us reflect on the legacy left to us by the Liberal Party. Let us reflect on that, for a start, because we need to judge people by their actions and not by their words. The previous Liberal government left us with an emergency services bureau where the most senior bushfire control officer—

Mr Smyth: That had never lost a house, never lost a life.

Mr Pratt: Like people dying in waiting rooms—they also had people dying in their homes.

MR CORBELL: I know they do not like it, Madam Temporary Deputy Speaker, but I heard their critique in silence and I would ask them to give me the same courtesy. The most senior bushfire control officer under their regime was an ASO6. The person charged with managing major bushfires in the ACT was an ASO6. How do you think that demonstrates their seriousness about protecting the Canberra community from a major event such as a bushfire? Let us also reflect on the deeply unpopular decisions they took to incorporate the SES—

Mr Mulcahy: Why don't we talk about a few of yours? That is what is contemporary. That is what is of interest.

MR CORBELL: I have got 15 minutes; I am going to use all of my time, Mr Mulcahy. The SES and the RFS were pushed together in a deeply unpopular merger. In fact, I think that was one of Mr Smyth's, or it might have been one of Mr Humphries's, legacies. But it was, indeed, a deeply unpopular merger, the ramifications of which continue to this day. So that is their record.

Mr Smyth: And we didn't lose a single house, we didn't lose a single life, we never injured a volunteer.

MADAM TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Dunne): Order! Mr Smyth.

MR CORBELL: Madam Temporary Deputy Speaker, that is the most petulant, childish and pathetic defence—

MADAM TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: And you do not need to respond to interjections, Mr Corbell.

MR CORBELL: I have ever heard, because what it shows is that—

Mr Smyth: So being effective is not a defence?

MADAM TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Mr Smyth.

MR CORBELL: Mr Smyth asserts that, just because they and previous governments of all persuasions let fuel loads build up in Namadgi national park for decades, and just because they were lucky enough not to have a major fire event on their watch, that somehow demonstrates good management. What a pathetic argument it is, because it displays no such thing. All it displays is that it was good luck.

Mr Pratt: Yes, but if you'd warned them, you wouldn't have had those—

MADAM TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Mr Pratt, don't interject.

MR CORBELL: It was good luck, Madam Temporary Deputy Speaker, that that did not occur on their watch. That is all it demonstrates. It certainly does not demonstrate any foresight, wisdom or effective management on the part of ministers in the previous administration.

The Canberra community can be proud of the emergency services that exist in our city. The ACT ESA and its four different services stand ready to respond to the community's needs 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Contrary to the assertions made by Mr Mulcahy, they are capable of responding to large-scale, ongoing and repeated emergencies.

Mr Pratt: That's God speaking, and he's not very happy!

MADAM TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Mr Pratt.

MR CORBELL: I would not know, Mr Pratt; I do not believe in him.

Mr Pratt: Oh dear! Perhaps that is another discussion.

MR CORBELL: Well, you raised it.

MADAM TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: You did not have to respond.

MR CORBELL: It could be like the motor vehicle accident in Osburn Drive, Macgregor yesterday afternoon, the 25 calls for assistance from the public last Friday following a heavy downpour of rain, or the response of intensive care paramedics on

board the Snowy Hydro SouthCare rescue helicopter who responded to an injured motorcycle rider in Corin Forest last weekend. These are all examples of the professional, dedicated work of our volunteers and full-time paid staff. We are extremely well served by these men and women.

Last week I had the honour of attending a special ceremony for local emergency services personnel and presenting them with national medals for service. Thirty-five men and women were recognised for their service and dedication to the community over 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 and 35 years—people like veteran firefighters Lee Summerfield and Andrew Thompson from the ACT Fire Brigade. Both men have spent the last 35 years putting their lives on the line for the people of the ACT.

As we know, at this time of the year, one of the major risks that the Canberra community faces is bushfire. Yesterday, I was very pleased to join with personnel from the Fire Brigade, the Rural Fire Service, TAMS and our community fire units in launching a new bushfire preparedness awareness campaign. This campaign, which is run by the ESA, focuses, through a series of radio, TV and print advertisements, on directing people to the ESA website for information on what they can do and what they need to do to ensure they are well prepared should a bushfire approach or come near their property.

We as an agency are well prepared for the bushfire season. There have been extensive pre-season checks, training, planning and community education activities over the last few months. We have over 1,500 trained personnel ready to tackle the season ahead. We have fire towers. Aircraft are on standby. Indeed, we will have three helicopters based here in the ACT for the coming fire season. That includes the Squirrel and Bell 212 helicopters, as well as a Skycrane under the National Aerial Firefighting Centre arrangements, which will arrive in town mid-December. Of course, our call-taking centre and Comcen are manned 24/7.

We have done the work to improve the resourcing of our Emergency Services Agency. Unlike those who came before us, we have made the investment to improve funding for our emergency services. In the most recent budget, over \$15.7 million was allocated for a range of new resources and initiatives aimed at directly supporting front-line emergency services personnel. For example, we provided funding for a \$6.5 million fire vehicle replacement program. That will replace 32 firefighting vehicles in the RFS and in the departmental brigades as well as the fire brigade.

We have provided over \$200,000 for 10 additional community fire units, bringing to 38 the total number of community fire units located around the urban interface; \$1.5 million for improved bushfire readiness, including implementation of any of the agreed outstanding bushfire coronial recommendations; money for the Bushfire Council to independently monitor and report on the implementation of these recommendations; and just under \$1 million for the training of remote area firefighting teams, incident control and heavy vehicle driver training. These are all indications of a government that is prepared to invest in order to improve the readiness and preparedness of our emergency services.

Why are these things important? It is important that we train, for example, remote area firefighters so that, in the event of a fire in a mountainous area in the ACT, we

can get firefighters to it quickly. We know that we will not always be able to get a vehicle there. We know it may be difficult to walk firefighters in. Therefore, we have this remote area firefighting capacity on hand.

Mr Smyth: Which we've always had.

MADAM TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Smyth!

MR CORBELL: I note Mr Smyth tries to claim we have always had it.

Mr Smyth: We've been sending RAF teams up for 20 years.

MADAM TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, don't interject.

MR CORBELL: It is an absolute joke, Madam Temporary Deputy Speaker, and he knows it. Of course, the very extensive fire vehicle replacement program will accelerate the replacement of a large number of the old ACT Rural Fire Service fleet. This program replaces about 50 per cent of the fleet. It is a significant investment in making sure that our firefighters have the equipment they need to do the job that we ask them to do and which they want to do. We have also replaced nine command vehicles, we have completed specification for the new RFS tankers, and ambulance vehicles have been ordered and will arrive early next year following a build in Sydney. We have increased the number of community fire units to 38.

There is still more that we are doing. I turn now to the issues around the headquarters and communications. We have in place now a very effective communications framework. With the provision of the TRN digital radio network, with the commencement of the tower on Mount Tennant, TRN now has effective coverage into a large part of the more remote areas to the south of the ACT. That has allowed us to turn to TRN as the primary radio network for the Rural Fire Service.

Mr Pratt: Has that footprint been tested?

MR CORBELL: That has been tested and it has a very comprehensive level of coverage. Of course, in a mountainous area you will not get 100 per cent coverage because of the nature of the terrain, but we achieve a very good level of coverage and one that has given the RFS confidence to switch to that new network. So that is the result of our investment.

In relation to FireLink, I will always assert that it was the poor project management of the previous statutory authority that led to that debacle. It is a debacle, and we do not want to see it happen again. That is why the government has put in place measures to make sure it will not happen again, to make sure we have put in place proper business planning, to make sure we have put in place proper cabinet sign-off of these matters, so that we do not have a statutory authority running off and doing this work without any proper reference back to government. Senior managers do need to accept responsibility. Ministers need to accept responsibility, and I have, but senior managers need to as well, and I will not accept an argument to the contrary.

In relation to the headquarters, the government is moving ahead with the implementation of the Fairbairn headquarters. Following 2006, the changes to the structure of ESA necessitated a review of the accommodation arrangements for that organisation. It also required the completion of the enterprise bargaining arrangements for the ACT Fire Brigade, which is the single largest paid element, and therefore full-time employee element, of the ESA. Those negotiations are largely complete, as of course is the restructure of the ESA. We are now in a position to move forward with the development of the new headquarters at Fairbairn. Yes, it has taken longer than anyone would have liked, but it is still proceeding. That is where the ESA will be, and the government will be announcing further measures to ensure that that does occur in the coming months.

The government's record is a strong one when it comes to emergency preparedness. It is easy to play the fear card in this debate and to talk up risks of disaster, but it is harder to deal with the very serious issues that we face in running an organisation of this size and budget and making sure that it is well prepared to meet emergencies and to protect our community into the future.

This government has a strong record: more funding for our emergency services, improved governance, better business management and improved accountability. We have shown that our emergency services are up to the job—and not just with small-scale, ad hoc emergencies, whatever they are, according to Mr Mulcahy, but with ongoing, serious, large-scale incidents such as the hailstorm earlier this year and the flooding associated with some of those severe storm events.

We have seen significant fires in areas of the ACT that have required a coordinated response across agencies, and we have involved our emergency services in detailed exercising around countering terrorist-style events. In all of these incidents, the structures have worked, and worked well. Our emergency services work well together, they coordinate and communicate effectively with each other, and they now have the resources, the governance and the framework to deliver their important services to the ACT. The effectiveness of our emergency services is not in doubt, and they will continue to go from strength to strength.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (3.55): Mr Speaker, I am quite sure that I will be brief compared to the other speakers because I want to add a different element to the debate. I want to start by saying I think it is a pity that the topic of emergency services, like health, has become so politicised. I suppose it is unavoidable. This is a political place; politics is our business. My concern is that it does not lead to constructive discussions and moving forward on these matters. Like health, emergency services is absolutely basic to our wellbeing in this territory. I am not sure that it is really helpful to have one side trying to find fault and the other in the position of defending itself. There is a lot of ground in the middle where there could well be agreement but one does not often hear it in these kinds of debates.

There are a number of issues. Mr Mulcahy touched on them in his speech, and no doubt Mr Pratt and Mr Stefaniak will do so in theirs—and they will be right, in many senses. But I do get the impression from Mr Corbell that there is a genuine attempt to move ahead on most of those matters, and I do appreciate that.

There are issues around FireLink that I am assuming will be inquired into by one committee or another. They do need to be exposed to the light of day. But there have clearly been issues of management and administration that occurred in the past, and it is very difficult to undo matters that have already occurred. Nonetheless, I take it with some faith that that is what the minister is trying to do with his changes. With respect to the relocation of the headquarters to out near the airport, instead of looking at the problem and at what we need to do, it is a matter of going to a solution straight away and ignoring all the stops along the way. If we had looked upon it as a problem and asked, "Where's the best place to locate the emergency headquarters?" we might not have come up with Fairbairn. I still need it explained to me why that is the appropriate place.

There are a lot of issues there, and I hope that we continue to go forward on this. I hope that the shadow minister and the minister realise they have the same aims in mind. Because of their positions on opposite sides of the house it is very difficult for them to agree. It is a really important area on which we do need to agree because it is highly likely that in the future we will need to put more resources into this area than we have before. All the climate change predictions indicate that the kinds of fires that we faced in 2003 are already part of our ecological landscape and are predictable over a number of decades—the 50-year fire, the 10-year fire and so on. We have all seen those. But we will need to put more, and clever, resources into the way we prepare for fire in the territory.

I reinforce that by quoting what was said by a scientist called David Bowman, who was, serendipitously for me, interviewed by Robyn Williams last night on the *Science Show*. He is currently living in south Tasmania, around Hobart. He was living up north. He makes the study of fire his area of expertise. I will summarise what he said. He was asked by Robyn Williams what he would do if he was appointed as the federal minister for fire, and he said that, first of all, you would ask the professionals. He said:

The guys who are responsible for managing fire are now in a really difficult place because they have such an accumulation now of many, many dry summers. So step one is to really take this summer, and probably subsequent summers as we go into a warming world very, very seriously.

The fact that it has rained lately may be a good sign, but everyone knows that if it dries out from now on, and we have a very dry summer, what we will have is more growth and more fuel. So we have this constant attempt to reconcile matters. We cannot control the weather; we must merely study it, adapt to it and prepare for its impacts. David Bowman continued:

Step two is a medium-range issue and that is we've got to have a conversation ... how are we using the landscape? How are we living in the landscape? Is it actually realistic to expect suburbia to be backed onto highly flammable vegetation? Some of this vegetation can't be burnt safely any more, it's just too dry and there's too much fuel. So we need a conversation about where we live, how we're going to live with possibly an increasingly flammable world.

And step three, the hard one, is we really are going to have to take the claims of global warming being a direct consequence of the combustion of carbon very, very seriously, and if we want to reduce natural hazards like fire we have to cut down our emissions and we've got to see that as one of the benefits of cutting down emissions. It's a direct relationship. 'Global warming' sounds almost benign, but no, global warming is going to have some terrible, terrible consequences, and one of those terrible consequences are going to be mega-fires.

He concluded by saying:

... then the third step is we have to see mega-fires as being part of the global change story and that it's a very good reason, one of the many very good reasons why we should be cutting our emissions. We talk about forests sequestering carbons, but one of the slogans which really undermines that in a way is 'It's the emissions stupid'; we can't just think that growing forests is going to be our 'get out of jail' card. And in any case, in Australia we can grow forests and then they can turn around and catch on fire and we're back to square one.

