



# Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD  
SEVENTH ASSEMBLY

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

24 FEBRUARY 2009

[www.hansard.act.gov.au](http://www.hansard.act.gov.au)



## Tuesday, 24 February 2009

Death of Mr David Balfour (Condolence statement by Speaker).....	843
Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 (No 2) .....	843
Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee.....	845
Road Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 (No 2) .....	845
Questions without notice:	
Land—rent scheme .....	849
Education—sustainability .....	853
Schools—investment .....	854
Land—rent scheme .....	858
Economy—stimulus package .....	858
Land—rent scheme .....	861
Land—rent scheme .....	861
Health—oversight.....	863
Land—rent scheme .....	864
Standing and temporary orders—suspension.....	865
Questions without notice:	
Land—rent scheme .....	878
National Multicultural Festival.....	880
Supplementary answers to questions without notice:	
Land—rent scheme .....	883
Land—rent scheme .....	884
Papers.....	884
Rhodium Asset Solutions Ltd—statement of corporate intent .....	884
Operations of the Gene Technology Regulator—quarterly report .....	885
State of the ACT budget (Matter of public importance).....	887
Victorian bushfires.....	906
Adjournment:	
Death of Mr Noel Flanagan AO .....	920
Arts organisations .....	921
Canberra area theatre awards.....	921
Canberra area theatre awards.....	922
Canberra area theatre awards.....	923
Canberra area theatre awards.....	924

**Tuesday, 24 February 2009**

**MR SPEAKER** (Mr Rattenbury) took the chair at 10 am, made a formal recognition that the Assembly was meeting on the lands of the traditional owners, and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

**Death of Mr David Balfour  
Condolence statement by Speaker**

**MR SPEAKER:** Members, on Tuesday, 17 February Senior Firefighter David Balfour of the ACT Fire Brigade was tragically killed by a falling tree while on deployment with an ACT Emergency Services task force undertaking fire-fighting operations to protect the Victorian community following the devastating bushfires in that state. His untimely and tragic death has had a devastating impact on his wife, children and family, his colleagues in the ACT Fire Brigade and across the emergency services.

As a mark of respect for the ultimate sacrifice Senior Firefighter Balfour paid in serving out his creed as a professional who was always there to help others in their time of need, and as an expression of condolence and deepest sympathy to his wife, children, family, friends and colleagues at this time, I invite all members to rise in their places.

*Members rising in their places—*

**MR SPEAKER:** I thank members.

**Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 (No 2)**

Debate resumed from 11 December 2008, on motion by **Ms Gallagher:**

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (10.03): On behalf of Mr Smyth, who is not with us at the moment, I rise to support the Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill. This is principally a bill that deals with some technical matters. It does two things: it clarifies the application of the Duties Act 1999 to situations where a motor vehicle is re-registered and it extends the way in which the first home owner grant can be repaid.

With respect to the re-registering of motor vehicles, it is intended that where a vehicle has been registered in another jurisdiction and duty has been paid in that jurisdiction, no duty will be paid when the vehicle is presented to the ACT for re-registration. On the other hand, where a vehicle has been exempt from or not liable for duty in another jurisdiction but the vehicle is liable for duty in the ACT, the duty will have to be paid when the vehicle is presented for re-registration. The beautiful simplicity of this amendment is that it is affected by the insertion of a new example in the act.

The amendments in relation to the first home owner scheme are a little more, but not much more, complex. These amendments provide for the commissioner to have the

capacity to require a person who is a debtor to the recipient of the first home owner grant—that is, a third party to the transaction—to be required to repay part or all of the grant. This provision will increase the power of the commissioner to recover amounts that are due in repayment for the first home owner grant. The amendment also provides for the third party to be able to object to the demand from the commissioner. There are no financial implications arising for this bill and the opposition is happy to support it.

**MS BRESNAN** (Brindabella) (10.05): I am speaking on Ms Hunter's behalf. The Greens will also be supporting this amendment. The legislation, as has been noted, is designed to provide greater clarity for taxpayers with regard to duty liability on the application to register a motor vehicle and also to amend the first home owner grant for 2000 for debt repayment.

**MS GALLAGHER** (Molonglo—Treasurer, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Women) (10.05), in reply: I thank members for their contribution to this legislation.

The Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 (No 2) amends the Duties Act 1999 and the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000. The amendments contained in the bill do not impose any new revenue measures. Firstly, the bill amends the Duties Act in relation to duty on an application to register a motor vehicle in the ACT where duty has been paid in a corresponding Australian jurisdiction. Under the Duties Act, duty is payable on an application to register a motor vehicle in the ACT. Duty is not charged on the application to register the motor vehicle in the ACT where duty has been paid in another Australian jurisdiction and the registered owner remains the same.

However, where the registration was exempt or duty was not payable in other jurisdictions and such a registration would not have been exempt in the ACT, duty is payable in the ACT. The amendment inserts an example to assist taxpayers to help explain the operation of the provision in this situation.

Secondly, the bill amends the First Home Owner Grant Act to allow the commissioner for ACT Revenue to require a third party debtor for a grant recipient to repay a grant instead of the grant recipient. The changes will allow for the efficient and effective recovery of the grant where the grant recipient is owed money by a third party debtor. This amendment will bring the First Home Owner Grant Act into line with the debt recovery provisions in the Taxation Administration Act 1999.

As is appropriate in the circumstances, the amendments will also provide the third party with the right to object to the commissioner's written notice that they, instead of the grant recipient, repay the grant. There are no financial implications arising from these new provisions and I commend the Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 (No 2) to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

## **Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 3**

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee (performing the duties of a Scrutiny of Bills and Subordinate Legislation Committee)—scrutiny report 3, dated 23 February 2009, together with the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

**MRS DUNNE**: Scrutiny report 3 contains the committee's comments on two bills and 40 pieces of subordinate legislation, and six government responses. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

## **Road Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 (No 2)**

Debate resumed from 11 December 2008, on motion by **Mr Stanhope**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (10.08): I rise to speak on the Road Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 (No 2). This bill will amend the Road Transport (Safety and Management) Act 1999. The Canberra Liberals are committed to an efficient and sustainable road transport system in the ACT.

