



Debates

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Wednesday, 6 August 2008

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Wednesday, 6 August 2008

The Assembly met at 10.30 am.

(Quorum formed.)

MR SPEAKER (Mr Berry) took the chair and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

MR SPEAKER: Members, particularly Dr Foskey, I draw your attention to standing order 29, which reads as follows:

A Member shall not be permitted to withdraw from the Chamber within 5 minutes after the time appointed for the meeting of the Assembly unless a quorum is obtained.

To be here and go when a quorum is being called is in conflict with that standing order.

Matter of public importance Speaker's ruling

MR SPEAKER: I draw members' attention to a lodgement by Ms Porter this morning of an MPI concerning building a better city and a stronger community. *House of Representatives Practice*, 5th edition, stipulates, at page 578, that a matter submitted "must be definite—that is single, specific and precise in its wording". It also requires the Speaker "to have regard to the extent to which the matter concerns the administrative responsibilities of Ministers". As the MPI initially submitted by Ms Porter did not meet these requirements, I have asked Ms Porter to amend her MPI so that it conforms to the provisions set out in *House of Representatives Practice*, 5th edition. A supplementary daily program is being circulated with the amended MPI.

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Planning—Gungahlin

By Mrs Burke, from 217 residents:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory.

The petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly the remarkable lack of commonsense in planning and distinct lack of effective consultation from ACT agencies, and the Stanhope Government, toward Gungahlin businesses. This petition also concedes that the ACT Government has taken far too long to secure both Federal and Territory Government Agencies to the Gungahlin area.

Your Petitioners therefore request that the Assembly strongly consider the effect this inaction has had, and continues to have, on Gungahlin businesses and requests it to be urgently addressed.

Parking—Nicholls

By **Mr Stefaniak**, from 633 residents:

To the Speaker and the Members of the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory.

The petition of certain members of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly the parking difficulties experienced by shopkeepers, staff and customers at the Nicholls shops; in particular the narrow carriageway in the car park which leads to frequent accidents, the lack of short-stay parking bays (the ones that were there were filled in recently) and the inadequate number of car-parking spaces. Your petitioners therefore request the Assembly to redress this situation and improve parking at the Nicholls shops.

The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petitions would be recorded in Hansard and a copy of each referred to the appropriate minister, the petitions were received.

Rates (Fire and Emergency Services Levy Repeal) Amendment Bill 2008

Debate resumed from 2 April 2008, on motion by **Mr Mulcahy**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (10.35): Mr Speaker, I would have assumed that the government might like to speak about this, but clearly the Treasurer is not—

Mr Mulcahy: Obviously tax reform is not a big item on the agenda.

MR SMYTH: It is not a big item for the government at this time. That is probably a bit of a shame, because it is an important issue.

The fire and emergency services levy fails all the tests of what a good tax should comprise, if there is such a thing as a good tax. A taxing policy should satisfy three key principles. It should not detract from economic efficiency; that is, it should not distort decisions made by individuals and businesses. It should be fair and equitable. And it should be simple: it should be simple to administer and it should have the least possible cost of compliance.

It is inevitable that there will have to be a balance achieved between each of these principles, but they are a sound starting point. This levy—this taxing measure, and, let us face it, that is what it is—is not efficient, not equitable and not simple. This tax is regressive. It probably ranks as one of the worst taxes that have been implemented by

this government. As a taxing policy it is a failure—another Stanhope government taxing failure.

It is pertinent to consider taxing policy in the context of the ACT's budgetary situation. The ACT has been the recipient of a revenue boom in recent years. There has been a veritable flood of revenue into the coffers of the ACT government, a boom amounting to more than \$1.6 billion that it did not expect to receive. Unfortunately for the Canberra community, the Stanhope government has failed again. It has failed to use this revenue boom effectively, while it has foisted inefficient, unfair and complex taxing proposals on the territory's citizens and businesses.

This taxing policy also fails the test that the Chief Minister set out when he was the Leader of the Opposition in May 2000 as he complained about the budget that had been brought down by the then Chief Minister, Kate Carnell. He said, "We need a government that will focus on ... low tax rates." Did you miss that statement, that commitment? "We need a government that will focus on ... low tax rates." That was Mr Stanhope, then the Leader of the Opposition, on 26 May 2000.

The Stanhope government has not only failed the very test that the current Chief Minister set out but acted in precisely the opposite way. It has attempted to introduce a raft of new and expanded taxing measures during its term in office. Fortunately, a number of these have failed. Unfortunately, some got through.

Let us consider some of the failed Stanhope government's tax proposals. Firstly, we had the failed rating policy. The government proposed a complete change to the way in which general rates are determined in the ACT. The then Treasurer said that it sounded like a good idea at the time. Unfortunately, this proposal was not good policy. Fortunately, the silly proposal was defeated in the Assembly.

Then we had the bushfire tax. The government proposed to impose a fixed levy on all rateable properties for two years. This knee-jerk proposal was abandoned as totally unnecessary.

Then we had the loan security duty. This policy would have imposed a duty on secured loans with a value of more than \$1 million, raising only \$500,000 at a time. This proposal was abandoned after the government realised belatedly that all the other states were abolishing this duty.

We had the pay parking in Barton. This proposal had to be abandoned when the Stanhope government finally realised that the ACT government could not introduce this taxing measure. Then we had the parking space tax. This measure was proposed in the 2003-04 budget, to apply in four city centres in Canberra, raising approximately \$2½ million. This poorly planned and developed policy was finally abandoned—

Mr Corbell: Point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Corbell.

Mr Corbell: Mr Smyth has been speaking for nearly five minutes now and he is yet to actually address this levy and the bill that deals with the abolition of this levy. He is

citing a whole range of other matters but he is yet to say what his commentary is on this levy bill per se.

MR SPEAKER: Remain relevant, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: As I said, Mr Speaker, the government has put in place a number of levies and taxes that have been inefficient and poorly thought out and that have had a detrimental effect on the community. I am not just highlighting it. If he wants specific examples on the failure of the fire and emergency services levy, it is quite clear. I would like to read from the pre-budget submission from the Property Council. Let me read some of what they say:

In some cases in the ACT, rates have increased on commercial properties by 60 per cent—

that is fair and equitable: 60 per cent!—

partly as a result of the imposition of the FESL—

the fire and emergency services levy—

the St. George Centre for example, had its rates bill increase in 2006-07 by \$24,000 from its base of \$45,000 ...

Did they get any extra service for that? Did they get better service for that? The answer is no. That was an increase of 53 per cent. What about the AMP building, for instance? The document says:

The AMP Building had its rates bill increase—

because of the fire and emergency services levy—

in the same year by 55 per cent.

Fifty-five per cent, Mr Speaker! Remember that on 26 May 2000 the Chief Minister said, “We need ... low tax rates.” It is worth noting that the 2006-07 budget claimed an average commercial rate increase of \$442. You have to look at these things and truly question the ability of this government to deliver tax reform at all.

The Property Council submission goes on to say:

On a reasonably modest commercial property with an unimproved value of \$3m, the FESL—

fire and emergency services levy—

alone would represent an additional cost of \$14,518 for which there is no offset or benefit.

What happens when you go through the taxes and the levies that this government has put in place? For instance, there is the city heart levy, which failed and took several

years to be reworked and come back. There was a motor vehicle tax: in May 2006 the Stanhope government sought to impose stamp duty on motor vehicles based on the list price of a vehicle. Following fierce opposition from the opposition and the industry, the government became aware of the stupidity of this proposition and it was withdrawn.

Then we have the utility land use permit. In June 2006, the Stanhope government sought to impose a utility land use permit as a charge on utilities where they occupied unleased territory land. Following concerns about how this tax would be applied, this permit proposal became a network facilities tax, after consulting with utility companies, such that it would impose a lower administrative burden for the utilities. So we have a backflip characterised as consultation. Where have we heard that before?

Then we have the fiasco with the outdoor cafe fees. In November 2007—it is great to see the minister here—

Mr Corbell: Point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Corbell.

MR SMYTH: we had the embarrassing error in the calculation—

MR SPEAKER: Stop the clock, please.

Mr Corbell: This bill is not about a whole range of other taxes and charges; it is about the Rates (Fire and Emergency Services Levy Repeal) Amendment Bill. Mr Speaker, you have already drawn Mr Smyth's attention to the fact that he must remain relevant in this debate on the matter before the Assembly, which is the proposed repeal of the Rates (Fire and Emergency Services Levy Repeal) Amendment Bill. He has ignored your direction, Mr Speaker, and I ask you again to require him to remain relevant.

MR SPEAKER: Remain relevant, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Mr Speaker, I am entirely relevant; it is a bill about repealing a tax. But I will read it again, because obviously Mr Corbell missed it.

MR SPEAKER: It is a bill about the repeal of the fire and emergency services levy, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: I just spoke about this. Let me read it again. Obviously Mr Corbell has problems with his hearing, so I will read it again. Let me read it more slowly, perhaps. Perhaps I should read more slowly for Mr Corbell. Let me read an extract from the Property Council of Australia submission re the fire and emergency services levy. Let me read again. In some cases in the ACT, Mr Corbell, you and your cabinet have increased rates on commercial property by 60 per cent, partly as a result of the imposition of the fire and emergency services levy.

Mr Corbell: At least you are being relevant now.

MR SMYTH: I was relevant when I read this two minutes ago, Mr Corbell, but for your benefit I will be quite happy to read it again. It says:

The St. George Centre for example, had its rates bill increase in the 2006-07 year by \$24,000 from its base of \$45,000 ...

That is an increase of 53 per cent, Mr Corbell. Yes, I would be embarrassed too. I would pull that paper much closer to your face and hide your embarrassment, Mr Corbell. I will keep reading slowly:

The AMP Building had its rates bill increase in the same year by 55 per cent. It is worth noting that the 2006-07 Budget claimed an average commercial rate increase of \$442.

I would be embarrassed about that too, Mr Corbell.

Mr Corbell: You still haven't told us how you are going to vote on the bill.

MR SMYTH: I am sure you do not want to hear your record, but I will keep reminding you of your record. It goes on, Mr Corbell; you clearly missed it. It says:

On a reasonably modest commercial property with an unimproved value of \$3m the FESL alone would represent an additional cost of \$14,518 for which there is no offset or benefit.

There is no extra service, Mr Corbell; people got nothing except a slug from a government that, as I pointed out, promised on 26 May 2000 to be a low-taxing government. I know that Mr Corbell does not like his record and I know that he does not like the fact that—

Mr Corbell: I just want to know how you are going to vote on it.

MR SMYTH: You will have to listen, Mr Corbell; you will have to be patient. You will have to be patient, Mr Corbell.

Mr Corbell: You have got halfway through.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Corbell!

MR SMYTH: I know you are embarrassed. Then we had the outdoor cafe fees. In November 2007, we had Mr Hargreaves with an embarrassing error. He laughed it off in the Assembly, but a couple of days later he had to correct it.

We could go on, Mr Speaker. I will not go into details about the taxes that were meant to be repealed after the goods and services tax was introduced, which this government has failed to do. Sufficient to say that the Stanhope government, along with all other Labor state and territory governments, had to be dragged kicking and screaming to the point where they all agreed to abolish a number of nuisance taxes or transaction taxes. I note that the repeal timetables for these states and territories have been stretched out

for as long as possible at the same time as they enjoyed the largesse that is being reaped from the GST.

MR SPEAKER: How does that relate to the fire and emergency services levy?

MR SMYTH: The arguments against the fire and emergency services levy are extensive. At the same time, however, it is important that rash decisions that have longstanding consequences for the budget of the ACT are not made without having a complete understanding of the context and the consequences of policy decisions.

The reality of the situation that the Canberra community now faces is that this levy, this tax, has been introduced. It is now a part of the ACT government's revenue mix. It is essential, therefore, that any decision to repeal this tax is made in the context of having a thorough understanding of the ACT's current and prospective revenue situation. It would not be appropriate to remove such a revenue stream without being aware of the consequences of such a decision.

In the first instance, we need to have a detailed insight into not only the latest financial situation in the ACT budget but also the prospects for revenue collections. We will receive the answer to the first of these questions very soon with the tabling of the latest quarterly financial report. We will receive the answer to the second question when the pre-budget election analysis is presented.

At that point, the Liberal Party will be in a position to release its tax policy in the lead-up to the October election.

Mr Corbell: Where's Steve Pratt? Bring him down.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Corbell, come to order, please.

MR SMYTH: The opposition is disappointed that the Stanhope government introduced this taxing measure. It is neither appropriate nor responsible. However, for the opposition to support the repeal of this tax at this time we would need to put in context and deliver our full tax policy. We will do that on our own timetable, not in debate on a bill presented by somebody who shortly will not be with us in the Assembly, for his benefit.

This tax should be repealed as soon as it can be. Any decisions today will not repeal it, because the government is going to vote against it. But this repeal decision must be taken in a responsible manner, taking into account the budgetary circumstances of the ACT. We in the Liberal Party will make decisions about revenue measures in the proper context in the lead-up to the election and the context of the state of the territory we find after the election. I repeat: it would be irresponsible of me to go beyond that position at this time.

The Stanhope government has a hopeless record with respect to taxation policy in this territory. The fire and emergency services levy is the latest of a long line of poor decisions from the Stanhope government about taxation policies. Look, the Treasurer turns up. It is fantastic: the Treasurer has finally arrived. Fortunately, some of these very poor taxation proposals have not proceeded. Unfortunately, the sloppiness

implicit in majority government means that more recent tax proposals have gotten through and have affected the public.

The fire and emergency services levy fails all the tests of good policy. It fails all the tests of good taxes. This levy should be repealed as soon as it is possible to do so in a responsible manner, in a reasonable manner. We will do that. I note that the Canberra Business Council, in its taxation pre-budget submission, says:

... phase out or reduce over time the Fire and Emergency Services Levy as a reasonable and realistic tax relief measure ...

That is what we will do. We will phase it out over time when we are able to. This levy should be repealed as soon as it is possible to do so in a reasonable and responsible manner. We in government will do all we can to remove this and other taxes as appropriate. At this time, however, we will not be supporting the bill.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (10.50): From what I am hearing in the chamber, and given the noise I am hearing from the left-hand side, it looks as though the government will be supporting this piece of legislation. I think that is what I am hearing, but we will see later on, I guess.

Mr Mulcahy asked me yesterday whether I would be supporting this bill, and at the time I said, "Well, of course, intuitively it seems attractive." In fact, when you look at it, it is not a particularly good idea to repeal the legislation. The Greens are not convinced that the levy, of itself, is unfair and inequitable. Of course, we have received lots of complaints about it, just as the Liberals have.

It is interesting to hear the argument regarding inequity being driven by the Property Council and other commercial ratepayers. But it would seem to me that, at this stage, if anyone is doing well in the ACT economy, it is the commercial property owners. On the whole, these are the ones who are best able to afford to pay more tax. Whether it should be this tax or not is another question.

I certainly supported Mr Mulcahy's last unpopular tax excision exercise because the impost that he was then seeking to remove, the utilities and network facilities tax, was inequitable, and there was considerable agitation at the community sector level for it to be removed because of that inequity. At the time, the rumour was that the ACT government wanted to do the excision itself as part of a more humane vote-winning budget, but in fact it has not done so yet. Maybe we will have an election announcement soon that will offer the Canberra people a more equitable tax system with more expansive concession schemes in place, and even a decision to drop that tax.

This levy, the fire and emergency services levy, is part of our rate structure, just as rubbish and recycling removal and roads maintenance are. If we want the government to provide fire and emergency services, the funds have to come from somewhere. We all know that after the 2003 bushfires there have been more demands than ever on our emergency services. A lot of money has gone in to improving their ability to respond, and this costs taxpayers.

This year, we are expecting more than \$23 million from this levy. If we agreed to scrap that levy today, where would those funds to cover these services come from? Each household will be charged \$91.20 in this financial year, which does not seem too much to pay if we get a good service. There is a pensioner rebate of 50 per cent. Perhaps there is room to discuss other concession options, as it is not only pensioners who are doing it tough. As David Tennant said on Triple 6 this morning, it is now the moderate income earners who are contacting Care Financial Services and who are now doing it tough as well.

However, the levy on commercial property owners is obviously the largest, which is why Mr Mulcahy has taken up the issue. An average levy on property owners is around \$2,150 this year. Obviously, the larger property owners will have a far more substantial levy than this. But isn't this how it should work in a progressive tax system? These property owners are also getting far higher returns on their capital than individual house owners.

More broadly, as to whether this levy is the right one to have, at the moment it adds \$22 million to the ACT government coffers, and that needs to be considered within this debate. Mr Mulcahy may have a clear view of the \$22 million of expenditure that he would like to cut, but in the context of a city that needs to adjust quickly and profoundly to a low carbon, low water use, low energy use, fair and equitable economy, I am not able to see where those savings would come from.

Of course, one of the irritating elements of this levy, and why I believe Mr Mulcahy does have a point, is that it does not directly go to pay for our fire and emergency services. When property owners, ratepayers, pay this tax, they just see it going in to the black pool of government revenue. They do not look at the annual reports of JACS to see whether emergency services spend that exact amount of \$22 million. I believe people would feel a lot more comfortable about paying these kinds of taxes if they could see that the money was spent in the area that the tax is claimed in.

The ACT government has a very strong resistance to hypothecating revenue. That is definitely the case when it comes to water, where money raised by water does not go in to water. Therefore, people complain, rightly, about the costs of water when they do not necessarily see—even though it could be occurring—that the amount they are paying for water is going into improving the quality of our catchments, or improving our water supply in other ways that are not environmentally damaging.

It really is time for the government to get over itself on this issue of avoiding hypothecation. I know it likes to have discretion in its expenditure, but things like emergency services and water will always require a substantial part of our income, and it is time that we labelled that.

The extraordinary ongoing costs relating to the unused emergency services centre at the airport make us all concerned that the government has not got the right handle on how it is spending this revenue, even if it were to be hypothecated. I would like to see an equity comb drawn over this government's revenue measures. Following that, I would support the reduction or elimination of some measures and an increase in others. So while my first instinct was to have a good look at this bill and to lend it my

support if I could, in the absence of a more coherent and overarching approach that is consistent with the Greens' priorities of social equity and environmental protection, I cannot support the simple withdrawal of the tax.

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) (10.57): The Rates (Fire and Emergency Services Levy Repeal) Amendment Bill 2008 seeks to repeal the Rates Amendment Act 2006. In effect, the bill seeks to abolish the fire and emergency services levy.

The government will not be supporting the proposal. The levy was introduced in the 2006-07 budget to offset just some of the costs of fire and emergency services. The levy is a broad-based and efficient tax that has been well bedded with a relatively low administrative burden for both the government and the taxpayers. The levy provides a significant level of revenue—around \$23.2 million forecast in 2008-09. Abolishing this tax would require a corresponding reduction in expenditure, a corresponding increase in a different tax, or a reduction in the territory's operating result. No proposal accompanies this bill that would restore the revenue position or the budget position.

The revenue from this levy is used to fund the provision of emergency services within the ACT. The government has undertaken significant investment in enhancing the response capability of emergency services. Since 2001, the government has increased expenditure on fire and emergency services by around 120 per cent.

It is important to note that all other jurisdictions, with the exception of the Northern Territory, impose a form of fire and/or emergency services levy. In general, the levies recover approximately 75 per cent of the cost of fire brigade services. For the ACT, the revenue of around \$23.2 million should be put in the perspective of the total cost of emergency services in the ACT, forecast at \$86.7 million in 2008-09. New South Wales and Victoria raise their levies through insurance companies, while all other states raise their levies from property owners. The ACT has adopted a property-based levy as it is more equitable when compared with an insurance-based levy. An insurance-based levy can also create a disincentive against insuring.

Contrary to claims by some sections of the property industry, the fire and emergency services levy is an efficient and equitable source of revenue. As a property-based levy, it does not create the disincentives against insuring that are inherent under the New South Wales and Victorian approaches of raising levies through insurance companies.

The government has also been mindful of the impact of the levy on low-income households and has provided a concession on the levy for such households. Property owners who receive a Centrelink or Department of Veterans' Affairs pension are eligible for a rebate of 50 per cent of the levy. The levy is distributed equally between the commercial and residential sectors. It is levied at a flat rate for residential properties and is based on the unimproved land value for commercial properties.

Charging residential and rural properties a fixed levy reflects the fact that a certain level of capability to respond needs to be maintained irrespective of the size of the

dwelling. Charging commercial properties based on the unimproved value of land is a reasonable proxy for risk associated with the nature of activity and the weight of response and capability required to respond to any incident.

The government has invested considerable effort in returning the ACT public finances to a sound footing. As a result of these efforts, the government is now in a position to invest in the ACT's future and to increase the productive capacity of the economy. Unfortunately—and we see it again today—the opposition seems committed to turning back the clock and putting the public finances at risk, based on mistaken perceptions about taxation and service levels. Today, of course, they have had the classic two bob each way. They have foreshadowed—

Mr Smyth: You should have modified your speech before you came in, Jon.

MR STANHOPE: No, the Liberal Party have actually done the classic thing here, by saying: “We won't support it now because there's an election in a few weeks time, but after the election, if we happen to win, we might actually agree to abolish it. But we won't abolish it just now, because if we do, we know that the deficit we've already promised to create of around \$200 million a year will grow by another \$23 million.”

Mr Mulcahy: Sounds like one of those L-A-W promises, doesn't it?

MR STANHOPE: It does. That is exactly right. This is a Liberal Party L-A-W promise.

Dr Foskey: Hang on, this is Mr Mulcahy's bill, not the Liberal Party's.

MR STANHOPE: But it is the position of the Liberal Party that is interesting. Mr Mulcahy has been philosophically true; he has adopted the position that the Liberal Party actually had adopted when he was its shadow Treasurer, which now, since his departure, has been abandoned, just as it has abandoned every other principle.

But it is a classic position by the Liberal Party now: “Just now, we'd like to be able to spend the \$23 million that the fire levy raises, in the context of our election promises, but once the election's over, if we win, of course, then we would be prepared to get rid of this \$23 million.” What a load of bollocks! It is another promise that they have absolutely no intention of keeping. We saw one yesterday. The only promise that we know the Liberal Party will keep after the upcoming election, if they do win, is the promise not to build a pool in Gungahlin. That is the only promise that the Liberal Party will make in this campaign that we know they will have the capacity to keep. They have promised not to build a pool in Gungahlin, and that is the one promise we know they will keep. This is their promise: “Oh look, we won't oppose the fire and emergency services levy now but we'll consider abolishing it if we do accidentally fall into government after the election.”

In the context of the debate around the proposed abolition of this levy, the claim is consistently made in this place, most particularly by the Liberal Party, that the ACT is already a high taxing jurisdiction. Of course, if the Liberal Party truly felt that, they would have supported this bill, so they obviously no longer feel that. They obviously no longer feel that, so we do not expect ever again to hear from the Liberal Party a

suggestion that the ACT is a high taxing jurisdiction because the Liberal Party are now out there endorsing the level of taxation.

Here was the opportunity to knock \$20 million off the taxation base and the Liberal Party said: "No, it's okay, we don't want to do that. We're happy, we're satisfied, we'll live with the taxation rate and the level of revenue effort here." I do thank the Liberal Party for their endorsement of the fire and emergency services levy, and I thank them for the implicit acknowledgement today that the government has got the level of taxation just about right. It has taken them four years to get there, but we do acknowledge and appreciate this last-minute acceptance by the Liberal Party that this government has got the level of taxation right in the ACT and that they are spurning Mr Mulcahy's attempts to knock \$20 million off the bottom of the budget.

As the Liberal Party quite rightly acknowledged today, the ACT is not a high taxing jurisdiction, and the Liberal Party is supported in its assessment that this is not a high taxing jurisdiction by data from the ABS and assessment by the Commonwealth Grants Commission, which indicate that ACT taxation levels are similar to those in the majority of other jurisdictions; we are pretty much in the middle of the pack. At the same time as delivering in the middle of the pack in relation to revenue effort, the government continues to deliver above-average levels of high-quality government services. The community continues to call for these services and the government continues to deliver them, while at the same time keeping its taxation effort in line with other jurisdictions and delivering prudent budget services.

In the context of government services and the overall taxation level, there is absolutely no case for the abolition of the fire and emergency services levy, as the Liberal Party have said today. But this is not the first time that we have seen a proposal such as this which we believe to be an irresponsible and untenable argument for the removal of the tax.

We ought to focus on the potential budget impacts of this proposal: \$99 million in revenue over four years given up from the abolition of the fire levy and \$73 million over four years from the abolition of the utilities network facilities tax. It would be interesting if we did throw in that proposal by the Liberal Party; even now they acknowledge it in foreshadowing that they will abolish the utilities network facilities tax; they have already undertaken to do that. They have also undertaken to include an untargeted stamp duty concession worth, I understand, from the opposition's calculations, \$122 million. So there is a commitment by the Liberal Party in this place over the four years to reduce stamp duty by \$122 million, to reduce the utilities network tax by \$73 million, totalling \$195 million. This, of course, is against a budget surplus forecast of \$244 million. This is interesting: in the context of the \$200 million or more of recurrent initiatives that will impact on the budget that the Liberals have already foreshadowed, in the promises they have made—

Mr Mulcahy: Don't forget the hospital beds.

MR STANHOPE: No, they are in there. This is just revenue forgone. The forecast budget surpluses over the next four years are \$244 million. The Liberal Party proposes, through its untargeted stamp duty concessions, to forgo \$122 million over the next four years. It proposes, through its decision to abolish the utilities network

facilities tax, to forgo \$73 million. That is \$195 million of budgeted forecast surpluses of \$244 million. As Mr Mulcahy interjects, Mr Smyth has promised 100 acute-care beds at a cost of \$63 million a year. So there you have it.

Mr Smyth: \$63 million now, is it? It just keeps going up.

MR STANHOPE: \$63 million a year. So you have \$195 million in revenue forgone, and, just on that one promise—100 acute-care beds at a cost of \$63 million—there you have it: \$250 million. So the Liberal Party's approach to fiscal responsibility is to forgo, over the four-year cycle, \$195 million in revenue and, just on that one promise of 100 acute-care beds, they have pushed their expenditure, just with those three initiatives, to \$250 million that will come off the bottom line over four years. Of course, we then start to count the other \$200 million or so of promises that we know have been made or will be made.

Mr Smyth: On a point of order Mr Speaker: if I am to be called back to a certain bill, perhaps the Chief Minister should be called back to a certain bill, even though it is entertaining.

MR SPEAKER: I trust that the Chief Minister is commenting on the bill and the contributions that have been made so far to the debate.

MR STANHOPE: I am; that is what I am doing. There will be more of this, of course, in future, but there you have it.

Mr Smyth: There will be more.

MR STANHOPE: There will be more; there certainly will. We have, in terms of the Liberal Party's contribution to this debate, an understanding of their attitude to the budget and to guarding the finances and the future of the ACT. We are beginning to see, slowly unravelling, the Liberal Party's capacity to manage the budget and finances of the ACT.

Mr Mulcahy: Lack of.

MR STANHOPE: A complete lack of capacity; it is just a fly-by-night frolic, and a matter of saying what you want. I think it is relevant, in any discussion around revenue and around the attitude of the alternative government, that we do seek to understand what the implications are of the attitude and the position that they take on these issues. I acknowledge that this is Mr Mulcahy's bill today, but the Liberal Party have indicated today that they are not supporting this bill; nor is the government.