It is very important that we engage with our emergency services. According to the opposition there appears to have been a breakdown in communication between our volunteer fire brigades, and perhaps between our professional firefighters as well. It would seem to me that repairing that needs to be one of the first priorities of the government to make sure we are looking at a safe summer this year.

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (4.03): I noticed that in this very important debate Mr Corbell danced around this very important issue by taking pot shots at Mr Mulcahy's debating preparation. That is noted. What is noted is that that was a stunt and a diversion.

There are three major areas that we are concerned about in terms of the effectiveness of our emergency services. The first is the communications equipment area; the second is the Fairbairn headquarters relocation area; and the third is the organisation and command and control. My colleague Mr Mulcahy has dealt with the first two; I am going to focus more on the organisation and command and control. If you do not get the organisation and its people right—if you cannot look after your people—then the emergency management system will deteriorate; and we maintain that it has.

Firstly, let me acknowledge the government's announcement of the many millions of dollars that it has spent on the public awareness program. That is fine, but it is going to be of little use if you have not got the organisation right, if you have not got the other foci right and if you have not got the folk right. That is the concern that the opposition has.

Mr Mulcahy talked about a couple of those issues, but I will go into them in far more detail. As Mr Mulcahy pointed out in his speech today, the emergency services are broadly respected for their day-to-day work, their responses to daily emergencies, but it is vital that our emergency services be geared to the strategic level, to be able to respond at that level. That is a concern that we have. It is the broader strategic level that the opposition is concerned about, not the individual services and their

professionalism. We hear the minister run the old furphy that the government always runs—that the opposition is being mean and nasty to the men and women of our services. That is just a stunt; that is just a diversion.

The effectiveness of our emergency services is a matter that must be reviewed by the Assembly as we now approach the height of the bushfire season. We think that the effectiveness is a mixed bag. At the unit level, our front-line units strive to be as effective as they can be. Our four services are professional, and we can be proud of them. However, at the strategic, bureaucratic and ministerial support level, our emergency services and the emergency management system are being dramatically let down. This impacts adversely on their effectiveness.

We have a good Bushfire Council, finally. I thank the government or at least acknowledge that the government has got the Bushfire Council more actively involved than it has been in the last four or five years. But the Bushfire Council is also quite concerned about and frustrated with many of the organisational matters. The RFS, the SES, the Ambulance Service and the Fire Brigade are working hard. They are well organised and they are well led at the unit level, but they are simply not supported.

The government dramatically reorganised the services during last year's government rationalisation, fundamentally destroying the independence of the emergency services authority as established on the back of the recommendations coming out of McLeod and further encouraged by Coroner Doogan. The government feebly argues that the operational independence and responsiveness of the ESA and its units was not affected, but nothing could be further from the truth: any half-educated observation on the state of the services proves the government claim to be a lie.

Furthermore, the men and women in our front-line services have overwhelmingly rejected the government's restructure. That was demonstrated clearly on 15 March 2007 when the volunteers—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Pratt, I think you should withdraw the allegation that the government is lying.

MR PRATT: I withdraw that, Mr Speaker. On 15 March 2007, the volunteers, with widespread sister service sympathy, went out on an unprecedented strike. Who will forget that day? I am sure that Mr Corbell and Mr Stanhope still have sleepless nights remembering that day. Mr Corbell subsequently made all the right gestures—I will acknowledge this—when he directed the commissioner of the ESA, Mr Manson, to sit down with the volunteers and other permanent staff, consult with them and review the organisational changes which had been made in 2006 and about which the volunteers were deeply concerned. I take Mr Corbell at his word and appreciate his gesture, but I must lament the fact that he has been unable to ensure that there has been any completion on those tasks. They have not been adequately completed; they simply have not been done.

Further, it must be lamented that Minister Corbell has failed to ensure that the relations so deeply damaged in March 2007—and in the months prior to Christmas—

have been adequately attended to. For example, I have received numerous complaints from volunteers that, while the minister has looked the other way, senior leaders and bureaucrats have bullied the RFS headquarters continually since March 2007, blaming the RFS leadership for allegedly condoning the demonstration that occurred on 15 March 2007. The volunteer bushfire association are deeply concerned about the effect of this bullying on the ability of the RFS and its units. People should not forget that negative impacts do cascade down—the negative impacts that affect these units' ability to do their job.

This would not surprise me. This is Labor's way—vendettas; "get squares"; the squashing of whistleblowers; the tacky, seedy, secret surveillance of employees. This is Jon Stanhope's workers paradise—bullying and witch-hunts, a mark of his government. There is despicable arrogance by Mr Stanhope and his ministers which permeates down to the senior bureaucratic leadership and therefore impacts on the effectiveness of government service, in this case on the effectiveness of our emergency services in protecting our community. If the ministers behave in that way, the bureaucrats think they can get away with it too. I believed the VBA when, this week, they advised me of these grimy circumstances. I demand that the minister take immediate action to sort out the relationship between leadership and the services.

This is the point I make to Dr Foskey, too, by the way. Dr Foskey, would you have the opposition neglect the concern of the VBA and a broad community of folk because you and the Greens are frightened that it might seem to be politicised? Get off the fence, Dr Foskey. Scrutinise properly; make a real contribution to the debate about essential services. See if you can get stuck into it.

Furthermore, the promises made by the government and the ESA leadership to meet with the volunteers by 1 October 2007 to establish the terms of reference for the long-promised review of the organisational restructure—a review promised to commence on 1 November—have not materialised. What is this: arrogance, incompetence or both?

Does the government and its officials not care for the men and women in the front line? Does it wish to continue to treat them with disdain? I suppose that, as long as the government allows the bullying of its agencies, the opinion of the RFS units who have to put themselves in harm's way does not matter in its eyes when it comes to reviewing essential capability and the emergency services organisation. The first day of October has come and gone; there has been no meeting and there are no terms of reference. The first day of November has come and gone, and there is no review. We are now two months into the bushfire season, and these fundamentals have not even been looked at.

For a moment, I want to step down from the strategic level and turn to one matter of operational detail—to demonstrate how this effectiveness has been impacted upon. I refer to 3 October, a day of total fire ban. We have already talked in this place about the failure by this government to man the bushfire towers. Something else has now come to our observation. At 5.00 pm that day, the observers in those towers were stood down—for bureaucratic reasons of course. I happen to know that the VBA went up to those towers after 5.00 pm. They measured the wind gusts, and those wind gusts

were up to 100 kilometres per hour. In the view of the VBA, those towers should have been manned at first light and they should still have been manned beyond 5.00 pm.

There is something rotten in the way that strategic decisions are taking place. There is a crisis of confidence in the services. Leadership is failing; poor strategic decisions are being made; and our men and women are being let down. (*Time expired.*)

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (4.13): I thank Mr Pratt for raising the matter of public importance today.

Mr Pratt: I didn't raise it.

MR GENTLEMAN: There is no doubt that our emergency services are an important part of ensuring the safety of the ACT community, and they are very effective at undertaking this task.

Mr Pratt: I know I might look handsome, but it was Mr Mulcahy that you are talking about.

MR GENTLEMAN: I am sure it was yours, Mr Pratt. The services within the Emergency Services Agency manage around 41,000 incidents per year. That involves around 53,000 responses. This means that there is an average of 112 incidents per day that our emergency services deal with in an extremely effective manner. I would like to refer to some of the performance measures that are set out for our emergency services.

Firstly, I go to the ACT Ambulance Service, which has seen an increase in the demand for its services. As reported in the 2006-07 annual report, the increase in demand was nearly eight per cent on the previous year. Despite this increase, they are still performing well in their response times. The ACT Ambulance Service attends almost 30,000 incidents a year, involving almost 33,000 responses; they attend to 50 per cent of their emergency incidents in eight minutes and 16 seconds. Their performance target for this category is eight minutes. They are also responding to 90 per cent in 14 minutes and 21 seconds, against a performance target of 12 minutes and 30 seconds.

Given the decrease in spare ambulance availability due to the continuing increase in demand for ambulance services, as well as delayed patient off-load at hospital emergency departments, this is a wonderful achievement by the Ambulance Service. The ACT government has recognised this increase in demand for ambulance services and in this year's budget is providing funding for an additional 16 ambulance staff, two additional intensive-care ambulances, one additional non-urgent patient transport vehicle and a bariatric ambulance for the transport of morbidly obese patients.

Another positive outcome for our Ambulance Service is that during the 2006-07 period a survey of patient satisfaction showed that 96 to 97 per cent of patients are very satisfied or satisfied with the patient treatment provided to them by the territory's Ambulance Service. It should also be noted that ambulance officers were again named the "most trusted profession" in Australia—for the fifth successive year—in the *Reader's Digest* magazine's annual survey.

I would also like to reflect on a public forum held with ACT paramedics here in the Assembly just a few months ago. They provided us with an update of the services that they are providing for the ACT community now—in comparison to what used to occur a few years ago. There have recently been substantial changes in the service delivered by ACTAS. These changes have resulted in the delivery of pre-hospital care in the ACT second to none, with intensive-care paramedics operating as autonomous health care providers, utilising a far wider range of interventions and delivering real financial savings to the ACT health budget from the doorsteps of ACT residents.

ACT ambulance paramedics now have increased their skills. They have early intervention options available in pre-hospital care. This has a direct impact on the patient's length of stay in hospitals and their overall health in terms of ongoing treatment. ACTAS intensive-care paramedics undertake more invasive and non-invasive treatment initiatives in the pre-hospital setting. The patient is presented to the hospital accident and emergency department with several hospital work-up procedures already completed and documented.

This presents real time and cost savings to the hospital. In some circumstances, such as with the 12-lead ECG interpretations and treatment initiatives, the patient will bypass the hospital accident and emergency department altogether and go direct to the area of definitive treatment. Since the introduction of the 12-lead ECG to ambulance, it is evident that the patients are moved to areas of definitive care, including the cardiac catheter laboratory, within much shorter periods, spending less time in the hospital emergency department.

Our ICPs are also able to provide different pharmacology than other areas. There is a new drug that you may have heard of—ketamine—which can now be administered by our ICPs. When you are talking about this sort of thing, you better understand the extra, important work these officers put in if you see something that affects you personally. I want to reflect on an accident that occurred just last week. One of our colleagues—Mr Mike Hettinger, who was a candidate in the last Assembly elections—had a motorcycle accident last week in Deakin. He was severely injured. He is recovering in Canberra Hospital now, but if it was not for our ICPs and their ability to administer this new drug, ketamine, he may well not be there.

The ACT Fire Brigade are also performing very well against their performance measures. In 2006-07 the ACT Fire Brigade attended over 10,000 incidents, which involved over 21,000 responses by operational crews. They achieved a 50 per cent response time to structure fires, of six minutes and nine seconds, against a target time of eight minutes, and a 90th percentile response time within 10 minutes and 24 seconds against a target of 10 minutes. That is an effective emergency services response which should be recognised and for which they should be congratulated.

Another performance target that is worthy of mention is the percentage of structure fires confined to their room of origin. The current figures for this financial year show that 85 per cent are contained to the room of origin against a target of 80 per cent. This is a great result considering that a major contributing factor to meeting this measure is the time that elapses between the fire starting and it being reported.

The ACT Rural Fire Service are another of the services which have been effective in meeting performance targets. In the 2006-07 financial year, they attended 359,273 bushfires or grassfires. The ACT Rural Fire Service have a target to contain 95 per cent or more bushfires and grassfires to less than five hectares; in 2006-07, they exceeded this target, with 97.8 per cent of bushfires and grassfires being less than five hectares. It should be noted that 91.2 per cent were less than one hectare. This is an outstanding achievement by our volunteer and departmental firefighters and another example of how effective our emergency services are.

The ACT State Emergency Service have also seen an increase in demand. The 2006-07 financial year saw a 19 per cent increase in operations, with 91 per cent of incidents related directly to storm and flood operations. They not only provided substantial clean-ups after a number of severe thunderstorms that impacted on the ACT, but also provided two weeks of on-going deployments to the New South Wales Hunter region in June 2007, where they performed several hundred tasks relating to flood and storm response and recovery.

This Assembly should applaud our emergency service workers for their performance over recent years. In addition to responding to over 41,000 incidents per year, the Emergency Services Agency is providing those in the community with valuable emergency information and education on how to better prepare themselves and their properties for emergency situations.

The ACT government is providing support to our emergency services and in the last budget has provided funding of \$213,000 over four years for 11 new thermal imaging cameras for the ACT Fire Brigade; \$50,000 to purchase fully encapsulated chemical protected clothing for the Fire Brigade; \$572,000 to purchase new hydraulic rescue equipment; \$226,000 for 10 additional community fire units; a further \$193,000 over four years for ongoing volunteer training and maintenance; \$895,000 for training the ACT Rural Fire Service; and funding for the recruitment of 16 additional ambulance staff.

In addition, as part of the ESA fleet replacement program, 2007-08 will see the purchase of eight firefighting tankers, one urban pumper, three firefighting support vehicles, four intensive-care ambulances, one non-urgent patient transport vehicle and one bariatric ambulance to transport morbidly obese patients. There will also be a storm response vehicle. That is a total of 19 operational vehicles.