Like in most places in the world, road transport is critical for our economy. As a landlocked jurisdiction, we are heavily dependent upon ground transport for the movement of goods. The correct management of the network is critical for thousands of jobs and the city's livelihood. Part of an effective system is protecting the safety of users. Under the current rules, if a person whose licence is suspended continues to drive and incurs further demerit points that warrant a suspension or cancellation, they are not notified of this until the end of their current suspension. Under the new rules they will be notified immediately of the new suspension or cancellation. The opposition supports this improvement.

The bill will require the Road Transport Authority to send a notice to a person if they incur enough demerit points to warrant a suspension or notification. That notice will tell them that if they are already under suspension there will be an additional period of suspension or cancellation. This back-to-back sentencing will mean that if there are enough demerit points for another period of suspension or cancellation it cannot be served concurrently.

This new notice requirement will enable affected drivers to make appropriate plans about their future. It may also provide, as the minister said in his speech introducing

the bill, an incentive for drivers to pay off their fines earlier in order to avoid further periods of suspension. The bill also makes technical amendments with regard to traffic light offences in line with the Australian road rules. The opposition supports the bill.

**MS BRESNAN** (Brindabella) (10.10): The Greens will be supporting this bill. Its impact will be to advise people whose licence has been suspended of the consequences of further contraventions. The intention is to advise people of the cascading consequence of any decision they might make to continue to drive while their licence is suspended for whatever reasons. It will allow them to choose to manage their situation more effectively, such as paying off unpaid fines, organising for other transport options and so on.

I am not sure why this bill needs to be legislated and would have thought that it could have been handled as a regulation, in that it is an administrative action which would assist relevant people and does not, in fact, create or alter the definition of any offence. We often find complex details and prescriptions of offences and responsibilities prescribed in regulation on the basis that it is more convenient or efficient for government to manage complex regimes in that way. But here, when we are talking about a courtesy that is easy enough to set up and which will probably have some rolling benefit for people that are concerned, the government has formed the view that legislation is necessary. Nonetheless, I am happy to support this bill.

**MR HARGREAVES** (Brindabella—Minister for Disability and Housing, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (10.11): The clauses in this bill amend provisions of the Road Transport (Driver Licensing) Act 1999 and the Road Transport (Driver Licensing) Regulation 2000 by inserting notice requirements for demerit point suspensions. It also makes minor technical amendments to the Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Act 1999 relating to red light cameras. At the outset, let me make it clear that these amendments are not intended to change the policy regarding demerit point suspensions and red light cameras. Instead, they clarify the drafting of the amended provisions and improve their operation.

The first set of amendments deals with the demerit point system. Under the demerit point system, if a person incurs more than a specified number of demerit points for that person's licence category, the person's licence will be suspended or cancelled. When the relevant number of demerit points has been recorded the person is sent a notice advising that the person's licence will be suspended or cancelled, as the case may be, from the date of effect set out in the notice.

Where a person's licence has already been suspended under another law—for example, because the person failed to pay a fine and the person continues to drive and incurs enough demerit points to trigger a demerit point suspension or cancellation—he or she will not receive a notice about the demerit point suspension or cancellation until the person's current suspension ends and the demerit points suspension or cancellation is about to begin. This means that in practice the driver may not receive a notice about the demerit point suspension or cancellation until after the current suspension is lifted, which may be months or longer after the person has committed

the infringement that triggered the demerit point suspension or cancellation. At this point, the person may have forgotten that he or she had reached the demerit points limit and that he or she faced a further period of suspension or cancellation.

The new provisions insert an additional notice requirement into the provisions of the Road Transport (Driver Licensing) Act 1999 and the Road Transport (Driver Licensing) Regulation 2000. This additional notice requirement will ensure that when a suspended driver reaches the demerit points limit, he or she will be sent a notice to explain that the driver has incurred a demerit point suspension or a cancellation, if applicable. The demerit point suspension or cancellation will take effect after the current period of suspension ends and the person will be sent a further notice before the demerit point suspension or cancellation takes effect to let the person know when that will occur.

The new notice requirement will ensure that the drivers are fully aware of the effect of reaching the demerit points limit for their type of licence, and it will enable affected drivers to make more informed decisions about their options, including future transport arrangements, before the demerit point suspension or cancellation takes effect. I would like to remind members that if drivers are concerned that they are close to their demerit points limit, they are able to check their current demerit points without charge, either by attending an ACT government shopfront or by phoning Canberra Connect.

The second set of amendments contains minor drafting changes to the Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Act 1999. These technical amendments simplify the drafting of several provisions in the act and provide a generic description of the traffic light offences in division 1 of part 6 of the Australian road rules. That provision contains the basic traffic light offences, such as failing to stop at a red light and proceeding through a red light or red arrow. These amendments remove any confusion about the red light offences in the Australian road rules that may be detected by red light cameras.

The existing provisions were drafted before the Australian road rules were released by the National Road Transport Commission, now the National Transport Commission, in 2003. The amendments will ensure that the provisions of the act dealing with the use of red light traffic cameras align properly with the wording used in the offences in division 1 of part 6 of the Australian road rules. The proposed amendments do not affect the contents of the Australian road rules, which will continue to apply to ACT drivers.

Mr Speaker, I turn to the genesis of this piece of legislation. How do I put this? It came about because people had experienced confusion. It was brought to my attention in the first part that they were driving whilst suspended and they did not know about it. They were saying to me, "I have got this notice of cancellation. I did not realise what was going on." What became abundantly clear to me when I was minister for transport was that, for the want of a notice to somebody to say that if your behaviour is such you are likely to cop a second suspension, these issues and these confusions may very well be removed. We toyed with the idea of tightening up the legislation and these sorts of things, only to sort of apply the ordinary-man-in-the-street test—what would I like if it were me that was in this position?

For the record, I have only got about three points missing, actually; I do not have anywhere near the 12. Of course, there are some people who are on the roads a lot. It is particularly the case in those times when double demerit points apply. People on their P plates can get dangerously close to losing their licence just for a little speed over the limit and a little lack of attention. The penalties are appropriate; nobody is arguing about that. But what we need to do is to make sure, of course, that if they have not paid a parking fine or something like that, they are likely to have their licence suspended.