The government is pleased to have Liberal Party support for this particular revenue measure. It is an acknowledgement by the Liberal Party that, on the fire and emergency services levy over the last two to three years, there has been nothing but hollow, shallow posturing for political purposes. When push comes to shove, the Liberal Party now acknowledge that the fire and emergency services levy is a good tax. It is a tax that they now support; it is a tax that they recognise is important to maintain the budget position of the territory. It is important in order to deliver the services that we deliver. I recall Mr Pratt, most particularly, making the explicit

promise in this place that the fire and emergency services levy would be abolished. I am not quite sure about the colourful statement or description he gave, but Mr Pratt's undertaking in this place was that you would see him drop dead before the Liberal Party would support the fire and emergency services levy, and that the first thing—

Mr Mulcahy: 17 October last year.

MR STANHOPE: It was on 17 October last year—Mr Mulcahy is across it—that Steve Pratt—

Mr Seselja: Give us your dissertation on it.

MR STANHOPE: Mr Mulcahy actually agrees with Mr Pratt in relation to this; it is just that Mr Mulcahy has the integrity to carry through with the position that the Liberal Party used to have. The Liberal Party opposed this for shallow, hollow political purposes at the time it was introduced. But now of course, as it faces the dim prospect of perhaps falling into government, this is a tax that the Liberal Party now adheres to like glue. The Liberal Party now supports the Labor Party's revenue measures. The Liberal Party is now endorsing a significant plank of the functional review. That is what we have got today. The Liberal Party is now endorsing one of the most significant outcomes of the functional review. (*Time expired.*)

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (11.13), in reply: Mr Speaker, I am glad to be speaking again about the importance of tax relief, since it is a subject that I believe is very important to the ACT economy and to the people of the ACT. Notwithstanding the publication of representational issues yesterday that showed that the shadow Treasurer had taken up four Treasury issues in the entire time he has been here, most people in Canberra are actually concerned about this issue, and that is reflected in the volume of communications I have directed to the Treasurer and Chief Minister on this issue. This is one that stands out as a matter of concern.

ACT residents are suffering under the weight of an oversized and high spending government that looks to the wallets of its citizens whenever a problem arises. We have heard a lot of talk lately about the cost of living, including the high cost of fuel and grocery prices. We have seen the two wonderful initiatives of the federal government—the fuel watch and now the grocery watch—so you actually now watch while you try and cope with the soaring costs that are providing a massive burden on the family budget. Nothing will change of course; you will still pay through the nose, but that seems to be the go on the hill.

We have heard a lot of talk on these issues. They are serious issues, and they are important to the day-to-day lives of ACT residents. Whilst the ACT government does not have control over those particular matters, there is one area of living expenses over which they have a great deal of control—that is, the rates of taxation and charges imposed on residents. While questions of economics and taxation are sometimes seen as rather dry issues, they do have a very real and very significant impact on people's lives.

For example, I recently had a constituent complain to me—one of many, and we refer them along—about the high cost of taxation and the difficulty she was having raising

her daughters and making ends meet in such an environment. My constituent was particularly annoyed because she felt that the high taxes she paid were not commensurate with the standard of services that she is receiving from the territory government. She will be delighted to hear the Liberal Party's endorsement of that high tax regime, and I will have much pleasure in writing to all of those people and letting them know that that is what they can expect if, under some bizarre circumstance, the Liberal Party ever secured the treasury bench.

Mr Stanhope: That is a bit cruel, Mr Mulcahy.

MR MULCAHY: I acknowledge Mr Stanhope's view that it is a bit cruel, but I think the electors are entitled to know this position, because we are already getting advice on the matter. In particular, though, this constituent was not satisfied with the education provided at the local government schools. She made a point of saying that, despite her difficult financial position, she was scraping together all the money she could in order to send her daughters to a private school. She complained that the high levels of taxation made it harder for her to make ends meet and to educate her children.

That it is just one typical example, albeit an anecdote, of the kind of stress that is being created by the government's philosophy of big government, high spending and substantial increases in taxation. I recognise what the Chief Minister says that we are not the highest taxing jurisdiction. I have sought further information through a question on notice, the answer to which has now been supplied, to ascertain whether the municipal issues are being taken into account and discounted in spending. Nevertheless, it provides little comfort to the people of Canberra to say that there are a couple of other states in Australia where they are paying more taxation. It does not help their household budgets.

In speaking on this bill on 2 April, I referred to the Chief Minister's remarks to the *Canberra Times* made after the December quarter financial report. He told the *Canberra Times* that he may wind back some of the tax increases imposed by his government and that there was capacity to do so within the budget. In that article the Chief Minister was quoted as saying that it was an option that we could realistically explore. This position was a much more softened and positive approach than the Chief Minister has previously taken when he has ruled out the possibility of tax cuts. Of course, it is certainly a softer position than his former Treasurer took when he told Canberra businesses that he intended to squeeze them until they bled.

We have seen the government take a more friendly approach in its taxation rhetoric as we draw closer to the election, but what we have not seen is any genuine attempt to provide tax relief. It is easy for the Treasurer to make tantalising comments to the electorate about how he will consider tax cuts and how there are options that may be explored. But all of this is for nothing, of course, if the government is unwilling to back up these comments with action to reduce the burden of taxation that is imposed on ACT residents.

Make no mistake: the government has obtained the surpluses in its budget for no other reason than because it is rapidly increasing taxes in this territory. The government has made only minor attempts to reduce its costs, obtain efficiencies or curtail excessive

expenditure. Instead, the government has paved over its legacy of spending and waste by simply taking more money from taxpayers. In fact, since coming to power in 2001, the government has increased ACT taxes, fees and fines by a massive 66.2 per cent, an increase of more than 7.5 per cent per annum and a rate of increase that blows out of the water the figures on the growth of CPI, the growth of WPI or the growth of the ACT economy.

I will just turn my observation to some of the remarks that were made by other speakers in this debate. Mr Smyth went into great detail to talk about the three key principles of taxation. One would have thought that was as a basis for supporting this bill, but, of course, in the final analysis, he went to water on this. He talked about the impact on members of the Property Council, whom he is happy to schmooze when it comes to trying to get people to contribute to campaign funds, but when it comes to the crunch he is not willing to permit any situation where any other party may secure credit for tax reform as I have been outlining consistently since I have been in this place.

He talked about the GST. Indeed that issue is important in my view and one about which, even as recently as this week, I have had constituents write to me. The government seems to have squandered the opportunity, or profited from the opportunity, afforded it by the introduction of GST. Rather than using it as an opportunity to lower the tax level on residents, it has made occasional repeals extended over a very long period of time and then often followed them up by substantially increasing existing taxes and charges or even introducing new ones. The windfall, in effect, has been pocketed, and the people have been double-dipped in terms of the taxation.

I do find the Liberal position absolutely extraordinary. It has to be the classic backflip that I have seen since coming into this place. It is interesting to see the position of the Liberal Party on this issue. It is very interesting to hear them speak against the bill, given their claimed philosophy of smaller government and good economic management. I find it staggering that the ACT Liberal Party, a party allegedly committed to smaller government and greater individual liberty, would fall into lockstep conformity with the government's high tax agenda. The Chief Minister is right to be delighted at the endorsement of his taxation policy by the supposed shadow Treasurer in this place.

In fairness to the opposition, their previous position on tax relief, including their positions on the utilities tax and the fire and emergency services levy, were both formulated at a time when I was the shadow Treasurer in that party, and that is when they adopted those policies. Perhaps I incorrectly believed that there were others in the parliamentary party of the ACT Liberals who felt that the government should stay out of people's wallets. In that position, I became well aware of the utter impossibility of getting any of my former colleagues in three years to ever suggest a genuine cut in government spending. At least I thought they would support tax cuts, but they could not come up with one single reduction in expenditure in three years. They all said, "I have got another idea for spending money."

The best example has to be Mr Smyth's mathematical equation on how tourism works. He said, "You know, every dollar you spend in tourism is \$5 in the ACT revenue." I

said, “Brendan, where do these economics come from?” “I will look it up,” he said. I said, “You don’t understand. They talk about a stimulatory effect on the economy when you spend a dollar. It might bring you \$4 to \$6—that is a view in the tourism industry—but it is has got absolutely no economic basis in terms of tax revenue whatsoever.” If that were the case, we would get out of every line of business and just go into tourism in this territory, because you would increase your revenue five-fold. It is typical of Mr Smyth’s shallow approach to economic and tax policy, echoed, of course, by the costings.

Mr Smyth talks about government spending. We have not heard a word in months about the costings on that hospital fiasco, because it has been a complete and utter stuff-up. It was embarrassing to Tony Abbott when he was the federal minister, because the Chief Minister actually saw the flaws in the mathematics, and it was embarrassing to me and the shadow Treasurer. He did it all over 10 minutes and lobbied people behind my back. When we look at the figures, we see they are completely and utterly flawed. It is typical of the approach to economics and taxation, a lack of understanding and, in this instance today, a complete repudiation of the principles that they are supposedly committed to. From my point of view, I do take some pleasure in this, because it gives me an opportunity to differentiate very clearly as to who supports constant—

Mr Stanhope: That’s unseemly, Mr Mulcahy.

MR MULCAHY: Yes, it probably is, Chief Minister, but it does give me the opportunity, I must say—not that one would exploit this—to let the people of Canberra know how serious they are about getting the tax burden off. I say this also to the Greens: how serious are they about decreasing the tax burden when people are battling and having to find the money on their property for rates, the emergency services levy and other taxes? People who are on fixed incomes, commonwealth superannuants—of whom there is a very large number in this city—see their federal pensions going up by CPI but they just cannot meet the extra charges, not only the ones going up by WPI but the new ones that came in during the last two years since they retired. They can only stay in their homes by lightening their capital, borrowing money or cutting their expenditure, which is what many of them do, because they do not like to be in debt when they get towards their latter years.

The Canberra Liberals—they have got a new name because they are embarrassed to be called the Liberal Party of Australia—do not care two hoots about these people. They are worried about people on \$200,000 incomes getting government subsidies for housing. They make a statement in terms of education reform that is completely all over the place in terms of costing, ranging from \$25 million to \$30-odd million in the course of one day. They have not costed that one out too well. They do not know where they stand in terms of swimming pools in Gungahlin. Mr Seselja is paying for ads in *Gunsmoke*, saying, “We need a pool in our suburb.” Of course, he lives in Macarthur, but they will not let those little facts interfere with the truth, because they might be able to keep the ruse going that he lives up there. Then, of course, when the government call their bluff and say, “Well, we’re going to spend the money up there,” suddenly they will not commit to it. It is just an extraordinary shambles of an arrangement and a shambles of an approach to taxation and economic policy.

The Chief Minister talked about the opposition's lack of capacity to manage the budget. You really would have grave doubts, when you look at the approach to tax policy and spending policy, as to where the economic advice is coming from. I do not know; I do not see it in the corridors of this place. I see constant changes of position. As the Chief Minister said, Mr Pratt was a full-on advocate of getting rid of this levy, but he has obviously been crunched and silenced, just like the shadow Treasurer. Of course, you never hear a word from him these days.

Mr Speaker, I remain very committed to the process of tax reform. I am sorry to disappoint you, Mr Smyth, but I think you will find I will be here after the next election. If you look at the polling, I think the biggest problem is the vote you are dragging down in Brindabella. I think it is going to tip your mate, Mr Pratt, out. I will remain committed to the principles of tax reform. I am firmly of the belief that we are in a position to extend tax relief to the people of Canberra, and they are principles to which I strongly adhere.

There was an argument in 2006 that this territory was under a lot of financial pressure; there were concerns being raised by the credit rating agencies. But the fact of the matter is that we have moved on from there. I have always been willing to acknowledge the improvements. I have said that the territory now has the strongest balance sheet of any jurisdiction in the country. But I also believe that, when you are in those strong financial positions, you ought to be handing back to the people of Canberra some of those taxes.

The Chief Minister's philosophical view is to spend it on various things. It seems that whilst a measure of this nature, which is around \$20 million on an annual basis, is beyond capacity, ministers and members can race up to Gungahlin and make expensive announcements which seem to be able to be funded very, very rapidly, whether they be GDEs, swimming pools and leisure centres or extending police services. I am pretty cynical about this view that tax reform is beyond the capacity of the budget. Clearly, it can be funded, but, clearly, there is no commitment to provide that relief to the people of Canberra. They will have the opportunity to express their view in 10 weeks.

Question put:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 1

Mr Mulcahy

Noes 14

Mr Barr

Mr Berry

Mrs Burke

Mr Corbell

Mrs Dunne

Dr Foskey

Ms Gallagher

Mr Gentleman

Mr Hargreaves

Ms Porter

Mr Seselja

Mr Smyth

Mr Stanhope

Mr Stefaniak

Question so resolved in the negative.

Schools—class sizes

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.31): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the positive benefits of small class sizes on educational outcomes especially in primary school;
- (2) condemns the Stanhope Government for cutting 35 high school teacher positions as part of the 2006-07 budget; and
- (3) welcomes recent commitments by the Canberra Liberals to:
 - (a) implement a policy over the term of the next Assembly of having no more than 21 students in ACT government primary school classes;
 - (b) appoint an additional 150 primary school teachers and an additional 20 teaching assistants over four years to meet class size targets;
 - (c) replace over three years the 35 high school teacher positions cut by the Stanhope Government;
 - (d) pay the Higher Education Contribution Scheme debt of some graduate teachers to recruit outstanding teachers; and
 - (e) sponsor mid-career professionals in maths, science and information technology to do teacher training.

I see an amendment to my motion is being circulated already. What a shock! Mr Speaker, all parents of school children, especially young children, will welcome the opposition's announcement that it will reduce class sizes in years K to 6 to 21 students. This means that many classes will be reduced to by up to a third of their current size. It seems that one of the few commentators not to welcome this announcement has been education minister Andrew Barr. Mr Barr's comments in yesterday's MPI debate have spelt an end to what had been bipartisan support for smaller class sizes in our schools.

At the start of this decade the previous Liberal government first provided funding for smaller classes. Subsequently, Labor followed through with their reductions up to year 3. That effort stalled at the end of 2004, but there was bipartisan acceptance that smaller classes remained the way to go. Since Mr Barr became minister two years ago, some class sizes have been going up as they have shut schools, stripped the system for spare parts and sought efficiencies. Mr Barr has been shamelessly stumping around claiming credit for class size reductions that preceded his time in parliament and claiming rhetorically that Labor still supported smaller classes.

Less than 12 months ago Mr Andrew Barr was extolling the virtues of the policy when quoting Professor Linda Darling-Hamilton, who found that smaller class sizes were one of the factors that consistently affected student achievement. The minister

labelled the research compelling and was quoted as saying that the research makes sense. But yesterday Mr Barr performed a foolish backflip—not a backflip based on evidence, but one based on political posturing. It is the kind of decision you get from someone who believes in nothing and sees politics as a game, not as a business of helping to deliver real solutions to people in need.

So what has happened since October last year? Why the backdown from a policy that he described as making sense? The answer is simple. Politics has trumped policy. Labor has been shown up as being on the back foot and willing to sacrifice sound policy for party room politics. In yesterday's debate Mr Barr declared for the first time that Labor would oppose my proposals to lower primary class sizes which can reach 30 students in years 4 to 6. It has taken Labor two weeks to work out where it stood, and we now know. Mr Barr now claims that the electorate has to choose between investing in teacher quality or investing in smaller classes. He is setting up a false choice and showing ignorance or dishonesty about the contents of my major reform package.

Canberra Liberals are committed to both smaller class sizes and investment in top quality teaching, as is reflected in our policy. Our \$34.7 million package includes \$24.7 million for smaller classes in primary schools and \$7.5 million for teachers for high schools. These investments will lower class sizes. We have also committed \$2.7 million for securing the most talented teachers—graduates and mature age. This investment will bring a wealth of talent into the ACT teaching profession. I want to unashamedly poach the best talent in the country for our city and for our education system.

My policy includes HECS forgiveness scholarships for the best teaching graduates in the country, particularly in areas that are sought after. I will provide funding for a flexible teacher training course that will draw professional scientists, statisticians and IT experts into the teaching profession. We have school shortages in high school teaching that need to be met, and my plan will bring us the best available talent to meet those skills gaps. These policies are on top of our commitment of 15 April to increase the teacher professional support fund by 50 per cent, and to index it. I have also committed to index the teacher scholarships fund. All public school teachers will benefit from this enhanced investment in their ongoing training.

Mr Barr has some cheek to claim that Labor supports teacher quality when in fact Labor has cut funding for teacher training in real terms by \$280,000. The latest budget included a little bit of catch-up money, purely as a cosmetic response to our announcements. But that catch-up money cynically cuts out after just a couple of years. It reduces to zero. So much for Mr Barr's interest in teaching quality in the long term!

This debate is not about pitting investment in teacher training against smaller class sizes. It is about achieving both. There is no reason we cannot have smaller class sizes and better teacher outcomes, and this is exactly what the opposition has proposed, and this is exactly what our policy will deliver.

Most parents and teachers believe that smaller class sizes are better for student outcomes, and the key research evidence supports this belief. The first major

randomised experiment was conducted in Tennessee starting in the mid-1980s. The STAR project looked at the effect of smaller classes and continued until very recently to monitor student outcomes for years after their passage through the primary school system.

This study was the first major randomised experiment with smaller class sizes and involved more than 11,600 students. The study randomly assigned students between small and regular class sizes. It also randomly assigned teachers. The findings of that research are very compelling. The study found that third grade students in small classes were up to 4.7 months ahead of their peers and that several years after the end of the experiment they were up to 14 months ahead of their peers.

This research has found that the greatest effects were achieved when smaller classes commenced in the earliest years of schooling and, importantly, when they were extended across several years of schooling. My policy acts on this evidence that shows that smaller classes are most effective when sustained across several years of schooling. Studies conducted on the participants in the STAR experiment have shown an 18 per cent difference in high school graduation rates between students who have been in smaller classes during primary school than those in larger classes. There are many other benefits which other studies have identified. Research from Britain has found that teachers in smaller classes use an extra six per cent of their classroom to teach and make 48 per cent more teacher-student interactions.

The New South Wales government commissioned Professor Bob Meyenn to study the effectiveness of class size reductions in New South Wales primary schools. Over the course of three studies he has found that student behavioural problems and learning difficulties are identified earlier and more easily corrected while there is increased morale and enthusiasm among teachers in small classes. Teachers found they were able to spend more time with individual students and use different and more effective teaching methods.

There have been critics of the STAR report. We believe the research is very solidly in favour of smaller classes. One of the dissenting critics is Professor Eric Hanushek. His principal argument is that across-the-board large reductions in class size are a highly expensive means of achieving small gains and outcomes and that other policies should be considered, namely, a focus on better teaching quality. It would seem Minister Barr has read Professor Hanushek's work exclusively from front to back at the expense of broader and more credible research. Ironically, the Hanushek writing is mainly used by right-wing think-tanks that want to argue against extra investment in education altogether.

The old work of Hanushek had several notorious methodological flaws. For one thing, he attempted to reinterpret other studies. He does not conduct fresh research of his own. Hanushek places a disproportionate amount of weight on studies that are based on smaller samples and is very selective in avoiding studies that show significant positive results.

Findings from the largest longitudinal study of class size, project STAR, were excluded from Hanushek's review while studies of a much smaller magnitude were included and given very high weighting. The outcome variable in some of the models

used by Hanushek was obtained by a show-of-hands survey in the high schools. Despite these limitations, this data received over three times as much weight as the median study in Hanushek's summary.

If Mr Barr is aligning himself with a study that uses a show of hands to gather its data, this indicates the level of analysis that we are seeing from the other side. Hanushek's writing has been thoroughly debunked. Labor has never paid any attention previously to this dissenting academic. Now he is all they have to back up their argument against smaller classes.

Smaller classes have very strong support from the Australian Education Union, from teachers and from parents. In recent meetings with the Australian Primary Principals Association it was made clear to us that students in the ACT up to year 4 tend to trend upwards in terms of academic performance in the areas of numeracy and literacy. However, from year 4 onwards, where class sizes jump, achievement plateaus.

This assessment was reinforced in the groundbreaking publication released in 2007 *In the balance—the future of Australia's primary schools*. The most effective way to address this plateau is to reduce the class sizes of all years through to year 6. Canberra Liberals will fund a maximum of 21 students per class from years 4 to 6. The gains from smaller classes are long lasting and sustained.

Research studies show that teachers do not necessarily change their teaching practices when they move to smaller classes. This is why they must work in conjunction with teachers not only to reduce class sizes but also to provide teachers with training in how to make the most of smaller classes. Canberra Liberals' policy will fund additional teacher training to equip teachers with skills and techniques to make the best use out of smaller classes.

International and interstate research has proven that the biggest beneficiaries of smaller classes are children from low socioeconomic groups. These are the kids who frequently fall behind in large classes. The improvement found by the STAR project and many other studies is greatest for minority and economically disadvantaged students than it is for other students.

There is a major issue that the Stanhope government is not interested in. There is a compelling need for a major reinvestment by the ACT government in helping kids who are struggling at the bottom of the performance results. The ACT school system has one of the largest gaps in student achievement between students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Research commissioned from the Australian Council for Education Research shows that the achievement gaps in the ACT are the highest in Australia after the Northern Territory. Our large achievement applies across reading, maths and science. Labor has not only been blase about this performance gap; worse still, the education minister, Andrew Barr, has even argued with community groups about whether the gap even exists. Labor is only interested in investing in bricks and mortar. It is not seriously interested in investing in and supporting teachers to improve student performance.

I do not want a public education system that is second best. We are serious about having an ACT public school system that is world class. Our policy is an important way of delivering it. That is why we will appoint 150 new primary teachers, plus 20 teacher assistants, to help kids across the board. We will reinstate 35 new high school teachers and also I will go out and hand-pick the best graduates. As well we will invest in increased training for all teachers, including existing staff. We will also attract mature-age graduates in areas of need such as maths, science and IT.

Canberra Liberals started the process of mandating smaller class sizes at the start of this decade. Labor has taken the policy to year 3 but then stalled, and under Mr Barr they have been going backwards. Stanhope Labor has completely the wrong approach on class sizes. They have merged schools and forced students to consolidate onto larger campuses and larger classes to achieve their efficiencies. Since 2006 Labor has dismembered large parts of the public education system, stripping the system of spare parts and dollars.

We see education funding as an investment in our future. It is an investment that will pay dividends through a more skilled workforce, better paid jobs and lower social disadvantage. It is time the ACT had a government that is prepared to put public education at the top of its priorities. It is worth reflecting once again, Mr Deputy Speaker, on what this government's focus has been in the area of education.

That focus has not been about lowering class sizes other than in one year, and then it stopped. Their focus now has simply been about rationalisation of schools, about shutting down schools based on the claim that putting students into ever-larger schools and the relatively small efficiencies that we see produced as a result of this will somehow producing better outcomes. We know that not to be the case. We know the data does not show that to be the case, and the focus on the school closure program, the focus on this massive breach of faith with the community, has distracted this government and this minister from actually making real reforms in our education system which will have a lasting effect.

Mr Barr is going to point to the fact that he closed schools, he consolidated and he made some efficiency savings and that this is the great reform in education. There is no evidence to suggest that this is going to improve the outcomes of our students, particularly those who are struggling. How are we going to address this gap? He has done nothing to address the fact that parents in the ACT continue to choose private schooling over public schooling. We have to ask why that is. Is it because this government has not shown a commitment? Is it because they have actually lost faith in this government's management of public education, most particularly as a result of their determination to close schools, having promised not to do so prior to the election?

This may well go to the heart of it. But it is the distraction of this and the lack of rigour that we have seen from the government and from the minister in education and in actually improving outcomes that has forced this minister into retreat. This is why we have come up with this policy to lower class sizes, and all Minister Barr can do is oppose it. All he can do is oppose it. In fact, he did not have the guts in the chamber yesterday to actually back the bogus figures put out by the Treasurer. He did not want

to be on the record in this place backing those bogus figures but he was happy to put them in a press release. So in a press release you can say what you like. It does not matter if your figures are wrong but the last thing he wants is to be held accountable for the words he says in this place.

I put the challenge out to him again. When he gets up to speak he should address each of those issues. He should say that he believes every one of those bogus figures put forward by the Treasurer is correct. He should tell us why they are correct and point out where there are errors in our costings. But there are none. There are none and they are published. We publish our costings; we put them out there. This government does not and the minister now has the onus on him to actually get up in this place and tell us where we are wrong and tell us that the Treasurer is right. He can't.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, Minister for Industrial Relations) (11.47): I seek leave to move the amendments to the motion that have been circulated.

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: I seek your ruling on these amendments. They basically throw out all the words in Mr Seselja's motion and substitute other words which are, in fact, contrary to the spirit of the motion. I know that Speakers in this place from time to time have ruled in relation to this, but I want a new ruling in relation to this.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Do you have a standing order on that?

Mrs Dunne: The amendments are contrary to the spirit of the original motion, and they should be ruled out of order on that basis.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Just resume your seat, and stop the clock, please. On the point of order, I have just taken advice, and I have had a good look at *House of Representatives Practice*. I have to say, Mrs Dunne, that at page 306, under the title "Alternative propositions", it is allowable to move an amendment which removes every damn word off the page except one. Unfortunately, in terms of your particular point of order, that is what the House of Representatives standing orders allow the minister on this occasion to do. You might want to debate later the issues around the spirit of that, but that is what the rules allow. There is no point of order.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I seek leave to move the amendments.

Leave granted.