This funding by the ACT government is helping to ensure that our emergency services have state-of-the-art equipment and vehicles to ensure that they can effectively and efficiently carry out their jobs in a safe manner. I have no doubt of the effectiveness of our emergency services. They are doing a wonderful job in often arduous circumstances. They should be recognised in this Assembly for their achievements. *(Time expired.)*

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (4.23): Yes, we do have effective emergency service workers, Mr Speaker. You know them—the firies, the ambos and the volunteers of the bushfire brigade and the State Emergency Service. Their effectiveness is unquestioned

because of their dedication. It is the effectiveness of the government in hindering that dedication and that zeal that is in question today.

We have a minister who is in denial. He reads his brief, so everything must be fine! We have a minister who is afraid to stand up to the commissioner and say, “Stop the retribution; implement the promises that we negotiated back in March; and get on with the job of delivering a better working environment for the volunteers and a safer ACT for the people of the ACT.” You only have to look at the answer: “We throw more cash at it. We have got better governance.” I am afraid that we do not.

It is quite simple. In seven months, the commissioner could not come up with the terms of reference to evaluate the effectiveness of Simon Corbell’s reforms. Seven months to come up with a set of terms of reference! By mid-November there had not been a single meeting between the volunteers and the commissioner—because the minister does not care. He did not check; he did not ask; he did not direct. He is afraid to stand up to the commissioner because he has no interest in this part of his portfolio.

Let us run it off. There is the TRN, which does not cover everything that it should. There is FireLink, which was implemented. At last, he said that ministers should take responsibility—but not him. There is the FireLink that does not work. We have got the failure to set up the Fairbairn base; we have got the RFS controllers being dragged back to Curtin on days of total fire ban. We have got incidents where, at the start of the fire season, we cannot even effectively man the fire towers. Those things do not indicate to me that they have the hallmarks of good governance.

Mr Corbell has a litany of not delivering on capital works programs—the step-down facility, Gungahlin Drive, FireLink, the prison, the supertanker. The supertanker was promised more than two years ago. And there is the extra command vehicle, which I know Guises Creek brigade has not received yet—the new command vehicle. A supertanker that is missing in action has not arrived. There is money there for it; it is a capacity that the government decided the brigades needed. But where is it? It has not been delivered.

Then we get to the issue of the new tankers. The minister says, “Yes, we have got funding in the budget for new tankers.” Yes, there is, and the government is refusing to listen to the advice of the volunteers, who would like to see the tankers from Victoria purchased instead of the tankers that the government—the commissioner—favours, which are the tankers designed by the South Australian Country Fire Service.

The problem is that the CFA tankers from Victoria cost \$40,000 extra each—\$40,000. That \$40,000 is primarily in crew safety. Yes, that is right, Mr Speaker: we are arguing over \$40,000 per vehicle of crew safety. That is okay: they are volunteers; just send them out. “We will use the tankers that have less water.” The volunteers want 3,700 litres of water on their tankers. The government is saying that a 3,000 litre tank is okay. The volunteers are saying that they want things like doors that open rather than roller doors. As you would know, Mr Speaker, roller doors tend to jam, and in an emergency a jammed door can make all the difference.

We understand that the finish on the South Australian tankers is less good and that they are simply less safe. The report from the committee of the volunteers said,

“Purchase the Victorian tankers, please. We will do with one less tanker and we will wait a little bit longer to get them, but buy the right one.” (*Time expired.*)

MR SPEAKER: Order! The time for the discussion is concluded.

Appropriation Bill 2007-2008 (No 2)

Debate resumed.

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (4.27): Mr Speaker, I rise to talk about the government’s appropriation bill No 2. The opposition supports the government’s initiatives, because they are useful initiatives; they are reasonably well supported. But in these new initiatives the government says that it is seeking better services. It is saying that its initiatives in appropriation bill No 2 will allow them to pursue better services. The opposition maintains that the bulk of the initiatives simply reflect the government’s catching up on services and programs which have been allowed to run down in the last five or six years.

In this debate on the appropriation bill, I am going to focus fundamentally on transport—the initiatives taken in relation to transport. I noticed with some disappointment that Mr Corbell indicated earlier that the opposition were not being seen to support some of these initiatives. That is not correct. Most speakers on this side of the chamber that I have heard have acknowledged that most of these initiatives are reasonable and have said that we were not rejecting the government’s appropriation. Mr Corbell accused the opposition of political point scoring—“points of political point scoring” I think is the way that he put it.

But it is the opposition’s job, Mr Corbell. Okay, we are going to be supporting the appropriation, but let us point out to you that you are simply catching up. You have neglected services and programs over the last three or four years; therefore a lot of the initiatives that you have announced are simply plugging the holes which you created—which the government created through its mismanagement.

Let me demonstrate that by identifying the issue of security of bus interchanges. The failure of this government to act swiftly to address the violence and criminal activity at bus interchanges, especially given that they have appropriated funds for this, is inexcusable. Excuses on this issue come thick and fast from the minister, Minister Hargreaves. We saw his wave of excuses—his approach of ducking and weaving—clearly demonstrated in the hearings last week. In that hearing, we asked him why it was taking so damn long to do something about these bus interchanges—why the CCTV program, for instance, was taking a significant amount of time to be rolled out. He said this:

The timetable of the rollout is affected by the availability of equipment, a program for the equipment, the monitoring services, whether it is done by the interchange or whether it is done by the police—

whatever that means. He went on:

It is also governed by the creation of the privacy protocols ...

There have been too many incidents of violence—too many for this minister to continue using these excuses. The minister went on to say that the constraints of the Financial Management Act were yet another excuse, another reason, why the CCTV program was somewhat slow in being rolled out in the interchanges.

The advice to me from experienced urban services hands is that the existing departmental budget would have easily supported at least the introduction of three or four CCTV cameras into each of the Woden and Belconnen interchanges—the two most pressed bus interchanges—to immediately improve safety there. This has not occurred, because the idea or notion of urgency simply does not exist for this government.

While we are talking about the appropriation suddenly becoming the panacea to resolve the security issues at the bus interchanges, let me remind this house what the minister said in May when we were debating and discussing the deep concerns that we all shared—and, in fairness to the government, the government acknowledged those concerns—about the insecurity of our bus interchanges. What did the minister say then? I have said this a number of times, and I will keep on saying it.

I will remind the members of this house and the public that early this year and then again in May the minister acknowledged that there was a problem with our bus interchanges and said that he was going to do something about it as soon as possible. The minister said that he would be looking at both the CCTV strategies and the staffing strategies to improve security at our bus interchanges. He said that he would move as quickly as possible and that he acknowledged the need for urgency.

We now know that that has gone right out of the window. We are all sitting back, relaxed and happy, because the appropriation has been announced and in the fullness of time the program will be rolled out: there will be CCTV cameras at some stage. Apparently it is no longer the concern of the minister for services to ensure that those cameras are put in those interchanges quickly, because it is now a police matter and it is the police minister's concern to roll out the CCTV program township-wide.

That is simply not good enough. The government knew early this year that there were significant problems. I know that because members of its own staff were being bashed in those interchanges. I also know that because there was a lot of feedback from people that assaults were occurring. I also know that because the police have reported something like 53 assault incidents in bus interchanges and on buses, I think in the six-month period to June this year, but if not six months then certainly in the 12-month period to June this year.

That is a pretty serious indicator. Yet again we see no sense of urgency by the government to move on this. If the government are fair dinkum about wanting to increase patronage on our public transport system and know that they must have to do something, why can the minister not find a few hundred thousand dollars to at least start the ball rolling with the two most badly impacted bus interchanges? He does not seem to be able to; you have to wonder where the sense of urgency is.

Just have a quick look at the Nightlink taxi service. The security for the taxi ranks will not go far enough. The \$227,000 in the appropriation has been allocated but does not include security guards or more police—although I notice that in the hearings last week the minister mentioned that there may be some security guards. For some reason, strangely enough, he was reluctant to point that out until he was closely questioned in the hearings; then he finally admitted that there might be some security guards. He was not concerned about the question of policing those Nightlink taxi service stands. Again, according to the minister, that was a matter for the police minister.

I find this peculiar. Why does the minister responsible for transport not acknowledge the fact that he has to work with the police minister to ensure this? Bus interchanges, buses, bus routes and Nightlink stands in Civic are a joint problem. Haven't they heard of this whole-of-government approach to providing better and safer services? Clearly not.

Of course, we welcome the government's initiative on the victims of sexual assault crime. We welcome the engine immobiliser program. We welcome the motorcycle anchor points initiative, which is going to be deployed in Civic and I think some town centres. Of course, we welcome the road safety action plan. I will have more to say about the road safety action plan later.

I turn to the fleet replacement strategy. The announcement of 25 new buses needs to be analysed closely to see any advancement to the position of our bus fleet. The upgrade will affect only 100 of the 273 buses of the total fleet of 379 that are over 12 years old. Also, the 100 buses will not be on line in their entirety until 2012. During the hearings last week, the minister was unable to expand on what, if any, engineering benchmarks or Australian standards will be adhered to. In fact, his response was:

The engineering benchmark, quite frankly, is the registration requirements for the bus.

That is not good enough. Any bus that is re-engined or refurbished is going to go over the pits and be registration checked, but there surely must be a standard that the government adheres to. When the government decides to appropriate funding to increase its bus fleet and part of that initiative is to re-engine 12-year-old buses to extend their life to 20 years, where is the engineering standard?

For some reason, the minister was unable to advise us on that. What is the Australian standard where we know that a 12-year-old bus can be safely refurbished and given a second life to take it to 20 years? I have no doubt that those standards exist, but we want to see those standards tabled here. We want to know that the government is on the right course and is able to really breathe life back into an ageing bus fleet. So far we do not have that much confidence, because for some reason the minister is ducking and weaving.

Let me have a quick look at the timetable changes. There are some welcome initiatives. The runs to Russell and other centres of employment are to be applauded—no question about that. There have been a number of old services re-introduced into areas which have been previously hit hard; they are to be welcomed.

However, the honest truth of this would seem to be that we are robbing Peter to pay Paul. It appears that a number of bus users, particularly in the Tuggeranong area, have been further disadvantaged by route changes. The token consultation process was just that: a token attempt at consulting—something that this government fails to do time and time and time again. Those attending the consultation sessions, as it turns out, did not seem to hold much faith that anything would be done about their concerns or complaints. It would appear that the great bulk of timetable changes are simply a reversion to the pre-2006 timetable session.

The opposition is saying well done on a couple of quite creative route initiatives; however, the bulk of the timetable changes—which are now going to cost something like \$5.5 million to implement—are simply this government reverting to a standard that existed pre the government rationalisation of 2006. The government are now appropriating money to go back and reverse the errors—the damage—they did a year and a half ago and a year ago. This is a reversible errors program. That should be acknowledged; the government should be truthful about this.

I turn to the road safety action plan. The minister laments that the government has been accused of implementing revenue raiser fixed cameras. The government should be lamenting that: that is what the government have done. Their fixed camera strategy is simply that: a revenue raising plan. I have yet to see the minister announce—I am happy to stand up here and withdraw my concern when he does—that he is going to redeploy one of those cameras to the Long Gully Road accident zone, a well-known accident zone where three people have been killed in the last 18 months. That is where these fixed cameras ought to be.

There are many black spot areas across the ACT where we know we need to quickly slow drivers down because those zones are dangerous. But that is not where these fixed cameras have been located. When cameras are at the bottom of the long hill on the Monaro Highway and on a similarly long hill on the Barton Highway, you have to have a strong suspicion—particularly when those are areas not known for high accident and death rates—that the government has put those cameras in there to raise revenue. The opposition is deeply suspicious about that, and we will continue to encourage the government to redeploy cameras. We have no problem with the camera strategy, but these cameras must be located where they are of best use—saving lives, not raising revenue.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo) (4.42): I want to say a few words about a couple of aspects of the second appropriation, but before I get into the subject matter it does need to be said that we are seeing the government with this extra money not because of any fantastic economic management; it is, of course, because they have simply gouged the people of the ACT, whether it is through new taxes or whether it is through increased rates; we have seen them gouge first home buyers; we have seen them ride on the back of one of the greatest property booms that has every been seen in the territory. This is a result of those things. They are swimming in extra cash as a result and are deeming it acceptable to start spending a little bit more as a result.

It was only last year that we saw the Treasurer deliver a devastating budget based on the assumption that we were in dire economic circumstances and dire budgetary

circumstances. Of course that has been proven to be wrong, but one of the reasons is that we are seeing an unprecedented property boom and increased GST revenue as well as the increases in taxes, which this government refuse to review in light of their improved budgetary position.

There are a couple of areas in relation to corrections. We have seen the minister—and I will get to the Attorney-General's non-answers to some of the questions in question time today about his broken promise on the prison costs—give an absolute commitment to the Assembly and the community that the prison project would be delivered within the budget allocated. This is what he said:

The bottom line is that the project will not cost more than the budget provision. That is the requirement the government has put in place, and that will be the way it is delivered.

He said that to the Assembly. We have seen that promise go the way of their school closures promise before the last election. They went to the last election promising not to close any schools, and they closed 23 schools. Here we have the minister in the Assembly saying that they would not exceed their budget, giving an absolute guarantee. Now we see extra money being appropriated for this project.

The prison is not only receiving an extra \$2.5 million in funding; it should also be noted that there has already been significant cutbacks in the scope of the project. We saw the cutting back of 74 beds to achieve a saving, we are told, of \$11.846 million; the government decision to abandon the quiet area to save \$430,000; and the loss of the gymnasium facility, to realise a saving of \$1.346 million. We do not know how much inmates might be paid to build the facility should the minister want to actually push ahead with that. We have seen also the throwing out of the dog squad facilities, for a saving of \$430,000.