The average-man-in-the-street test was that if we tell them, we do not take away the responsibility to act responsibly on the roads. We also take away the possibility—this is the significant part—that people will inadvertently commit a crime for which they must appear before a magistrate. I am referring to driving whilst not licensed. That carries a significant penalty and, as we all know, ignorance is no excuse. But it behoves us, of course, to make sure that that ignorance does not work to the detriment of the ordinary and fairly honest driver.

The second part of the legislation that we have before us had its genesis again in the application of the red light camera process. I am referring to the people who thought, “If I go through the amber light, if my front wheels are over the line and my back wheels are not over the line, am I going to get pinged when I go through the red light?” So we were trying to say that it really does not matter. If the light is red and you go through it, you have broken the law. But the people who wished to apply a pedantic approach were quite correct in saying that the law, as it was written, was confusing. We have no problem in saying, “Okay, if the law in the way we had written it had a certain intention, but it was confusing, it behoves us to remove that confusion,” and I think that was fair.

However, the background is still that people who go through a red light do it knowingly. You do not go through a red light accidentally. You can go through an amber light accidentally, but if you have a look at the delay between when the amber light goes on and when it changes to red, you know full well. There are those of us who occasionally in our lives have been in a line of traffic and who think, “Oh, my heavens,” when you have in fact gone through the red light and you have known full well you have done it and you have got this horrible sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach. That is because people who have done that have known that they have broken the law.

But when we come to saying to people, “You have broken the law and you need to take the penalty for that,” but they say, “But the way you have written the law lets me off—it is a technicality; bad luck,” we would like to think that these people do not actually commit that offence again later on, but I cannot be guaranteed of that. What we have done is tighten up the law so that it is absolutely crystal clear for those people who wish to have a look at the Australian road rules and the application of red light camera legislation in the ACT.

This is a case of clearing up the legislation. On behalf of the government, I express my appreciation to the opposition and to the Greens for their support for this



legislation. I am pleased that at the end of the day we are aware that this is a road safety issue. This is not a case of bureaucracy gone rampant. This is a matter of trying to keep all road users safe on our roads and to clear up the rules around it. I hope that we can have this sort of joint approach to cleaning up the legislation as these things are brought forward by the community at large. With that, Mr Speaker, I thank members for their support and we will get on with the legislation.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

**MR SPEAKER:** I understand that it is the wish of the Assembly to suspend until question time.

**Sitting suspended from 10.22 am to 2 pm.**

## **Questions without notice**

### **Land—rent scheme**

**MR SESELJA:** My question is to the Treasurer and is in regard to the stalled land rent scheme. Treasurer, before the launch of the land rent scheme, what assurances were given to the government from lending institutions, when were they received and who were these lenders? Will you table any written assurances that the government received?

**MS GALLAGHER:** The Chief Minister has responsibility for the land rent scheme.

**Mr Smyth:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker: under the administrative arrangements tabled in this place, the Land Rent Act is under the guidance of the Treasurer and I am surprised that the Treasurer does not know her AAs and what acts she is responsible for and that she is not able to answer the question. The question is entirely appropriate to be answered by the Treasurer.

**MR SPEAKER:** Chief Minister, can you address the content of the point of order? I need some clarification on the point of order as to why you are taking the question.

**Mr Stanhope:** I have day-to-day administrative responsibility for affordable housing and for the land rent scheme and I choose to take the question.

**MR SPEAKER:** Sorry, Mr Stanhope, again?

**Mr Stanhope:** Under the governmental arrangements, I have day-to-day responsibility for the administration of the affordable housing initiatives the government is pursuing, including a land rent scheme, and I choose, irrespective of that, to take the question.

**Mr Smyth:** To the point of order, Mr Speaker, page 15 of the administrative arrangements clearly lists the Land Rent Act 2008 as part of the portfolios,

administrative units and functions of the Treasurer. If it is not a function of the Treasurer, the Chief Minister should not table documents that are faulty and he might like to update the AAs.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Smyth. I will just take a moment to consider this. Looking at *House of Representatives Practice*, it is possible for ministers to pass a question on if they so choose. So there is no point of order.

**MR STANHOPE:** That was my point, that this is an issue which I, in discussion with the Treasurer, have agreed I would be responsible for; I am the minister that is across the issue and I am the minister that has been briefed. I am very happy to take the question.

The government, as I think now for some time—indeed, perhaps for more than two years—have been surprised at the willingness of the Liberal Party to not support the home ownership dream or aspiration of families now currently cut out of home ownership as a result of their household income and, most particularly, their disposable household income. I think the land rent scheme is an extremely good scheme; it is innovative.

**Mr Hanson:** The banks disagree with you.

**MR STANHOPE:** We will see. It is a scheme that certainly operates out of the square and has required a real effort at grappling with those issues of home ownership, particularly in this instance—and most specifically and first up—for households with combined incomes, total household incomes, of less than \$75,000. And that was the genesis of the land rent scheme and my acceptance of it and the brief which officials within the Treasury and the Chief Minister's Department had: to respond to a request or a demand by me and the government to think as laterally and to think as innovatively and creatively as possible to create home ownership opportunities for all Canberrans—not just for those Canberrans that are favoured by the Liberal Party but for all Canberrans, including those households in rental accommodation, with household incomes of less than \$75,000—what can a government or a community do to guarantee them home ownership, the great Australian dream, the aspiration that each of us has, the hope of every family, to one day own their own home?

The facts are that nowhere in Australia will lending institutions make loans for mortgages significant enough to allow a household with an income of less than \$75,000—this is a family, not an individual, a family—to borrow sufficient amounts to pay for land and then a house. You cannot pay off a \$300,000 mortgage when your total household income is less than \$75,000.