MR BARR: I move:

- “(1) paragraph (1)—Omit all words after ‘especially in’, substitute ‘early childhood’;
- (2) paragraph (2)—Omit all words after ‘condemns’, substitute ‘the ACT Liberals for failing to accurately cost their recent commitments’; and
- (3) paragraph (3)—Omit all words after ‘welcomes’, substitute ‘the Stanhope Government’s:

- (a) reduction of class sizes in the most critical years of kindergarten to year 3 to 21 students based on a body of international research;
- (b) increased funding for education of more than 40 per cent since being elected in 2001;
- (c) investment of over \$350 million in building new public schools where they are most needed and in upgrading every other ACT public school;
- (d) development of the new curriculum framework *Every Chance to Learn* for ACT schools from preschool to year 10 and the investment of \$2 million for curriculum renewal to ensure all students and teachers can access up to date and relevant curriculum;
- (e) development of new policy in the areas of national testing, early childhood education, ICT, safe schools framework, countering bullying, harassment and violence, restorative justice programs and countering racism;
- (f) consultation on and investment in the development of a Schools Standards Authority;
- (g) investment in the Green Schools initiative to enable students to continue to learn about the effects of climate change and how to tackle the problem including \$20 million over 10 years to assist both government and non-government schools become carbon neutral by 2017;
- (h) investment of an extra \$2.378 million in quality teaching under the 2008-2009 ACT Budget;
- (i) investment of an extra \$421 000 for teacher leadership under the 2008-2009 ACT Budget;
- (j) amalgamation of all ACT pre-schools with public primary schools to deliver on the Government's commitment to early childhood education and give young Canberrans the best start in life;
- (k) increase in pre-school hours to 12 hours per week;
- (l) development of 4 new early childhood schools catering for children from preschool through to year 2 in Lyons, Narrabundah, Isabella Plains and Belconnen;
- (m) investment of \$3.3 million to improve indigenous education outcomes and targeted assistance for year 4 Indigenous students to meet national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy;
- (n) investment of an extra \$977 000 in literacy and numeracy support for students under the 2008-2009 ACT Budget;
- (o) investment of an extra \$802 000 to support students at risk of dropping out of school under the 2008-2009 ACT Budget;

- (p) investment of an extra \$402 000 to support teachers to help disadvantaged students and the investment of an extra \$1.612 million to support students with a disability under the 2008-2009 ACT Budget;
- (q) investment of more than \$1.2 million to revitalise physical education and the \$250 000 investment in the Children's Physical Activity Challenge;
- (r) \$300 000 extra investment in languages education;
- (s) investment of \$27.7 million to ensure state of the art IT in classrooms and broadband connection;
- (t) investment of \$14.6 million in student support services/pastoral care in every high school;
- (u) \$10 million investment in performing arts centres for Calwell and Lyneham High Schools and \$250 000 for additional musical instruments for schools;
- (v) investment in and extension of the Secondary Student Bursary fund to support financially disadvantaged families with students in years 7 to 10;
- (w) development of the ACT College Business Plan 2007-2009 which focuses on further improving teaching and learning and ensuring there are pathways for all students in colleges in their journey through the post compulsory years of education;
- (x) partnership with the Australian National University (ANU) to further develop the ANU Secondary College through an additional \$607 000 for this facility in the 2008-2009 Budget;
- (y) expanded Australian School-Based Apprenticeships enabling students to gain educational and work experience within the ACT Public Service; and
- (z) establishment of the CIT's Vocational College delivering education options and pathways to people of all ages, offering essential skills and job training for around 3 000 youth, mature-age and migrant students each year and strengthening career training pathways for students in years 10 to 12 through CIT.'".

The government bases its education policies on the results of current research related to student learning. Labor is taking seriously the conclusive research that shows that it is the quality of the teacher that is the most significant impact on student achievement. The government's policies and actions are consistent with the outcomes of this research. The work of eminent researchers such as Hattie, Newman and Ladwig conclude that the most important resource is the quality of teaching that occurs in our classrooms.

The available evidence indicates that improvement in the quality of the teaching workforce is central to any overall improvement in student performance. The evidence goes on to suggest that improving the quality of teachers will almost certainly involve a range of incentives, such as strengthened professional learning, career structures, recognitions and rewards.

The government has made a considerable and sustained investment in improving the capacity of all our teachers. The government is investing in quality teaching at all levels of the teaching profession, from primary schools through to our high schools and colleges. The 2008-09 budget provided over \$2.3 million for additional professional staff and expert consultancy support for our schools to implement the quality teaching model. The government is investing in a comprehensive package of education reforms and significant infrastructure investment to ensure that the ACT's education system is well placed to meet the teaching and learning needs of the 21st century. This investment will improve outcomes not just for primary school students but for all ACT students.

These reforms and initiatives include programs to improve teacher capacity and to provide excellence in early childhood education, Indigenous education, literacy and numeracy, languages education, and student health and wellbeing, including physical education and pastoral care. This is a well-rounded and comprehensive approach to ensure quality teaching and learning in every classroom, every day for every student.

Let me begin with our early childhood schools. Students in those schools, the youngest of whom will be leaving school in around 2020, will benefit from quality, well-structured, integrated early childhood education services and programs to optimise learning and development outcomes for children, and that will have longer term benefits for individuals, families and the community. For this reason the ACT government has committed to establishing four purpose-built early childhood schools to open throughout 2009. These schools will join the very successful O'Connor cooperative school, and, indeed, will encourage and draw on family and community participation to ensure that students are provided with the best possible comprehensive care and education.

Along with the new model of amalgamating preschools with primary schools, these schools provide a coherent approach to early childhood learning and wellbeing for all ACT children. By providing integrated education, health and family support services, there is a greater opportunity for early identification of learning needs, intervention and prevention to enable students to achieve their full potential.

Early childhood is just the beginning of the government's investment in our students' education. It is a matter of great pride that school students in the ACT achieve the highest levels of academic performance as measured against national and international reading, writing and numeracy benchmarks. The ACT government is committed to maintaining our high national and international education ranking. The government is providing nearly a million dollars over four years to build capacity within the teaching workforce to improve the literacy and numeracy outcomes of all students, providing targeted professional development for literacy and numeracy coordinators in every school that has been identified as an effective way of building teacher capacity.

In addition, the government has committed \$3.3 million to a suite of strategies designed to improve the literacy and numeracy of Indigenous students. Indigenous students from kindergarten to year 4 are being provided with explicit and systematic support to improve their literacy and numeracy development. This funding will also be used to provide support for and mentoring of higher achieving Indigenous students in years 6 and 10 to successfully transition to high school and college respectively. Indigenous education officers based in high schools support one or more high schools and contributing primary schools and work to improve attendance and establish the connection between schools and their Indigenous communities.

Studies have also shown that effective educational leaders are vital in assisting teachers in the delivery of engaging and challenging curriculum programs. In recognition of their key role, the government is providing current and aspiring school leaders with quality professional learning in educational leadership, including quality teaching, evidence-based practice and the integration of ICT into the curriculum.

In 2008 professional learning in school leadership for principals will focus on Indigenous education. Principals will engage in discussions about the collection, analysis and use of data to inform the development of strategies to improve student outcomes, particularly the outcomes of Indigenous and disadvantaged students. Some 77 schools have joined the dare to lead program to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students through innovative resources and teaching methods.

In recognition of the importance of sustaining effective leadership through our schools, \$420,000 over two years has been provided to develop existing and aspiring educational leaders at all levels within the ACT Department of Education and Training. The initiative includes a mentoring program for newly appointed leaders, a residential program to be offered to selected aspiring leaders and a new leadership framework outlining the leadership skills required at each level of school leadership.

As part of our overall focus on quality teaching, the government has also provided funding of \$300,000 to provide professional development, including high quality interactive language training for primary school teachers and language teachers, to ensure the quality of programs for students. This initiative has been implemented because of research that demonstrates that studying other cultures and languages enhances intercultural understanding and prepares our children and young people for participation in a culturally diverse and globalised society.

In 2008 teachers have been provided with numerous opportunities to undertake targeted professional learning and languages education. Eminent speakers have addressed teachers and provided practical strategies for teachers to engage students in sustained languages learning. This year, high quality language-specific and ICT professional learning workshops are being provided, focusing on resources which teachers can use to improve the quality of their teaching and enhance the learning environment. Schools have been provided with the best of curriculum resources across the country, including online resources and CDs to support their teaching programs. Support is also being provided to clusters of schools to encourage and ensure the continuity of the same language from primary to high school.

A student's overall wellbeing is critical to their success and achievement of successful academic outcomes. A key government initiative in recent times is the \$14.6 million investment in providing 16 additional pastoral care coordinators/teachers in our high schools, one for every public high school. These pastoral care coordinators commenced at the start of the 2008 school year and are providing a range of pastoral care and student welfare initiatives for ACT public high school students and their families. The pastoral care coordinators are coordinating whole school student pastoral care programs that take a personalised approach to supporting student wellbeing. They also have a role in supporting staff to promote and increase student attendance and engagement with learning and, ultimately, their connection to school.

The government has also allocated over \$3.4 million over four years to the moving forward initiative, which has delivered an additional eight teachers as career advisers, one for each college. This will ensure that students have the very best advice and support in making decisions about their post-school education or work pathways.

The ACT government has also been a national leader in advancing physical activity levels of school-age children. Three specialist physical education teachers have been appointed over the next three years to strengthen the capacity of public primary school teachers to deliver quality physical education experiences for their students. The ACT government provided \$1.2 million in the second appropriation bill to support this commitment. This year we instigated the physical activity challenge for the first time and set up the Children's Physical Activity Foundation. This has proved a very highly popular strategy for engaging students in physical activity, and more than 85 schools and 12,500 school students are involved.

The 21st century teaching and learning environment, though, must keep pace with the context of our rapidly changing technological environment. To ensure that we maintain our position as the leading jurisdiction in the provision of information and communication technology services for schools, the ACT is leading the way in providing schools with widespread access to fast, efficient and up-to-date ICT environments.

In 2006, the ACT government committed \$20 million over four years to the smart schools—smart students initiative. We supplemented that announcement in this year's budget with a further \$7.7 million, taking the total investment in ICT in schools as part of this initiative to \$27.7 million. I am pleased to advise that this initiative is already well on the way to improving the capacity of teachers and students in public schools to access high speed connectivity across their schools, across the territory, across Australia and across the world. This includes ensuring that colleges and secondary schools will be connected using fibre optic cable and that primary schools are upgraded using a combination of fibre-fixed cabling or wireless connectivity. This project is putting ACT public schools at the leading edge of bandwidth provision, both nationally and internationally. These improvements aim to enhance student learning and deliver to students the necessary knowledge and skills to thrive in an information-rich world.

The Stanhope government understands that improving the educational outcomes for ACT students is a more complex task than simply reducing class sizes in the

years 4 to 6. It requires investment in a range of evidence-based policy positions that encompasses improving the quality of our teaching and investing in a range of technological and infrastructure enhancements in order to meet the needs of students in the 21st century.

There is no evidence to prove that placing children in smaller classes across the board has a significant impact on improving students' educational outcomes. Similarly, there is no agreement in the research that there is an optimal class size for students in any year, let alone in years 4 and above. There is certainly no research that children in class sizes of 21—the magic figure that is mentioned in the Canberra Liberals' education policy—are more likely to achieve higher outcomes than children in other classes. In fact, the research cited to support the opposition's policy statement is 20 years old. Project STAR commenced in 1985. The opposition has used project STAR in a simplistic way that fails to recognise the complexity of its findings which, in any event, do not support the thrust of the opposition's policy platform.

In 2007, the report of the Senate committee on employment, workplace relations and education on the quality of school education eloquently stated:

The single most important influence on academic achievement is the quality of teaching. Quality teaching engages students and is the key to higher learning for all.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (12.02): I want to thank Mr Seselja for putting this motion up for debate. Obviously, education is a key responsibility of the ACT government, and it is very good to explore our various views on the priorities for school education in the ACT prior to the election.

Indeed, I do not think we have talked about education except in the context of school closures around that time when very foolish government policy was being enacted. This motion is a bit of political grandstanding, unfortunately—it is simply a commendation of the Liberal Party for adopting the education policy that it has adopted. As we have seen, it has been proposed to be amended by the government to say something equally self-serving but entirely different. Of course, with the resources of government, it can make as many claims as 26.

It is good to know that Mr Barr's early childhood education was so adequate that he knows the whole alphabet and was able to think of enough points to match every letter in the alphabet. I suppose it is a coincidence that his amendment ends with paragraph (z). The lesson, as always, is that a minority government would give a motion like this some real meaning as it would need to be reshaped in a more collaborative way by the various parties in order to be passed. That collaboration would, in itself, be the interesting thing. I am afraid that these debates where one side opposes the other are not really very interesting to the community because we do not end up with any positive outcomes.

I will not be supporting either version of the motion, but I would like to take the opportunity to explore how these issues sit in the ACT Greens' education policy and to give my views on the challenges facing school education in the ACT. Clearly, the

big ticket item is the promise by the Liberal Party to cut class sizes in upper primary school.

Yesterday's discussion on this matter was illuminating. The Liberal position appears to be that there is some research which, if not looked at too closely, shows that smaller class sizes in general are good for educational outcomes and that more teachers would be a good thing. The Liberal Party believes it has its costings right and that the government must have its figures wrong, and anyone who disagrees with the Liberal Party's approach just does not care about kids and education. At least I think that is what was being said.

The government's argument appears to have been that the research on smaller class sizes in upper primary is not convincing and that getting and keeping good teachers—for which it hopes the federal government will come to the party—and new and reorganised schools is the best way forward. I have to say that hearing Minister Barr invoke the expertise and insight offered by ACT educationalist Trevor Cobbold is rather galling given that he has specialised over the last couple of years, in my mind, in making unfounded derisory and personal attacks on Mr Cobbold for daring to analyse the impact of ACT government schools policy and question the thinking behind it. I believe Mr Cobbold's work over the past 15 or 20 years has been extremely important to our understanding of school education in the ACT, and the government has certainly benefited by his support for quality public education. In fact, he has been one of the government's advisors, and it is a pity that his advice on some matters is rejected while his advice on other matters is used to support the government's position.

I was very pleased to read Mr Cobbold's considered response to the Liberal Party's smaller class size initiative. His analysis supports my view and those of other educationalists that the Greens work with. I seek leave to table the paper entitled "Do smaller classes make a difference and is it cost effective?", which is written by Trevor Cobbold, spokesperson for Save Our Schools and taken from the Save Our Schools website.

Leave granted.

DR FOSKEY: I table the following paper:

Smaller class sizes—*Do smaller classes make a difference and is it cost effective?* by Trevor Cobbold, Spokesman for Save Our Schools, dated 27 July 2008.

Education debates in this place rarely get to the point of an overall assessment of where we are now and what we need to do not in terms of the system—the buildings, the facilities, and attracting and retaining good teachers, although all these things are vital—but in terms of the experiences we offer our children in the world they will live in and the outcome they achieve. So, in the five minutes or so left to me, that is what I will focus on.

In the first instance, I do not think it is accurate to talk down our education systems or the basic capacities in terms of literacy, numeracy, scientific understanding and the

ability to think critically that the bulk of our students develop in the ACT school systems. ACT students in all our education systems are near the top in the world. Talking down their standards and achievements is both misguided and destructive to them and to our community in general. Rubbishing the ACT's new curriculum framework, which could yet happen in the education debate in the lead-up to this election, would be ill-informed and miss the point.

As discussed here before, while the ACT has good education systems, there is a growing gap in achievement between those who are falling behind and the majority who are doing very well. This is true across all education systems in the ACT. Indeed, in the ACT, we are slipping from being classed as a high achievement, high equity jurisdiction to one which is high achievement and low equity. That should be of real concern to all of us in the Assembly. It certainly is to the Greens. Any forward-looking education strategy needs to take that challenge on.

It is also an unarguable fact that government schools take on a larger proportion of students with high needs at school—including but not limited to students with a disability, those from relatively low socioeconomic backgrounds and children from some particular cultural and ethnic groups—than do schools from the Catholic or the independent sectors. This is really an issue of resources, and it is specifically about resources available to schools and teaches in the public education system. The evidence, as Trevor Cobbold has argued quite clearly, is that reducing class sizes after about second or third year is not necessarily the issue, particularly in terms of bringing classes down from 25 to 21, for example, when 20 seems to be the cut-off point for effective class size reductions.

The job of teachers is to keep students on task and engaged. These are necessary preconditions for learning. A class full of kids from fairly affluent, well-educated families with no special needs or capacities is, of course, challenging in today's world where children often see themselves and their families as a cut above their teachers. But a class with a high degree of children with difficult behaviours, learning problems and special needs requires greater resources. We will all agree on that. Rather than losing three or four kids from the ordinary classes, we would do better to look at ways of better supporting teachers and kids who need more support in the classroom. Here are some ways that we could do that.

Bringing experts—not necessarily teachers, but people who can engage with young people and children—into the classroom would be an effective response. Remember, the teacher would be there as well. This might mean arts training and support for primary school teachers, expert languages tuition, special resources targeted to groups and individuals where needed and flexibility for school and teachers to address the needs of students at both ends of the spectrum, especially environment and science-intensive classes. The list is endless of what we could provide our children.

I do not think the big issue is going to be just primary schools either. We need to address that area of our schooling where we know the biggest problems are—that is, our secondary schools. We have put this off for the whole four years I have been here. It is the area of our schools where it is hurting; it is probably the area where we are losing most teachers. We need to increase the interface between school and work, and CIT could do a lot more here.

We are increasingly looking at our schools as an opportunity for social and health interventions to improve the prospects of our young people. The early childhood schools are a valiant first attempt at this. Teachers are at the front line of children's out-of-family interactions with the world. Teachers need time to have that all-important conversation with a child, which can be perhaps life saving and certainly future changing for some kids. Reducing class sizes alone will not do that; bringing in other teachers and community experts at strategic times will. It will also improve the quality of teachers' work conditions and remove from them the burden of being experts in everything from language to arts and sciences and to childhood development. Let us think creatively about this. It really is too important to come up with formulaic responses.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (12.12): Mr Speaker, you know the minister is in trouble when he comes in with 26 amendments to a motion that he knows is fundamentally correct and you know the minister is in trouble when he comes in and reads deadpan his speech but will not go to the heart of the matter. The heart of the Labor Party attack on this policy was the costings.

We saw the Chief Minister make the tactical mistake of releasing the treasury costings, costings that, in the main, back up what the opposition have said or are based on wrong assumptions. The minister is willing to put out press releases in the public bagging our costings but he will not come in here and take it to task because he knows that ministers should not mislead the Assembly. That is what he would have done had he run the rant that they have run in public.

Let us go to the heart of this issue: what is good for the students of the ACT. What is good for the students of the ACT is greater contact with teachers, and the only way you can achieve that, the only meaningful way you can achieve that, is to reduce the size of the class so that the students can individually spend more time with their teachers.

It is great having high-quality teachers—and we all want that—but if they are caught up in the burden of administration and dealing with troublesome children, then they are not being given the opportunity to do what they went to teachers college and university for, teach. It is interesting that the minister ignores the facts when they do not suit him.

There is a piece of research—and the reference is Blatchford, Moriarty, Edmonds and Martin—that says that in year 1, on average, teachers with small classes reported using 76 per cent of their overall classroom time to teach; whereas, with class sizes over 26 or more students, teachers reported using 70 per cent of their overall time to teach. And that is the problem. If you are not, as a teacher, being allowed to teach, then you are not doing what you want and what you are paid to do. And that is what this policy seeks to do, to increase the hours of contact between all students and their teachers so that students get better outcomes, teachers get greater satisfaction and we as a society enable our kids to reach their potential, whatever it is they want to do.

But the minister is not interested in that. The minister has not got the moral fibre to stand up and say, "Yes, this is a good initiative. Yes, we should have done more." The

key reforms in education in the ACT have occurred since self-government under Liberal governments. And let us look at them.

The minister talked about greater IT awareness. Who implemented the year 10 IT certificate, to make sure that all our students left the schools with the knowledge they need to participate in the modern electronic world? The Liberals did. Bill Stefaniak, as minister, did. And that IT certificate sets the foundation for all that comes after it. We guaranteed that all kids would get the IT education that they need.

Indeed, who put in place professional development? The Liberals did. We put in a fund that has not been increased for seven years, under three successive education ministers, two of whom have not got the guts to show their faces here now. They let teacher improvement and career development languish because they did not care.

This of course occurred at a time when education as a percentage of the budget collapsed under Labor. It used to be almost 24 per cent and it is now just above 20 per cent. So you can put your 26-point list of all the little bits and pieces that you have done, Mr Barr, on the table and say, "Oh what a good fellow am I," but the reality is that education funding has fallen under this government and the effectiveness of that education has fallen under this government.

They tried to emulate us; they tried to emulate what Bill had done. Let us face it, Clive Haggart and the Australian Education Union are not real close friends of the Liberal Party on most occasions, but what did Mr Haggart say when Kate Carnell and Bill Stefaniak put into the realm that we were going to reduce class sizes for kindergarten, first grade and second grade? They said it was the most significant reform in education since self-government. And that still stands today.

I cannot remember whether it was Ms Gallagher or Mr Corbell—there have been so many education ministers now—who raised it to third grade because they appreciated the value of it. And I commend them for raising it to third grade. They should take the bipartisan approach that occurred then and say, "Yes, four, five and six are important."

What we had when we announced this was educationalists and members of the union saying, "Do not stop there. This is such a good initiative, do not stop there. Take it into the high schools where the high school students are suffering." The government, particularly under this minister with his fetish for knocking down schools and building super schools which do not address the needs of students, have allowed the mass exodus of students from our high school system to the non-government sector, which is now over 50 per cent.

The saddest indictment of this minister is that so many students choose not to attend the free system and their parents are willing to pay to send them to get the education that they deserve. That is the sad indictment. And it goes to the heart of the figures. They are spending less on education; they are directing it to the wrong areas; they refuse to acknowledge the many reports and studies that show what the benefits of smaller class sizes mean. The tardiness of the minister on this issue and his feeble speech earlier show that they do not understand what education is about in the ACT.

What we have to have is a system that looks after the students of the ACT. When we held a forum recently at the Calwell Club we heard from the head of the principals association that five per cent of students in the ACT—a growing number, now five per cent—have difficulties. And the policies of this government have done nothing to address those difficulties.

They have picked up on some of the policies that Mr Pratt took to the last election which talked about more pastoral care. They have gratefully accepted the chaplains funded by the federal government, the former Howard government. Mr Pratt understood what was required. Four years ago he was talking about this and the then government laughed at him. We are grateful that the government has at least taken on what the Howard government offered. But they have abandoned the field and they have abandoned the students of the ACT because they simply cannot say, “Yes, you are right, this is a good initiative.”

Their feeble attempts to discredit the figures are just ridiculous. And the minister can have time to speak again; he can come down here and read his press release; he can put his costings on the table. But I bet he will not because he knows he is wrong.

We took some of Labor’s own budget numbers. It is interesting that Labor said the capital cost per year to reduce a year 3 class size was a million dollars and that the cost per year, once fully implemented, was \$3.6 million. We took high figures; we scaled that up because we knew that the costs had grown.

Indeed, when you get to the treasury costings that the Chief Minister released, he says the initial costs of 150 primary school teachers is estimated at around \$13 million per annum. We agree. That is what we estimate it at. Spot on. The cost of 35 high school teachers is estimated at around \$10 million over four years and \$3 million per annum when fully implemented. We agree. They are in our numbers. We agree.

What they did get wrong was the cost of HECS because they used the wrong assumption. We can only assume that the treasury people were working on the detail that was delivered by the Chief Minister.

We said that demountables will cost about \$240,000 a year. That is what this says. These are the treasury costings: \$2.9 million will only provide around 12 demountables. We agree. The numbers agree.

Then we have got this spurious assertion that an additional 150 teachers will require an additional 150 classrooms. The whole point of the supposed reforms was that there were so many classrooms. Bulldoze whole schools. Make the promise, “We will not close schools,” then close schools. “We will not sell land,” then sell land.

But there is capacity in the system. And this can easily be achieved—

Mr Barr: That’s not what you were saying in 2006. So you’ve backflipped on that one, have you?

MR SMYTH: The minister now gets his courage up and starts to interject; he is feeling the pressure over there. Go and get your press release and read your press release and justify your press release in this place. Take the numbers. Come and have a debate. You have got your degree with an economics unit in it. Fantastic! Take our numbers on. You cannot. And that is why, deadpan, you read your speech, without erring from it. You know you are on dangerous ground. You are wrong on so many things, minister, as the Labor Party has been wrong on so much in this place.

They have reduced education funding in real terms; they have failed to acknowledge that class sizes are important; and they have failed to demolish the costings of the opposition.

MR SPEAKER: I call Mr Gentleman.

Mrs Dunne: So Mick is going to do the costings?

Mr Seselja: We don't want a minister to mislead!

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Seselja: I am sorry. I apologise. I withdraw that.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (12.22): Yesterday the opposition attempted to demonstrate that smaller class sizes are the best single route to increasing student outcomes. This is simplistic and indefensible. Yesterday the opposition argued that their policy was superior because it was research based and that the government was ignoring academia in its support for alternative educational policy. Unfortunately for them, the body of research available does not support the theory that class sizes are indeed the panacea they see for improving student outcomes or will stem the drift from public schools to private ones. Indeed, while there is expert academic opinion backing the belief that smaller class sizes do work well in early childhood years, the results of research on the effects in the later years are far more equivocal.

While class sizes can have a bearing on student outcomes, they are not necessarily the greatest or possibly even one of the greatest influences. Rather, there are a range of factors such as the quality of teaching that have more significant bearing on the achievements of students. This essentially is one of the conclusions drawn by Professor John Hattie from the University of Auckland's faculty of education. His 2005 paper, "The Paradox of reducing class size and improving learning outcomes", studies research carried out over three decades and provides a balanced and thorough analysis of why smaller class sizes do not always result in improved student outcomes.

Rather than relying on one or two research papers, Professor Hattie has undertaken a systematic meta analysis of a wide range of studies into the effect of small class sizes as well as other factors that influence student learning. His analysis allowed him to compile a list of 46 influences on student achievement. Some of the most important influences were feedback from students and teachers, early intervention and quality of teaching. Quality of teaching was the fifth ranked influence, a ranking that was based on the size of the positive effect of student achievement.

But ranked 40th was class size. Why is this? Why do not smaller classes necessarily lead to greater benefits for the students? One reason put forward is that many teachers, when put into classrooms with smaller numbers of students, do not necessarily fully adapt their teaching techniques accordingly. And Mr Seselja supported this position earlier. While they may exploit some of the potential benefits, their teaching style remains the same as it was in the larger classes. So reducing class sizes as a unilateral policy intervention does not lead to the outcomes that Mr Pratt, Mr Seselja and Mrs Dunne claimed yesterday. What is also required is providing teachers with the training that will allow them to make the most of their situation.

Professor Hattie found another reason why smaller class sizes do not necessarily lead to better outcomes in the evidence of a \$1 billion push in California to reduce class sizes, namely, that there were not enough quality teachers to staff all of the classrooms created in the push to reduce class sizes. All states and territories are competing for the best and brightest teachers, teachers who should be encouraged, through initiatives that reward their expertise, to remain in the classroom to bring the best out of many generations of students. This is what parents want: quality teachers in their children's classrooms who are skilled, trained and supported to ensure that their child achieves as highly as they can.

Again we see that this quality of the teacher leading the classroom is the bigger factor in determining student success. Good teaching will result in quality student learning outcomes in a large as well as a small classroom. This is not to say that the government should not reduce class sizes, particularly where there is evidence this intervention would provide positive dividends for student achievement. There is some consensus, based on research evidence, that smaller class sizes do work in kindergarten and the early years of schooling, and this is why the ACT government has targeted investment in the early years of schooling.

Professor Brian Caldwell, in his recent 2008 publication, *Raising the stakes*, states:

We need to direct attention at higher quality teaching, and higher expectations that students can meet appropriate challenges—and these occur once the classroom door is closed and not by reorganising which or how many students are behind those doors ...

It is the pedagogies and skills of the teachers, pedagogies practised particularly in the earliest years of schooling, that lead professors Hattie and Ehrenberg to believe smaller class sizes are most beneficial in the early years of schooling. This is where most of the advantage can be gained and it is where the ACT has targeted its investment in evidence-based, research-supported policy. By helping students earlier on, we are making the task of educating them in later years much easier.

The undoubted conclusion of all the research on the effects of smaller class sizes is that there is no clear conclusion that unequivocally supports smaller class sizes across all classrooms in all primary schools and certainly no body of evidence that the opposition can produce to repudiate this government's investment in quality teaching and quality learning environments.

Mrs Dunne: You are not even listening. The money runs out—

MR SPEAKER: I warn you, Mrs Dunne.