We saw the reduction in the scope of the project and we said to the Attorney-General, "You started off with \$128 million for a 374-bed facility and now you have only got a 300-bed facility. You are scaling back other parts of the project. Clearly you have exceeded your budget. Clearly on a per bed basis you have significantly exceeded your budget." He said, "No, no, no, we have not blown our budget. We will not blow our budget. We are bringing it down in order to stay within our budget. That is what we are doing."

We saw, at the beginning of the project, \$128 million for 374 beds. We got to a point where it was going to be \$128 million for 300 beds. He said, "We have not blown our budget and we are not going to blow our budget." Now we see that not only has he reduced the scope to try to stay within the budget but he has also then gone ahead and blown the budget. And this is a minister who has simply failed to manage the delivery of this project. He fails to acknowledge it. We saw, as I said, some of his non-answers in the Assembly today but, of course, we saw him in the recent PAC hearings. I said to him:

When did you become aware that that promise not to breach your \$128 million budget was going to be broken?

He said:

I do not agree with your assertion that any promise has been broken.

He stood here in the Assembly and said he would absolutely ensure that they would not exceed their budget of \$128 million. Now they are going to exceed their budget by \$2.5 million, after having reduced the scope significantly. Yet he sat there and on the record in the estimates hearing said:

I do not agree with your assertion that any promise has been broken.

I do not know what part of this equation the minister does not understand. First, he told us that, no, it really was not a budget blow-out, even though we were getting a lot less for our money. Now he tells us it is really not a budget blow-out when, after having got less for our money, we are also going to be spending more money than we said we would spend. I do not quite understand what part of that the Attorney-General does not understand. He sat here in this place and made a promise. It has been breached, and he needs to acknowledge that. And he needs to apologise for making promises he simply cannot keep. He has shown himself to be unable to keep his promises.

Then we saw him today, when I asked him about his statement of 11 May 2006, in his non-answer, even though the budget blow-out contradicts what he said, say, "It is only a small blow-out. We have seen an increase in costs." Then Mr Mulcahy asked him about the cost per bed and he took it on notice. This is a question he has had put to him before. He claimed recently in the estimates hearing:

We do not cost this prison on that basis, Mr Seselja. I think you are the only person who does. No other jurisdiction and no other government in the country cost prisons on that basis.

Yet we get, in answer to a question on notice in relation to the costs, when we asked him, "What was the projected cost per bed when it was first costed?" his answer: "When first costed in 2003 the projected cost per bed was \$303,000." Having told the Assembly that we do not cost it that way, apparently back in 2003 that is exactly what they did, and they costed it at \$303,000 per bed. Now when we ask him what is the projected cost per bed, the current projected cost is \$374,000. We have seen that blow out again.

Then, you, Mr Deputy Speaker, asked the minister for a comparison with other jurisdictions in relation to cost per bed.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: In a deep voice, Mr Seselja.

MR SESELJA: In fact, in a deep voice. The Attorney-General once again was unable to answer the question and took it on notice. I think the reality here is that it is probably not that he is unable to answer the question; it is more that he is embarrassed about the answer. And the answer is this: "The cost per bed of this facility must be the most expensive in the country." I have asked the minister—and he can correct this if I am wrong—to point out an example around the country of a prison facility that is being built or has recently been built where the cost per bed is higher than what we

have here at the Alexander Maconochie Centre. I do not think he can, and that is why he has not come back to us.

The fact that he keeps taking things on notice and keeps refusing to answer these questions shows that he is simply embarrassed because he has not been able to keep his commitment to manage the costs here. They have blown out considerably when you look at the scope of the project—how much that has come back—and when you look now at his severe embarrassment that, having tied himself to the fact that the headline figure was not going to increase, we have also seen the headline figure increase. This minister should be embarrassed, and I think that is why we get this constant obfuscation when we ask him questions and when we get questions that he has been asked in broad terms before that he is taking on notice because he is simply embarrassed to answer them.

There is an extra \$1.45 million for ACTPLA to aid in accelerated land release. I find it extraordinary—given that the government said to us last year what a commitment it had to tackle the issue of housing affordability and given that we have known for some time, clearly with the increases in the commonwealth public service, there would be a need for accelerating the land release—that we are only now, in the second appropriation for this financial year, seeing this money for accelerated land release. This demonstrates once again what a comprehensive failure this has been. The management of land release in the territory by this government has been an absolute failure.

We have seen it. We saw no starker example than when we saw 700 Canberrans recently turn up for a land ballot for 50 lots at Franklin—700 Canberrans begging this government to give them a plot of land, and the government has 50 lots. What is the Chief Minister's response to this? He implies that it must be just because they are fussy. He says the quality of this land release is why there are 700 people lining up and begging for these 50 lots; it has got nothing to do with this government's complete failure to get enough land out to the market; it could not have anything to do with this government's total and utter failure to provide sufficient land to the market.

The argument—and the planning minister now backs it up—is that it is because these people are fussy. So the message to first home buyers in the territory, given first by the Chief Minister and now backed up by his planning minister, is that these 700 Canberra first home buyers are fussy and are just looking for only the good blocks and will not take the wonderful services that are being offered to them in terms of land release in the territory by this government.

Their performance in this area has been shameful, and the fact that the Chief Minister and the planning minister now do not want to take responsibility for their failure, that they actually want to blame the buyers and the potential first home buyers, many of whom of course who cannot get into the market because of this government's failures, is an absolute outrage. They would turn it around and essentially imply that these people are simply fussy.

Those of us here in the ACT who know young people who are trying to buy into the housing market know that many of them would buy anything if they could afford it.

They are not fussy; they are simply looking for any in that they can get into the market, whether they are lucky enough to be able to buy a new house or whether it is an old three-bedroom house in the outer suburbs which are going, in many places, for well over \$300,000. Many of these people are desperate to get into the market, and the government has not assisted them. It has continually failed in this area.

All we see are PR stunts. We see announcements and re-announcements. Then we have the stark example of this failure when, of 700 Canberra families, 650 of them are missing out on their dream of home ownership as a result of this government's policies. "It really must be because they are fussy" is the message that this government, through the Chief Minister and now through the planning minister, are giving to these young people.

The fact that we are only now seeing the \$1.45 million to aid in accelerated land release is an admission of failure by this government. It is an admission that they simply have not kept up with the demand. It is not like it has been sprung on them in the last six months or since the budget. It has been well known for at least 18 months, if not longer. We have seen a significant pick-up in demand. There was an anticipated pick-up in demand in part because of the significant growth of the commonwealth public service. It is not as if the Chief Minister and his predecessor in Simon Corbell have not been told and not been warned before this time.

We have consistently asked about this. When I asked the previous planning minister about this issue, I was consistently told that there was enough; in fact that there was enough on the shelf ready to come on line quickly. That simply has proven to be false. I think the government's statements in relation to the Franklin ballot in particular are an outrage and a slap in the face to first home buyers in the territory.

MRS BURKE (Molonglo) (4.57): I would like to start with a comment from page 4 of the Chief Minister's presentation speech, just to put on the public record how wrong Mr Corbell was in his comment.

Mr Seselja: Wrong again?

MRS BURKE: He was. I am sorry, Mr Seselja, to have to say this publicly but Mr Corbell was wrong. In fact, comment was made in the Chief Minister's speech. He said:

I welcome the opposition's generally positive reception of these initiatives.

That needs to be said. But let us have a look at some of the initiatives. I will particularly keep my comments to the area of health. Nobody would ever say anything bad about those particular initiatives. The timing of the initiatives might be an interesting conversation stopper.

However, I would support all the comments made, particularly by the shadow Treasurer, Mr Mulcahy, and Mr Stefaniak and my other colleagues. Mr Mulcahy said words to this effect: the expenditure, in itself relatively minor, speaks volumes for the attitude and priorities of the Stanhope government to react to more money—and this

is true—by seeing an opportunity to create more expenditure. Mr Mulcahy has it spot-on. He is quite right, because much of the expenditure could have and should have been provided for—and we have debated this in this place—if the items, in fact, are necessary from the existing appropriation.

I would also say that this government is big on plans, but these health initiatives show a case where the government has realised that it is now rolling in money and it can start spending again. It does not seem that there was a lot of strategy in terms of where we were going to use this and how we were going to time it. And why were some of these major areas not dealt with in the major budget? That is my concern, and I cannot understand why we have waited until now to bring these on in a second appropriation, only a few short months after the main budget. It seems a little ad hoc.

Whilst we welcome them, I would still say that the approach has been all over the place, to put it bluntly. We could have and should have provided for some of these major areas, for example, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residential alcohol and other drug rehab facility. We all know that that has been an ongoing problem for as long as I have been in this place and we all know that nationally it is a problem. So why now all of a sudden do we have to say, “Here is some money; we will put some money towards it”? As good a program as it is, the timing of that leaves a lot to be desired.

Why have we made the community wait six months before getting down to providing this very, very essential service? It will provide a culturally appropriate residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility which I am sure my colleague the shadow minister for Indigenous affairs, Mr Smyth, would also agree is a very, very good initiative. But why make people wait?

One of the other things that I want to touch on is the capital asset development plan. There is \$1.2 million set aside for that to provide for the development of a capital asset development plan that will guide the creation of a capital asset base to accommodate service development priorities and is flexible enough to meet changing healthcare needs for the period 2007 to 2021. This is very thin on detail. I have not heard a lot about this and I would really appreciate maybe a briefing even, if somebody is listening, in terms of what the capital asset development plan will actually do.

It says here that it will integrate capital and clinical service development requirements for all aspects of clinical service delivery and identify the infrastructure, including information technology, required to support it. I think we need to know more detail about some of these things that are just being thrown at us in this way now. I would like to see the outworking of that so that it does recognise the growing demand for public hospital and healthcare services and the need to review our current capital stock to support this growth into the future. I would like to see what that “into the future” bit entails and what this really is going to deal with.

The ophthalmology service, obviously, is another critical service. Why, again, have we made people in the community wait so long for that? The government must have known this has been on the cards for quite some time. It is providing for the

establishment of a department of ophthalmology, including a registered training program, to expand the range of ophthalmology services provided in the public health system. That is very good; it is very, very credible. But, again, it says to me that planning here really has not been forthcoming or we have just made people wait until we have found more money so that we can get on with it now. Again, that is disappointing in terms of the timing.

There are other things. The gamma camera replacement project is also a very, very worthwhile initiative. But, again, I wish somebody could explain to me why we had to wait until now and why it could not have been done in the budget. I think somebody said something about actually getting the machines. Maybe I will give the benefit of the doubt on that one.

The same applies to the computer radiography unit for radiation oncology. Again, it is another worthwhile program, to purchase a computerised radiography unit for the linear accelerator. I am not sure of the timing of these things. If somebody can explain to me why we had to wait to bring this on now and why we could not have done it sooner that would be really good.

Mr Barr: Look at it the other way and say it has been brought forward ahead of next year's budget.

MRS BURKE: No. It could have been done in June, surely.

With regard to the replacement of the existing superficial X-ray radiotherapy treatment unit, it is the same again; purchasing new equipment. That is good. We have got to replace ageing and existing equipment. But, again, there is the timing of it. Why did we have to wait so long?

Another thing I want to look at here is the GP work in Canberra campaign. Obviously, we know we are around 60 GPs short in Canberra. I know that this has been an initiative welcomed by the ACT Division of General Practice. ACT Health are going to fund the marketing and support officer. I will obviously be keeping a keen eye on that and hoping that it works. But, again, it seems to me that we are just tinkering around the edges with this. It sounds nice, and I really hope it works. I really hope we can get something from that because, obviously, as the government says, more GPs mean better access to primary care and less pressure on hospital emergency departments.

I would have to question that because the head of the AMA, Dr Rosanna Capolingua, actually made some comments in which she asserts that people attending and presenting to an emergency department do need to be there. So there is some grey area about whether people actually do need to be there. Maybe we need to train people in their minds that they should call Health First, as it is now known, or go to their pharmacy or get information from elsewhere, but many people who go to emergency, in their minds, do not particularly go there to wait eight or nine hours or longer. If they do not need to be there, I cannot see why they would be presenting there. I think there is a lot more work that needs to be done on that particular area.

I also think there need to be—and I will say it in this place—more radical reforms from the federal level now. We have got a new federal government, and I think we need to see the way in which Medicare actually works, the whole bulk-billing issue, the way that we remunerate GPs. Maybe a ranking system is something that we could think about, much like they do in the forces. You have a rank and you are actually paid, like in any job, I suppose, accordingly. There is a whole new area there that is still untapped. We perhaps need to investigate that.

The other thing I was looking at—and it has already been announced, which I have welcomed but, in part, would pose a big question over it—was the paediatric emergency department waiting area. Obviously, children do need to be in an area conducive to their wellbeing. It is a very stressful time for young children and for parents too. Is this going to really ensure children are moved through more quickly in the emergency department? If it can be proved to me that that is the case, then that is all to the good.

What are they going to do? “Provide for the refurbishment and furnishing of the current waiting area ... to incorporate a children’s waiting and play area within an extended main waiting area, ensuring that children and parents awaiting emergency care do so in a safe, child friendly environment”. It does say that there will be two clinical initiatives nurses to provide extended treatment and care options for children. I am about getting people into the area where we can, moving them through the system as quickly as we can. Of course, we have heard today vexed issues of access block, bed block and so forth.