So we looked for a way to deal with that disability. And we found one, an excellent one, a land rent scheme, a scheme which, in its simplicity, is that the land will be rented, not purchased, obviating the need to borrow that first \$100,000 or \$120,000 to buy or pay for the land so that that \$75,000 of income in that family can be devoted to the payment of a mortgage to cover the construction of a house on land which they rent.

**Mr Hanson:** Mr Speaker, on a point of order, on relevance: the Chief Minister simply did not answer the question. The question was: what assurances were given to the government from lending institutions, when were they received and who were these lenders? He has simply not answered the question.

**MR STANHOPE:** I am happy to go to that part of the question, but it was very important that there be some background because there is a very poor, a lack of, understanding of the issue which the government is seeking to deal with.

But in relation to the interests of banks and lending institutions, it has been strong. Indeed, a couple of the major banks—and I think we have got four left—asked in initial discussions whether or not we might deal with them exclusively, so attracted were they to the product or the possibility. *(Time expired.)*

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Seselja, a supplementary question.

**MR SESELJA:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Chief Minister, has the advice from lenders changed and, if so, when? If it did change, why has your government not informed Canberra families of the change in lending practices by banks and other financial institutions?

**MR STANHOPE:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am very happy to respond to that. The attitude of some of the lending institutions, the major banks, has changed and they have been quite explicit that their change of attitude is very much a response to the global financial crisis.

We began negotiations in relation to this. We launched the scheme on 1 July 2008. I think we all know that the world has changed significantly between 1 July 2008 and today. Indeed, I can recall the Liberal Party, as recently as, what, August 2008, a day after we launched the land rent scheme, promising to cut the ACT Public Service to the tune of \$200 million. They promised actually to reduce revenue by \$30 million a year.

I recall promises by the Liberal Party as recently as the last six months promising to slash ACT government expenditure by over \$200 million and reduce our revenue by \$30 million a year. I wonder whether, if they had their time over in the context of the circumstances of today, the Liberal Party would repeat its promise to slash \$200 million from the ACT Public Service and reduce revenue by over \$30 million a year. Of course they would.

**Mr Hanson:** I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Chief Minister is not answering the question. He is making a point about election promises from last year of the Liberal Party that are not related to the land rent scheme. He needs to answer the question.

**MR SPEAKER:** Chief Minister, please come back to the specific question. I think you made enough of the context of the timing.

**MR STANHOPE:** Yes. That is very perceptive of you, Mr Speaker. I was going to the context and the Speaker understood I was going to the context. I am sure actually that the Liberal Party understands I was going to the context, but it is not a particular context that they want to go to, namely, their outrageous, spendthrift and reckless election promises.

**Mr Hanson:** Mr Speaker, he is continuing to—

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Stanhope, hold on, please.

**MR STANHOPE:** It was context. I was just rounding off that part of my answer.

**MR SPEAKER:** All right.

**MR STANHOPE:** Certainly there has been a change in attitude from some of those with whom we, the government, have been in discussions. I think in relation to the issue, it is important nevertheless to understand the role of government. We have proposed a scheme. We bring essentially to that scheme our goodwill, our energy, our innovative and creative capacity and access to land. We are not bankers. We are not lenders. We are not a financial institution.

What we have done is bring a major proposal to deal with the issue of affordability, most particularly for that group within our community most particularly cut from home ownership—young working families with young children on household incomes of less than \$75,000 a year. We are proudly seeking to do something about their capacity, the capacity of those young families, to access home ownership.

I am proud of it. I will not resile from it. I will continue to strive and we, as a government, will continue to negotiate with the banking and financial and lending sector, as we do. We are not going to give up on this just because the Liberal Party, in concert with a fairly negative attitude by the *Canberra Times*, do not believe it is a scheme that should be pursued.

We are not going to give up. We are going to continue. Hopefully, through our involvement, we are going to find a lending product that will allow young working Canberra families with incomes of less than \$75,000—a group of potential home owners, dreaming or aspiring home owners that the Liberal Party prefers to abandon.

At the end of the day that is what it comes down to. We would much prefer, in relation to this and other issues, to try and fail than to adopt the attitude of the Liberal Party and not try at all. What is the Liberal Party's alternative to finding or breaking through—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR STANHOPE:** The alternative for families earning less than \$75,000 is to reduce stamp duty. That is not the issue in relation to capacity to pay a mortgage. Here we have the mantra straight from Mrs Dunne: we would have just abolished stamp duty and that would have solved the problem. Rubbish, absolute utter rubbish!

The issue is around the capacity to service a mortgage of up to \$300,000 to purchase the land and provide a house. Those families with incomes of less than \$75,000 will simply not receive that sort of support from any lending or financial institution. We continue to negotiate, and we will not give up. (*Time expired.*)

### **Education—sustainability**

**MS HUNTER:** My question is to the minister for education regarding sustainability education in ACT schools. What are the department and the minister doing to lead the promotion and pursuit of sustainability education in ACT schools?

**MR BARR:** I thank Ms Hunter for the question. This is an area where there is broad agreement, both within the education community and within the government—and clearly in the Greens party. I might even extend it to those opposite—

**Mr Hargreaves:** I wouldn't.

**MR BARR:** It is generous: there are perhaps mixed views in those opposite in relation to the importance of sustainability education within the context of both the territory's education system and our role within the context of the Australian education system.

There are a number of programs that are in place within ACT schools and a number of national programs where the ACT is the leading jurisdiction in terms of school participation. The Australian sustainable schools initiative, for example, is one of those national programs where the ACT has the highest percentage, the highest proportion, of schools participating.

In terms of our new curriculum framework that came into operation from 2008 after a number of years of trial across all ACT government, Catholic and independent schools, there is a strong focus on sustainability, in terms of both the broader environment and also the role that schools can play at a local and grassroots level, both within their local communities and also in the schools themselves.

The ACT government has sought to partner with school communities around a number of specific initiatives, particularly working with our biggest energy using schools to ensure that they are more sustainable. Those schools tend to be high schools and colleges, but we also recognise the importance of early intervention. Through our new curriculum framework and our focus on early childhood education in those early years, preschool to year 2, there is work that begins with students at that age and continues through primary school, high school and college education.