MR GENTLEMAN: While a policy of further class size reductions in years 4 to 6 might benefit some students, it cannot be viewed as the sole or even the leading solution to improving student outcomes. It has to be part of a package that addresses the quality of teaching, the quality of curriculum, the provision of quality teaching environments, access to ICT and much more—in other words, exactly the approach undertaken and being carried out by the ACT government.

For every piece of research supporting one supposed benefit of smaller class sizes there is at least one more countering this argument. For the opposition to say definitively that smaller class sizes produce greater student outcomes places them at odds with a legion of respected academics. And I know whom I would prefer to trust.

Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition said the ACT government had not consulted academic research in formulating its education policies but, from his unequivocal statement that smaller class sizes increase student outcomes, it seems clear to me who is guilty of failing to check the research. It seems that the Leader of the Opposition was selectively quoting the research in order to retrofit that to his policy statement.

The ACT government is interested in addressing all the established factors that go into improving the outcomes for our students, students who already regularly achieve the best results nationally and who rank among the best in the world. And that is what we are providing in the ACT, through a range of measures, including reducing class sizes in K to 5, but not just limited to a narrow vision that smaller class sizes are somehow the silver bullet that will lead to improved learning outcomes for all students who study in classes with the magical number of 21 students.

We are putting money into teacher professional development. We have outlined a proposal for increased pay to keep top teachers in the classrooms. We are rolling out new quality teaching programs. We are building new schools across the ACT. We are putting broadband and computers into more classrooms than ever before. We are making our schools more environmentally friendly. We are addressing gaps in the achievements between students.

Mr Seselja this morning commented on the government's focus. We only have to look at the facts, and those facts are in this amendment that the minister has moved: increased funding for education of more than 40 per cent since being elected in 2001; development of new policy areas in national testing; early childhood education; ICT; safe schools framework; countering bullying, harassment and violence; restorative justice programs and countering racism; investment in green schools initiative to enable students to continue to learn about the effects of climate change and how to tackle the problem, including \$20 million over 10 years to assist both government and non-government schools to become carbon neutral by 2017.

The opposition appears to be hanging its entire education policy on a reduction in primary school class sizes. While there is certainly evidence that doing so in the early

years of schooling, in kindergarten and years 1 to 2, as we are doing, has strong benefits, this is not the case throughout all the years of school and requires a broader policy intervention to ensure that ACT students continue to perform highly from preschool to year 12 and beyond. (*Time expired.*)

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 12.33 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice

Gas-fired power station

MR SESELJA: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, I refer to the announcement today of the full EIS regarding the data centre and power station in Tuggeranong. Given your and your party's refusal to support an EIS previously, isn't today's announcement another acknowledgement that this process has been mishandled to date?

MR STANHOPE: Absolutely and utterly not. What the government has said from the outset is that every proponent in relation to every project has a right to expect that the statutory processes will run without interference, most particularly from politicians.

What we see are the respective positions of the Labor Party and the Liberal Party in relation to this. There is a determination by the Labor Party, the government, to support the possibility or potential for economic growth and economic expansion. There is a determination by the government to ensure that our statutory planning processes are free of political interference.

What we see today is an announcement by the minister based on a recommendation by the independent statutory planning authority that a preliminary assessment undertaken by ACTPLA—at arm's length from government, without political interference—has raised a number of questions which the proponents of this major, important project need to answer before further or detailed consideration can be given to approving a development application.

We see today a rigorous, independent statutory process at work—a process that the Liberal Party in government would suborn; a process that the Liberal Party in government would intervene in; a process that the Liberal Party in government would not have allowed to run—and a result, a resolution, consistent with the statutory planning process that the Liberal Party does not support.

Today we see a stark difference between the attitude of the Liberal Party and the Labor Party to probity, to integrity in planning, to integrity in decision making and to the importance of an independent, arm's-length statutory planning process. Today we see the integrity of the ACT's planning process working in precisely the way that it was always intended to work, and consistent with everything which I and my ministers have said in relation to this project.

You have a major multinational company coming to this town seeking to make a major billion dollar investment in the economic base of this town, and the Liberal Party has done everything in its power to ensure that this project does not succeed, and that the independent statutory nature of our planning processes be suborned by political interference and political direction.

Today is a classic example of why politicians should not intervene or interfere in statutory planning processes. Today is a perfect example and proof positive of the strength of the planning regime that applies in the territory. What has happened today is absolutely consistent with everything that I and my ministers have said was a potential outcome of this process.

A process is in place. It has been running for a number of months. The statutory planner—independently, at arm's length from the government, without recommendation or interference from the government—has arrived at a position in his consideration at the preliminary assessment stage which raises a number of questions not appropriately dealt with in the application made by the proponents for this major development.

Today we see—and we saw it again in this response from them—the Liberal Party not prepared to accept the integrity of the planning process. We see their willingness, in government—were they ever to be elected—to interfere, to intervene, to corrupt the planning processes by political direction and interference. We saw it this morning too with their amazing backflip in relation to the emergency services fire levy. Their lack of capacity—

MR SPEAKER: Come back to the subject matter, please.

MR STANHOPE: It is the same issue.

MR SPEAKER: No, it is not.

MR STANHOPE: It is a lack of capacity, a lack of integrity and a lack of either political or moral strength to make the decisions that good, open, transparent government demands.

Mr Pratt: You led TRE up the garden path. You and your Labor mates and Actew—you led them up the garden path. Bloody incompetence.

MR STANHOPE: Today is a complete vindication of the position that the government has adopted in relation to this process from day one.

Mr Smyth: It's just another backflip. Another day, another backflip.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Smyth!

MR STANHOPE: There is no backflip here. This is the statutory planning process working precisely as it was intended to work—independent of government, open, transparent and effectively.

Mr Pratt: If you'd put them in the right site—

MR SPEAKER: I warn you, Mr Pratt.

MR STANHOPE: It is a wonderful vindication of the integrity of our planning process. It is a wonderful vindication of the attitude that this government has taken in relation to this thing from the outset. (*Time expired.*)

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Seselja?

MR SESELJA: Chief Minister, did you or your government require that a peaking power station be part of this proposal as part of the agreement to sell this piece of land in Tuggeranong?

MR STANHOPE: There were a number of conditions in relation to the potential sale of land. One of them was that the independent statutory planning process would be allowed to run, and of course by implication, without interference from the government—an interference that the Liberal Party have indicated that they are more than prepared, indeed willing, to adopt in relation to this. There were a number of conditions in relation to the ultimate transfer of the land.

Gas-fired power station

MR GENTLEMAN: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Minister, can you please inform the Assembly of the planning process in place for the assessment of the data centre project for Canberra?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Gentleman for his question. As members of the Assembly are aware, on 26 March 2008 a preliminary assessment for the Canberra technology city was lodged with the Planning and Land Authority. The PA was publicly notified in the *Canberra Times* and it was also notified by way of a notifiable instrument on the legislation register, in accordance with part 4 of the Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991. Over 700 submissions have been received on the proposal.

The ACT Planning and Land Authority have been undertaking an assessment of the proposal as set out in our planning laws, and they have now completed that assessment and advised me that more information is needed on certain aspects of the PA. So following a thorough and independent evaluation of the preliminary assessment by the Planning and Land Authority, their advice to me is that further environmental assessment of the proposal is required in the key areas of health, flora, fauna and heritage. As a result, today I have announced that I will be directing the proponent to engage an independent consultant to undertake an environmental impact statement on the project.

The government believes the data centre project has great potential for the Canberra economy and community, but we have been consistent in our commitment to the people of Canberra that the project will only go ahead if there are no adverse direct health impacts or environmental impacts for the community.

We have always said that we would follow the procedure set out in the law. The next step in the assessment of the project will further inform the planning authority as to the impacts of this project on the environment and the community. So in the coming weeks I will be providing the proponent with directions specifying the matters to be included in the EIS. This will require the proponent to engage an independent consultant to prepare the draft EIS. When ACTPLA receives the draft EIS, it will notify the public, and members of the community will have 20 business days to comment on the document. The draft EIS will be made available electronically on CD. It will also be available on the Planning and Land Authority's website and in hard copy from the Planning and Land Authority offices.

The timing for the completion of the EIS process depends largely on the time taken by the consultant to prepare the EIS, its adequacy and the issues raised by the public during the consultation period. Under the law, a decision must be made on the development application by 26 March 2009 and the EIS process would need to be completed to provide time for the Planning and Land Authority to assess and make a decision on that application. Any public comments received during the notification period will be considered by ACTPLA in its assessment and recommendation.

We have planning law, and we have an independent planning authority for a reason. This is an example of that law and that planning process working. ACTPLA have fully assessed the PA and have informed me under the act that they need more information. Under law, an EIS could not be called for under the act until the PA had been evaluated and reasonable grounds were present for me to call for one. Whilst there are many in this place who would say that an EIS needed to be undertaken earlier, the government has followed the correct process as set out in law, and we are now proceeding to an EIS based on independent advice from our authority rather than for political reasons.

The opposition have demonstrated throughout this process that if they were to form government they would seek to circumvent the planning law and make decisions based on political convenience—Wollongong style. The Stanhope government have always said that the process needs to be followed, and this is exactly what has occurred and what will continue to occur whilst the project is being assessed.

Mr Savery, from the Planning and Land Authority, said today that he would like to see the EIS completed by November. ACTPLA now has until March 2009 to make its final decision. When that final decision is made, the Canberra community can rest assured that the full impact of this project on the environment and their health has been fully investigated by independent experts in this area.

I remind members that in the debates we have had on this matter, on 7 May, 25 June and 27 June, I have consistently said that I would not make a decision to call for an EIS until the planning authority had provided me with that advice. This decision is entirely consistent with what I said on 7 May, 25 June and 27 June, at pages 1489, 1924, 1925 and 2277 of *Hansard*. (*Time expired.*)

Transport—rail

MR MULCAHY: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, last month you announced the ACT government's priorities for its wish list application to the federal government's building Australia fund. You mentioned a very fast train in your media release on the subject. However, much of your announcement focused on the inclusion of light rail in your list of major infrastructure projects. Chief Minister, can you advise the Assembly whether you have made any effort to engage with your counterparts in New South Wales, Victoria or Queensland in relation to a joint submission to the federal government for the construction of a very fast train?

MR STANHOPE: In a formal sense, Mr Mulcahy, no, I have not. Of course, a proposal for a very fast train is a proposal that would require in the first instance the full support of the New South Wales government and, indeed, the commonwealth government. I was pleased to have the opportunity which the Australia infrastructure fund presented and the invitation I received from Minister Albanese to make representations to him in relation to the projects that I believe the commonwealth should consider. I am pleased that, as a result of that, there has been a significant, broad-ranging community debate within the ACT, most particularly in relation to light rail. I hope and have every expectation that the commonwealth will take each of the suggestions I made seriously and that each of them will be formally assessed and, hopefully, progressed.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question.

MR MULCAHY: What preliminary work has the ACT government undertaken in this term of government in relation to a very fast train?

MR STANHOPE: I would need to check, but, beyond raising the issue in the way that I have, I am not aware of any formal work that has been undertaken in this term of this Assembly.

Gungahlin Drive extension

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Chief Minister and concerns the Gungahlin Drive extension. Chief Minister, why did you state in your media release of 23 July that "\$83 million has been set aside in the 2008-09 budget for the duplication of Gungahlin Drive" and why is this contradicted by the ACT Roads document tabled by your transport minister yesterday, through the office of the Speaker, which only shows \$30 million was scheduled over the next five years for stage 2 of the Gungahlin Drive extension and which only allowed for works between Belconnen Way and the Glenloch interchange?

MR STANHOPE: The position the government has taken in relation to the Gungahlin Drive extension is that we have undertaken to deliver a duplication of the Gungahlin Drive extension in the term of the next Assembly if we are elected. In the context of that commitment that we would seek to deliver a completed GDE duplication in the next term of the Assembly, we have of course identified the fact that there is the billion dollar infrastructure fund, which is included in the budget as

a significant initiative to prepare Canberra for the future and, indeed, which is a direct response of this government's good economic management and the fact that we have created the best balance sheet of any government in Australia as a result of tough decisions that we have taken to ensure that we have the best balance sheet and sustainable budget, with sustainable surpluses into the future.

We have accumulated \$750 million in cash and anticipated surpluses in excess of \$200 million over the budget cycle. We have, through the stringency of our economic management, been able to fund, through cash, a billion dollar infrastructure fund. There is provided within the infrastructure fund a capacity of \$83 million—\$83 million within the transport component of the infrastructure fund—and it is a great credit to the economic management of the territory that we are able to forecast and deliver a billion dollar infrastructure fund for the future from accumulated surpluses, cash accumulated from surpluses and anticipated surpluses in the order of a quarter of a million dollars over the next four years.

Contrast that of course with the \$60 million to \$80 million annual capital spend of the Liberal Party in government when they delivered accumulated deficits over the terms of the previous Liberal government—just compare the difference—in excess of \$800 million against a one billion dollar cash fund.

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, resume your seat.

MR STANHOPE: I beg your pardon, Mr Speaker.

Mr Smyth: The question was about what is in the budget and about documents tabled yesterday which show only \$30 million. I did not ask about our policy.

MR SPEAKER: The Treasurer.

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. One does understand the shadow Treasurer's embarrassment. It is an embarrassment that rises to the top whenever one mentions the fact that their annual capital spend in government varied between \$60 million and \$80 million. They accumulated deficits of over \$800 million.

Mr Smyth: Again, relevance, Mr Speaker.

Mrs Dunne: Relevance, Mr Speaker.

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

MR STANHOPE: Of course the \$800 million accumulated deficits contrast very starkly with the one billion dollar infrastructure fund.

Mrs Dunne: Relevance, Mr Speaker.

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

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I ask my colleague the minister for transport to re-explain. He might want to contrast the \$80 million accumulated deficits against our one billion dollar infrastructure fund. Thank you, Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker and Chief Minister. In budget paper No 5, page 7 you will see at the top of the page that \$83 million has been allocated out of this budget. Further, Mr Smyth quotes a page from the document that we covered yesterday. It has \$30 million in it. He forgets, however—conveniently I suggest to you—to go forward a little more in the document. If he does so, he will come across another page in there that says the same project will receive a further \$60 million.

When I went to school, Mr Speaker, 30 and 60 added up to 90. And what was the amount in the Chief Minister's press release? It was \$90 million. Mr Speaker, here we have a classic case of picking one page in a document. I can only assume that the problem with Mr Smyth is that he is lazy, he is illiterate or he is building a straw man. He has been sprung not doing his work. He is the embodiment of laziness.

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

MR SMYTH: Yes, Mr Speaker. Chief Minister, on page 34 of budget paper 5, why did the line items under "Capital initiative—transport" not mention the Gungahlin Drive duplication? Why do they have amounts of zero dollars in 2008-09, zero dollars in 2009-10, zero dollars in 2010-11 and zero dollars in 2011-12 for the Gungahlin Drive duplication if you going to build it in the next four years?

MR STANHOPE: Quite simply, the decision had not been made at that point.

Planning—land use

DR FOSKEY: My question is for the Minister for Planning and is in regard to section 63. In January 2005, I was advised in writing by both ACT and federal ministers that issues of housing mix and land use would be a matter for both ACTPLA and the NCA. When I spoke to the new owners of section 63 in May, they certainly took the view that the ACT government was still a part of decisions regarding land use. Yet in answer to a question put on notice by me during the estimates process in June the minister advised me that the National Capital Authority was the sole approving authority for the section 63 development. Now we have seen an admission that an ACTPLA blunder might lead to a retail glut in the city at a time of retail downturn. Can the minister advise the Assembly if he was wrong to try to duck responsibility for land use on this block and advise the Assembly what steps he will take to ensure that major developments do not proceed unless he is confident that they will effectively address the social needs of the Canberra community.

MR BARR: I thank Dr Foskey for the question. It would seem that Dr Foskey is confusing—as many do, as we have a somewhat confusing and overlapping planning system—responsibility for planning approval with land sale conditions. Those two things are entirely separate. The National Capital Authority is the approved planning body for development applications in relation to that particular site. But it was ACT

government owned land; hence the conditions that went with the sale of that were in the purview of the Chief Minister.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Dr Foskey?

DR FOSKEY: Why isn't the mix of housing, retail, commercial and public use in high-profile sites such as this determined by government social policy rather than by the developer? And does the government have any plans in place to review or correct the existing process?

MR BARR: I do not accept the premise of Dr Foskey's question. I again remind her of the point I made in response to the initial question, which is around the difference between being a landowner and being an approving authority for development applications. What it does highlight is the need, through the review of the National Capital Authority's responsibilities, to move towards the principle that the government—be it the territory or the commonwealth—party that owns the land should have planning approval for that particular land. That is why the government put forward such a policy position as part of the review of the NCA.

Dr Foskey: I do not believe that the minister responded to my actual question then.

MR SPEAKER: I think you had a supplementary.

Gas-fired power station

MR PRATT: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, given the announcement today that your government will now commit to a full environmental impact statement of the data centre proposal at Tuggeranong, why has your government up until today arrogantly ignored sound process and blatantly refused to take into consideration community concerns that all along sought a full EIS to be undertaken? When did ACTPLA first advise you orally or in writing that they were disposed to supporting an EIS for this project, and will you table all advice in the Assembly, Chief Minister?

MR STANHOPE: I am not the Minister for Planning. ACTPLA have never advised me orally or in writing in relation to a decision that there would be a full EIS in relation to this matter. They may have advised the Minister for Planning, but they certainly have not advised me.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Pratt.

MR PRATT: Chief Minister, whether you or your planning minister have the guts to answer that question remains to be seen.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Just come to the question.

Mr Stanhope: I beg your pardon, Mr Speaker. I just answered the question; the answer was no.

MR SPEAKER: Just come to the supplementary question, Mr Pratt.

MR PRATT: Chief Minister, how many months will this process delay the project, and how many months in total has your government added to the process by resolutely refusing to commission an EIS earlier?

MR STANHOPE: I thank Mr Pratt for the question. Mr Speaker, I am not the Minister for Planning. I do not have that information available to me. I am sorry, I cannot answer the question.

Gungahlin Drive extension

MR STEFANIAK: My question is also to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, why did you claim that your 2008 budget allows the GDE project to be completed in the next five years when Roads ACT documents tabled by your transport minister yesterday show that the bulk of GDE duplication, covering all works from Belconnen Way to Barton Highway, will not be built until between five and 10 years away?

MR STANHOPE: The government has consistently said in relation to this that it was in receipt of advice that in five years time the GDE would most certainly need to be duplicated to avoid significant delays. The announcement that I made recently was that this government would commit to delivering it in four years. The advice was first prepared by Roads ACT in relation to the GDE some months ago. By the time we get through this election, the next four years will end in the context of an election. Having regard to the basis for the undertaking I have made on the GDE—namely, that it was made in the context of an electoral cycle—we are looking at October 2012.

What the government has committed to is that it will deliver duplication of the GDE by October 2012. That is the basis of the undertaking we have made. With respect to the first advice, I would have to check, of course, but it is now some months old, so we are talking about 4½ years since that initial advice was made that this was a road that could be reasonably expected to have been delivered within five years, and we are delivering it within five years. The advice is that this is a road that can quite reasonably be expected to be delivered by any government to the people of Canberra within five years, and we are delivering it within five years. In fact, it will be delivered within 4½ years of when I first became aware of that position in relation to the GDE.

In the context of the absolutely foolish proposition that has just been put by the shadow Treasurer, in asking why wasn't the duplication of the GDE represented in the budget papers, it was not a budget decision. It was not in the budget papers and it does not appear in the bottom line, Mr Smyth, because it was not a project that was incorporated or included within the budget. It is a project—

Mr Barr: Still got the L plates on!

MR STANHOPE: That is right. It is quite remarkable. The question that was asked by Mr Smyth was: why is there no funding in the budget for the GDE? The GDE was not a budget project. It is not funded in the budget, Mr Smyth. I have just made the commitment. The budget is over. The budget was put together last April. Last April,

we had not made a decision to build it. Mr Smyth, in response to your direct question as to why there is a nought, a nought, a nought and a nought here, it is because the GDE was not a budget project. It does not appear. We do not retrospectively amend the budget papers when we make decisions after the budget has been passed. We do not go along and write little numbers in the budget papers for the budget that has just been passed. This advice, Mr Smyth, will be of enormous use to you in your continuing role as shadow Treasurer.

MR SPEAKER: Order! This is not about Mr Smyth. Mr Stefaniak asked the question.

MR STANHOPE: It is; it is all about Mr Smyth. In fact, the whole election is really all about Mr Smyth.

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: the Chief Minister is being entirely disorderly. You tried to bring him to book and he just said, "No, that's not the case." It is an entirely disorderly comment and he should be brought to book.

MR SPEAKER: The Chief Minister may respond to Mr Stefaniak's question. If he does not wish to, he can resume his seat.

MR STANHOPE: It would be far more entertaining just to dwell on Mr Smyth for a little longer—

MR SPEAKER: Not for me, though.

MR STANHOPE: and elucidate. Mr Mulcahy in his address this morning went to the extent to which Mr Smyth has dragged the Tuggeranong vote into the negative.

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, resume your seat, please.

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Stefaniak?

MR STEFANIAK: I do have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. We will see how we go. Chief Minister, when did Roads ACT officials learn about proposals to draw forward works between Belconnen Way to the Barton Highway to commence before the year 2014? Did they learn of your change of plans at 5.45 pm on 23 July in a media release?

MR STANHOPE: I must say, Mr Speaker, in response to that that there is perhaps just some little misapprehension here about how government works. I don't run around seeking the approval of officials in relation to decisions that I take, Mr Stefaniak. I am sure when you were a minister, if you can remember back that far—no, no; I take that back. Actually, it is quite likely that Mr Stefaniak really did need someone holding his hand in relation to every decision he ever made.

Mr Stefaniak, perhaps one thing that distinguishes you in government from us in government is that we actually do have the capacity to make decisions. We can make

decisions actually without the constant assistance and guidance of our officials. The government made a decision in relation to this matter through our processes and the decision has been announced—and a very good decision it was.

Gas-fired power station

MRS BURKE: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the planning minister noted today in his press release regarding an environmental impact assessment into the Tuggeranong data centre debacle that:

Following a thorough and independent evaluation of the Preliminary Assessment by ACTPLA, their advice to me is that further environmental assessment of the proposal is required in the key areas of health ...

Minister, what would your health assessment add that the EIS will not cover?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mrs Burke for the question. I have had some discussions this morning with the steering committee providing advice to me on the health impact assessment. The decision we have taken is that the health impact assessment should run along with the full environmental impact assessment that is now underway. They have been rolled in together, and those processes will run concurrently.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mrs Burke?

MRS BURKE: Minister, will the proponents be forced to pay for both the EIS and your health assessment? If so, have they been advised of this new expectation?

MS GALLAGHER: I can only answer in terms of the health impact assessment. Certainly, the decision was that the proponents pay for that work. That work will be completed as part of the full EIS.

Gungahlin Drive extension

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, traffic numbers tabled by your transport minister yesterday confirm that traffic volumes on the GDE are 19,400 vehicles north of Belconnen Way and 29,300 vehicles on Caswell Drive. Chief Minister, do you stand by your comments on ABC radio that these traffic volumes were unexpected?

MR STANHOPE: Certainly what was unexpected and not anticipated was the extent to which the lack of merging capacity on Caswell Drive south of Belconnen Way would cause the delay and the frustrations that it caused. The great difficulty is, of course, that cars travelling north on Belconnen Way wishing to turn south into Caswell Drive actually create a difficulty, interestingly, for cars travelling south on the GDE as they approach Aranda.

Certainly the government never anticipated or expected the extent to which there would be a merging incapacity there. We are moving quickly, through the provision of an underspend on the construction of the GDE, to expand Caswell Drive. It is our

hope that that initial expansion of Caswell Drive will ameliorate the worst of that particular merge—accepting that there are other issues that will be addressed progressively, particularly as a result of the decision that has been announced by the government to duplicate, in the term of the next Assembly, the whole of the GDE.

In relation to car numbers and expectations, the minister for transport would have been a more reasonable minister to approach in relation to the issue. I invite the minister to add a comment if he wishes.

MR HARGREAVES: For the information of members, I remind members of some of the comments that I have made in the public arena around the traffic numbers affected by the Gungahlin Drive extension project. I have said on numerous occasions that there were at least 20,000 vehicles on other major arterials during the course of the construction of the GDE. I have said on a number of occasions that we would look at the treatment for the second stage of the GDE once we knew what the result of the opening would be on the rest of those roads.

We fully expected those cars—the extra 20,000 vehicles on major arterials like Northbourne Avenue, Majura parkway and William Hovell Drive—to gradually come on line along the Caswell part of the GDE. What happened in fact was that the public in Belconnen, particularly, and the public in Gungahlin thought that the road was so fantastic that they all had to get on it a lot earlier than we thought they would. That is the unexpected part that the Chief Minister was talking about. It happened a lot more quickly than we anticipated.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Members of the opposition who are on a warning should not provoke me.

MR HARGREAVES: I remind people again that I said that there were an extra 20,000. In fact, the number increased. It came in at 29,000 at the last count. As I mentioned, I think yesterday, there were 19,000 on the Belconnen Way to the Barton Highway—this is both ways; let us not misconstrue this. And on Caswell Drive, part of the GDE, it was an additional 10,000 from Belconnen Way, making 29,000 going down there. In our count midway through the project of the GDE, we knew that there were approximately 20,000 going down the other arterials that we put down as an implication of the interruption and the disruption that the GDE had caused.

I also remind those opposite of the document that was tabled—to read what it says. It says that over five years it was expected that the traffic volume, particularly in Barton Highway to Belconnen Way—would be filled with cars in zero to five years. It is not like those opposite; there is nothing in their minds at all.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Never mind them, minister.

MR HARGREAVES: No need to build a bridge to nowhere.

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

MR HARGREAVES: Those projects, as identified in the document that they sought from us, which we happily gave them, told of the plan over zero to five years. They add up to \$90 million. The infrastructure fund has a provision for those funds: \$83 million is the provision. Our advice from roads goes back months.

Mrs Burke: Don't make the hole any bigger.

Mr Pratt: This reminds me of Dr Who and his travelling machine.

MR HARGREAVES: You just don't understand it, do you—or you are deliberately obtuse.

MR SPEAKER: Hurling insults across the chamber does not assist us much. Mrs Dunne, with a supplementary question.

MRS DUNNE: My supplementary question to the Chief Minister is: why did you ignore traffic studies published by the Department of Urban Services in 2001, which showed that the daily traffic volumes would reach 20,000 vehicles north of Belconnen Way and 30,000 vehicles on Caswell Drive by 2006? Chief Minister, why did you ignore them? Why were these traffic volumes so unexpected?

MR STANHOPE: I have never ignored any traffic modelling, Mr Speaker, ever.

Ambulance service—resourcing

MS PORTER: Mr Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, can you outline what steps the government has undertaken to improve resourcing to the ACT Ambulance Service?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Porter for her question. I am very pleased to outline to the Assembly that the Labor government has undertaken significant levels of investment in improving resourcing for the ACT Ambulance Service.

Last month I was pleased to unveil five new ambulance vehicles for the ACT Ambulance Service fleet. Three of these vehicles are all-new additions to the fleet and two replace older, intensive care ambulances. These new ambulance vehicles increase the total number of ambulances in the fleet to 20, including our patient transport units.