As well, we may need to look at the whole area where people wait. It is great that we are doing this for children first, but let us hope that people who are sick and chronically ill can wait in an area that is conducive to their wellbeing, too. I will cite a recent example—this week, in fact—of a friend of mine who has had recent brain surgery and now is receiving treatment. He presented not well to the emergency department. Because he is receiving radiation treatment, his immune system is quite shot. He had to sit around while people were vomiting in bags and coughing and spluttering. In the end, after about three hours, he left.

There is a whole other story to that which I must tell the minister about as well, but I am really keen to see that whole emergency area improve in the way that we mix patients together. This person should have been fast-tracked through as a category 1, because they phoned the oncologist to clear a path for him, but it did not happen when he got to the hospital. Notwithstanding that, I cautiously say that is a good initiative, but let us see how quickly children can be moved through the emergency area.

We also have been hearing much about management of public hospitals. I think the management issue within public hospitals is a major problem. The health minister keeps standing up and saying that I am denigrating our nurses on the front line. That is rude, and she knows it is. It is disingenuous in the least to say that I would attack people on the front line. I do not, I never have, and I never would. People in the administration who may have been nurses are a different issue. I would say people in the administrative area should be held accountable. That is reasonable. But people on the front line are the ones often who tend to get the rough end of the stick.

The government, unfortunately, is good at distorting facts, as we have seen over this whole issue in regard to access block. But the fact is that when we look at the management of hospitals, we have put forward what we believe to be a very good proposal in terms of hospital boards. The fact is that Jon Stanhope abolished the hospital board-type situation in 2001 because he is ideologically opposed to independence. He imposed a bureaucratic regime on the then Woden Valley Hospital. Ever since, we know it has proved to be a cumbersome disaster, wreaking havoc on hapless staff at all levels and patients alike, because we have seen increases in every area.

The government says, “We are addressing this”. After six years, three health ministers, hundreds of plans flying around the place and the biggest budget since self-government, we would hope that there would be some better improvement than we have seen now. We are not just talking about the dedicated medical staff, the surgeons, general practitioners, pathologists and the like; we are talking about what I have just said: the very dedicated nurses, wardsmen, emergency support staff and administrators—those people on the front line. Whenever we push a pen to make a decision in one area, we have to make sure that those people on the front line are going to actually be able to work the system in the way that it says on the paper.

The feedback I am getting is that that is not happening. In regard to the many things that the minister stands up to gloat over and tell us how wonderful they are, that is not the feedback I am getting. Again, she will be in denial, because she will say I am making it up or some such ridiculous waffle. I do not make things up. I do tell her when I have got issues.

I have had nurses contacting me, and I still do. I have had two this week. They are scared to speak out. Whether or not the minister denies that, that is another issue. They are scared to speak out because of reprisal. I think it is an unfortunate situation where you have got people on the front line who could improve things but they are scared to speak to their line above because of reprisal. I think that is another area we need to look at.

We see again how the government can distort things. We have got the largest budget of any department or agency in the ACT. Yet it is rather unfortunate—I do not know who this was down to, and I have not quite got to the bottom of it yet—that the minister was only asked to be made available for one hour. I think that is a travesty. I am sure she would have stayed longer. This was a disappointment, because we had many more questions to ask and we wanted to make sure that we got all the facts, because that is what the minister likes. She likes me to have the facts. So it was disappointing that only one hour was given to the minister at those hearings.

I will touch on something the Chief Minister said. He said that this is a city that responds. Unfortunately, I do not think this is a government that responds, certainly not in a timely way. Today, we have seen a government playing catch-up, a government finding, “We have got some money in the piggy bank, let us go spend.” In the meantime they are making the people of Canberra wait for things that should and could have been implemented in the June budget.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (5.12): Yet again the Treasurer, the Chief Minister, is absent to steer one of his bills through the parliament. It is arrogance: “I don’t have to attend to hear what people have to say about my bills, because they are going to be passed anyway.” It is the sort of arrogance that is truly indicating that the Chief Minister is out of touch and it shows that this bill, while perhaps individual initiatives are fine and worthy in their own right, is also out of touch with what the people of the ACT truly want.

Mr Corbell made one of his fabulous stirring speeches. He was using both hands to emphasise, and occasionally he talks slowly because that means it is more important. He said, “That’s because this is a good bill, this is a good Labor government agenda designed to deliver to the community the benefits of strong financial management, the benefits from effective and restrained expenditure”—even though they are spending an extra \$36 million—“and to target the support in areas where it makes a difference for people in our community.”

And he is right: it is definitely a Labor government bill. I detect a shade of Gough Whitlam in there: “She’ll be right, comrades.” There is no view for the long term or the future. What we have got is a big-spending, scattergun approach with no obvious plan to get the maximum effect out of this budget. And we know that because, as the Chief Minister admitted in this place under questioning from the opposition, the process was, “Yes, we’ve asked departments to put up bids for money.” It was not, “What is the government agenda and how do we achieve it?” It was, “Departments, give me some ideas to spend some money.” That is the spakfilla approach to budgeting: a couple of holes here, put a bit there or a bit of putty there. You have got \$36 million. Use it effectively. Quite clearly you do not know how to.

I guess there are a number of ways you could characterise the bill. It could be a “we’ve got more revenue than we expected last financial year because we ignored the property council’s advice” bill so they are just going to spend, spend, spend. The government characterise this as a budget or a bill that does not need to include tax cuts because they have an aversion to tax cuts.

We know that because the former Treasurer said, “We are going to squeeze them until they bleed, but not until they die.” And we know that from other Labor Treasurers around the country who have said that extra revenue is simply not available for tax cuts—that was Eric Ripper in Western Australia—and Kevin Foley, the South Australian Treasurer, when asked why he was increasing property taxes, said, “Because I can.” So there is no need for tax cuts despite the fact that Mr Stanhope when Leader of the Opposition said, “Being a low-taxing government is a desirable thing.”

The budget has increased by 50 per cent in six budgets: \$2.031 billion was approximately our last budget. This year it is over \$3 billion and we are just adding another \$36 million to it. But then again perhaps this is the “I forgot to put enough money in the budget for climate change” bill, because that is exactly what it is—and the reason that occurred was that the Chief Minister and minister for the environment did not want to expose his climate change strategy to the scrutiny of estimates, and anyway after six years in government it was not even finished, or that was the excuse.

You have got to question some of the commitment of the Chief Minister who I think in March said, "Climate change: it is the issue of the century." And what are they putting in for climate change? They are putting in \$836,000. So they are words; they are just words. Possibly it is the "we have abandoned our plans and we are just spending willy-nilly because we can" bill. There is this interesting line in the budget called "the future of Canberra studies". I thought we had done this work; I thought we had a set of plans called the Canberra plan—you know, the spatial plan, the economic white paper, the social plan. The brief here says, "This initiative will provide for a series of studies to identify planning and economic development issues for the ACT and its immediate cross-border area."

Clearly the Canberra plan has now expired and they are now starting the next series of planning for the next series of plans: "We are going to spend money looking at things we should have looked at back in 2002-03 but we didn't, so we are going to do them in 2007-08, because we can, because we have suddenly found the money." What it shows is that all the planning that this government have done is worthless because they have not looked at the demographics, they have not looked at the ageing population, they have not looked at the economic impact—and these are things they should have done if their plans have got any validity. That might be the reason why there are no meaningful targets or time lines in any of this government's plans.

Of course it could definitely be characterised as the "everything we forgot to put in the original budget" bill. For example, the tourism minister is here—and he forgot to get funding for the event director: "We're going to put on the best tourism events ever, but they didn't tell me we needed an event director." You are going to run an event, you are going to plan—but you have to come back to this place for \$50,000 for an event director. It is illogical.

Some of these amounts are so small in terms of the budget that they should be absorbed by the departments. They could be absorbed by the departments, but, because we do not have any financial guidance from the absent Treasurer, nobody bothers. So the departments will spend everything you give them and they will surrender nothing unless you force them. What we have got is a Treasurer who is absent in his management style as much as he is absent from this place today.

Then again perhaps it is just the "I think we are hurting in the electorate and we intend to spend our way out of it" bill or what might possibly become known as the "another fine mess you've gotten us into, John Hargreaves, so we will just have to spend our way out of it" bill. There is a litany of mistakes from Mr Hargreaves. Members remember them: FireLink, the ESA headquarters, the Grassby statue and its comparison to the Vietnam War Memorial, Tharwa bridge, the GDE blow-out, graffiti, taxis, Griffith library closure, the Revolve debacle, no waste by 2010, shopfront closures, road funding and of course ACTION.

So not a year after they have introduced a new network they have now got to put more money back into ACTION to save it—\$3.95 million. There was a great quote from Mr Corbell. He said, "We are proud of this because we want to target support in areas where it makes a difference for people in our communities. People want to see

improved support for better services, they want to see improved support for people with disabilities and the way we support our schools and they want to see better public transport.” Well, I thought that was what the whole review of ACTION a year ago was meant to do—give us improved transport. But through the suburbs of Tuggeranong, Mr Hargreaves’s own electorate—through Isabella Plains, through Chisholm, through Richardson, through Gowrie, through Gilmore—they are cutting the really big services. They are cutting the services. Mr Gentleman, you should know this because it is your electorate as well. They are actually cutting the services that have big numbers on them that take people directly from southern Tuggeranong to places like Russell. They are going—they are gone.

This is Mr Hargreaves’s idea of reforming the bus service: kill the routes with lots of people on them so we can have lots more buses with fewer people on them. It is illogical. So when Mr Corbell says that people want more services, yes they do—but they do not believe that an arrogant, out-of-touch government is going to deliver them. The perfect example of that is Mr Hargreaves’s running of the Department of Territory and Municipal Services, and in particular ACTION buses.

The final thing that this could be is the “Andrew Scissorhands, I’ve cut too hard, now I can’t keep my promises of a bucketful of money for ovals because I forgot to ask cabinet in the big budget” bill. There he was in March, telling the sports community there was going to be a bucketful of money to save the ovals—and it did not eventuate. It did not eventuate where it should have, which was in the budget for the year. And, because he has been under pressure and because the sporting groups have told him of their displeasure, he has had to go back to cabinet and say, “I need \$2 million to drought proof the ovals.”

We heard in estimates that he was going to give us a number—he said a number—of surfaces that are drought proof. I doubt that is possible with \$1.6 million. I have asked people how many artificial surfaces, plus lights, plus other work can you fit into \$1.6 million—and they are all scratching their heads. They were saying, “You’ll get a couple of projects, you’ll get some lights and you will get one surface, if you are lucky, out of that money.” So it will be interesting to see. The minister is on record in *Hansard* as saying there are a number of surfaces in this. But we will see what happens, because nobody out there believes it; it is impossible.

Everyone is confused about how this works. The government has asked them what facilities they want to drought proof, so the government can give their money, so that they can give the money back to the government, so the government can upgrade the facilities that the government already owns. It is some sort of pea and thimble trick, just moving money around the place. But the reality is that this is money that will be spent in the main on government facilities, and that is fine. But let us just say that; let us not create this illusion that we are going to give money to the community, so that they can give it back to TAMS, so that TAMS can do the work. It is a very confused strategy and it will be interesting to see how many artificial surfaces we get out of it, how many ovals get projects to help them and how many lights go up.

Again what it says is: “We haven’t done our work. We’re now going to save a number of ovals. We’re going to put lights on those ovals so we can use them more often and

put them under more pressure, which may put those that use those ovals at more risk as the ovals become degraded, but that is our strategy.” I have to say, minister, that it is a very poor strategy indeed, and I know that the community have told you they are not impressed with the money and that they are not impressed with how it is going.

The introduction of this second appropriation bill so early in 2007-08—the bill was being considered and almost put together before the first quarter of the year had passed—represents failure in governance and financial management by the Stanhope government. You have to ask: why has this bill been introduced now? The cynical amongst us would say that the government is being hurt by continuing criticism of its policies and responses across a range of policy areas, it has seen a boost to its revenue and it simply wants to try and fend off this criticism by spend, spend, spend. Why else do we see the Treasurer using the phrase “deliver another dividend” in this tabling speech?

The previous dividends have been school closures, cuts to sport and recreation, cuts to tourism, hikes in charges across the board on your rates, water abstraction and other charges, and more charges against the property sector in particular, but against business. But they are not dividends.

Perhaps Mr Barr could lend the Treasurer his economics book from economics 1 at the ANU about what a dividend is, because people do not see having more money taken out of their pockets as a dividend—and that is all this government has done. Or is the Chief Minister preparing the community for further displays of pork-barrelling in the lead-up to the 2008 election? I am sure that is part of it too: “Let’s get them used to us spending. We’ll roll out all these promises and it will make good for everything.”

There was little argument made to support this bill at the time. There has been little argument made in the course of the debate today to confirm it. What we have is a failure of governance, and it is a failure of governance for a number of reasons. The Stanhope government’s climate change strategy was late. It should have been finalised early to enable it to be incorporated into the budget. Instead we are coming here bit by bit, piecemeal, which is entirely the approach of this government to the environment: bit by bit and piecemeal to funding.

The government’s management of ACTION is not up to the mark; it is as simple as that. The issues set out in this bill were, or should have been, well known as the last budget was being prepared—and they were, but nobody could come up with the answer. The criticism has mounted. “We’ll just throw more money at it.” Many of the relatively minor spending decisions in the bill should either have been included in the 2007 budget or held over to the 2008 budget, which we know is being prepared as we debate this bill.