And our higher education providers—both the CIT and the University of Canberra, under the auspices of this Assembly, and then the Australian National University and other universities in the territory—also take their sustainability obligations seriously. I would go so far as to say that I believe the education sector in the ACT is a leading sector in terms of promoting sustainability not only in its own infrastructure but in its own education programs.

I look forward to the continuation and strengthening of those programs in the years ahead. We continue to see across the education portfolio—we did cover this in the annual report hearings for the Department of Education and Training last week—continued improvement in both the performance of school buildings in terms of sustainability and also the broader curriculum and engagement with students, parents and the broader community in terms of how schools can take a leadership role in this area.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Hunter, a supplementary question?

**MS HUNTER:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Just to clarify—how are these programs funded and where is the leadership of these programs based?

**MR BARR:** Funding comes from a combination of sources, predominantly within the ACT government but also from the commonwealth government. It would be worth noting, as it has been a topical matter in recent times, that the commonwealth stimulus package involves a large capital injection into all schools in the territory, and one of the criteria for receipt of that commonwealth funding is measures to improve the environmental sustainability of our schools.

So there is leadership at both the territory and commonwealth government levels. There is leadership within school communities. There is leadership from students. Mr Speaker and Ms Hunter, you would be very pleased to hear that the level of leadership shown by the next generation of territorians on sustainability issues is admirable.

I am sure that the work that is underway in all of our schools will continue. It has my full support as Minister for Education and Training and Minister for Planning. We will continue to work in partnership with the local community, in terms of both our infrastructure and our curriculum.

### **Schools—investment**

**MS PORTER:** Mr Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Minister for Education and Training. Minister, in your portfolios of both education and training and planning, would you advise how you are working within these portfolios to secure investment in our schools and to help ensure our economy remains strong?

**MR BARR:** I thank Ms Porter for her question and for her ongoing interest in the education portfolio. In order to protect the ACT against the global financial crisis the territory government is working with federal Labor to invest in jobs and education for Canberrans. The ACT Labor government is determined to ensure that the ACT gets its share of federal Labor's \$14.7 billion building the education revolution package.

This will deliver upgraded libraries, new classrooms, new gymnasiums—better places to learn, better places to work. This package builds on ACT Labor's record investment in our schools. We have invested \$350 million in upgrading every ACT public school and building new schools where they are most needed. The territory

government has also increased funding to non-government schools by over 35 per cent since coming to office. And now all ACT schools could receive an extra \$230 million from the federal Labor government.

To ensure that this package is as effective as possible at protecting the jobs of Canberrans and further improving our education system, this government has been consulting with the community. We have consulted with every public school community through their principal. I have met with the P&C association, the AEU and the principals association. And through last week's jobs and education roundtable the ACT government has consulted with the ACT independent schools association, the Catholic Education Office and the ACT Block Grant Authority. Through our consultation we have worked with the community to ensure that all ACT schools get their building projects started as soon as possible.

Mr Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to briefly put on the record my thanks to those who attended the roundtable. I thank them for their ideas and congratulate them on the way that they embraced this urgent and historic investment in jobs and education.

As a result of our community consultation, I announced last week that the ACT government will further cut red tape to allow schools to make the most of federal Labor's package. This approach will allow schools to move quickly to become more sustainable. It will allow them to move faster to install new shade structures to keep classrooms cooler, water tanks to keep play spaces greener and bike racks and enclosures to encourage more kids to ride to school.

It will allow schools to move quickly to provide even better educational facilities to students, such as new classrooms, upgraded libraries, new gymnasiums and new halls. It will allow schools to move more quickly to become even better places to work and better places to learn.

We must move quickly because of the danger the global financial crisis presents to the jobs of Canberrans and because the commonwealth will set strict time lines as a result. That is why the Prime Minister has made this a "use it or lose it package". That is why he has threatened to start "cracking heads and knocking skulls" to roll out this economic stimulus package.

To demonstrate the urgency let us take the example of a school that wants to build a new gymnasium in round 1 of the commonwealth funding. This is a major project for any individual school. A school's bid needs to be with the commonwealth for approval by the end of April this year at the latest. Work must start no later than June this year. And work must be completed by December 2010 at the latest. If schools cannot meet this deadline, they miss out. As the Prime Minister put it, "We are in uncharted, unprecedented times." This package cannot wait, schools cannot wait and the economy cannot wait.

ACT Labor will do all it can to work with the federal government and the community to see that this \$230 million is invested in our schools. Why are we doing this, Mr Speaker? Because we know that in the midst of this global financial crisis the jobs of

Canberrans depend on this investment, because we know that in the long term there is no better way to strengthen our economy than by investing in the education of young Canberrans.

We are working hard to ensure that this extra \$230 million is invested in our schools because we know that, along with teacher quality, school facilities are important in delivering excellent education outcomes. We are working hard to secure this massive investment because we know that to attract and retain the best teachers you need to provide them with modern places in which to work. That, it would appear, from the interjections of those opposite, explains why only ACT Labor is committed to delivering for the people of the ACT.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Porter, a supplementary question?

**MS PORTER:** Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker. Would the minister advise of reaction within the community to federal Labor's stimulus package and the ACT government's plans to ensure schools and our economy can benefit from this investment?

**MR BARR:** There has been much support in the community for federal Labor's proposed investment in education and jobs. For example, Jeremy Irvine of the ACT Independent Schools Association said, of the Rudd package, immediately after the jobs and education roundtable last week:

The Federal Government has been very proactive in ensuring that funding is equally spread for the computers in schools program, the trades training centres; we have a Federal Government that is acting across all sectors and we think that's impressive.

The Australian Local Government Association applauded the package, with association president Councillor Geoff Lake saying:

At this time when the economy and our communities are facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression we have to pull together and develop innovative solutions for the benefit of the nation.

Even Colin Barnett, the Liberal Premier of Western Australia, when asked if he supported the package, said:

I'm not going to tell people they can't get a payment.