This highlights the government's commitment to improving the capability and the resourcing of our ACT Ambulance Service. It is very important to remember that we have seen an increase of around 10 per cent per annum in ambulance callouts each year for the past four to five years. These new intensive care ambulances are a welcome addition to the ambulance fleet, with demand for ambulance services in the territory continuing to rise. The level of investment is about \$914,000 for these five new vehicles. These are four intensive care ambulances and one patient transport unit.

I am particularly pleased to highlight the fact that officers of the Ambulance Service have been directly involved in developing the design and layout of these vehicles. It is their feedback that makes these vehicles some of the best in the country. Some of the features include improved high-visibility markings, LED warning lights that use new technology to draw greater attention to the vehicles under emergency conditions, orange low-glow exterior lighting to improve visibility and safety at night, and new module designs internally to facilitate the introduction of new and emerging pre-hospital technologies.

I am pleased to say that the ACT Labor government has now funded 10 new ambulance vehicles for the Ambulance Service in the last three years—10 new vehicles to replace or add to the existing ambulance fleet.

I am also very pleased to report to the Assembly that in the most recent budget the government also provided funding for an additional 12 frontline intensive care paramedics and two support staff. That increases the level of staffing in the ACT Ambulance Service to 156. These additional staff will complement the introduction of the new ambulance vehicles across the territory to meet the growing demand for ambulance services as our community continues to age.

Once again, it demonstrates ACT Labor's commitment to providing a high quality ambulance service with some of the best response times in the country. I am very pleased that the government has had the financial management skills and, indeed, the long-term vision to understand the importance of making an investment in this crucial area of community services.

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

Supplementary answer to question without notice Schools—early childhood

MR BARR: Yesterday in question time, Dr Foskey asked me a question in relation to early childhood schools and I indicated that the government had invested \$13½ million. That figure is incorrect. The correct figure is \$15½ million. I neglected to mention that recurrent funding of \$1.895 million over four years had also been provided in the budget.

Answers to questions on notice Questions Nos 2003, 2082, 2117 and 2121

DR FOSKEY: I seek an explanation as to why the following questions have not been answered: question No 2003 to the Attorney-General, which I have been asking about for months now, regarding low-doc and no-doc loans; question No 2082—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Would you mind doing them one by one so that the minister can respond to them individually.

DR FOSKEY: These are all for the Attorney-General; can I do them in one go?

MR SPEAKER: It would be better to do them one at a time.

Mrs Dunne: It will drag out the embarrassment.

DR FOSKEY: All right, we will drag it out.

MR CORBELL: I am aware that question on notice No 2003 is outstanding. The reason is that a range of developments at the commonwealth level have meant that the advice Dr Foskey is seeking needs to be updated. That is currently in process and an answer will be provided shortly.

MR SPEAKER: I anticipated that you would be spraying them across several ministers, so if you have some for the Attorney-General, bundle them together.

DR FOSKEY: In this case there is only one recalcitrant minister, Mr Speaker. Question No 2082 relates to enduring power of attorney; question No 2117 relates to community groups' interaction at the Alexander Maconochie Centre; and question No 2121 relates to women prisoners in the Alexander Maconochie Centre.

MR SPEAKER: Before the minister answers and responds to the barb, could you please withdraw the barb that you threw at the minister. It was unnecessary.

DR FOSKEY: I withdraw the barb; it was unnecessary.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you.

DR FOSKEY: But I am pleased to see that the minister is smiling.

MR SPEAKER: And he is not going to respond to it now.

MR CORBELL: Absolutely not, Mr Speaker, as tempted as I may be. In relation to Dr Foskey's inquiries, with respect to question No 2082, the action officer for this question is the same officer who was involved in the development of the government's guardianship bill. This matter has taken priority; as a result, the answer has not been finalised but I anticipate that it will be shortly.

In relation to questions on notice Nos 2117 and 2121, an administrative error has meant that the question on notice was not entered on the day it appeared on the notice paper and it is currently awaiting a formal response. Again, these should be provided shortly.

Dr Foskey: Is that the same with 2121?

Mr Corbell: You did not ask me about 2121.

Dr Foskey: Yes, I did.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Dr Foskey: I am sorry, Mr Speaker; that was not complete.

MR SPEAKER: Is there another question outstanding? Would you like to let us know what the problem is, Dr Foskey?

Dr Foskey: There is no problem. The problem is that I listed four questions and I have been told about three. I am waiting for an explanation about question No 2121.

MR SPEAKER: Minister?

Mr Corbell: My understanding is that Dr Foskey has asked about questions on notice Nos 2003, 2082, 2117 and 2121.

Dr Foskey: Yes.

Mr Corbell: And I have answered all of them.

Dr Foskey: Excellent.

Canberra—government investment Discussion of matter of public importance

MR SPEAKER: I have received letters from Mrs Burke, Dr Foskey, Mr Gentleman, Ms Porter, 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, I have determined that the matter proposed by Ms Porter be submitted to the Assembly, namely:

The importance of Government investment in building a better city and a stronger community for all Canberrans.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (3.18): In all areas of government, the Stanhope government has delivered a better city and a stronger community through its investment. We have taken the long-term decisions to prepare our community for the future. That is the advantage of having a stable team that is united, experienced and energetic. The Stanhope government has kept Canberra's economy strong, meaning that we can now prepare Canberra for the long term, with more health and community services, and it is this strong record that I will reflect on today.

The cornerstone of the government's commitment to better human services is the Canberra social plan. It provides a vision for building a better city and a stronger community. The 2007 progress report demonstrated the significant improvements it has driven for our community. It reported that fundamental reforms have been initiated in almost all areas of government activity and service delivery, including high-profile changes in public education, housing and health systems. Most particularly, this has been done by supporting community activities and celebrations, providing local support to families in Gungahlin and Tuggeranong in the form of child and family centres, and giving concessions on utilities to more than 26,000

low-income households. The Stanhope government is continuing to invest in the future. This is important work that it needs to do.

It is perhaps in the area of health that this government has had to make up more ground than in any other. We inherited a health system that was suffering from chronic underinvestment and poor decision making. A stunning example of this is the 114 beds that were cut from our public health system by those opposite. Since then, this government has built a better and stronger health system. Investment in health has gone from \$472 million in 2001-02 to \$889 million in this year's budget—a near doubling of spending on our community's health system.

We have restored the 114 beds cut from the system and have increased those bed numbers even more. The increased number of beds has taken back the spaces converted from wards into administration. At the end of 2008-09, this government will have funded an additional 172 beds in our system. Our system will provide an estimated 855 beds.

The additional investment in beds for our public hospital system is working. In 2007-08, the average bed occupancy of our public hospitals was 89 per cent compared with 91 per cent in 2006-07 and 97 per cent just two years ago. This decrease in bed occupancy shows that the additional beds funded by the government are working to reduce pressures in our hospitals.

That is only the beginning, of course. We are also driving year-on-year record levels of elective surgery through our hospitals. Our system provided 7,847 elective surgery procedures, year to date, as of April 2008. That is 348 procedures above the number provided over the same period in 2006-07 and it puts us on track for yet another record-breaking year regarding elective surgery procedures.

Mr Speaker, one of the most important elements of our health system is mental health, as you know. Under those opposite, mental health funding slumped to amongst the worst per capita funding in the country. In contrast, we have increased investment by 143 per cent, and it now enjoys the second highest per capita spending in the country. I was particularly pleased to see the establishment of the first youth step-up, step-down centre here in the ACT.

We all know that decisions for the future need to be made now. We are facing the issue of the fastest-ageing population in the country. That is why this government has made such a significant commitment to public health infrastructure and services in the 2008-09 budget. This investment includes a down payment this year of \$300 million in infrastructure as part of a comprehensive redevelopment of our health facilities which is likely to cost \$1 billion or more.

In this year's budget, we have funded: \$90 million for a women's and children's hospital at the Canberra Hospital site; \$37.6 million for a suite of mental health facilities, to include an adult mental health acute inpatient unit, a secure adult mental health inpatient unit, a mental health assessment unit on the Canberra Hospital campus, design of a mental health young persons' unit and an additional \$8.5 million of recurrent funding over four years for greater support for people with mental illness;

\$18 million for a new health walk-in centre at Gungahlin; \$9.4 million for a new 16-bed ICU facility at Calvary Hospital; \$5.7 million for digital mammography; \$5.5 million for a neurosurgery suite at the Canberra Hospital; \$5 million for the redevelopment of a community health centre to provide expanded health services to the community; \$4.1 million for a new 16-bed surgical assessment and planning unit to streamline the admission process for non-critically-ill surgical patients; \$2.4 million for 24 additional beds at the Canberra Hospital; and \$1.3 million for a new skills development centre.

This new infrastructure will lead to an increase of 23 intensive care beds, importantly; a 61 per cent increase in hospital bed numbers across our system; and an increase in mental health beds from 100 to 120. This will complement an increased number of care places which are based in the community. Aged-care and non-acute beds across the territory are projected to double, from 115 to almost 230, as will beds for the Capital Region Cancer Service—from 26 to 68. The additional beds will be housed in an integrated cancer centre with increased chemotherapy and radiation therapy services available.

Extended day surgery units will be developed at the Canberra Hospital and at Calvary. Better management of theatres will allow for emergency and elective surgery to be better catered for. I can recall, when I was working as a nurse in theatre, how difficult it was when we had to bump off elective surgery when an emergency occurred. A medi-hotel is planned for the Canberra Hospital campus, which will provide alternative accommodation for patients who do not need to be admitted but who need to be close to a hospital.

Already, the increased investment in recent years is delivering results. We have expanded the junction youth health model. We have built a new sub-acute and non-acute facility at Calvary Hospital. We are constructing a new paediatric waiting area for the Canberra Hospital emergency department. We have opened a third linear accelerator. There is an additional MRI machine at the Canberra Hospital.

We have invested in training the health professionals of tomorrow through a \$10 million allied health building at the University of Canberra. This is critical in the current environment of skill shortages that we are experiencing. I chair the education, training and young people committee, and we have heard from health workers and health professionals how important and critical this is.

In short, we have delivered a new, comprehensive health system for the people of the ACT. We have a detailed plan for increased investment to ensure that we truly have a better city and a stronger community through that investment.

Obviously, the Stanhope government's investment and planning are not restricted to health. In the disability area, we similarly inherited a disability services system that was under-resourced and failing. The Gallop report detailed a litany of problems that the Liberals caused through this mismanagement. In contrast, since coming to government, we have increased investment in the disability area by 69 per cent. Last year, the Labor government provided an additional \$15 million—the highest injection of funding to disability in the history of self-government. The new funding has

enabled people with disabilities to access much-needed accommodation and increased carer support, access to respite and improved community access programs.

In addition to this, the Australian government has committed to matching the ACT government's \$15.8 million funding boost for accommodation and support services. An additional \$15.23 million of commonwealth money will go to providing additional individual support packages, flexible respite care options, more supported accommodation places and increased community access places. The commonwealth will allocate \$1.69 million of capital funding for the ACT, which will be used to provide additional accommodation options. This contribution is very welcome and again demonstrates how Labor governments at all levels are committed to providing better services for people with disabilities. Further, in the crucial area of therapy services, we have increased expenditure by 106 per cent and have improved the government's equipment loan scheme and support for children with autism.

As with disability services, the ACT government has made child protection a priority. Since coming to government we have increased spending in this area by 167 per cent. During the last sitting the Assembly passed the new Children and Young People Act, as we are all aware, which modernises the current system and incorporates significant policy changes. This is particularly so in the areas of care and protection, youth justice and childcare services. The changes have been informed by community consultation with young people and key community, government, legal and advocacy agencies over many years.

The Stanhope government will also shortly open the new Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, which will replace Quamby, with design and operation in compliance with human rights principles and which will provide opportunities for rehabilitation, positive personal development and reintegration into the community. Members would be aware that an opportunity is being organised by the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Young People to visit Bimberi next week. I would encourage all members in this place and their staff to take up this opportunity and to join us on that visit.

The Stanhope government has invested in the innovative child and family centre model, now championed by the Prime Minister, as an opportunity to bring health and family services together under one roof. The centres at Tuggeranong and Gungahlin are now providing a vital service to those communities and the government has announced planning work for a third child and family centre, at west Belconnen.

Finally, I will touch on the area of community services. We have increased expenditure on homeless services by 74 per cent and continue to overmatch commonwealth government contributions by \$3 million per annum. We have worked with the community sector workforce to improve conditions. This year, the government implemented one of the key recommendations of the tripartite community sector task force report, with the establishment of a portable long service leave scheme for the community sector. We are currently seeking feedback on the implementation of that. As you know, Mr Assistant Speaker, I worked for many years in the community sector. I know how important this and other work undertaken by the sector with government has been.

Members have heard in this place before about investment in education, sport, recreation, emergency services, social housing, affordable housing and the building of and investing in our city and our community to meet its rich potential. There is much more that could be said. I could stand here all day and list all of the achievements of the Stanhope government and its sound investment for the future. This government is proud of its achievements so far. However, most importantly, it is facing future challenges by having proper investment where it counts.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (3.33): It is interesting that the government could not even manage a 15-minute speech on their achievements and the things that they have delivered and invested in the city.

Mr Stanhope: How pathetic.

Mr Corbell: How pathetic.

MR SMYTH: I can hear the jibes across the chamber. Yes, they are hurting. It is interesting. What they should have done is tried to list the things that perhaps they failed to deliver on. The premise by Ms Porter seems to be that if you spend the money it will be okay—the Kevin Costner *Field of Dreams* vision of politics. It did not work in the films and it is not going to work here in the ACT. You only have to read the litany of failures to know that this government has not understood the importance of investing in a better city and a stronger community on time, on budget and with community involvement.

Mr Corbell is leaving so we might as well start with Mr Corbell. He ran the step-down facility. When he ran health, there was a step-down facility that we announced in March 2001. It was only completed last year. It was only six years late. We have the library building, which was in our last budget. I was the minister responsible for it. Again, it is five years later. There was the glassworks, six years later.

There was Gungahlin Drive. We find today that it was not a budget announcement. It is not in the budget because the decision was made after the budget. Yet yesterday it was in the budget. The numbers were there and the Chief Minister was quoting page 7, page this and page that. Again we have confusion.

There are the roads at the airport that are running so late. Tharwa Drive and Lanyon Drive are roads that should have been built ages ago. There is Tharwa bridge, a bridge that was going to be knocked down due to John Hargreaves's incompetence but was saved by the community and the hard work of Steve Pratt.

There is Griffith library. That is building infrastructure! That is investing in building a better city and a stronger community! Shut the local library. That is in touch with the people of the inner south!

There are the 23 schools. Let us not forget the small number of schools, the 23 schools, that this government has closed or will close. That is certainly building a better city and a stronger community! Go to the meetings and see the devastation, the

looks on the faces of people at Tharwa, Cook, Flynn, Isabella Plains and Chifley. I did not see too many Labor members at the consultation on what to do with the land that is left over. Closing 23 schools in such an arbitrary way is not investing in a better city and a stronger community.

But it goes on. There is Billabong Corporation and an Indigenous community that are still trying to come to grips with their future because they were left without a licence by this government—left without a licence. They were looking after some of the most disadvantaged people in this city but they were left without a licence because the government did not deliver.

There is network 06 and network 08 in ACTION. I am sure that Mr Pratt will speak about the debacle that they were. They were certainly building a better city and a stronger community! There is the promised youth mental health facility, Mr Corbell—promised in the 2005 budget, not delivered in 2007-08. It should have opened this year and we have not even seen a plan yet. That is a good investment! That is building a better city! That is building a stronger community!

Calvary aged care took five years. Constitution Avenue—we are not going to see the upgrade of Constitution Avenue now, because this government cannot stand up to the federal Labor government. And there is the National Convention Centre. As tourism minister and Treasurer, Mr Quinlan said in December 2001, “You will have the answer on a convention centre next year.” Normally “next year” would mean December 2002; maybe we will get an answer by December 2008.

And of course there is the busway. Depending on whose body ends up in the political graveyard—whether it is Mr Corbell or Mr Hargreaves—it will or will not be built in somebody’s lifetime. The problem is that the government has spent an enormous amount of taxpayers’ money but has delivered nothing in regard to the busway.

There is the standing joke of the week that they are already talking about at the Gungahlin shopping centre. Will the Gungahlin pool have two, four or eight lanes? Will it be an Olympic wide pool? Will it be half a pool? Will it be a quarter of a pool? Will it be a 25-metre pool? On the basis of what the government delivered when it said that it was going to build Gungahlin Drive on time and on budget, we can expect that the 50-metre Olympic pool—which I assume is meant to be going into some sort of facility under the Labor government if it is re-elected—will actually be a 25-metre pool that costs twice as much. That is the standard of the delivery and the standard of investment that this government has made in things like that. They are already joking about the Chief Minister and his delivery of projects.

There they are, the people of Gungahlin, living at the end of a two-lane road—a two-lane road that has cost more than double what it was projected to cost. When it is a four-lane road, it will probably cost four times what it was projected to cost initially. They still sit there at the end of two lanes waiting. Depending on who you talk to and what time of the day it is for the government, it is going to happen between zero and five years, five and 10 years, zero and four years or in 4½ years. Yesterday we heard that it was in the budget; today we heard that it was made after the budget. We have a Chief Minister who is all over the place on Gungahlin Drive, and at the end of that

road will be half a pool. There you go. That is what they are joking about in Gungahlin.

This is a government that does not deliver. We get health. We hear the words from Ms Porter about health. I have got two numbers to quote back to the member for Ginninderra. When we left office, the elective surgery waiting list was 3,488. It is now—

Ms Porter: It is throughput now.

MR SMYTH: Oh, it is the throughput. If you are not sitting on the list it is okay when you quote the throughput. But Mr Stanhope was going to make a crisis injection of \$6 million—a crisis injection—to fix the elective surgery problem, to fix the hospital problem. It was all going to go away with \$6 million. It was a crisis injection. The list has gone from 3,488. It is just below 5,000 now, but it did peak above 5,000—a 40 per cent increase in people waiting for elective surgery in the nation's capital. What is the government's investment in building a better city and a stronger community health? Longer waiting lists, longer waits. That is all it means—longer waiting lists, longer waits and a staff who paid the price for their mismanagement. There is the much-touted women's and children's hospital. It sounds like a great initiative, but if you listened to what Ms Gallagher had to say during the estimates it is simply a co-location. That is all they are doing: they are pulling all the units together.

What about tourism? Let us look at tourism. After the investment this government has made in building a better city and a stronger community for all Canberrans, the numbers still are not as good as they were in 2003-04. Five years later the tourism numbers are still behind what we had in 2003-04. Thanks for that! And we had the huge cut—a quarter of the budget, \$4.5 million just gone like that—on the basis of a spurious review that was conducted but that no-one can see. I would be embarrassed to show the review as well.

Then there is the emergency services authority. That was building a better city and a stronger community! It was out; it was in. It was up; it was down. It was badly run by the ministers, who had no commitment to protecting this city in the way that they said they would.

We all heard the Chief Minister's words after the bushfires: "Blame me." It is interesting that the only one left from the leadership group at the time of the bushfires is the Chief Minister. The head of the bushfire brigade is gone; the head of emergency services is gone; the head of JACS is gone; the head of Chief Minister's is gone; the head of urban services is gone. The list is long and honourable.

Everybody got blamed except the Chief Minister. He is also now known in the community as—and this was investing in building a better city and a strong community!—"Take on the coroner". That was a real investment! Spend all the taxpayers' money on stopping the coroner from finding the truth. That is a genuine investment from the Labor Party in building a better city and a stronger community! "Let's not get to the bottom of the matter. Let's not come up with solutions to stop it from occurring again. Let's attack the coroner, because she is going to say things that we do not like."

What about sport and rec? Again, they suffered cuts. That was a good investment in building a better city and a stronger community! At a time when we have growing childhood obesity and major concerns about the health of all Canberrans, what do we do? We cut the natural preventative measure of sport and rec. That is it. Critical to this was Healthpact. Ms Porter spoke about Healthpact. I thought you had a lot of gall speaking about Healthpact. "We shut down Healthpact, the independent authority. We dragged it back into the arms of the department." And what is the first decision? The funding for the Capitals to run an antismoking body image program among young Canberra women is cut.

This is probably the country's premier female sports team—certainly one of Canberra's most successful female sports teams—and you cut the funding to help them help young women address body image and stop them from smoking. That is a seriously good investment in the future, isn't it! We cut the most effective vehicle—successful young women talking to other young women about how they should look and feel and about whether or not they should smoke. What do you do? You cut it. That is an investment in the future! That is an outstanding investment!

People remember that. People do remember these things—trivially small amounts of money in the context of the budget, but huge amounts of money for community groups. People remember that particular cut, particularly in women's circles, and what it said about this government's commitment to the health of young women in the territory. That is a sterling investment in building a better city and a stronger community for all, Ms Porter! I thank you for reminding me to mention Healthpact to you again.

Then there is the failure to invest in business—the absolute failure to invest in diversifying the economic base of the ACT. There is \$1.6 billion of revenue above what they expected to receive—a billion and a half dollar boom. It is on the back of the property market, mind you, but there is a billion and a half dollars. What have we got to show for it? Over the last few years, absolutely nothing. The taxes continue to go up; they are piled on the backs of the people of the ACT. But for the government to have the gall to talk to us about the importance of government investment in building a better city and a stronger community for all Canberrans and for Ms Porter to try to laud what this government has done is just appalling.

The list just goes on. In March last year suddenly the Chief Minister discovered climate change. It was the decision of the century. This was amazing. He had discovered climate change. After having abandoned our climate change strategy—which I remind members was the first climate change strategy in the country and the first one to have a strategy imprinted out there which people could work by—the Chief Minister finally found climate change. After years of not investing in environmental sustainability in the ACT, he is rapidly playing catch-up.

But the Chief Minister suffers from the burden of the albatross of the ACT, Mr Hargreaves. Mr Hargreaves is responsible for projects like no waste by 2010. When it was started in the late 1990s by the previous government, 2010 led the world in attitudinal change amongst residents in cities. There are now no-waste networks

around the world because of what happened in the ACT. But it has been largely ignored and abandoned by the Stanhope government. That is good investment in the future, Ms Porter! That is the way that you build sustainable cities! You forget about things like that! They are successful programs that have been copied around the world. “We will ignore it. We make no decisions. We make no hard decisions, certainly. We do not invest in it. We just ignore it. We talk about it but we have no commitment to building a better city environmentally and a stronger community with environmental credentials.” Then you discovered it last year; you just discovered it.

We have *Weathering the Change*, a wally of a document. Goodness me! It proposes weaker targets, in longer time frames and at greater cost than what I proposed as the minister responsible back in 2000. That is an investment! That really is investment! Wait longer; let things get worse; spend more to achieve less! Explain that logic to the community—about how this government is investing in the community. They know you for what you are. They understand. They will make a decision come October.

The list of things that this government has failed to look at is long and honourable. I am sure that Mr Pratt might mention graffiti—how investing in a graffiti-free environment has beautified the ACT. I am sure that somebody will mention taxis and how this government has invested in proper infrastructure and a system that certainly makes the taxi system work better here!

In terms of volunteers, I can only come back to the government’s investment in members of the Rural Fire Service who, last week or the week before, were absolutely insulted to be told that they had two weeks in which to consult and offer their comments on the business plan put forward by the commissioner, Gregor Manson, so that the government could implement what it wanted to do before the start of the fire season. Total arrogance. Total disregard for volunteers. In particular, total disregard for volunteers who regularly put their lives on the line in front of bushfires, protecting this community—to be given two weeks notice in which to make comments about things that have dramatic impacts on their lives. That is a real investment in building a better city and a stronger community, an absolute investment!

It goes along with the aborted FireLink project. Millions of dollars were spent. On one hand we know that there were upgrades and things that could have been done to assist the system, but it was thrown from the moving train because Mr Corbell was divesting himself of all of Mr Hargreaves’s failures. On top of that, we can add the ESA headquarters move to Fairbairn. Now, there is a good investment! You sign a lease so that you can rent buildings so that you do not move anybody there so that the few staff that actually get stationed there get a transfer back—(*Time expired.*)

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (3.48): Mr Speaker, this is an interesting topic because I think it really looks at how you interpret a lot of these terms that Ms Porter has used. “The importance of government investment” is fairly straight forward. But “in building a better city” I think is one area that we need to tease out a bit more. The other term used relates to “a stronger community” and finally “for all Canberrans”.

Because we have discussed many MPIs rather like this—most of the ones put out by the government are of this nature—I would like to take a slightly different approach to

it so that I do not fall asleep halfway through my speech. First of all, what is a better city? Really, we have to ask who is it better for? Is it better for the government? If this is the case we would probably see a lot of landmark developments—the kinds of things that a chief minister gets remembered for into posterity.

No doubt a successful arboretum would fit into that category—but the key words are “being successful”. I think that we should look at what is a better city for the people who are most disadvantaged and for a city that is going to still be doing what it should be doing in 100 years time. And 100 years could be a little short. We are nearly 100 years old here in the ACT; so we know that it actually did not take quite as long to get there as we might have thought. I think looking 100 years ahead is a fairly feasible test of what makes a better city. I think that if we are going to be talking about a better city we cannot avoid that word “sustainability”.

Sustainability, of course, has three dimensions. We hear primarily about the economic one here and from the government, but we know that social and ecological aspects are just as important. In fact, probably they matter more to most people here. I actually think there is a question about whether our city will be around in 100 years time. If the predictions by the climate change scientists are accurate, there is a good chance that our city will not exist in the way that our government currently imagines it. Will we have enough water? Will we have more frequent fires? Is this a city that is sustainable to live in without volumes and volumes of cheap coal-fired electricity? At the moment all our planning is premised on the fact that we will continue to have cheap oil, cheap electricity and plenty of water.

Is it 500,000 people by 2030? I think it is. I will be looking forward to seeing the revised Canberra plan and to seeing whether there are any alterations to that which indicate that the government is really taking sustainability on board. Thank you very much, Mr Chief Minister, for the booklet *Living in Canberra* that came in my *Canberra Times* today. If I were living in Montreal or perhaps Pretoria in South Africa, I might find that a useful booklet. It seems to me to be written for people who do not live in Canberra to encourage them to come to Canberra. Anyway, perhaps Canberra people need to be encouraged to stay here.

How would we have a sustainable city in 2100? For a start, we would be getting people out of cars. We should be doing that right now. The car should be a very limited last resort option in 100 years time. If we want a sustainable city in 100 years, we have got to start planning that now. That means good public transport. It means amenities close to hand so that people do not have to jump in their cars to go and buy a litre of milk. I must say that people who are paying a fortune to live in O'Malley will have to jump in their cars every time they want even a loaf of bread or a litre of milk. How much forward planning was there in that?

We will need to encourage a smaller ecological footprint. How are we going to do that? We know that Canberra people at the moment have one of the largest footprints in the world. We know that we buy more and throw away more than anyone in the world. We are the people most likely to buy an expensive product. I think it is something like \$1,000 per person that we do not even use before we dispose of it.