The scenario that led to this bill appearing is quite clear. The Chief Minister and his colleagues have seen the additional cash rolling in, the urgent call has gone out to the departments and agencies to find projects that could use up at least some of that cash, and a compendium of projects has been cobbled together to comprise this bill. This is not a bill that represents a cohesive strategy by a government that knows where it is

going or how it is going to get there. It is in fact a grab bag of suggestions that demonstrate the Stanhope government has no idea of where it is going or what it is doing. Emphasising the lack of strategy underpinning the spending included in this bill is the proposal for a residential facility for alcohol and drug rehabilitation. The concept of the facility is excellent; the problem is that it became a political football once it got into the hands of the Chief Minister, the interfering hands of the Chief Minister.

Members will all remember the extraordinary debate between Mr Seselja and the Chief Minister earlier this year in the estimates hearing over Kama. So what do we have now? We still do not have a site for the facility, we have got funding of \$0.7 million being appropriated this year and a total budget that has been estimated at \$11 million—and for what? What is it—budgeting by ouija board? This is all for a facility that has no home, so we do not know about site costs.

As Mrs Dunne pointed out, when it comes to site costs you have only got to look at Harrison primary, where the landscaping budget has blown out by more than \$1 million—because this government does not know how to budget. So we have no idea whether there are any issues with foundations, access roads, provisions of services and so on—and yet the Chief Minister is clever enough to tell us that this project, sight unseen, will cost us \$11 million: “Let’s just make it up.” This is the kind of sloppy planning that characterises the Stanhope government.

If we examine the detail of proposals in this bill to reinforce my views on the nature of this bill, I can judge that there is one and only one proposal that merits the description of being urgent, and that is the spending on the response to the equine influenza outbreak. None of us expected it, nobody saw it coming: it is urgent spending. In that regard you could have used the Treasurer’s advance for it. I wonder whether the Treasurer would consider that—or is he hoarding the Treasurer’s advance for late next year as we get much closer to the election?

There is another proposal that could warrant funding from the Treasurer’s advance, and that is funds for the Civic petrol plume. I say this because we have to assume it is a recent development. I remember it, and you probably remember it, as a kid growing up in Canberra, when the old Civic Theatre blew up. It has been there for a long time, but if it has destabilised or deteriorated in some way then of course it should be covered in that way. Apart from that, the bill is a grab bag. There is no strategy here. It is a shame that worthy projects are being mired in this process by this government. *(Time expired.)*

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Minister for Health, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Disability and Community Services, Minister for Women) (5.27): I welcome the opportunity to speak today about the elements that cover my portfolio, particularly in health. This is the first opportunity that I have been given to talk about them. For some reason that I cannot really understand, the public accounts committee did not call me at estimates for either of my areas to discuss any of these proposals. There was no request made of my office for ACT Health or for the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, which also had an initiative there, under homelessness, for the extension of the homelessness shelter.

Neither of those agencies was called and although there was agreement reached with my office for further questioning or for questions on the second appropriation to be allowed during my appearance at annual reports hearings, no member of the committee took the opportunity to put questions to me at that time. In fact, from memory, since that time I have only received a couple of question on notice from Dr Foskey in relation to the ATSI drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility.

Mrs Burke: I have got 20 on notice.

MS GALLAGHER: Well, I have not seen those yet.

Mrs Burke: You have not got them yet? Okay.

MS GALLAGHER: They must be coming to me. I have not had the opportunity to talk about the initiatives in the health portfolio. They are important initiatives. In fact, the largest single initiative relates to the capital asset development plan. Contrary to the view of those opposite that this is just spending willy-nilly with no foresight and with no longer-term looking into future spending, this funding is about ensuring that our health system has the capital infrastructure required to meet the needs of our community in 2022.

I do not know about anyone else sitting in this chamber, but I certainly do not intend to be sitting in this chamber in 2022. I do not intend to be a member of the government or the health minister at that time. I am actually trying, through this initiative, to put forward a longer-term view—dare I say a view without politics—to make sure that everyone knows the future needs of our health system.

We have significant challenges in terms of our ageing community. When our baby-boomers hit that point, their health needs are going to be very substantial. We have massive increases in chronic disease in particular areas—diabetes, heart disease and illnesses associated with the lifestyles that many of us are leading. This work is going to map out our health needs for the long-term future. It is not about helping this government or even the next government.

It is about being able to provide for our children a health system that is prepared for the onslaughts that will present. This is very important work. It is looking at everything from capital to clinical needs, and a wide consultation process will be implemented. This is extremely important work for the ACT community. I look forward to discussing it with members of the Assembly as it proceeds. It needs everyone to be behind it and supporting it.

The 2007-08 appropriation provides for about \$1.6 million in recurrent funding, growing to just over \$2 million in recurrent funding in the outyear and around \$9 million in capital. In response to the question: why now; why not before, health is being funded in the budget with a component of growth in it. That growth funding provides for a range of initiatives. These initiatives were outside the funding envelope in the budget, but when the opportunity arose for a second appropriation, I did take the opportunity to put forward things that we probably would have funded in next

year's budget through the growth that the government has provided. So, rather than missing this year's budget, it is really about getting these things in place earlier. Rather than waiting for next year and having the wait, particularly for things like equipment—for example, the gamma camera replacement project that perhaps could have waited—it is nice to be able to get them on track and purchased and operating.

We are expecting that, over the next 10 to 15 years, the ACT will have a 60 per cent increase in the demand for nuclear medicine diagnostic services. An amount of \$1.4 million has been provided to replace the two gamma cameras nearing the end of their lives at the medical imaging department. We are hoping to be able to purchase this equipment within this second approp prior to Christmas 2007 and have those cameras in place by June 2008. If we had waited for the next budget, those timeframes could not be met. Really, there is an opportunity to get that equipment in and operating.

We will also replace the computer radiography unit for radiation oncology and the SXRT equipment. Again, hopefully, with the funding that will be allowed through the second appropriation, all that equipment will be in place and operational by the time the next budget is being discussed next year. For me, that is a very good outcome, not just for the staff who use that equipment but for the patients who are going to require it as well.

This second appropriation also allows for the formation of a significant ophthalmology department at the Canberra Hospital. We have been successful recently in retaining 1.5 staff specialist ophthalmologists, which we are very pleased about. We believe that through this initiative, which will provide extra support for this unit and allow us to implement a registrar training program, we will be able to significantly reduce patients' travel to Sydney.

We have not been able to do that in the past, in part because our ophthalmology services have been restricted but also because we have not had staff specialists in this area. With the increase in staff specialists, a registrar training program will be established, which will be fantastic for medical students. Previously we have not been able to offer that sort of service at the Canberra Hospital.

We will establish an outpatient service that will include an after-hours emergency ophthalmology service to cover gaps in the service. I know that the Canberra community got behind that—I think it was Larry the Laser—and raised funds for equipment required for neonates needing a particular type of surgery. We have appointed a specialist who can operate that machine, as delivered. I am aware certainly of one neonate who has been able to benefit from that service already this year and who has not been required to make that trip to Sydney. So this is a fantastic initiative. It grows on the services that we can offer at the Canberra Hospital in addition to what we have done in the past.

The GP work in Canberra campaign again has been welcomed by the division of general practice. I think it has been welcomed by a number of GPs as well. This is really the only thing more the ACT government can do that we have not already done to attract GPs to Canberra. I have written every two months to the

ex-federal Minister for Health. Every two months I wrote saying, "Please increase GP training places."

Mrs Burke: See how you go with the new government.

MS GALLAGHER: That is right. I have said, "Please increase GP training places, please increase medical student numbers and please extend your incentive programs to the whole of the ACT, not just restrict them to particular areas." Now, every single response I got back was no. We have eight GP training places a year in the ACT. It is not enough to deal with our ageing GP population and the numbers of GPs that we will see retire and the numbers of GPs that work part time.

Some of the reasoning around not allowing the extension of the incentive programs to GPs has come down to regions such as Civic, which has the John Curtin School of Medical Research, which has a whole load of doctors, none of whom are practising medicine on patients, and Woden, where the Canberra Hospital is. It distorts the numbers of doctors we have in those areas. We have doctors in those areas, but they are not GPs. They are not delivering a service through primary health care.

So I am hopeful. I will be raising this with the federal minister once she hits the ground and I am hopeful that we will see some movement in that area. In the absence of all of that, the division's request to me was, "Look, how about we try this?" We will try it. This second appropriation has provided some money to do that and we will see how it goes. Even if we get one GP out of that, I think it will be a good program.

The paediatric waiting area is an area that I have been conscious of for some time, and the government has also been conscious of it. In actual fact, we established—I am not sure whether it was Minister Corbell; it may have just crossed at the time I took over—a paediatric area within the emergency department. There were paediatric beds and, with support from the paediatric staff, pediatric patients could come and watch TV and play with the toys and generally get out of the waiting area.

Again, we have seen increases in our paediatric patients. Those beds, if they are staffed, are often full, particularly over the winter months. Again, at times we see children waiting for care within the emergency department waiting room. I am not happy with that, and I think the hospital understands that. ACT Health understands that. Through this initiative we are going to provide a special waiting area which will be partitioned off, but with glass so that the triage nurses will be able to see patients. We will also staff that area with two waiting room nurses at particular times when there are a lot of children in there.

Those waiting room nurses—I think they are called clinical initiative nurses, CIN nurses—will be there to take temperatures, do observations and to be there as a resource for parents. If you are sitting there and you are worried about your child, instead of going up to the staff at the triage desk, who are often busy dealing with other patients, you will be able to have nursing care within that space. We accept that, from time to time, there are long waits for children and at times, particularly at night when there are a whole range of patients presenting to the emergency department, it can be very distressing for young children to witness some of the issues that are dealt with in a waiting room.

I am very hopeful that this new area will separate children and protect them from that as much as possible and also that with the CIN nurses we will be in a position to provide that support to parents at what is an extremely stressful time. We are hoping that the seating will be comfortable and that parents will be able to hold children in their arms. All those little things, if you are having an extended wait, become important. I am very hopeful that that will improve the patient journey for paediatric patients coming to the emergency department.

There is a range of initiatives that I am very pleased with. I know that they will improve the service that we offer to the Canberra community, which is what we are all about. I thank people for their comments. I welcome this first opportunity to actually talk about them because the lack of interest in this part of the appropriation bill has been very surprising to me.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Minister for Industrial Relations) (5.41): I want from the outset to indicate my very strong support for this bill and the range of important initiatives that are included within it. However, I could not let the opportunity go past without making some observations on some of the broader issues that have been raised by those opposite in the course of the debate. I think perhaps the most interesting one goes to highlight a theme and a particular issue that I have spoken about before in this place. That is the internal inconsistency of the position that is put by the Liberal Party, particularly the wild variation between the approach of the shadow Treasurer and that of his colleagues on financial matters.

It was interesting to observe during the course of the speeches from those opposite a welcoming of some of the issues, and I am very pleased that the opposition is supporting a number of the initiatives that we have put forward. In some areas they say, “You should have spent more money and spent it earlier.” But then you get this railing that this is a Whitlamesque government that is undertaking wanton spending in a range of areas. Well, it cannot be all of the above. I can understand a consistent line that the shadow Treasurer is attempting to run in this debate, that is, that the priority should be around reducing taxes, and that is it—that rather than increasing service provision, it should be about reducing taxes. That is an entirely legitimate argument to run. I do not happen to agree with it, but I at least respect its intellectual integrity.

What I find a little hard to stomach, and we have seen this over the course of budget debates in the last two years—certainly since I have been in this place—has been the desire of those opposite to walk both sides of the street, to preach about efficient service delivery and the need for the government to account effectively for every cent that is expended and to do so in an efficient manner. Yet, when you undertake exercises that improve efficiency and improve the delivery of government service and certainly seek to ensure that the available funds are put to their best possible use to achieve positive outcomes for the community, those opposite seek to oppose it.

There is no more classic example of that than in the education portfolio, but you see it in tourism, in sport and recreation and in a range of areas where there is this constant cry, “You must deliver services more efficiently. You must put more money into

frontline services and not have a bloated bureaucracy.” Yet, when we make those particular changes and look to alter the structure of government and how we deliver services, we are criticised for cutting these areas and that this is somehow a bad thing. Yet the focus is, as it should be, on frontline service delivery.

As I say, that applies no more than in the education portfolio where those opposite seem to be arguing that the priority should be around maintaining empty school buildings and not putting resources into improving the quality of our education system. The range of initiatives that feature in this second appropriation in the education sector seek to target those key areas where we know we need to improve the quality of service delivery within our school system or where we have targeted particular initiatives to address particular concerns, be it under performance in certain areas of student population or be it to enhance the ability, for example, in areas of physical education for the school system to respond to broader societal needs.

The bill provides over \$23 million in additional expenditure in education over the next four years. The range of initiatives that are funded include \$14.6 million for pastoral care and student welfare in our government high schools. Members would, indeed, be aware that at the 2004 election the government indicated that during this term of government we would provide an additional \$12 million for pastoral care and student welfare services in high schools. This is an upgrading of that package to elevate the positions to school leader positions, to make them executive positions within our public schools and to provide a team of non-teacher professionals, such as social workers and community nurses to assist the pastoral care coordinators who will be in place in each of our public high schools from 2008.