There has also been strong support for the ACT government's proposal to further cut red tape to let schools get on with delivering their share of the \$230 million commonwealth offer. The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations has today called on the Greens and Liberals to pass changes to the planning regulations to allow money from the federal government's stimulus package to flow to our schools. Describing the package as "a once in a 100 year opportunity for our schools" and an opportunity that "we can't let pass us by", association president Elizabeth Singer said:

The Minister for Education has identified changes to the Planning Act that are needed for the ACT government to spend this money in time, for the benefit of our schools and our community.



John Miller of the Master Builders Association told ABC radio yesterday:

The Government's hell bent on making sure that we can actually get this work rolling out the door.

He went on to say:

We support the Government, we support moves to make sure that we're in a position to actually act on it, and we don't have to hand back money to the Commonwealth that otherwise could be spent in the territory."

David Garrett of the ACT Block Grant Authority noted the tight deadlines associated with this funding and said that he is pleased planning regulations will be changed to expedite applications.

Whilst the overwhelming majority of expert and community opinion backs this investment in our schools and our plans to secure this investment, it appears that the opposition parties in this chamber do not. The ACT Liberals have flip flopped on this package, claiming part of it as their own on 3 February and then rejecting it on 5 February. I am concerned that the ACT Greens appear to have split from their federal counterparts, who voted in support of the stimulus package, and that last Friday both opposition parties, the Liberals and the Greens, made it clear they would oppose this plan, and they have done so without the benefit of a briefing. My office has contacted the offices of both the Leader of the Opposition—

**Mr Seselja:** Today, just before question time.

**MR BARR:** today, to arrange for a briefing tomorrow.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! I cannot hear the minister.

**MR BARR:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. We know the standing position of the Liberal Party in relation to this. They oppose this stimulus package and this investment in schools at the federal level. The now shadow Treasurer described the amount of money being spent on schools as "a ridiculous amount". The ACT Liberals at no point in this debate have come clean and indicated whether they support or oppose the investment in our schools. They are looking to find a million process arguments not to answer the substantive question that they still have not done, either through the shadow minister or the Leader of the Opposition, who has seemingly taken responsibility for education matters in this particular education debate off his shadow minister, who has made no public statement. They are yet to indicate a position. The Greens, on the other hand, have supported the package at a federal level but seem determined at this stage not to, although I hope that some more detailed briefing on what is proposed will ensure their support and that of the opposition.

The challenge I set to the opposition parties is that, if they want to oppose this, they should front up to every school community in this territory and explain why it is that

they do not deserve their share of this commonwealth funding. The fundamental point here is that the Greens and the Liberals do not need to do anything. There is no requirement for you to act. All you can do is block the ACT government and its attempt to work with the federal government to deliver this package. That is the only option open to the opposing parties. It is not there for your support. All you can do is oppose. That is the only option you have and I am calling on those parties to indicate their support for this package. *(Time expired.)*

### **Land—rent scheme**

**MR SMYTH:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, in the 2008-09 budget, in budget paper 3 on page 68, two sums of money are identified for the land rent scheme: \$1.1 million entitled “land rent scheme” and \$40,000 for the land rent scheme update. Treasurer, how much of this funding has been utilised so far, to date, during 2008-09?

**MS GALLAGHER:** Funny that I do not have that page of the 2008-09 budget in front of me at the moment, but I will endeavour to have an answer to the question for the member by the end of question time today.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Smyth, a supplementary question?

**MR SMYTH:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Treasurer, while you are providing that update, as you are providing an acquittal of the expenditure so far on this scheme, will you also update the Assembly on how many people have attended the sessions at the CIT and any other future sessions that are planned. And how many people have actually built homes as a consequence of your scheme?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I will endeavour to get the answer to that question. It will involve liaison with the Chief Minister’s Department, which is running those sessions. We will see what we can do as soon as we can.

### **Economy—stimulus package**

**MS LE COUTEUR:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and concerns his decision to bypass the normal development application process for school projects funded by the federal stimulus package. Minister, can you tell the Assembly why you need to exempt these projects from the normal ACTPLA processes, given that only 20 per cent of school projects funded by the stimulus package need to commence by July, many schools have already prepared their design templates to use for their project and most of the projects do not require development applications anyway?

**MR BARR:** I thank the member for her question. I think it represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the time lines for the commonwealth stimulus package and the current public notification of third-party appeal time frames that are associated with developments of the size of school gymnasiums and halls I do acknowledge the point that the member makes in relation to some of the smaller projects. In fact, that is already covered off by changes made to the planning system and supported in this place unanimously towards the end of the last Assembly, for

example, the sorts of provisions that the government has made through both the exempt and code tracks within the new planning system do exempt a large number of smaller developments.

The question, of course, relates to the extension of some of those matters from residential zoning into land zoned for school use. I suppose the question I pose to the member in response to that is: if it is okay under the current planning arrangements in relation to a single house in a new housing estate for a carport or shade structure, a courtyard or freestanding wall, decks, patios, terraces, fences, garage, sheds, pool fencing and barriers, swimming pools, retaining walls to all be exempt in a context of residential development, why would it not be supportable that new school buildings or porticos, awnings, canopies, entries, school signs, school playground equipment like monkey bars, swings, slippery dips, fencing around schools, normal sized shade structures, school flagpoles, the installation of water tanks and artificial grass, bike enclosure structures and changes to the sealing treatment of driveways could not similarly be exempted? That is the simple proposal that the government will put forward.

It can be done by regulation. It will not require this place to do anything. The government has it entirely in hand. As I indicated previously, the only action that the opposing parties in this place can take is to block this regulation. That is the only option open. If they cannot do anything constructive, they can get out of the way and let the government get on working with schools communities to deliver this investment.

I do note that the Greens spokesperson made a suggestion that just employing a couple of extra DA staff would resolve all of these issues. That, of course, does not address the statutory time frames in relation to public notification and third-party appeals on some of these projects and it belies the fact that there are already 35 staff in the development application area. Adding two more will not significantly increase the capacity of the authority to process those applications.

It is worth noting that, as a result of a number of initiatives I introduced late last year, the Planning and Land Authority has reallocated resources such that every officer within the authority who has experience in assessing development applications has been working with that DA assessment team. I am advised that more than 400 DAs were processed between the end of December and February and that there are now only about 280 outstanding DAs in the merit track.