We do have a consumption problem here, and we do source our food from all over the planet without a thought. Strawberries in winter—no problems. What else was there? I notice that we have got cherries from North America at the moment. Just imagine the food miles that they have travelled. These are the kinds of things that we have to consider. Canberra as a better city would be embedded in its region. We would be encouraging the introduction of food that is grown in our region. That might mean some changes to our diet, but I tell you what: it is a lot better than not surviving at all.

I notice that Ms Porter had difficulty reading her speech, probably because it had so many figures in it. It is very hard to read out a string of figures and sound fascinating and interesting. But that is what we had and to me spending money actually does not mean a lot at all unless you say what we get from spending that money. What is the big vision there? What vision does this government have for Canberra in 100 years time? Will it still be here? I think that we should make sure that it is because we have got to show that an inland city in Australia can survive and can, in fact, be sustainable. And that is a challenge.

Turning to making a stronger community, I think that our communities would be a lot stronger if we involved them a lot more in decision making about their communities. At the moment we have got disempowered communities who are watching their shopping centres disappear, who have seen their schools disappear and who have watched their bus routes change. I think this has happened twice in the last four years. These are changes over which they feel they have no power. How do you strengthen communities? You give them some power, Mr Acting Deputy Speaker.

I note, again in this wonderful booklet *Living in Canberra*, which is so informative to you if you live in South Africa, that there is going to be some consultation and focus groups around the new Canberra plan. It is going to be called “Towards our second century”; so perhaps we have got that far-sighted thinking happening there. But isn't it terrific that the government has just found out there is a problem with community consultation—that there are disempowered communities? So we put out a new plan and give people the opportunity to give feedback and to attend forums and focus groups.

All that will be over before the election, of course. Then what does it matter what we do. Let us hope that sustainability is a big word in this new Canberra plan. I think that “real citizen engagement” was the term used in the latest document on community engagement. Let us hope that we start to empower communities and realise that they have some of the answers.

Many of our keys to sustainability will be through developments that happen at that local level through groups like See-Change, which we have got in Jamieson and Woden now, through CROWK, the Concerned Residents of West Kambah, and through the little neighbourhood community organisations that do all that work. Wouldn't it be a good idea to give them a 2008 election present by covering their insurance?

I was told just the other day that the biggest impediment to a stronger community is the cost of insurance to community organisations. It was very disappointing to hear

that the government-organised community insurance program does not actually save community organisations any money at all. I am waiting to hear better news on that, but if we want to really strengthen our communities we could start right there with our community organisation insurance policy.

I look forward to talking about our aged people in our community when we get to the next item, which I see that Ms Porter has also brought to our attention.

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Minister for the Environment, Water and Climate Change, Minister for the Arts) (3.58): Mr Speaker, I thank Ms Porter for raising this matter of significant importance to the community. When we talk about infrastructure we are talking about much more than bricks and mortar and steel and concrete. We are talking about services for the community and making life easier and better for the people of Canberra.

Underpinning this, of course, is a strong focus on generating economic activity and using the dividends to meet our community's needs. Mr Speaker, I am very proud of the fact that this government has kept Canberra's economy strong so that we can invest in the future with more money for schools and hospitals, addressing climate change and building a stronger community.

We have maintained a budget surplus, balanced the books, and made the tough decisions to prepare Canberra for the future. As Ms Porter has already articulated, our record speaks for itself. We have doubled spending on health services for Canberrans, and I understand that we have lifted the mental health budget from the lowest per capita in Australia when we came to government to the second highest.

We have increased funding for disability services and child protection services so that we are better able to protect, support and care for those most vulnerable in our community, and we recorded strong economic growth with the lowest level of unemployment and high interstate migration.

Mr Speaker, our commitment to the future in delivering what the community needs is apparent across the ACT, but I would like to highlight at this time our particular focus on the new development areas of Gungahlin. We have initiated a bold program of development in Gungahlin of both physical infrastructure as well as vital community services. We are able to do this because we have strength and stability through working together as a united, experienced and energetic team.

We are delivering on a range of initiatives to build a better city and a stronger community for Gungahlin. The Gungahlin Drive extension, which was recently the recipient of the Master Builders Association major silver project award has delivered seven kilometres of road and 10 bridge and underpass structures.

Along with other road connections, the Gungahlin Drive extension now provides improved access from Gungahlin and the new northern developments to other suburbs of Canberra. We are also committed to a staged duplication of the GDE, starting with a \$4 million project at the southern end of the GDE which will, amongst other things, create a second lane from Aranda to the Glenloch Interchange.

Mr Speaker, the road was designed to be duplicated, and given there are now over 20,000 people using the road daily it is time, as we have announced, to commence the process for the duplication of the GDE. We have committed, as people know, \$83 million, or at least there is an \$83 million capacity within the budget, in the \$1 billion infrastructure fund that is a feature of the budget just delivered. That is a provision, and I think this is a point that has been misunderstood certainly by the Liberal Party in this place, that is over and above just the standard or normal rolling capital budget that is a feature of any budget within the ACT.

We have also committed \$18 million for a new community health centre at Gungahlin in direct response to the needs of this growing community. Of course, Mr Speaker, that \$18 million committed for a new community health centre at Gungahlin is simply \$18 million out of a \$1 billion health enhancement project. It is a complete re-jig and re-build of health capital infrastructure in the ACT, the first \$300 million of which has been provided for in the budget just passed by the Assembly.

That \$18 million for a new community health centre for Gungahlin is just the first \$18 million of a first \$300 million which has already been committed or provided for out of \$1 billion which we anticipate investing in health capital and facilities within the ACT over the next 10 years.

In addition, we are investing heavily in quality education services in Gungahlin. The schools in Gungahlin feature excellent standards of teaching and learning and high quality facilities. The Amaroo school opened in 2004 and features a renewable energy system that uses solar hot water panels, in-slab heating, roof-mounted PV cells and a wind turbine to generate electricity. The school also has large water storage tanks to collect stormwater for recycling within the school.

We have invested over \$23 million in the development of Harrison primary school, which opened in 2006. We have a \$1.5 million school upgrade program running over four years for improved school facilities in Gungahlin. We have also committed \$67 million to the development of the proposed Gungahlin college, and our last budget provided additional funding for a feasibility study for a possible Harrison high school, plus we have allocated \$27.7 million in fibre optic technology to every school in the ACT.

This is all part of our commitment to providing state-of-the-art schools and quality education. We are ensuring that young families have access to affordable and well-located housing through our land release programs in new suburbs like Bonner. Our 15 per cent housing affordability targets will be met in this new development and the own place program will be delivered in partnership with the private sector to benefit low to moderate income earners wishing to make the move to home ownership.

In June this year we announced the release of 2,200 sites for home developments and the first 114 blocks were released by ballot on 28 June in the suburb of Bonner. Mr Speaker, these new residents of Bonner will be part of the Gungahlin community by late 2009 and will enjoy housing that is well-designed, family friendly and environmentally sustainable. Over time the population of Bonner will reach approximately 6,000.

Earlier this week my colleague the Minister for Police and Emergency Services announced that the Gungahlin police station will operate 24 hours a day from January 2009. Twenty-four additional police and an extra two dedicated patrol cars will be stationed at Gungahlin from next year to provide Gungahlin residents with a permanent full-time police station. The government has committed an additional \$3.1 million in recurrent funding and \$200,000 in capital funding to do this.

Mr Speaker, this expansion has been made possible through this government's major investment in policing by increasing the total number of police in the ACT by an additional 122 police since 2001-2002. My colleague the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation also announced this week the government's commitment to building a pool and indoor leisure centre for the Gungahlin community.

We are anticipating that the new centre will include a 50-metre pool, a 25-metre pool, at least one court space—for example, a netball court—and associated amenities such as a cafe and gymnasium. In stark contrast, Mr Speaker, the Liberal Party, in response to the announcement of a major leisure centre and Olympic swimming pool for Gungahlin, have committed to not building such a facility for the people of Gungahlin.

The Liberal Party have declared unequivocally that they will go into this election with a policy of no pool for Gungahlin. That is an amazing lack of commitment by the Liberal Party for the people of Gungahlin. It is almost a spiteful response from the Liberal Party to an announcement by the government. It is a petulant response from an immature and inexperienced leader that the Liberal Party, if they are elected to government, has absolutely no intention of providing a swimming pool, aquatic centre or gymnasium for the residents of Gungahlin.

We are committed, Mr Speaker, to building a better city and a stronger community, and the developments that I have outlined above will allow the people of Gungahlin to benefit from yet another state-of-the-art community facility in the leisure centre. This commitment comes on top of other developments of community and recreation spaces in Gungahlin including the establishment of the Harrison district playing fields and neighbourhood oval, feasibility and forward design of the Throsby district playing fields and forward design of an enclosed oval next to the swimming pool site in the town centre.

The government is also committed to improving economic activity in the Gungahlin area by releasing blocks of land for commercial development in the Gungahlin business park. Land sales in June this year will lead to a real boost for employment in the area, which will benefit both the Gungahlin community and local business operators in the town centre, thus helping to secure the economic future of Gungahlin.

Mr Speaker, the government has also been leading the way in the development of child and family centres with a very successful one-stop shop for parents operating at the Gungahlin child and family centre. The centre brings together integrated services for children, including maternal and child health, play groups, therapy, parenting services and allied health services such as counselling and nutrition. And the Gungahlin child and family centre is currently leading a project which involves the engagement of the families attending the Koori pre-schools in Ngunnawal and Holt.

Of course, this government's commitment to investing in building a better city and a stronger community stretches all the way across the ACT. We are in the process of drawing up an infrastructure plan to set longer-term priorities to build on those commitments made for our \$1 billion infrastructure fund which was announced as part of this year's budget. Mr Speaker, this \$1 billion fund is simply a first down payment on a long-term program to build a better city and a stronger community for Canberra.

A centrepiece of our infrastructure plan is our health services and facilities program. The 2008-2009 budget provides \$300 million over four years to begin the health infrastructure program called "Your health—our priority". This will take our health system into the next decade. We are investing in major projects such as a \$90 million brand new women's and children's hospital, a suite of mental health facilities, including an adult acute inpatient unit, a secure adult unit, mental health assessment unit—(*Time expired.*)

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (4.08): Mr Speaker, this certainly is a timely subject to be raised as a matter of public importance. I thank Ms Porter for bringing it to us, but that is about all I thank her for. I do not thank her for this attempt to throw out an election curtain. This revised MPI barely deals with protocol. I am sure there is no correlation at all between the fact that the ALP seems to be very attached to the slogan of "building a better city" and the title of Ms Porter's MPI. It is, after all, an election year.

It may be construed by this government that, by virtue of its poor decision making and failure to adhere to proper process, it has instilled a sense of community of sorts, a sense of togetherness and bonding, formed out of the community's overwhelming disdain for the way in which this government conducts itself. Look at the crowds that have gathered and continue to gather to protest against the power station and data centre proposal at Macarthur. Look at the 300 or so members of the community that banded together only yesterday in their protest against the closure of the Wanniasa medical centre. Look at the hundreds of community-minded citizens who bonded over the closure of 26 schools and the Griffith library. These bonds, if we are talking about building a stronger community, are formed by adversity and as a reaction to the arrogant, dismissive behaviour of this Chief Minister and his lacklustre ministers.

You really do need to learn, Mr Stanhope, that, as a community leader responsible for the cohesion, welfare and strength of our community, this is not the way you are supposed to go about it. This is not the way that you are supposed to strengthen our community. The fact is that that this government has no regard for the ACT community at all, let alone building a stronger one. In fact, this MPI should be called "the ALP's divestment in building a better city", or perhaps it should be called "demolishing a better city", because, when you look at this government's track record, that is about what it amounts to.

Let us have a look at a number of examples. The Griffith library was closed by the Labor government with flagrant disregard for the important role played by libraries in providing literacy and communications services as well as providing a focus for local

communities. Instead of investing in our library network, this government has divested it. Let us not forget the classic comment from Mr Hargreaves, the hapless Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, that probably underscores this magnificent government attitude: “I didn’t consult with youse, because I knew what youse would say. Therefore, I made the decision to go ahead and shut the library.”

Let us look at school closures. The core of local communities is often their local schools, which enhance the ability of residents to connect with their neighbours. But 23 of them have been closed by Labor. Initially, 39 were on the hit list, so the anxiety built around those 39 schools and their communities. That is really building a strong community, is it not, Mr Speaker? Building better communities does not mean shutting huge numbers of schools. Let us face it, schools oriented to communities, smaller schools and smaller classes are what build a better and a more cohesive community. This government has spat in the eye of that principle.

Let us have a look at the city shopfront. Access to essential services has been denied by the closure of this important government facility. Again, it is not investment but divestment. What about police? We have just heard the Chief Minister crowing about the police minister’s gorgeous announcement that they are increasing police numbers. I think he said 107, or 122 perhaps. But that is only after denying in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006—perhaps waking up in 2007—that there was any problem with our police numbers. Do you remember, Mr Speaker, that the police presence on our streets, the strength of our police and their ability to be able to back each other up were problems, and this mob were in denial? They were only dragged kicking and screaming to increase the numbers, backflipping again. There has been divestment in our police services over so many years, and now finally we have a belated announcement to try and do something about it.

Let us have a look at the 2006 rationalisation exercise which saw the destruction of our bus network. That was great investment, was it not? Ms Porter, that is another example of your government’s divestment approach to exercising its so-called duty of care over our city. My colleague Mr Smyth touched briefly on graffiti. There is a wonderful investment. Have we not seen Mr Hargreaves investing beautifully in the more complicated, colourful graffiti patterns on the Braddon depot, a depot which, of course, has responsibility for cleaning up our urban and cityscapes? He has invested there all right. Graffiti there has remained untouched for 12 months. That is an investment! Talk to the shopkeepers down through Braddon shops where the same graffiti tags are proudly displayed as those on Mr Hargreaves’s depot. Those same tags are scattered right the way down Lonsdale Street and other streets. That is an investment in the look of the city! Well done, Mr Stanhope and Mr Hargreaves.

What about the bushfires? What investment did we see from this government in 2002 in fire prevention and preventative and strategic planning when the bushfire and drought indexes were through the roof? Nothing was done at all. They just sat there waiting. Despite a small but rapid and vicious fire in December 2001 which indicated what was coming, still they sat there on their bums and did nothing about preparing this community. That is not investment.

What about the power station and the data centre? That is an abysmal example of this government taking into account the needs of the community and, indeed, the needs of

the business community. Does ramming something secret beneath the radar build stronger communities? Does running a sham health impact assessment build stronger communities? Does refusing to undertake an EIS until finally you are overwhelmed by community opinion build stronger communities? Is the way to build a stronger economy to contribute to stronger communities leading the proponents up the garden path and siting the damn thing in the wrong place? The proponents must be wondering what the hell they walked into. Well done, Stanhope government.

There is the Tharwa bridge. There was no consultation with that community. There was no bringing along of the community on that one. As Dr Foskey quite rightly pointed out earlier, if you are going to build stronger communities, you empower them; you bring your communities along with you. Mr Hargreaves just said to them, "Well, guess what: this bridge is going to fall into the river, so we'll have to build a concrete one." That was a good piece of governance, was it not? What an investment that was! "We will divest the old wooden bridge because it is going to fall into the river." Well done, Stanhope government.

Of course, the Gungahlin Drive extension is another example. The budget was brought down in April, and in April the government had no idea they might be considering a duplication of the GDE. That is why there was nothing written into the budget. The Chief Minister today talked about a "rolling budget" to belatedly talk away his dilemma where, again, he was caught with his pants down.

This Chief Minister is constantly caught with his pants down. We have seen him caught with his pants down over the Macarthur power station. We have seen him caught with his pants down over the data centre and now the EIS. We have seen him caught with his pants down on the Tharwa bridge when he had to step in and relieve the hapless minister for municipal services and reserve the decisions about what to do about the Tharwa bridge. We have seen him caught with his pants down over Gungahlin Drive extension. We have seen him caught with his pants down over the FireLink project. We have seen him caught with his pants down over Tharwa Drive, which was neglected for five years. We have seen him caught with his pants down over the bus network. He used to be known as Captain Underpants, but now he should be known as Captain Pantsdown! What a government.

Mr Speaker, in all seriousness, a good government has to have the strength and the purpose to defend the public interest. This government has failed again and again to invest in this community.

MR STEFANIAK (Brindabella) (4.18): This is a very interesting matter of public importance, and I would like to make just a couple of points. I cannot see how you are actually building a better city and a stronger community for Canberrans by not taking them with you. I will just deal with one case in point, and that was the absolute sham, disaster and the total lack of real consultation in relation to closing 23 schools. That still causes great angst in our community.

We have been out talking to communities, in particular, the Cook, Flynn, Hall and Tharwa communities and several other communities, and they certainly do not think closing their schools builds a better city or a stronger community for Canberrans.

Those schools were at the hubs of their particular communities, especially in areas like Flynn where the school was the only public facility there. In the two rural villages of Hall and Tharwa, the schools meant a hell of a lot to the local communities. In Cook a very useful school had operated for many years and had already survived one school closure. Indeed, you would actually save money by not closing Cook and Hall. *(Time expired.)*

MR SPEAKER: The time for this discussion has expired.

Schools—class sizes

Debate resumed.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (4.19): Mr Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to support Mr Seselja's motion in relation to education today, because education is where we can make a real difference to the future of our community. Education is where we make real inroads into building a strong community. It is through education that we make future Nobel laureates and future prime ministers. Sometimes, despite the best will in the world and despite education, we also create school dropouts. How we treat children at school really makes a difference to them. We can never guarantee successful outcomes for everyone, but we use the education system to give every child the best chance we can.

If you are an ecorat like Mr Barr, you convert the differences in children's outcomes to a dollar cost. Those differences would obviously be dwarfed by the savings we make by educating children well and helping them to become functional members of a strong city and a better city. But if we just talk about these things in pure economic terms, we miss the point. We exercise on behalf of the community a sacred trust, and it is never more important than when we decide the future of our children.

We have to think very carefully about what education means. When we talk about education, do we think about investing, or do we, as the government does, think about expenditure? Do we put the money that we have put into education on the red side or the black side of the ledger? When you are dealing with the Stanhope government, it is something that comes down on the red side. It is something that this government thinks that it must spend money on and it does not really think about the benefits.

A purely fiscal view of the world is an incomplete picture. We can be responsible, but we cannot forget what public expenditure is for. Education is for the benefit of and not simply for the cost of the community. Surely any investment that we make repays the dollar investment many times over when we provide children with a good education.

We are in a time of high prosperity and good employment, and we live in a community that places a high premium on education. But what we see under the tutelage of the Stanhope government and three successive education ministers is that there are many people in the ACT who do not feel that we have a decent education system. This is more than a failure of financial management. We saw that financial management was used as an excuse for the failed towards 2020 process. Even today,

parents are puzzled as to why we had to go down that path and why we were threatened with the closure of 39 schools. We are about to see the eventual closure of 23 schools if Andrew Barr gets his way. Parents still ask me why.

We know that it was not about educational benefits; there were no educational benefits about it, and the minister himself said that it was about the savings. He admitted that the savings would be \$34 million—that is, two per cent of the education budget. In order to achieve those \$34 million in education savings, the government had to initially spend \$185 million in capital investment. Since then, that number has grown. Now there are fewer closures and there will be fewer savings achieved by Mr Barr.

The principal reason that the Liberal opposition opposed the ham-fisted approach of *Towards 2020* was that the small and meagre savings did not justify the amount of disruption that Andrew Barr was bringing upon the ACT schools community. As we know, the question of savings in *Towards 2020* were based on highly questionable assumptions. Many of the costs touted by the minister were wrong, and most of the schools involved had their cost figures revised down by the minister.

The minister likes to talk about the fact that he is an economic rationalist, but he seems to have forgotten that economic rationalism is just not about cutting expenditure. He stands here, over and over again, saying that he is the only economic rationalist in this parliament. The point is that real economic rationalists are not just about cutting expenditure; they are about cutting unproductive expenditure. Does anyone in this place actually think that expenditure on education is unproductive? This minister has proved over and over again that he is not interested in having an education system that provides for the whole of the community.

We are now in a situation where, with all of the education policies of this minister and his predecessors, we are still seeing a decline in government school attendance. There has been no attempt by this government to understand the reasons why or to address the concerns. As I have said before, the government does not know the real reasons why people are abandoning the government school system. They call it a drift, but I think it has gone past being a drift when you have just on 40 per cent of all your school children not being educated in the government school system. In the high school system in particular, something like 49 per cent of children are educated in the non-government school system. There are a whole lot of reasons, but this government and this minister and his predecessors have never bothered to find out what is causing the drift.

I have posed this question on a number occasions: what do people do if they are running a business and they suddenly realise that they are losing market share? They can do one of two things: one, they can find out why they are losing market share and address the issue. They can find out why customers are suddenly not coming. Is it training? Do they need to retrain the staff? Do they need to refine their product? Do they need to advertise better? You have to find out why people are not coming. Two, you could do what a bad businessman does or what a bad government does and worry about the costs, and you cut costs and close down branch offices but you still do not know why people are moving away.

What we have seen with Jon Stanhope under his tutelage in ACT education is that education is going into receivership. It will soon be the case—there is nothing that Andrew Barr has done in his two years or more in the job that will address the issue—that ACT government high schools will be a minority system. By his own admission, they will be the schools that the disabled, the poor and the intractably badly behaved will attend. That is a huge loss for our community. Mr Barr spends a lot of time talking about the education outcomes of people in the ACT and how they are better on average than they are in the rest of the country. To a large extent, they should be, simply because of the economic and social and educational background of parents. One of the biggest determinants of performance in education is the socioeconomic background of your parents and the socioeconomic background of the school which you attend.

It is very interesting that Mr Barr's own research—the research that he put together in an attempt to try and debunk the harsh criticism from the Save Our Schools representative, Trevor Cobbold—actually shows that the ACT performance in examinations and tests like PISA is in decline. The findings of Mr Barr's own research on the performance of students in the Australian Capital Territory on PISA says on page 2 that the results show that the best performance in reading and literacy in the ACT is not as high in 2006 as it was in 2002. It goes on to say that these findings are pretty much the same across the country. Although it is a national decline, in the capital city where you have the best and the brightest and the most educated community, you should not be seeing that decline. It goes to show that the investment that the Stanhope government has made has been without thought. In 2000, when Mr Stefaniak was the education minister, the children who did PISA exams did much better than they did in 2006, when this minister was the Minister for Education. That is what we see.

Under Jon Stanhope, Simon Corbell, Katy Gallagher and Andrew Barr we have seen a decline in educational standards, a decline in educational achievement and a gutting of the community. What we have today is this pathetic set of amendments, which, of course, is what you come to expect from the Stanhope government, because they cannot address the issues on the table.

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (4.30): The Canberra Liberals have not only made a commitment to reduce class sizes, but also, as part of a comprehensive range of associated policy initiatives, we intend to address teacher numbers by appointing 150 primary school teachers and an additional 20 teaching assistants, pay the HECS debt of exceptional graduate teachers and—a favourite initiative of mine—sponsor mid-career professionals in maths, science and information technology to do teacher training. In an ageing society, what a wonderful initiative this is by this visionary opposition—looking at the best ways to exploit the resources available in our community. This is, indeed, a centrepiece and Mr Seselja is to be congratulated on that. Thank God there is vision somewhere in this chamber because there is nothing on the other side.

The benefits of having 35 more high school teachers, and the downside of Mr Stanhope culling these 35 teacher positions in the first place, present a very

interesting juxtaposition. Clearly, we need these teachers, particularly in the junior years of high school. In that terrible transitional phase, students in their early adolescence need far more attention and far more care than they are currently getting in the ACT's public school system.

We have talked often in this place about the growing incidence of bullying—not just physical bullying but psychological bullying. Many of us in this place have tabled examples of a number of incidents to demonstrate that this is growing. I put it to the chamber that it is because our teachers are becoming rather overwhelmed, particularly in the early high school years. Therefore, we need to see that capacity developed.

Too often, we see teachers trying to function in high school environments which seem to be more about trying to control matters rather than stepping back, taking a good, deep breath and pursuing educational and academic excellence. In those high school years we need to be focusing on putting that extra shine on the academic standards of students.

I am afraid to say that it seems to be a bit of a struggle out there. The anecdotal evidence about this is very strong. I was at the Calwell shops last Thursday afternoon and, unusually, I was approached by three public school teachers. Of course, they are very careful about talking to the opposition in broad daylight, but they felt rather concerned and wanted to have a chat.

Mr Mulcahy: It is like you think it is East Germany.

MR PRATT: That is right. We have not quite reached that stage yet, Mr Mulcahy. They really were appealing because their jobs are so difficult, given the amount of time they spend on simply trying to sort out conflict within classrooms and within schools. This points to the need not for bigger schools and for classes which are still too large, but for smaller class sizes where we can afford to make that happen. Hopefully, one day we will be able to do more in high schools to assist in bringing their class sizes down to a reasonable size. Our teachers need that extra bit of capacity to be able to do what they should be doing first and foremost—teaching, and building on the excellence of that teaching. And they are saying that they are hurting. They are saying that to many of us in this place. I think Mr Mulcahy has had representations made to him from time to time. I can recall in better days Mr Mulcahy and I discussing those sorts of matters. These are capacity issues.

Let us look at the smaller class sizes that the opposition is proposing in its policy. I refer to a study that I did not have time to refer to yesterday in the MPI. The Australian Primary Principals Association, in recent meetings with the Canberra Liberals, made it quite clear that students in the ACT up to year 4 tend to trend upwards in terms of academic performance in the areas of numeracy and literacy. However, from year 4 onwards, where class sizes jump, the achievement plateaus. This assessment was reinforced in a groundbreaking publication released in 2007 and titled *In the balance: the future of Australia's primary schools*.

Let us look at the plateau from year 4 onwards that these principals referred to. They made a couple of points. Firstly, the only way to effectively address this plateau is to

reduce the class sizes of all years through to year 6. The Canberra Liberals, as a consequence of that, will fund a maximum of 21 students per class from years 4 to 6, a position that is not supported by the Stanhope government. And one wonders why. The gains, if we can achieve that, are long lasting and sustained. Clearly, the ACT government are simply narrowcast here. They have been blindsided. They are stuck with this ceiling to year 3. They will not think beyond that.

We know that when children get to the ages of 10, 11 and 12, they are getting to that phase of their growth and personal development where the challenges they face are much stronger. At that point in their lives, they are a little more troubled. Academically, they are also beginning to think differently, and this is a crucial time when they need a lot more attention than they are getting with class sizes which do not allow them to get that better focus.

That is why we believe it is very important to focus on this particular phase in education. It does not stop at year 3. You have to take it at least through to year 6—that very interesting transitional time between being a young kid and moving into early adolescence. A lot of focus is needed by teachers then. That is why it is crucial to bring these class sizes down.

I spoke yesterday in this place about the STAR project, which we believe was very influential in persuading many scholars and policy makers that small class sizes do make a difference. Its findings have been used to justify reductions in larger class sizes of 30 or more, small average reductions in class size and reductions in class size in other years of schooling. The critics of the STAR report considered that the faith placed in smaller classes was misplaced. A key critic is Professor Eric Hanushek. The principal argument posed by the professor is that across-the-board large reductions in class size are a highly expensive means of achieving small gains in outcomes and that other policies should be considered. That is what he said, and it is addressed here. It would seem, of course, that Minister Barr has read the professor's work exclusively from front to back, and that is where he seems to be hanging his shingle. We have talked about a number of studies in this place that really debunk those theories.