Mrs Burke during her speech alluded to timing issues and why we would fund certain items in a budget or, in this instance, in a second appropriation. Clearly, for these educational issues to be in place for the beginning of the 2008 school year, they needed to be funded through this second appropriation.

We seek to implement a range of priorities in the education portfolio where we have the ability, the funds and the capacity. Of course, it should be noted that there are a range of constraints on the ability of a government to deliver everything in the first budget of a four-year term, not least of which is that in the provision of services within the education sector, a large part—70 per cent—of expenditure is on wages and salaries. It is around having the capacity to deliver all of the programs and having the people and the ability to recruit into the positions that we are looking to fill.

This particular appropriation, as I have indicated, includes the commitment that we gave in the 2004 election to provide additional resources for high schools. We have upgraded the positions. We have taken them from standard teacher classification up to executive level, school leader C positions and provided \$14.6 million towards this initiative. There is an additional \$3.3 million over the next four years committed to improve the outcomes for Indigenous students in our public schools.

There is \$1.2 million to fund three additional specialist PE teachers at the school leader C level to coordinate physical education activities in the north, central and south parts of the city to work with primary schools to deliver enhanced physical

education programs and \$3.6 million in investment over the next three and a half years in non-government schools, again meeting the election commitment of \$1 million a year extra in funding for non-government schools.

We recognise that the move to national testing will see two tests conducted for ACT students in the 2007-08 financial year. The commonwealth government did provide assistance for government schools to be able to sit the test in May of next year. The ACT government has made available \$380,000 to non-government schools to ensure that there is no disadvantage to students in the non-government system having to sit two tests in the one financial year.

We have provided additional funds for the Gungahlin Wellbeing Precinct that involves work on the precinct park and stormwater works associated with the precinct surrounding the Gungahlin College. It will also include that precinct and enclosed oval and a sport and recreation centre, as well as a town park. Across my portfolios of education and sport, recreation and planning we are pulling together those agencies to deliver that new precinct for the Gungahlin town centre.

There are, of course, as previous speakers have alluded to, additional funds for the Harrison primary school to complete the landscaping works. It is important that a new school with outstanding enrolment figures already, even before it is opened, is provided with appropriate landscaping to meet the needs of the students in that school. We are also, through the water demand management initiative, providing for the installation of the COMTROL irrigation system in 15 additional government schools.

Dr Foskey asked me during the public accounts process if I could provide information on the 15 schools. I can inform her—and I will do this in writing also—that Lyneham high school, Canberra high school, Belconnen high school, Monash primary school, Stromlo high school, Calwell primary school, Hughes primary school, Curtin primary school, Red Hill primary school, Kaleen primary school, the Malkara school, Miles Franklin primary school, Farrar primary school and North Ainslie primary school are the schools on that list. They are in addition to the 17 schools which are receiving COMTROL units, the appropriation made available through the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. This initiative will allow for the upgrade and repair of school irrigation systems. Up to 30 schools can participate in that aspect of the program.

Looking at the range of other initiatives, I would particularly like to comment on the money for additional specialist PE teachers—as I say, one for each of the north, south and central areas of the city. Their task will be to develop capacity in primary school teachers to deliver quality physical education programs for students over the next three years. From next year all primary schools will have access to these specialist PE teachers. They will be school leader C positions. They were advertised last week and applications closed yesterday. It is planned to finalise the selection process before the end of this year so that these new teachers can commence duty at the start of the new school year.

Their main roles will be to develop quality professional learning in PE for primary teachers, with particular focus on how to develop students' fundamental movement

skills and to increase children's participation in physical activity; to create and strengthen links between cluster primary and secondary schools; to sustain the provision of specialist PE support to primary schools in the longer term and to create and strengthen links between primary schools and the community to increase children's opportunities to be physically active.

There are a range of options as to how these officers will work within schools. For example, they can, and will, be based in single schools for a five-week block working intensively with a couple of primary schools each term over a three-year period. They will also work with clusters of schools to provide support in the way that best supports the needs of individual school communities. At the end of this three-year program our expectation is that all primary schools will have quality PE programs in place, that teachers will be skilled in their delivery and that they will have established strong links with other primary schools, their cluster secondary schools and community groups and sporting groups, and that strategies are in place for ongoing specialist support.

Importantly here is the Children's Physical Activity Foundation, established by the government with seed funding of \$250,000. I am very pleased with the level of interest from sporting groups, business groups and other community organisations to participate in this foundation, which is based on the model of the UK Sports Trust. I am very pleased to report that the national forum that I hosted earlier in the year in Canberra in conjunction with Brenda McConchie and others to which we invited Sue Campbell and Steve Grainger from UK Sport to come and talk to us a little about the experience in the UK and how to establish such a model was a very productive and useful experience. We have now put that into place with the establishment of this foundation. I very much look forward to the continuation of community and business interest in the foundation. It will have the ability to provide the resources and the financial underpinning for the ongoing delivery of quality physical education programs in our schools.

To conclude in the education area, we have put in place a range of initiatives that meet the key areas that we have identified and that we undertook to deliver on during this term of government: student welfare and additional support for the arts, languages, and vocational education and training. We are looking at a range of responses here to meet our commitments during this term of government, but also, very forward looking, working in partnership with the incoming Rudd Labor government in the areas of early childhood, trades training centres within our schools—there is nearly \$45 million that is going to be coming to the ACT school system in that area—the provisions of IT and, particularly, backing our investment in the 2006-07 budget, in additional information and communication technology capacity across the entire public education system. The ACT leads the nation and the world in ICT provision in our schools and we look to build on this in partnership with the incoming Labor government.

I certainly look forward to working with Julia Gillard in the implementation of the education revolution. It is something that this country needs and something that the ACT government stands ready to back and support. In many areas, in fact, I am very pleased to say that the ACT is already ahead of the national benchmarks that the

incoming Rudd Labor government are setting in areas of education. But I think we have the opportunity to take it even further here in the ACT and to show, again, to the rest of the country that we are leaders in education, that we are innovative, that we are prepared to make changes where we need to to improve the quality of our education system and that we will continue, with record levels of investment, as we have seen through this second appropriation, to build on our strengths in education. (*Time expired.*)

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) (5.56), in reply: I did have a number of things that I wished to reiterate, but I think it is important that we finalise the bill today. There is much other work in this last sitting week of the year.

I thank members for their contributions to the debate. I thank members for their support. It is an important bill. It contains a number of very significant initiatives. It continues this government's record levels of expenditure in health and education, climate change and public transport. I am particularly pleased with the bill. I am pleased at the capacity of my government, through its management and stewardship of our economy and the budget of the territory, to be able to deliver today for the benefit of all of the people of the ACT. Again, I thank members for their contributions to this debate and for their support of the bill.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Tharwa bridge

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (5.57): I rise to talk about old Tharwa bridge. I am absolutely pleased to see this but, almost in the same vein, deeply disappointed with what clearly is government mismanagement over the issue of the old Tharwa bridge. I am pleased at least to see a press release put out by the government saying they are now going to seriously look at rebuilding the bridge. I am pleased to see that the government will now be able perhaps to hasten the end to the Tharwa community being beleaguered, and I am pleased to see at least that some common sense is prevailing.

It begs the question: how the hell did we get to this point? Minister Hargreaves, for the best part of 18 months, has insisted that the Tharwa bridge was beyond economic

repair and that there were no options available at all to do something about the old bridge. The government's press release states:

... after recent advice that it may be possible to rebuild the bridge while it is open to traffic.

Chief Minister and Minister for Heritage Jon Stanhope said that as part of the consultation the Government would gauge the value the community placed on the rebuilding of the bridge ...

There is this quotation in the press release:

“When the decision was taken by the Government a year ago to construct a new bridge over the river at Tharwa, the view of roads experts was that the old bridge was economically beyond repair,” ...

I stress that: “economically beyond repair”. Suddenly, there is, according to the press release, “a growing body of opinion that the bridge can be rebuilt”. What the hell went wrong in the last 18 months? This is a hell of a contrast to the decision taken some time ago that the old bridge was beyond economic repair and that the government had to proceed with an expensive \$10 million concrete bridge—which would not, by the way, be serviceable until late 2008.

This is an absolute farce. The government, in the last sitting, denied they had seen compelling engineering evidence or even a New South Wales RTA report, for example, which had given some pretty solid advice on the economic viability of building a new bridge. So we have here today the backflip of all backflips.

I have seen correspondence in which government agencies have talked about the strong possibility of the need to demolish the old bridge. So we have gone from a situation where the old Tharwa bridge was beyond economic repair, and serious consideration was given—and this is documented—to the old bridge being demolished, to suddenly a body of opinion indicating that perhaps after all the bridge can be rebuilt. This is comical farce. It is worse than that, Mr Speaker; this is almost moral corruption. How the hell were ministerial decisions taken to arrive at this point? In the press release the government goes on to say:

... representations that have been made in recent weeks regarding the possible rebuilding of the old bridge are sufficiently compelling ...

What is interesting is that Mr Hargreaves, the minister who so rigidly stuck for the last 18 months to this compelling plan to build a new bridge, has now been scuppered by the Chief Minister. I welcome the fact that the Chief Minister has scuppered Mr Hargreaves, after a series of very poor ministerial decisions by him about the issue of the Tharwa Murrumbidgee River crossing. He has clearly had a second look at the whole saga after a hell of a lot of pressure from the Tharwa community and a lot of pressure from the opposition, inquiring into the government's workings and decisions around this matter. There has been ministerial failure. A community has been put at risk and has been totally beleaguered. All of this needs to be inquired into.

Environment—climate change

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (6.02): Just last week, I had the privilege of attending the ACT sustainable schools tool kit launch at the Australian National Botanic Gardens. The ACT government, as we all know, is deeply concerned about the effects of climate change and the damage that it will have on this planet. It is for this reason that the ACT government is always looking at initiatives to further reduce the impact of climate change by reducing the amount of carbon gas that is emitted and by preserving our natural resources.

In order to help ACT schools to become more environmentally sustainable, a tool kit has been launched that will assist ACT schools with a transition from their reliance upon high-emitting carbon technology through the education of the students, staff and wider school community.

Following an initial trial of the program back in 2006, consultations were held with teachers and an easier step-by-step guide was established. This current guide focuses on sustainability in the management of water, waste, energy and biodiversity. In particular, it was concluded that teachers wanted to know how to involve the entire school in this process. As a result, this tool kit was established that will help to achieve this goal.

The tool kit is comprised of two elements that are broken up into two folders. The first folder, “Educating for sustainability through the ACT curriculum”, is an education for sustainability teaching program designed for students from preschool to year 10. The second folder, “Your operational guide to becoming a sustainable school”, is the hands-on, action-based component of the initiative. This folder outlines the sustainable practices schools can put in place to reduce their impact on the environment. These folders offer a best practices guide with a simple step-by-step process to reduce schools’ ecological footprint through the careful management of water, waste, energy and biodiversity.

The waste best practice guide recognises that schools’ purchasing practices can have a major influence on the amount of waste generated. This guide will encourage schools to recycle and to educate students about recycling. The importance of education is key to changing people’s behavior, and that is emphasised in the water and energy best practice guide.

ACT government schools continually review their curriculum to get a clear picture of where education for sustainability is currently being addressed. A best practice guide for the curriculum will assist teachers to embed sustainability into the school curriculum. Worthwhile learning opportunities, such as waste-free lunch days, will be encouraged through these guides. Schools will also be encouraged to participate in national events such as National Water Week.

To ensure that everyone can actively participate in making the school more environmentally sustainable, the guide will identify professional development activities for the whole school community. This professional development is not just

for teachers but also for building services officers, administration staff and canteen staff.

From the initial development phase of these guides, experts were consulted in order to achieve the most effective goals. It became obvious to this government that for a school to become sustainable it would require active support from all of the staff, and that is why the government is doing all it can to support initiatives such as this that are aimed at educating the wider school community. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that, due to the positive reaction to these guides, Territory and Municipal Services are now developing best practice guides for ACT government offices.

The ACT climate change strategy *Weathering the Change* encourages schools to become carbon-neutral by 2017. This tool kit will help schools to work towards this goal. These folders also contain walk-through audits for water, waste and energy. This encourages students to participate in audits and contribute to the development and implementation of an action plan to address problem areas. In order to include the entire school in this process of change, a school grounds and biodiversity survey encourages all schools to take part in the program.

Schools are encouraged to protect their existing flora and fauna. These surveys will allow everyone to have a say about what they like and do not like about their school grounds. The Australian sustainable schools initiative in the ACT has developed a database to record the data from each school audit. The data from the audits will provide invaluable information on the consumption levels of water, waste and energy in ACT schools. As new reduction strategies are implemented, these schools can use the information to monitor their progress.

The environmental footprint of the ACT will have a better chance of decreasing with the implementation of this tool kit, and I recommend this excellent resource to all ACT schools.

Federal election

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (6.07): I want to talk about the profound change that has occurred in Canberra over the last week or so. It is very interesting that, although nothing changed in terms of Canberra's political representation, and we still have the same members sitting in the House of Representatives, and most likely in the Senate—although the vote on the second Senate seat has not been called yet, it does look as though it will be retained by the Liberals—the impact of the change of the federal government is most profoundly felt in Canberra, more than anywhere else in Australia.