The new planning system, with its exempt and code track developments, has made a significant difference in reducing the amount of development applications that need to go through a rigorous and extensive development assessment process. That has resulted in fewer DAs requiring that assessment. It is all part of the government's agenda for a simpler, faster and more effective planning system. This government is about jobs and education and my challenge to those opposite is: get out of the way, let us get on with delivering this package; if you do not have the fortitude to do that, then you must front up to every school community and explain to them why you do not believe they should be allowed to get on with delivering these projects.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Le Couteur, a supplementary question.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the minister for his information and I note that I am still waiting for a full briefing on his proposed changes.

Minister, the ACT chief planner, Neil Savery, recently said that a manageable number of development applications is 150 but that ACTPLA is currently dealing with 400 of them. What are you doing to fix this problem? Is the real reason that you are planning to circumvent standard planning processes the fact that ACTPLA appears not to have adequate staff and resources?

**MR BARR:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I anticipated some of the supplementary question in my initial answer. I can, of course, repeat for the member that, as part of a range of initiatives introduced, firstly, around the change to the planning system in 2007 and then through 2008 and then through another set of initiatives that I released in December of last year, there has been a significant reassignment and reallocation of resources within the Planning and Land Authority to put more resources into the development assessment area.

As I indicated previously, more than 400 development applications were processed through December to February. There are now less than 300 outstanding. I recognise the comments from the chief executive of the Planning and Land Authority that a desirable number to have in the system is about 150, and that is why this process will continue.

My response to the member's question would be: does she think this would at all be aided by adding in potentially 300 new DAs from schools all at the same time? This is an unprecedented number and breadth of public works across all schools in the territory. We are moving quickly to respond, but it is important to recognise that in responding to the commonwealth's time lines we, like all other jurisdictions, will have to move away from a business as usual approach.

It is worth noting, just by way of contrast, how other jurisdictions are responding. In South Australia and New South Wales the governments in those two states are moving a blanket exemption for all projects under the stimulus package—a blanket exemption. All local councils are being bypassed in New South Wales and a similar process is occurring in South Australia. In Queensland and Victoria it is my understanding that infrastructure developments on school sites are already exempt in their planning systems.

Difficult and challenging times require different approaches. Fortunately, this Assembly and this government had the foresight to change our planning system. We now have a capacity, through regulation, to make a simple change to exempt further categories of development on our schools. We will, of course, as I indicated in my public comments last week, provide a set of criteria in relation to building heights and setbacks to ensure that any development on school sites is consistent with the territory plan.

These are a simple and straightforward range of commonsense exemptions that we can make. I have just been passed a note. Another stakeholder has come out in support

of the government's proposal. The Property Council "welcomes proposals by the ACT government to streamline planning processes for projects associated with the commonwealth government's economic stimulus package".

We now see yet another industry association coming out in support of the government's position. I repeat my challenge to the opposition parties. You do not need to do anything. The government has this in hand. The only thing you can do is block. If you are blocking, you are blocking for opposition's sake only. If you are going to do that, then you must face every school community and explain why you are opposing this sensible measure that other governments around Australia have taken. We will need to ensure that you are held accountable if you do seek to block this government's commonsense approach to addressing this issue.

### **Land—rent scheme**

**MR DOSZPOT:** My question is to the Treasurer regarding the stalled land rent scheme. Treasurer, under Treasury modelling, will participants in the land rent scheme go into negative equity at any stage of the contract?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I have not seen any Treasury modelling on this scheme. I will take that question on notice and get back to you. As we said, the day-to-day management and briefing on this scheme remains with the Chief Minister. I am not sure that there was modelling done at the time; it pre-dates my time as Treasurer. My non-understanding of whether there was modelling done at the time goes to that point. But I will check and get back to you.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Doszpot, a supplementary question?

**MR DOSZPOT:** Treasurer, have you sought updated modelling since you have become Treasurer?

**MS GALLAGHER:** No, I have not. I am not sure why I would.

### **Land—rent scheme**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Treasurer regarding the stalled land rent scheme. Treasurer, has any family struggling to enter the housing market through your scheme received lending support for a land rent package?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I note that the opposition are starting all their questions with "the stalled land rent scheme". As you would have heard from the Chief Minister, the interest that we saw from the major banks initially is not there at the moment. But we are still in active negotiations around this scheme.

**Mr Smyth:** So it is falling over.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I think you heard from the Chief Minister before that there are some reasons why. I do not know if you have missed the whole global financial crisis and some of the flow-on impacts of that and some of the changes in banks' behaviours

as a result of that. I do not know if that has completely slipped past the opposition's radar. But it should not be any surprise that the banks are more risk averse, perhaps, at the moment than they have been in some time.

We do not accept that it is a stalled land rent scheme. The land rent scheme is actively being pursued. I can answer in relation to one of the questions—

**Mr Hanson:** Mr Speaker, point of order. It is a fairly simple question, Mr Speaker, on a point of order on relevance. The question is: has any family struggling to enter the housing market through your scheme received lending support? It is a simple yes-no, Mr Speaker.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Gallagher.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, but I can choose to answer the question as I see fit without instructions from the person who asked the question. There has been significant interest in this scheme. Let us talk about the numbers of people who have been involved. I think this goes to the question that Mr Smyth asked me earlier. Three hundred and forty people have attended information sessions on this scheme. For the beginning of a scheme such as this, I would have thought that that is quite a significant level of interest, showing that there is a level of demand within the community for access to a product such as this. This government is actively pursuing the scheme.

**Mr Smyth:** So how many built a house as a consequence?

**MS GALLAGHER:** At the moment, nobody has received lending.

**Mr Smyth:** Nobody.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I do not think that is—

**Mr Stanhope:** Not that we are aware of.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Yes.

**Mr Hanson:** So nobody. That is the answer.

**MS GALLAGHER:** So because it has not reached—

**Mr Hanson:** How long has it been?

**MS GALLAGHER:** Because nobody has received it, we should just stop it? Is that the line that you are putting now? Is that what you are saying—that we should not actively pursue a policy response that tries to meet the needs of income earners under \$75,000, having access to a product because they cannot afford the standard home and land package? Is that what you are saying—that because at the moment—

**Mr Hanson:** They do not have access to it because no-one will lend them the money.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Because at the moment, in eight months, this has not been achieved, then we should stop it and walk away? Is that what you are putting? That is what you are saying—that we should not actively pursue this; we should not actively seek the support of lenders to come in and assist people on that income. Is that what you are saying? That is what you are saying.