This debate is not about pitting investment in teacher training against smaller class sizes. Rather, it is about achieving both outcomes at the same time. There is no reason why we cannot have smaller class sizes and better teacher outcomes, and that is exactly what the opposition has proposed. The government, quite erroneously, is saying that you cannot do both—that you cannot invest in teacher quality and reduce class sizes at the same time. Well, we have proven that you can. The opposition's well-funded and well-tested proposal proves that these can be undertaken concurrently.

This very point was made by Harvey Goldstein and Peter Blatchford from the Institute of Education at the University of London. In their analysis of the STAR project data, they provide another piece of empirical evidence research. So it is not just being said by the STAR report or the Australian Primary Principals Association; it is also being said by these learned men from the London university. We believe there is a strong case for reducing class sizes to year 6, and we on this side of the chamber will pursue that policy.

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (4.40): I will take some time to speak about the issue today. Class sizes and the quality of public education in general are important issues and it is worth while taking time today to discuss this important issue.

Mr Pratt would have had some dealings with people in the US and would be familiar with the expression “motherhood, apple pie and the flag”. There is a certain element of this in the motion that Mr Seselja has put forward. They are all great ideas—no-brainers. They are all fine, but I am not sure that they are the makings of an entire education policy. Maybe that is coming later.

The issue of class sizes in public schools is, of course, topical because of the Liberal Party’s recent election promise that this motion seems to replicate. I do not think there is much doubt that there is a deal of evidence that smaller classes are the preferable model in education, particularly for younger children. For that reason, the Liberal Party’s policy is, at least to an extent, welcome.

I will not focus on the costing of the policy in this forum, although I listened with interest to the debate yesterday. However, it is costed in the same way that the shadow Treasurer has used in the past. I would be inclined to be a little bit sceptical of the Liberal Party’s figures, and especially of the way that the figures constantly changed on the day they were released.

Mr Seselja: Do you want to go into them for us?

MR MULCAHY: I will cost them, don’t worry, because they have had four different costings so far.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR MULCAHY: It is an area of great sensitivity for the opposition.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Former friends should not squabble in here.

MR MULCAHY: I thought we were all friends here, Mr Speaker. So the issue of costings is one I am always happy to talk about because it put most of the grey hairs on my head, in trying to deal with my former colleagues opposite who struggled with economics. It is not a strong point over there. I was distressed—indeed, it was one of the factors that prompted me to enter the Legislative Assembly—when my daughter was placed in a composite class with children spanning three grades in her then school.

I have the distinction of being the only member I could find in *Hansard* who was subject to interjection in an inaugural speech, when the then minister for education, Ms Gallagher, took issue with me talking on this matter. But it was a matter of fact, and they called my office just after I gave my first comments here to find out what school was involved. Composite classes of 50-plus students will not bring out the best

in our young children. My opposition to this sort of practice remains. As I said, it was one of two issues that drove me to enter the campaign and get elected to this place.

However, I do acknowledge that a bit of brief research yesterday has shown that primary schools in my area of town have average class sizes in the mid 20s. Similarly, I have spoken to a teacher at a local high school where class sizes seem to average around the 25 to 30 mark, and I think this is a reasonably acceptable range. I am not particularly convinced that 21 is a magic number. I think that, as long as class sizes are kept at a reasonable level—and by “reasonable” I mean in the 20s—we can achieve a very good outcome for our children. By way of across-the-chamber comment, I said to the minister that at my first school there were about 74 people in the class. It shows that there has been considerable progress.

It was interesting that, when speaking to this teacher, he said that it was important to recognise that each class was different and that, whilst one group of 25 or even 30 students was manageable, with another group a much greater level of individual attention was needed. I agree with the Liberal Party that class sizes are important, and I recognise that there is a body of academic evidence that backs up this point. I have looked at a range of these studies, some of which the minister said were a bit dated. The source of some of this research is the Australian Education Union, so it may not be an entirely objective presentation of research. When you look at the work of Mitchell in 1989, Project Prime Time in Indiana, Project STAR in Tennessee, Baines’s research from 1992, the Burke study from Melbourne and Professor Campbell’s study in Brisbane, you see that there is quite a deal of evidence that suggests that lower class sizes can deliver better educational outcomes.

It is important to note that class size is not the only issue to be addressed when it comes to improving the public education system. The government’s point that it has made repeatedly in light of the Liberal Party’s election promise, that it is investing in infrastructure and quality of our teachers, is well made. You cannot expect quality education results unless you have properly remunerated teachers and state-of-the-art facilities. Notwithstanding my well-reported views about industrial relations and wage pressure, I have consistently believed that teachers have not been remunerated at a level that is appropriate. It is one area of public expenditure in particular where I would like to see a greater allocation of funds, because nothing is more crucial than educating the next generation of young Canberrans. If we do not pay teachers competitive amounts, let us not be surprised when we do not attract the most able and brightest young people to that profession.

The quality of a student’s education is likely to depend not just on the size of their class but on the facilities that are available to that class and the standard of the teacher that is in charge of the group.

I acknowledge the final two points of Mr Seselja’s motion and policy. I believe that the policy of enticing mature age people with appropriate backgrounds and experience into the teaching profession could be of some use. I remember Mrs Dunne advocating this idea some time ago and I think it has merit. I must say that I am not sure how many are going to take up the offer, but it is worth giving it a go. Similarly, offering a number of HECS forgiveness scholarships to top graduates may attract some teachers to Canberra.

However, I am not convinced that either of these initiatives is likely to come close to solving the broader problem. I believe that a greater focus must be placed on the type of people that are attracted to go into teaching in the first place. We must attract quality, committed people into the teaching profession, and one of the key ways to do this is to reward existing teachers and to remunerate them according to their worth. You simply will not attract quality people to take up any profession, but particularly teaching, unless they believe they can have a career that will provide them with a comfortable living that equates to the importance of the work that they complete.

I recall attending an introductory night when my eldest daughter was admitted to St Clare's college. In talking to one of the teachers there, he said, "I cannot even afford to take on a mortgage on my income level for my family to have permanent housing." To me, it was quite a profound comment. Here we were, giving this person an enormous level of responsibility, and they were simply not remunerated enough to maintain a reasonable standard of living in this city.

HECS forgiveness might be a short-term attraction to some, but I seriously doubt that it would be enough for an individual who was deciding, for example, between studying law or embarking on a teaching career. Similarly, I am sure that there are a large number of teaching graduates who get into the classroom, realise how hard it is, look at their friends in the public service or other employment making similar or greater amounts of money with less stress, and they jump ship. Adequate remuneration is a key way to address this issue and it should be a priority for the major parties to look seriously at how to recruit and retain quality teachers.

There has been considerable progress in nursing. I think there are issues with numbers of staff but the improved remuneration in relation to nursing has given Canberra something of a competitive edge, and the same principle should apply in terms of education. Of course, money is not the only consideration. People are more likely to look favourably on teaching careers if they are in an environment that is supported by quality infrastructure and equipment, and that is why, although class sizes are important, it is also important to ensure that schools and classrooms are well resourced.

I welcome much of the Liberal motion. Class sizes are important, but they are not the only measuring stick of a quality education system. Frankly, I believe the key point of this debate can be lost if one focuses purely on class sizes. After all, the Liberal promise extends an existing commitment by Labor by just three schooling years. On its own, it is far from enough to ensure that students in the ACT system receive a quality education. I would be much more impressed if the Liberal Party would present a comprehensive policy that addresses the broader issues facing the public education system rather than cobbling together a few points that are likely to grab a headline.

We must address how to recruit and retain quality teachers and how to best equip and support those teachers to educate our children. We need to consider infrastructure and the sorts of facilities that are available in schools. We have to consider the issue of discipline in public schools. It is not just an issue in public schools, but it is an issue that is coming up. When I go to shopping centres, people talk about it. I know it is

something Mr Pratt used to be very strong on until he was told he was not allowed to talk about it. But the fact is that it is an important issue. It is an issue of distress for teachers in their working environment. Some have told me that they felt threatened. Some are concerned that they do not get adequate backup. I think it behoves the government to have a stronger position on that to ensure they can work in a sensible environment.

So while there is a sort of gratuitous slapping of themselves on the back in this motion which I will disregard, I will go with the substantive points and I am happy to support the motion. But I do note that Liberal policy in education is far from complete. It covers one aspect of public education—probably enough to warrant a few TV ads—but it does seem to ignore a lot of the issues facing our public schools.

MRS BURKE (Molonglo) (4.50): I will be speaking to our motion but certainly will not be addressing the very petulant amendments to that motion, as if Mr Barr could not for once in his life talk through a single motion or, in fact, those opposite talk through any motion without changing it substantially. But it does change the spirit of what we are trying to present today. However, my colleagues have clearly outlined, in no uncertain terms, the way in which the Stanhope government really have taken the big axe to education in the ACT. We have outlined in that motion, and through our policy announcements, what a Seselja government will do.

I want to focus on maybe one of those aspects which, I think, is the root cause of a lot of problems as we progress through school life for students, for parents and for teachers, and that is the smaller class size issue. It is one that is widely debated around the world. There are many research projects done on this and they have been mentioned in this place today.

But the decision by the Canberra Liberals to implement a policy over the term of the next Assembly of having no more than 21 students in ACT government primary school classes will go a long way to restoring the faith, I believe, of the ACT community in our public schools. The Liberals are keen to address the root causes of the decline in educational standards and the drift from public education. I think this is an innovative move to, at least, start to do something. Nobody can accuse us of not having a go. I think that this motion today outlines some of the really excellent initiatives that we have so far put on the table.

As I have said, much world research, in fact, has been done and it supports such an argument and our position on small class sizes. The research on class sizes defines student outcomes solely in terms of subject learning. However, we all know that education is more than cognitive progress; it also is about personal social development.

I looked at an article on the ABC News website which shows that research on class size is wrong. The President of the State School Teachers Union, Anne Gisborne, disagreeing with research from the ANU which shows class sizes do not impact on learning—of course, she is taking on board large class sizes, and I think that is one thing we would not be in favour of—said:

I think there's fairly significant evidence to indicate that smaller class sizes are essential.

She would be an authority on that and I would take her word for that. I know there is a lot of conjecture. I know Mr Gentleman, in his speech, referred to the fact that we were looking at the STR project in a not holistic way. I will make some comments about that in a moment. Ms Gisborne said there was significant evidence and I think that is right. This one action, I believe, will have that flow-on effect of once more making teaching a profession that people will be proud to be a part of and value for the excellent services that they provide to our community.

Focusing on smaller class sizes, I was interested to read some comments which emanated from research done in Columbia relating to public health, and that is something I would like to focus on now. It was really interesting. This research showed that reducing the number of students per classroom in US primary schools may be more cost effective than most public health and medical interventions. I think this is something that we need to look at. If we are going to talk about holistic approaches to our community, I think, it is an excellent parallel to look at the health outcomes for children as well as educational outcomes. The study also indicates that class size reductions would generate more quality-adjusted life-year gains per dollar invested than the majority of medical interventions, which I found quite interesting.

It is worth noting also that a study we have talked about, the STAR project, which stands for student teacher achievement ratio, is considered the highest quality long-term experiment to date in the field of education. I am reading from the EurekaAlert! website, under the line "Study shows reducing class size may be more cost-effective than most medical interventions", of 16 October 2007:

The study shows that a student graduating from high school after attending smaller-sized classes gains an average of 1.7 quality-adjusted life-years and generates a net \$168,431—

that is, American dollars—

in lifetime revenue. "Higher earnings and better job quality enhance access to health insurance coverage, reduce exposure to hazardous work conditions, and provide individuals and families with the necessary resources to move out of unfavourable neighbourhoods and to purchase goods and services," says Peter A. Muennig ... assistant professor of Health Policy and Management at the Mailman School. "Regardless of class size, the net effect of graduating from high school is roughly equivalent to taking 20 years of bad health off of your life."

When we look at the correlation, right the way through smaller class sizes are shown to benefit significantly the health of an individual. So it is quite interesting. The article continues:

The findings not only raise issues of whether investments in social determinants of health can be more cost-effective than investments in conventional medical care, "but more intriguing still, also bring up the idea that each dollar invested in education could also potentially produce other long-term returns," observes

Dr Muennig. He notes that further analysis will refine models and produce more-precise estimates, but “these findings do point to the importance of looking more broadly at the options available for improving health outcomes—including those outside the boundaries of clinical medicine.

As one continues to read through them—and I will not go through them—there is a whole raft of information on that particular topic. I found that quite interesting. I will be pursuing that one further. But as we continue to read through the various research papers, both old and new, what is becoming clear is that some central things are emerging and that smaller class sizes benefit economically disadvantaged and minority students.

Studies in America also show that cutting class sizes has proved beneficial among pupils of all ethnic and economic backgrounds, according to comparisons in test results for English and mathematics. I think we need to look and continue to look more broadly at this specifically in the ACT because we are such a multicultural community. I think that is a very valid point in itself as well. Smaller class sizes obviously benefit those types of students who then perform better academically in small class sizes at all grade levels. This was pointed out by Bennett and Robinson in a 1986 NEA published review of major class size research reports and central themes which emerged from that study.

It is also critical that greater support is given to teachers to accompany reduced class sizes—and I think this is what Mr Gentleman was alluding to in the STAR project—so that appropriate teaching can be developed and reinforced as recognised by project STAR. Obviously, what we do see here in our policy is exactly that. We are on track to do exactly that. We are on track, in fact, to give those people in our community, those teachers who do such an excellent job, more support. And this is what we are saying. We will provide teachers with resources and professional support. The Liberal opposition do realise that, by reducing class sizes, there will be other things that we will need to do towards that end.

Teachers reported, in a lot of studies and findings that you read, that they prefer small class sizes in order to identify students’ needs and to provide more individual attention as well as to cover more materials. Project STAR recognised at the outset that small class size does not make a difference if teachers do not change the way that they teach.

The motion that we have before us today backs up a very sound policy. It backs up a very sound position. It is a starting point. There are other aspects, of course, to the motion today which I think members have spoken fairly kindly of, all in all, except for the government who simply cannot bring themselves to talk about it. All they can do is pooh-pooh it. It is a very sound policy indeed.

The policy seeks to extend the maximum of 21 students per class through all years of primary school, extending the support given from K-3 right up to year 6 students. It says that the policy will be supported by a range of associated policy initiatives that address teacher numbers, extra classrooms and the provision of tailored teacher support.

I think this is a very holistic policy. I think it attacks many of the problems that this government have simply been in denial over. Successive education minister—three, in total—simply have not attacked the issue head-on. Smaller class sizes mean, as we see here, teachers will be able to control children within their care and, of course, that relates more to antisocial behaviour as well. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR SPEAKER: I call Mr Seselja, to close the debate.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.00): I thought I was speaking to the amendment.

MR SPEAKER: You can speak to the amendment and close the debate if you wish. I cannot see a—

MR SESELJA: I cannot see a lot of—

MR SPEAKER: There is not a mad rush for the call.

MR SESELJA: I will speak to the amendment at this point and we will see whether anyone makes their way down. I would like to speak to the amendment in particular because, as usual, we have seen the government, particularly in their embarrassment over this minister's lack of educational policy, come out with a list of all the stuff they have done.

It does not say anywhere here, in fact, that this government have reduced the proportion of government spending on education. But under this government educational spending as a proportion of the budget has gone backwards. They can talk about all the stuff they have done, but we have seen school closures when they said there would be none, and we have seen less of a commitment to education because, as a proportion of the budget, this government now spends less on education than when they came to office.

That does demonstrate their commitments. It does demonstrate their priorities. And we know what their priorities are. We have seen them. We see them all the time. When we drive up the Gungahlin Drive extension, we see the Labor Party's priorities. We see the twisted metal on the side of the road. We go out to Fairbairn and we see the Labor Party's priorities—empty buildings, at \$180,000 a month. That is what they spend money on, instead of devoting it to better educational outcomes.

It is interesting to look at this amendment. This Assembly will, no doubt, because of the Labor Party's majority, pass this amendment. The minister could not even speak to the second amendment. He is happy to put it out there but he would not speak to it because he knows it is wrong. He cannot demonstrate his case. He did not say one word or devote one second of his time to backing up No 2. He cannot because he is wrong. He is wrong again. We gave him the chance yesterday. He hid; he did not want to take the 15 minutes, so he took eight minutes to tell us all sorts of things other than backing up his claim and backing up the claim of his Treasurer.

Again, he puts it here in writing but cannot even speak to it. He does not have the guts to speak to it because he knows it is wrong. In fact, he was backed up by his new friend, Mr Mulcahy, who said, "Those costings are wrong." I said, "Tell us where they are wrong." He said, "I will, later. I will tell you later when I go back and look at it, when I have had a chance for one of my staffers to look at it, but they are wrong."

How does he know that they are wrong? Because the Treasurer told him. The Treasurer told him they were wrong. The Treasurer told the minister that they are wrong, but the minister has such little confidence in what he is told by the Treasurer that, having been given a total of 30 minutes over the last two days to devote even two minutes or five minutes of that time to backing it up and backing up the claims that he is happy to put in his press releases, he was unable to do it.

We do note that he has kept his head down this entire time. It is embarrassing. It is embarrassing when you have got so much opportunity, when you have got all the resources of a department and Treasury to back you up, that you do not have confidence in what your Treasurer is saying and that you do not have confidence in what you put in your own press release to come here and say why you think you are right, because, in his heart of hearts, he knows that he is wrong on this question.

That is why we cannot support these amendments; particularly we cannot support No (2) because he has not even spoken about it. He is so embarrassed, he is so unsure of himself, that he refuses to speak to it. We have given him the opportunity.

I will continue to speak to the amendment and particularly Mr Barr's comments.

Mr Barr: You cannot even make up your mind what you are talking about, Zed.

MR SESELJA: He chimes in now; he figures we are not talking about the money anymore so he can put his head back up. All of a sudden, he can put his head back up and pretend he is finished doing whatever he is doing—the pretend writing that we saw.

As much as that was embarrassing and, I think, does undermine his credibility even further and undermines, of course, his Treasurer's credibility, we did see another new thing introduced into the argument today by Mr Barr. And that is the concept that under Labor not only will they not match our policy for reducing class sizes in years 4, 5 and 6 in our government primary schools but Mr Barr today, in his comments, left open the possibility of increasing class sizes. He has left open the possibility—

Mr Barr: What rubbish, Zed. Withdraw that.

MR SESELJA: He does not talk about the money because he does not like to be held accountable for what he says. He would not want to be held accountable for what he says. No, he would not want to be held accountable for what he says in this place. We know what he said in this place.

Mr Barr: Get your hand out of your pocket, Zed, at this point, I think. You have got both hands working furiously in your pocket at the moment.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Mr Barr, I think comment about where people's hands are is probably a little unparliamentary. You might want to think about withdrawing that.

Mr Barr: Mr Deputy Speaker, I withdraw.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Barr. Well done.

MR SESELJA: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Not only has he shown such a lack of ability to explain his position in relation to costings, but we see him today not only not backing our policy of reduced class sizes but also leaving open the possibility of larger classes under the Labor Party.

If they are re-elected, we can only imagine what they would do to schools. Remember last time they made a promise about schools. They made a promise. I think it went something like: "We will not close any schools in the next term of government." If the Labor Party were to be re-elected, we may well see more school closures. Certainly any promises that they make about not closing schools need to be seen in the context of the election promise in 2004 to the same effect.

We have seen the possibility left open now under Andrew Barr of larger class sizes. He said this morning that there is no agreement in the research that there is an optimal class size for students in any year, let alone in years 4 and above. There is no agreement, he says. He said that we should not support the Liberal Party's policy to reduce class sizes for better outcomes in years 4, 5 and 6.

Given that there is no agreement, given that this is the new position of the education minister, what can we expect? What is the magic number according to Mr Barr? Is it 25, is it 30, is it 35, is it 40? He has left open that possibility now. We have already seen Minister Barr push class sizes up. We know that that has been part of the whole idea behind the class sizes and the school closures, but we hear this from the minister today, for the first time.

It is quite extraordinary that we have had bipartisan consensus for sometime in this place that moving to reduce class sizes in our primary schools is a good thing. "Smaller class sizes" was his position until today. Yesterday it was: "Smaller class sizes in K to 3 are fine. Anything after that, it is not worth it. The magic figure is: you stop it in year 3. After that, it does not matter. Smaller class sizes do not make a difference. We should not bother. We need to focus on other things."

But today we have, from the minister, the very clear implication that he believes that, at any year level, there is no optimal class size. Presumably, we can take it from that that he believes that, if class sizes were bigger—if the class sizes maybe in K, 1 and 2 grew to 23, 24, 26, 28—that would not matter because there is no optimal class size, even at those early years. Certainly, under this minister, there is no optimal class size in years 4, 5 and 6. That is why he is happy to keep the class sizes high. That is why he will not back our policy. We know he will not back our policy because he is embarrassed. He is embarrassed because his focus has been on school closures. But we do see a new element in the debate now.

Members interjecting—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members on both sides of the chamber, stop engaging with each other.

MR SESELJA: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. He is embarrassed and he has now opened up the possibility of bigger class sizes under the Labor Party. Last time, there were school closures when they said they would not do it. This time he has left open the possibility ahead of this election that, under the Labor Party, we may well see classes growing. We may well see classes in our primary schools getting bigger across the board. Certainly, in years 4, 5 and 6 we would expect that, under this minister, given his public statement and his statements today, we would see classes grow. Our policy is a good one; our policy is the right one; and our policy demonstrates our priorities. I will close now.

Question put:

That **Mr Barr's** amendments be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 7

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

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.14): I will briefly wrap up. We are disappointed that the government has decided not to back our policy. We believe it is an excellent policy that will make a real difference to thousands of Canberra families, thousands of Canberra students and, in fact, thousands of Canberra teachers. We believe it is an important step forward. This has been an ongoing process.

What Minister Barr is saying today and was saying in the last two days and in the last couple of weeks is this: it stops at grade 3; this iterative process that we have been implementing about reducing class sizes, under this government, stops at grade 3 and, after that, it no longer matters what the class size is. This is a policy that will empower our teachers and will, in fact, go to the heart of some of the problems.

We have spoken at length about the fact that there are many good aspects of our education system here in the ACT and we are on the record many times that there are good aspects and we get many good results. But there are problems. There are problems in a number of areas. The achievement gap is one of those. The achievement gap is one of the important issues that we need to grapple with. I do not think any minister for education in this place should be comfortable with the achievement gap that exists in the ACT at the moment.

We can improve it. There are a number of ways of doing it. Smaller class sizes are a key way of doing it. We have seen in the research that not only do the smaller class sizes help all students but they in fact particularly help students from disadvantaged backgrounds. They particularly help students who are struggling, because they get the attention they deserve. They get help with numeracy. They get help with literacy. Behavioural issues and other special needs can be identified. They can be more easily identified and they can be more easily dealt with when we have teachers dealing with 20 or 21 students rather than 27, 28 or 29 students. It is basic logic; it is compelling logic; it is backed up by ample academic research over a period of years. Since the 1980s right through, we have seen it.

What we have unfortunately today is a shift away from this bipartisan consensus.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Members on the government benches, please keep the discussions down to a dull roar.

MR SESELJA: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. We do have a shift away from this consensus that we want to continue to improve and we want to continue to take the burden off our teachers in our primary schools. That is disappointing but that will provide a clear difference for the people of the ACT when it comes to education.

We have a mob who have been intent on ripping the heart out of our system through school closures; we have a mob who cannot be trusted on their education promises because they promised prior to the last election not to close any schools and they turned around and closed 23. We now have a Labor Party that is no longer committed to the idea of lowering class sizes; in fact, a Labor Party that leaves open the possibility of increasing class sizes.

That is why the original motion should be supported. That is why this amended motion, as we see, as usual, does not get to the heart of the matter, has not been well argued by the minister and in fact has been quite embarrassingly argued by the minister. But we will be very happy to continue this argument as the election approaches. Our plan is for small classes. Their plan leaves open the possibility of larger class sizes. They will be judged very harshly on their record on school closures and on education promises. And we look forward to a detailed education debate as this election approaches.

Question put:

That **Mr Seselja's** motion, as amended, be agreed to.

A call of the Assembly having commenced—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: The fire alarm bell ringing, I suspend the sitting until the ringing of the bells.

Sitting suspended from 5.20 to 5.23 pm.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8		Noes 7	
Mr Barr	Mr Gentleman	Mrs Dunne	Mr Seselja
Mr Berry	Mr Hargreaves	Dr Foskey	Mr Smyth
Mr Corbell	Ms Porter	Mr Mulcahy	Mr Stefaniak
Ms Gallagher	Ms Porter	Mr Pratt	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Ageing population

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (5.25): I move:

That this Assembly notes the importance of social inclusion for the ACT's ageing population.

I am sure members will join with me in affirming how important social inclusion is. To us in this place, not a day goes by that we are not fully engaged in a myriad of activities that keep us active, contributing members of our community. There is a wealth of evidence to show that if we remain active and engaged, we will remain healthier longer, both physically and mentally. We will make a greater contribution to the total social and economic capital of our society and it makes sense that we will also cost our society less in terms of health and social supports. Social inclusion is vitally important.

The Stanhope government recognises the changing demographic profile of the territory and has been active over the last few years in supporting people as they age in assisting them to remain active and engaged in the community. The 2006 census indicated there was close to 66,000 people in the ACT aged 55 years and over. Back in 1996, this figure was only 42,000. In the 2006 census, over 31,500 people were aged 65 years and over and by 2047, the proportion of people in the ACT aged 65 years and over is expected to reach 21.5 per cent of the total population, more than double the current proportion of 9.7 per cent.

In looking to support older people, one of the many areas the Stanhope government has been working on in recent times has been combating social isolation experienced by older people. As part of achieving this, the Stanhope government is committed to the principles of good community consultation. Right now, the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing is currently seeking new members to ensure it is truly representative of the whole community.

Just last week, the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing held a seminar on social integration to allow community input into what practical measures can be taken to increase social inclusion and reduce social isolation, which is part of a larger research project being undertaken into social isolation amongst older people in the ACT. Older

Canberrans are also represented on the Territory and Municipal Services Community Advisory Group, which provides information and advice about the community to assist the government in ensuring community engagement activity is targeted to relevant audiences and participants.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I represented the ACT government at the first meeting of ministers for ageing, which was called by the federal government last month. The issue of social isolation of older people was one of the matters that we discussed and it will be discussed further at the next meeting in November of this year. While we wait to see the outcomes of this work, the ACT government has already recognised the vital role that transport plays in keeping older people socially connected and actively participating in their community. In 2007 the ACT government extended the seniors card concessions to peak periods. This year, as you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, we introduced the gold card, which provides free public transport for people over 75 years.

In July this year, the government announced that the first MAN bus had arrived at ACTION. It is the first of 16 to be added to the fleet, with 100 new efficient and more accessible buses funded in the 2008-2009 budget. Importantly, this bus has major revisions to the wheelchair layout and increased passenger safety and comfort. ACTION's fleet already includes 99 easy access buses with ramps and wide front entrances to accommodate wheelchairs.