The reason that this happens, as we all know, although we are not hearing it talked about, is the public discourse focusing on whether the Prime Minister will live in the Lodge—or even whether it should be called the Lodge, because that makes it sound like a fishing hut somewhere on the lake. Of course, it is on a lake somewhere. There is also the question of whether we should be building a new Lodge, or residence, and whether that can be justified by making it more energy efficient.

So we are having those debates. But the most profound change involves a large number of people in the public service and those who used to work at Parliament House—the whole army of advisers that ministers have developed around them over the last decade and a half. We will see a changeover at the gates. We will see the Liberal and coalition advisers being forced to look for jobs elsewhere. Many people at the top of the public service will either choose to leave or be asked to leave by the incoming Rudd government.

I think that augurs well for Canberra. There has been talk about public service cuts, but we are aware that, when candidates speak in those terms, they are usually talking to the rest of Australia. It is foolish to do so in the ACT, where such news has very loud reverberations, but apparently it works outside the ACT. If there are cuts, we can expect, from the experience of other governments, that the cuts may be made but over time people will be replaced. The Howard government promised cuts but we know that by the end of its time there was a very swollen public service. Indeed, that was to the ACT's disadvantage, in a way, because we continually lose public servants to the commonwealth, and that is not necessarily a good thing for us.

I think we are looking at brighter days. I heard the term used, and I have used it myself, of the lifting of a cloud upon Canberra. I believe there has been a whole change in public discourse since the election. It is very interesting that the government and coalition were so pumped up with money for advertising and spin that they somehow or other inflated ministers and the Prime Minister so that they looked larger than they were. After the election they were very much diminished in size, without all the money for spin. It was a very sad coalition indeed. It became very obvious that it was a group of people electing a leader when they had very low morale.

It will become more obvious if Rudd enforces the changes to the freedom of information laws which he is talking about doing. Perhaps some of the stories will be revealed when some of the papers and documents come to light. I have just been reading in my copy of the *Public Sector Informant* that some of the things that will come to light involve especially the former Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. No doubt there are other departments about which some nasty secrets may be revealed. We will find out how much the previous government was held together by spin and perhaps by fear, to a large extent.

We can hope that Prime Minister Rudd keeps his promises. Perhaps Labor people are more optimistic about that than Green people. He will need to act very strongly on climate change. Perhaps he can save a few forests while he is at it. I would like to see more investment in our national infrastructure, such as railways and housing.

Death of Alma De Smet

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra—Leader of the Opposition) (6.12): I rise today to pay tribute to a Canberran who was 98 years old when she died on Friday, 9 November this year. Alma Veronica De Smet was born at Duntroon Station on 1 September 1908. Her parents were married in 1893 and they had nine children, with two dying in childbirth.

Alma grew up with six brothers, three of whom were older and three younger. She was the only girl in the family. She lived at the historic schoolhouse at St John's Church in Reid, with two of her older brothers attending school there. Her father worked at Duntroon Station at the time of her birth and the family remained there even after the commonwealth government acquired the land for the establishment of the Royal Military College in 1911.

She commenced school when she was five, at Duntroon public school, and recalled it being a thriving institution with two teachers. There were kids there from throughout the district. At the age of eight she went to St Gregory's convent school in Queanbeyan, attending as a boarder during the week and coming home to the family on weekends. After that she attended Our Lady of Mercy in Goulburn until the age of 17. She then stayed at home until she was aged about 29, when she got her first job.

She had great memories of growing up in Canberra in the early days. She had fond memories of Duntroon; there was a great mix of both military and civilian families. She had special friends there, including the family who ran the now historic Duntroon dairy.

The De Smet family remained at Duntroon until the Depression, when the RMC was transferred to Victoria Barracks. Alma's father, Albert, had retired by this stage and he managed to get lodgings at a Gungahlin property owned by a Dr Watson. He did odd jobs there in exchange for accommodation.

In 1940 her unmarried brother Charles became the lessee of a government house in Suttor Street, Ainslie, and she moved in there. She recalled that her weekly rent then was £1 5s 6d. She lived there for many years. She got her first job in accounts in what was later McGurr's butchers in the Sydney Building in Civic. She remained there for a year and then got a job in the Government Printing Office in Kingston, still in accounts. At this time her mother, unfortunately, contracted Parkinson's disease and she became a full-time carer at home. The house in Ainslie had many sad memories for Alma. Her father unexpectedly died in 1944; her mother was totally bedridden for many years and died in November 1949; and her brother Charles died at home in 1965.

She rejoined the workforce in 1954 as a clerical assistant in the transport section of the Department of the Interior at Kingston. She had at some stage rented a house in Ross Road, Queanbeyan, and she always had a great garden, with manicured lawns and an aviary that housed a great variety of birds. She spent many years in Queanbeyan, and it was not until she reached her retirement in 1973 that she came to live in Canberra. She moved into a flat in Kanangra Court in Reid. At this stage Tony was her only remaining brother, as Jules had died in 1970, Eugene in 1971, Arthur in 1972, Nairn in 1966 and Charles in 1965.

Her life there was enjoyable. She was close to her beloved Civic and loved David Jones and Fletcher Jones. She had public transport near to her door, her church was within walking distance, and with her ever-present charm and her retentive memory she was always ready for any inquiring mind that wanted to bone up on how things were in the early days of Canberra. Alma provided a tremendous amount of

information to those looking into their family history who sought information on what it was like in the early days, and she had been given due recognition regarding other matters of local historical inquiry.

She lived for 31 years at Kanangra Court. She was 65 when she moved there. Her remaining sibling, Tony, died on 2 February 1997. Crippling arthritis took its toll in her later years. She moved into nursing care and in August 2004 she went to Calvary Hospital for approximately five months and then went to Brindabella Gardens in Curtin, where she remained and was cared for by the wonderful staff there, and attended to by relatives and friends until she died, aged 98, on Friday, 9 November 2007.

She had a very large extended family who owed a great deal to her and they remember her for her inquiry, her interest, her love and her legacy of where it all began. The De Smets are a family that came to Canberra in the 1830s. Alma was an amazing long-term resident—one of our early pioneers from an early pioneering family who lived a life within our community and is part of our history. She almost made the ton. I met her on a number of occasions. She had her wits about her pretty well right until the time she moved into Brindabella Gardens. I pay tribute to one of our great early citizens who lived all her life in this region and is part of our history.

Gay and lesbian community Civil partnerships

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, Minister for Industrial Relations) (6.17): I take the opportunity to talk a little bit about the completion of the 2007 SpringOut festival, Canberra's gay and lesbian festival, that wound up on the weekend. It was another very successful event.

I had the opportunity in late November to present SpringOut pride awards to three members of Canberra's gay and lesbian community who have made a significant contribution to community life over a number of years. The first was to Mark Wittich, who has been president of the Gay and Lesbian Tennis Club, which is the organisation that, in addition to offering tennis every Monday night at Barton, has been instrumental in organising the bush dance, which is probably the biggest event on the Canberra gay and lesbian calendar—an event that attracts more than 1,000 people to the Yarralumla Woolshed. It is quite a night, and provides an opportunity for those of us who in years past might have learnt some square dancing at high school to put it into some practice. I cannot think of many other social occasions over the years where I have ever had to square dance, but there we go.

We also recognised Abby Jane, who has been instrumental in the establishment of the Transgender Network in the ACT and who is also a regular host of Q radio on 2XX Community FM, and Leah Mottram, who has been on the organising committee of the SpringOut festival for at least three or four years. I had the opportunity prior to being in this place of working with Leah on that committee. She is about to head overseas but she has given a number of years of commitment to the organisation of the festival. It contains amongst its events the bush dance and a film festival.

The AIDS Action Council hosts a fair day in the grounds of Westlund House each year that attracts between 500 and 1,000 people over the course of the day. A range of government organisations participate—the AFP, amongst others—who set up stalls and provide information over the course of the day. It is an important thing for the gay and lesbian community in Canberra that there is an opportunity through this festival to come together and provide a setting and environment outside some other aspects of life in which to get together. I thank this year's organising committee, particularly Emily Downie, who is also heading overseas. There will be a couple of positions that are very difficult to fill in organising the event for 2008.

Whilst we are on the theme of gay and lesbian issues, it was interesting that the incoming leader of the federal Liberal Party, Brendan Nelson, took the opportunity in some of his opening remarks to signal a change in direction for the federal Liberal Party in relation to a number of very important matters of federal law that the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission highlighted in their recent report. It is pleasing to see that, in addition to the range of other areas that have now been confined to the political dustbin of history, the federal Liberal Party is going to move forward on these important issues. I look forward to the incoming Rudd Labor government addressing the 58 areas of legislation in the federal arena that are discriminatory.

I am very pleased that the Attorney-General here, Mr Corbell, has indicated a desire to move ahead with the civil partnerships bill. These are important reforms for the ACT and for the nation. There is certainly a renewed sense of optimism within the gay and lesbian community in Canberra and Australia at the change of government. I hope that the local Liberal Party will take their lead from the federal Liberal Party in the change of direction that the federal leader has indicated.

I have to admit disappointment at one of Mr Smyth's remarks across the chamber during question time today—that civil union was not an important issue at all for the ACT. That was a bit disappointing and that little interjection was unfortunate. It is disappointing that those who march in Mardi Gras with the Canberra gay and lesbian community do not back that up with their votes in this place. I have had the opportunity to march in the parade and to attend it on a number of occasions. Most importantly, as a representative in this place, I vote for what I believe in.

Tharwa bridge

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (6.22): I would like to congratulate Mr Pratt on his stunning success in bringing John Hargreaves and the Stanhope Labor government to heel over the Tharwa bridge. For those who are not aware of it, at 5.22 this afternoon the Chief Minister, the minister with responsibility for heritage, released a press release saying that the government will now consult. So, 12 months after the decision, the government will now consult with the community about the future of the Tharwa bridge. I think it is a vindication of all those Tharwa residents who have campaigned long and hard. I refer particularly to Mr Pratt, and the hundreds if not thousands of people that have signed Mr Pratt's petition calling on the government to save the Tharwa bridge.

It is interesting that the Chief Minister's press release refers to "recent advice that it may be possible to rebuild the bridge while it is open to traffic". How come that advice has only suddenly appeared at this late hour? There has been advice for some time now that this could be done. If the Chief Minister were serious about it, the Heritage Council actually said at the start of this process that the best outcome for the bridge was for it to be rebuilt. You have to wonder what has dragged the government kicking and screaming to this position. As I said in the debate on the second appropriation bill, it looks like it is another fine mess you have got into, John Hargreaves, and yet again his colleagues are digging him out of it.

It is interesting that the government are going down the consultation route and will make their decision based on a random phone survey of 1,000 people to be conducted by an external market research company starting next week. I guess that could be characterised as the "How badly do we suck in the electorate" survey, because the government know that this is biting at them. I refer in particular to the three Labor members in Brindabella, Mr Hargreaves, Mr Gentleman and Ms MacDonald, who have betrayed their electorate on this issue. They have been mute; they have done nothing to try and save the bridge at Tharwa and to help the people in the community in Tharwa. Mr Hargreaves should come down and apologise to the people of Tharwa for the angst that he has put them through. It is interesting that, in part of the backflip from the Chief Minister, he says:

The Government is committed to preserving the built heritage of our region ...

Well, that is now; it was not the case last year. The sentence in the press release goes on to say:

... and few examples of this heritage are more iconic or have a higher value than the Tharwa Bridge.

Apparently, that high value or iconic status did not exist 12 months ago, when they shut the bridge and decided to try and rebuild it. So there are a number of inconsistencies in the government's approach. I think the most glaring inconsistency comes in the last dot point in the last paragraph on the first page, where it says that one of the options to be canvassed is—and I quote:

... proceeding with the decision to build a new bridge. This option would almost certainly result in the demolition of the old bridge ...

That is not something that Mr Hargreaves has made at all clear to people in this place. I will check the *Hansard*, because Mr Pratt asked this question and all we got was prevarication from the minister. The shame of this is that it has happened at all. For the last 14 months this bridge has been closed when, as Mr Pratt has said in this place on many occasions over that period of time, he has had advice that the bridge could remain open, that with small amounts of money it could be made safe, and that with less money than was required to build the new bridge, which as we now know would almost certainly result in the demolition of the old bridge, it could have remained open. The inconvenience that the people of Tharwa had been put through could have been avoided.

This is the saddest indictment of the Stanhope government's processes in putting together initiatives when we see that it is only through constant pressure from people like Mr Pratt that it is reassessed. On the second page of the press release, the government says that "the window of opportunity for rethinking the decision to build the new bridge is small". It goes on to say: "Preserving our heritage has its own intrinsic value." If it does, what are we doing about it? Why is it that, at this late point in time, we are only now looking at all the data? Why wasn't all the data canvassed before this happened? The press release goes on to say:

Fully rebuilding the bridge could take between two and three years, because of potential issues with sourcing specialist timber and hiring the highly skilled and specialised workers needed.

Why wasn't information available to the cabinet when they made this decision, and why wasn't this work done before the government took the decision? It is characteristic of so many of the decisions that Mr Hargreaves has made. With respect to closing the Griffith library, it was a matter of saying, "We don't want to listen to you, we know you don't like the decision." Closing shopfronts and the Grassby statue were examples of whimsy by Mr Hargreaves, who has proved himself to be an appalling minister for urban services because he does not take due care, he does not give due regard and he clearly does not follow the process properly in trying to inform his cabinet colleagues of what should happen. (*Time expired.*)

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.28 pm.