During 2007, the Stanhope government made improvements to the ACT taxi subsidy scheme to improve affordability and enable more people to be able to use this scheme. Through the home and community care program, the government provides funding to regional community services to provide a community transport service using volunteer and special needs drivers. This is to enable older citizens to get to important appointments and community-based social activities. Recently the Chief Minister launched the ACT regional community bus service, administered by the six regional community services and aimed at seniors and others who are at risk of social isolation due to limited transport options.

Mr Deputy Speaker, it is important that older people who continue to choose to drive are assisted to do that safely. The *Older Drivers* and *Retiring from driving* handbooks are intended to assist people to maintain their mobility and also assist them to decide when to stop driving. Unfortunately, as people age, the body takes longer to heal if injured, for instance. That is why the Stanhope government provides specific assessment and management for older people, both in the community and in hospital. It has a falls prevention program and a comprehensive transitional therapy program providing restorative and therapeutic support on discharge from hospital.

This government is committed to health, as was demonstrated through a massive commitment, as I mentioned earlier. Many health initiatives are to meet the needs of people as they become older. These initiatives are designed to ensure that older people in our community receive the health care that they need when they need it, enabling them to return to a normal, active life as soon as possible.

The independent living centre provides assessment, information and advice about what equipment and resources people may need to help them rehabilitate from surgery

or an accident, or to assist to deal with more chronic conditions. Often older people need mobility equipment loaned to them short term. This free service can make a world of difference between getting back on one's feet literally and remaining housebound, for instance.

Another example of the good work that is happening within ACT Health is the programs for older people, including the appointment of a multicultural case manager for the HACC program at Southside Community Services. Additionally, the home and community care program assists people in obtaining basic maintenance and support services, which can mean the difference for them with regard to remaining in their own homes independently while participating in the community or needing to move into care.

The ACT government's active ageing framework develops a coordinated approach involving key stakeholders to increase the participation of older people in physical activity. The strategy acknowledges and builds on the programs and services currently offered in the ACT through such organisations as the YMCA and the National Heart Foundation. As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am a keen supporter of the arts in the ACT and I am pleased that through the Office of Ageing the ACT government funds an award as part of the Canberra and area theatre awards to recognise the contribution of older Canberrans to amateur theatre.

Additionally, community arts officers help community members of all ages to gain access to the arts and participate in cultural programs. Along with key arts organisations, the government also provides opportunities for older people to participate through targeted programs.

Other Stanhope government programs that support broad community social participation by older people include Seniors Week. It offers approximately 70 events held each year for older people and their families. The government provides free travel during that week for all senior cardholders. Canberra Connect seniors information service provides, as its name suggests, information on seniors activities, groups events and other government support services. Additionally, funding of the ACT seniors card program, administered by the Council on the Ageing (ACT), is a notable government initiative. This program is a way of recognising the contribution of all seniors to the Australian community by assisting them to continue to access goods and services, including public transport and recreational services. There are over 40,000 senior cardholders in the ACT.

Through the government's support, the Canberra Retirement and Lifestyle Expo showcases a broad range of resources and information to Canberra seniors and their families as a part of promoting positive ageing. Through the Office of Ageing, the government promotes positive ageing and positive images of older people, by conducting the life's reflection photography competition. The competition serves to break down the stereotypical image of older people as being frail and inactive. I officiated at the announcement of the prize winners this year and was pleased to see so many wonderful images displayed in the Canberra Centre.

The Chief Minister's lifetime achievement awards are an opportunity to celebrate the lives and achievements of older Canberrans and to acknowledge the contribution that

they make to our city and our lives. Many of the activities and achievements that are recognised are as a result of voluntary work. The Stanhope government's volunteer policy encourages older people to engage in volunteering and supports their training, which is made available through Volunteering ACT. This is both for volunteers themselves and their managers. The senior grant program provides funds for projects that create a better understanding of ageing and encourages older people to maintain and enhance their connections with the broader community.

More and more people are choosing to remain in the paid workforce, Mr Deputy Speaker, as they age. Through the Department of Education and Training, learning opportunities are provided for retraining and up-skilling. The ACT public service work and life balance policy provides a whole-of-government framework for the ACT government to use in assisting employees with that all-important balance. This balance is of course important at any age but if we are to remain in the paid workforce and prepare ourselves for eventual active retirement, we need to get the balance right.

Working grandparents, of course, may need extended grandparents leave. The Stanhope government has provided additional payments and extended grandparents leave for mature age workers in the ACT public service. Leave of up to 52 weeks without pay over a three-year period is now available. Around 100 ACT public service staff aged 70 or older are eligible for additional fortnightly payments to compensate for the loss of employer superannuation contributions.

These initiatives were developed in consultation with the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, which is evidence of the Stanhope government's consultation process working to benefit older Canberrans. Carers ACT is funded through the home and community care program to provide a culturally and linguistically diverse carers program. It supports these communities in their caring responsibilities by offering a range of educational and information-based programs to address issues such as social isolation.

This supports older people from these backgrounds to remain connected to their communities and prevents their social isolation. The Australian government Department of Health and Ageing provides the ACT with funding to run the community partners program, which provides aged-care support services to ensure culturally appropriate care is delivered to older persons from these backgrounds. These initiatives are designed to prevent social isolation and to promote inclusion.

Improving infrastructure is also a way of fostering social inclusion. Because I am regularly out there in the community conducting my mobile offices I know it is often just as simple as improving someone's immediate environment that can make a difference to their feeling of safety and improving their lifestyle. Since being elected I have had many kilometres of footpaths repaired and replaced in nine suburbs in my electorate.

Footpath repairs, clear pavement markings, visible signage, median strip refuge islands, warning signs, improved street lighting and shopping centre refurbishment all make it easier for people to get out and about. As we age remaining in the family

home large enough to raise a family and set on a reasonably sized block may present challenges. The Stanhope government has a range of strategies in place to make downsizing more affordable for older Canberrans or help people adapt their housing and also to age in place.

In relation to aged care and independent living property developments, the ACT government is committed to working with the building industry and aged-care providers to reduce the time it takes to deliver high quality aged persons accommodation through a whole-of-government case management approach to assist proponents on virtually all projects.

I have taken a personal interest in the welfare of those living in retirement villages and I have initiated a series of consultations about retirement village living and also about the government system, which currently is regulated by the fair trading provision through a retirement villages code of practice. The Stanhope government will continue to support active engaged and inclusive policies to ensure older Canberrans do not become socially isolated. One way it does this is through the government's policy framework for ageing 2007 to 2009, which is entitled "A society for all ages".

This supports a society in which people of all ages and abilities or different linguistic backgrounds are valued for their contribution, a society where they are respected and included, a society where they are encouraged to reach their full potential and where they can share the benefits of our community and have ready access to a range of productive activities and interests. This government is committed to a social justice agenda where the principles of access, equity and participation are fostered and strengthened.

The third priority of building our community, the Canberra social plan, is contributing to a safe, strong and cohesive community, and this includes meeting the diverse needs of our ageing community and promoting social inclusion. The Stanhope government will continue to do this. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (5.39): It is important that we dwell on issues in relation to our ageing and how we foster social inclusion. I agree with Ms Porter that keeping engaged with the community is one way, and a very important way, of ensuring a healthy life for those who have retired from the workforce.

The expectations that we have in this day and age are quite different from what they were even half a generation ago, when people who retired at 60 or 65 may have looked forward to 10, or at most 15, years of retirement. Now, in the ACT especially, where we have a large proportion of people who are public servants, we find that we have people who are facing very long periods of retirement from the full-time workforce. There is a huge range of issues, ranging from whether they have enough income security to see them through a much longer than expected retirement to issues in relation to social inclusion.

We should go back and look at the issues that aged persons organisations think are the most important when we are dealing with issues relating to aged people. All of these eventually boil down to what Ms Porter might call social inclusion. The most

important issue facing ageing people is income security. In the last couple of days we have seen research that shows that a large number of the nearly six million people who will retire in the next 15 years do not have a clear idea of what their income will be after they retire and cannot say where they will find their health care and how they will pay for their health care.

This is an emerging problem. It is probably the highest on the list of priorities of people in aged persons organisations. In recent discussions that the Leader of the Opposition and I had with COTA, this was the highest priority issue—income security, especially income security for single pensioners. This is not something that we can directly have an impact on in the ACT, but we should be using the policy mechanisms that we have to assist people, especially those on low incomes, to make their retirement as pleasant and as productive as possible. We should also be using the relationships we have with the federal government to draw to their attention the needs of those of our constituents who are single pensioners, who do suffer on low incomes.

The next important issue is housing. With all of these things, people are worried about their income and they are worried about the security of their housing. Social inclusion is the icing on the cake that they will never obtain, because you cannot obtain social inclusion if you do not have some disposable income to get out and about. It makes it very hard to obtain social inclusion if you do not have income to get out and about. And you are not going to feel like getting out and about and engaging with the community if you are depressed, worried or anxious about your income and the security of your housing.

I was quite concerned to hear from the Council on the Ageing that they believe that five per cent of all people in the ACT who are at retirement age do not have housing security. They are in the private rental market and the cost of their housing is going up faster than they can cope with it. They are facing the possibility that they will lose the dwelling that they currently rent, as landlords try to put up the rent in a rising housing market. And there are significant issues with people who have too many assets to qualify for government housing but not enough assets to purchase their own house. This is a significant policy issue. Unless we address this issue, we will not be addressing the social inclusion of these people.

Other issues that are of importance to the Council on the Ageing are health services, particularly dental services, and the changes to the commonwealth arrangements in relation to chronic disease programs. The changes in the dental health program for people suffering from chronic diseases will have a huge impact on people in retirement age. Most of the commonwealth dental program has been subsumed into a teenage dental health program, which is fine on its merits but it means that there will be an increasing number of people amongst our retired population who will not have the same access to dental services that they had previously—who will have imperfect access. I know that at the moment there are arrangements in place and discussions between the commonwealth and the states and territories about commonwealth contributions to the dental schemes, but I am concerned on behalf of constituents who find it very difficult to pay for dental services. Once you do not have good teeth, your nutrition goes off, your general health goes off and it is a huge problem.

Another issue is one that really falls completely within our responsibility: transport. Ms Porter talked about the transport services initiated in the second appropriation bill which was recently launched by the Chief Minister. That is a laudable approach, though I am yet to be convinced that it will do everything that the Chief Minister and the government say it will do and I will be watching it very carefully.

The feedback that I am getting is that the service basically to some extent fills the gaps in the HACC system and changes to the taxi rebate system which have made it difficult for people to get around. This will do no more than fill the existing gaps. It is something that we will have to watch carefully. I suspect that to really make it work for older Canberrans we will have to put more money and more buses into the system. It does not actually address the issues that were raised by COTA, in that it is difficult for Canberrans to move around their own suburbs. It is difficult, for instance, to move from, say, in my electorate, McKellar to Flynn or vice versa without having to go into the interchange, catch another bus and go out again. That is because of the nature of the public transport system. It often quite makes it difficult to get about and it takes very long lead times to go anywhere. All of these issues militate against social inclusion.

The issues that Ms Porter raised about the local environment are important. She has been diligent, as I have, in working with the community in getting footpaths improved. There have been considerable improvements in footpaths around the Melba shops and further afield in Melba following representations to me by elderly members of the community who live near the Melba shops. It did take the government a while to get around to it, but I think it was something that inadvertently fell through the cracks. Usually the department of urban services are very prompt: when you raise issues of dangerous footpaths in areas where elderly people live, they usually address them very quickly. After I raised this on a second occasion, it was dealt with fairly expeditiously. I am pleased that substantial areas around Melba have recently been re-vivified and that the footpaths are much safer than they were previously.

There are issues with housing. Issues relating to downsizing are very important. The experiences of my own family in assisting older members into appropriate housing point to how important it is to find the right sort of housing for the right time in life. There have been improvements in the way the Stanhope government deals with this. There were some spectacularly bad examples in the past, and in some communities the Stanhope government has to do a lot to wipe away the bad memories of mismanagement. I mention particularly the initiative of St Vincent parish in Aranda to build supported accommodation on the school and parish site there; it was stalled for many years and the cost was driven up by planning decisions by the previous planning minister.

And there are the constant delays. Members of this Assembly were at the turning of the sod for Goodwin Village in Monash the other day. It struck me how long it took Goodwin to get to the point where it could turn the sod. That story is repeated over and over again in the ACT. There were the debacle of the long delays experienced by Calvary at Bruce; it was seven years before the project was open to people. And again it was roughly another seven years in the case of Goodwin Village in Monash. These

delays are unacceptable. They are far too long. There is too much expectation and anxiety built up in the community. And half a generation of elderly people have died while they have waited for these things to come on line.

There are many things that we can do in relation to encouraging social inclusion. One of the initiatives that Mr Pratt spoke about in the previous debate is our proposal to encourage mature-age graduates who have already had one career to contemplate a teaching career. In the ACT we have a large number of people who, at the age of 54 years and 11 months, are in a situation where they really have to retire from the commonwealth public service because of the conditions of their superannuation scheme. We do not want those people to go away.

We have people who are highly qualified, who have years of experience and who have huge expertise in a whole lot of academic areas, especially in maths and the sciences. We do not want those people to go away—to go down to the coast and play golf. After a while, they suddenly discover that is a bit boring if that is all they do with their lives. There is an awful lot of golf to be played between your 55th birthday and your 80th birthday, and it can pall after a while. We want these people to be actively engaged in the community, not just for their benefit but for our benefit.

One of the initiatives that I have always applauded the government for is its volunteers in schools program. Two or three weeks ago there was a nice piece on *Stateline* about volunteers in schools. It is an extraordinarily heart-warming experience to see people who look forward to going to school to help people with their reading and things like this. The beautiful interaction between young people, some of whom do not have contact with their grandparents, and the volunteers is very heart-warming and it does the school system a great deal of good.

I have had dealings with the CC cares program at Canberra college campus at Stirling; we have grandmother substitutes coming in to assist the girls in the young mothers program. They provide a great role model for those girls. These are the areas where we should be encouraging people to take part and be part of the community.

We need to be sending very strong messages that, just because someone retires from the paid workforce, that is not the end of the contribution that they make. Most people know that when they retire they are really just as busy as they were before; they just get paid differently.

Mr Pratt: Really?

Ms Porter: As you are about to find out.

MRS DUNNE: As you, I suspect are about to find out. In this day and age, most people do not envisage retirement in the way that I suspect my parents did. Most people of my age and a bit older, when they talk about retirement, say, “I cannot quite imagine what retirement is.” It is something that is quite a long way off and it is something that you would come to very gradually.

It is important to ensure that we do all that we can to foster social inclusion by all members of the ageing community—not just the senior public servants who have the

financial means to do so but people with more straitened means. There are a number of initiatives that the Stanhope government might like to trumpet, and I think that they are good enough, but there is a long way to go before we obtain real social inclusion.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (5.54): I would like to thank Ms Porter for bringing this issue to the Assembly. Canberra does have an ageing population, and, despite the relative affluence of our community as a whole, social exclusion is an escalating problem in the ACT for our elderly.

First I think we need to acknowledge the work of the ACT Council on the Ageing. As advocates for the older people in our community, they do a tremendous job. The council's attention to and input on issues concerning older people play a key role in keeping these matters on the government agenda. They note on their Livedrive website:

In 2002, people aged 65 and over made up about 8.8% of the ACT population.
By 2032, the proportion of people aged 65 and over are expected to make up 22% of the ACT population.

So older people are clearly a group we should be focusing our attention on—and that is not just because we will inevitably join this group, barring bad luck and bad health.

The Livedrive website provides a useful resource on transport options for older people. Transport is a key factor in social inclusion. The main reason that older constituents contact my office is to tell me about their transport concerns. Access to transport is vital to social inclusion; yet, based on the concerns that I receive about public transport in Canberra, our elder citizens feel as though they are being failed in this area. What happens to the ACTION network directly impacts on the quality of life of many of the older people in this town.

An integrated transport system, including accessible and efficient taxi services and bus services, is missing from the ACT. I have had many older people contact me about problems with ACTION and taxis. Most recently, a group of older ladies who live in Ainslie have put an enormous amount of work into tracking the negative aspects of ACTION's services, particularly the impact of network 08 changes on commuters. I sent all that information off to the minister. I hope that they get the response that they deserve, because they have put a huge amount of work into it.

The issues that they found included buses running early. This is not so much of a problem if you are on an intertown route or in peak commuter times or if you can just take your car instead. But if you miss a bus because it was early during off-peak times or weekends, you might have to wait for up to an hour for the next one to come. That might mean that you miss your appointment. One of these women told us that it took her about half a day to get over to her bridge in Fyshwick—an enormous part of her quality of life. It is just not worth it for her and she might have to stop doing that. She lives in Ainslie.

And there is the safety and amenity of our interchanges, particularly Civic interchange. There are concerns around the traffic on Northbourne Avenue and about trying to find

information and getting between platforms because you were not on the right one or because you missed that bus and you want to try another bus. That is really difficult for people with mobility and sight problems. There are concerns about the morale and the work ethic of ACTION staff, including drivers and information staff. Some of our constituents have reported unsafe driving practices or insufficient knowledge of routes. Just a couple of days ago, one of my worker's bus driver got lost and she was half an hour late for work.

And there is the under-resourcing of information staff. It is a bit of a pity when you go to the ACTION information centre there in Bailey's Arcade and (1) you are told that they do not know the answer to your question or (2) the people are just plain rude. And I am afraid it happens, Mr Speaker.

I acknowledge that the government has taken some steps to address transport options for our older residents. I welcome the recently announced regional community bus service. I do, however, think that more could be done to address the issue of transport and its role in social inclusion.

Another issue raised with me is access to affordable and appropriate housing. Having no fixed abode has a huge detrimental impact on social inclusion. There is homelessness and couch surfing amongst the older population. We do not call it couch surfing when an elderly person parks, by necessity, with a relative and really cannot move on. That is not a position of power for that elderly person. It certainly opens them up to elder abuse, and it might not be so good for the family member whose house they are in either. Pensions just are not high enough to cope with the rising cost of living. Lower levels of public housing and a stricter limit for public housing eligibility have meant that some needy older people miss out—

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

Adjournment Papers

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo): I seek leave to table some explanatory statements for two bills introduced during recent sittings.

Leave granted.

DR FOSKEY: I table the following papers:

Civil Partnerships Amendment Bill 2008—Explanatory statement.

Waste Minimisation (Container Recovery) Amendment Bill 2008—Explanatory statement.

These are the explanatory statements for the Waste Minimisation (Container Recovery) Amendment Bill 2008, which I introduced into the Assembly on

7 May, and the Civil Partnerships Amendment Bill 2008, which was introduced into the Assembly on 2 July. I will address the concerns raised in the scrutiny of bills reports if and when the bills are debated.

Cotter Road caretaker's cottage

MRS BURKE (Molonglo) (6.00): I thought I would give members an update on the friends of the Cotter Road caretaker's cottage. Their meeting held on 28 July 2008 saw a small but keen group gathered at the Weston Creek community centre. Jenni Farrell and Margaret McKay reported on the meeting that they had with Mr Hargreaves on 22 July, which they said was fairly positive overall. It really is good that at least we have seen that relationship brought together and that the Farrells, the former residents of the caretaker's cottage, are now in a position where, under the friends of the caretaker's cottage group, they are going to be able to work with the government on the future of the cottage.

They reported that the meeting was positive. Mr Hargreaves said he was keen to see the cottage heritage listed, which is good to hear. But he did stress that the procedure is completely independent of government control. He did confirm he did not want to see the cottage come under public housing, as the preservation of the cottage could then not be guaranteed. That makes sense. He called on the friends of the caretaker's cottage for their ideas, which I really appreciate the minister doing. He talked with them about things that the Friends of the Albert Hall had done and asked the caretaker's cottage friends to do the same thing.

He also talked about security arrangements at the cottage. I had actually asked the minister questions on notice about this and he was reluctant to answer them, and he did not want to answer inquires from the media. He was saying something about possible vandalism at times when the security was not in place. He went on to mention that a tenant in place was really the best security; however, it later appeared that he meant a day-time tenant, and he confirmed that. He also said that it was possible that a short-term tenant could be in place soon, for example, for the site office for the Molonglo development. I think that might be in question now, but we will see how that develops. Particularly with the north-western development, there may still be some short-term plan that could go through there. Unfortunately, the meeting did feel that, all up, Mr Hargreaves was avoiding the issue of the cost of security and the fact that security was being scaled down.

Grave concerns were raised about the number of trail bikes in the area and the problems of keeping out intruders. Apparently there was a plague of rabbits as well, but I think the minister, to his credit, has tried to address it and has got people in to try and deal with that. As for the use of the building, I think it is important that as many people in the community as possible can have their say about that. I flag with people that the next meeting of the group will be on 25 August, that is a Monday, at 6.30 pm. It is to be held at the school room of the Lions Westwood Farm in Kambah, Kambah Pool Road.

There is a list of objectives that the friends of the caretaker's cottage came up with, mostly around protecting and preserving the federal capital commissioned cottage;

protecting, preserving and enhancing the flora and fauna; educating and informing the community of the historical heritage, cultural, communal and social significance; encouraging community recreation, education or vocational cultural activities within the cottage; investigating the possibilities of a community lease at the cottage; promoting the interests of the friends; and providing a representative organisation of members who support the objectives of the friends of the caretaker's cottage.

The actions of the former residents of the caretaker's cottage surely prove that they are certainly not the type of people that the planning minister and some in the media have unfortunately tried to portray them as. Clearly, these people were on a mission, and always will be, to preserve the heritage of that place, and they are to be commended for that. I do hope that Mr Barr may find it within himself to humble himself and send these people an apology. Anyway, I encourage the community to become involved in the friends group, as it is extremely important we do all we can to preserve our heritage, no more so than preserving the caretaker's cottage at Weston Creek.

Environment—Banksia Environmental Foundation awards

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (6.05): Mr Speaker, I rise tonight to talk about an event I went to just a couple of weeks ago—the Banksia Environmental Foundation awards. The Banksia awards are an important event that ensures those people who dedicate their time and effort to the issues of the environment are duly awarded. The recognition by the industry, government and community is an important driver that encourages these people and businesses to continue the important work that they undertake.

The Banksia Environmental Foundation was established in 1989. It is a national not-for-profit organisation that promotes environmental excellence and sustainability through its awards program and other associated events. The Banksia environmental national awards are recognised as the most prestigious environmental awards in Australia. The Banksia Environmental Foundation also organises the Prime Minister's environmentalist of the year award and is in partnership with other environmental sustainability awards.

This year the Prime Minister's environmentalist of the year went to Professor Rob Adams. Rob is not your typical environmentalist. He was trained in architecture and urban design, and he has been a local government employee for the past 20 years. Professor Adams focuses his vision for Melbourne as an accessible, liveable sustainable city. Melbourne shares with many cities the challenge of addressing climate change while accommodating a growing population, and Professor Adams constantly warns against the temptation to "sit like frogs in an increasingly warming pot hoping someone will find a clever new way to turn off the gas". A director of design and urban environment for the City of Melbourne, Professor Adams is confident that local government can not only meet the challenge but can lead by example, managing systematic and incremental change and major innovation.

The international award winner was Dr Zhengrong Shi, who I was able to have lunch with a little while ago. Dr Shi is the Chairman of the board, Chief Executive Officer

and founder of Suntech, a worldwide leader in the design and manufacture of innovative solar energy solutions. Its research and development team in China continues to pioneer technology advances in solar power generation products.

In the late 1980s, Dr Shi was in Sydney to study photovoltaics after obtaining a master's degree in laser physics in Shanghai. In 1989 he became a PhD student in the groundbreaking photovoltaics laboratory run by Professors Martin Green and Stuart Wenham at the University of New South Wales. Dr Shi has been very successful, and Suntech has now become a very large company in China. He started off in 2001 with \$6 million in backing arranged by the Wuxi government plus the assistance of ex-colleagues at the University of New South Wales. Dr Shi led his first factory operation, and sales boomed as the market took on. Today Dr Shi is a billionaire; he is one of the wealthiest men in China and, for that matter, one of Australia's richest citizens.

The built environment award was won by a contestant from the ACT. That award is presented for buildings, development, infrastructure, services, technologies, and product, and it was won by Trevor Percy House from Australian Ethical Investment Ltd. The Trevor Percy House refurbishment has transformed an existing building and achieved a 6-star, green-star office design, which is world's best practice. The project was undertaken using accepted conventional and low technology design principles, technologies and materials which can be easily transferred to other projects.

Trevor Percy House produces 70 per cent less greenhouse emissions and uses 90 per cent less water than the average building. The refurbishment also reused a substantial amount of materials from the existing building fit-out, and the building has achieved these impressive environmental achievements while also providing a comfortable and productive work environment for the occupants with exceptional levels of user satisfaction.

These significant savings were achieved with focus on improving the building fabric through retrofitting insulation and shading upgrades, introducing natural ventilation through operable windows and thermal chimneys and a close focus on reusing materials or selecting new materials with a low environmental impact. Mr Speaker, I congratulate the Banksia Environmental Foundation on its leadership. I also congratulate all the winners for 2008, and I look forward to attending the awards next year.

Karinya House

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (6.10): I would like to echo Mr Gentleman's words of support for the Banksia Environmental Foundation and for the spectacular winners of the awards. But tonight, Mr Speaker, in Homeless Persons Week, I would like to talk about some of the issues affecting a group of people who are sometimes homeless in the ACT. There has been increasing discussion amongst welfare groups about the difficult situation that young pregnant women find themselves in in the ACT. There was some discussion in the last few weeks about the difficulties encountered by one charity which is increasingly coming across young pregnant girls and young couples who want to be responsible parents but who are not finding the support from either

their families or the wider community necessary for them to responsibly carry out their duties as parents.

I would like to bring to the attention of members—this would not be news to most members—the work of Karinya House, a home for mothers and babies. It is timely that, in this week that deals with homelessness, there was a feature article on page 3 of today's *Canberra Times*. There is a page 3 “babe” perhaps—a photograph of a young Karinya House client, Lee, and her four-month-old son. Lee exemplifies everything that Karinya House does so well and the needs of the people in the ACT community. She is a young mother with a four month old, but she has been waiting for an extended period of time on the ACT government housing list for accommodation. At the moment she is relying on Karinya House for accommodation.

Karinya provides a fantastic service to hundreds of people in the ACT and surrounding regions every year. Ever since I became a member of this place, I have been a patron of Karinya House. Over the years I have attended functions in support of Karinya House and spoken with many people in professional welfare organisations and medical organisations who sing the praises of Karinya House. The minister herself has, on many occasions, sung the praises of Karinya House. But there is only so much it can do with accommodation for about 10 people at any one time. Most of its extensive work is outreach work simply because it cannot provide accommodation for more people.

As patron of Karinya House, I will be writing to all members here and other members of the community, and I take this opportunity to encourage members to participate in the financial support of Karinya House and its work by becoming a member of Project 1000. Karinya House is looking for 1000 Canberrans who are prepared to donate at least \$200 a year to its work. That would provide it with \$200,000 a year towards the running costs.

Karinya House does receive substantial moneys through the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, and it costs about \$600,000 a year to provide its current services. I encourage members to take any of the spare money that they have for donating to charity and favourably consider Karinya House for the splendid work that it does, keeping in mind that it is a home-grown charity.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.15 pm.