We are getting used to this from the opposition. Opposition for opposition's sake. Four long years. What do we see? Opposition to money going to schools. Opposition to schemes like the land rent scheme. Opposition to the \$42 billion stimulus package. Opposition to everything. Four long years we have got. And while you sit there for your four long years staring at us, we will get on and implement schemes like this that support access to housing and to home ownership for people who earn an income that is less than what they can afford in standard mortgage rates. That is what we will do. And you sit there and oppose it. Sit there and oppose it: good on you!

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, a supplementary question.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, what action have you taken to resolve this crisis that Canberra families are facing due to a lack of financial support?

**MR SPEAKER:** I presume that was directed to the Treasurer.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would ask Mr Hanson to go and read the government's affordable housing strategy. As I said, we will not give up on a scheme that when it works—and we very much hope it does—will assist families with a product that they have not been able to access in the past.

### **Health—oversight**

**MS BRESNAN:** My question is to the Minister for Health and is in regard to the oversight of health professionals. A new national register of health professionals is being progressed through COAG, led by Queensland. What is the ACT government doing to ensure that the new national scheme improves upon current methods of addressing consumer concerns with practitioners?

**MS GALLAGHER:** The ACT government has signed up to the COAG plan for a national accreditation and registration scheme. That is in its final stages now. Bill A has passed the Queensland parliament and now drafting happens on bill B, which takes into account many of the technical aspects of how the scheme is going to work. This matter will go to health ministers and presumably then to COAG in March. We, as health ministers, just report to COAG; COAG has made the decision about this.

The outstanding issues are around how complaints are handled. Many jurisdictions have different ways that that is done, including here where we have a medical board but we also have a capacity for the Human Rights Commission to take part in joint consideration of some complaints. There is some concern that in some jurisdictions the national framework could take away some of the local arrangements that exist at the moment.

At the moment we are part of that national discussion. I am meeting with many stakeholder groups, as I normally do, around health in general, but national accreditation and registration is certainly part of that discussion. Some of the groups still have concerns around how complaints are going to be handled and they are the tricky discussions that are yet to be resolved. The idea of this whole national registration accreditation scheme is to improve oversight and awareness and patient safety in the provision of services by health professionals right across the board. That is what is directing the work. So how we improve access or information for consumers, but also protection for consumers through how those professionals are regulated, is very much at the centre of those discussions.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Bresnan, a supplementary?

**MS BRESNAN:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Given that is the case, is it possible to provide the Assembly with a time frame for the ACT government looking into this matter and reporting back to the Assembly at the end of this time frame?

**MS GALLAGHER:** I think it will go to health ministers in March and I think COAG is happening after health ministers. It is ultimately COAG's decision about how this proceeds from here. I am happy to report back to the Assembly post the COAG meeting.

### **Land—rent scheme**

**MR COE:** My question is to the Chief Minister and is in regard to the stalled land rent scheme. Chief Minister, it has been reported in the media and to me personally that Canberra families feel they have been led astray, let down and frustrated by the government over the land rent scheme. Chief Minister, will you offer a personal apology to those who have been led astray, let down and frustrated by the policy you personally championed? And if not, why not?

**MR STANHOPE:** Upon Mr Coe tabling the names and addresses of those who have personally contacted his office, I undertake to write to each of them to explain the rationale of the land rent scheme and the government's continuing determination to support them, unlike the Liberal Party.

Mr Speaker, do I need to seek leave to allow Mr Coe to table the names and addresses of all those people that have contacted his office? I do that. I seek leave to move a motion to suspend so much of standing orders as would prevent Mr Coe tabling the names and address of all of those people he just claimed contacted his office, none of whom have contacted my office, none of whom have contacted the office of the Chief Minister, the person responsible for the scheme, to actually seek personal assurances from me. I seek leave to move a motion to suspend standing orders as would prevent Mr Coe now tabling the names and addresses of all those that have contacted his office. I move that Mr Coe table before the close of business today the names and addresses of all those people that have contacted his office to inform him of their concern in relation to the land rent scheme.



**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Stanhope, you need to move to suspend standing and temporary orders to move a motion.

### **Standing and temporary orders—suspension**

**MR STANHOPE** (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage) (2.50): I move:

That Mr Coe provide to the Chief Minister, before the close of business today, the names and addresses of those who have complained to him about the ACT Government's Land Rent Scheme—

none of whom have contacted me or any member of the government.

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (2.51): It might be of benefit to those who are about to vote on this that they actually heard what the question was. As is so typical of the Chief Minister, he ignores the question and rewrites it as he verbals people.

**Mr Corbell:** The question is that standing orders be suspended.

**MR SMYTH:** Yes, to allow him to move a motion. The actual question that Mr Coe asked—

**Mr Corbell:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker: the question before the chair is that standing orders be suspended.

**MR SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. Mr Smyth is speaking to the motion.

**MR SMYTH:** The bit that the Chief Minister verbals, as he does so often when he puts his spin on things because he is uncomfortable, is this:

Chief Minister, it has been reported in the media and to me personally that Canberra families feel they have been led astray, let down and frustrated by the government over the land rent scheme.

He then asked, "Will you apologise to these people?" He actually has not said that he has had people come into his office. He has not said that he has received correspondence. The whole point is that you want him to table something that he has not done and he has not said and he has not brought to this place. There is no reason, under the standing orders, because it is not what he said.

When the Chief Minister speaks in this place, he must speak truthfully. We have a Chief Minister who continually misleads this Assembly by the way he tells his stories and by the way he twists things. He is very good at spinning things; we know that. But if we are going to have a motion, it has got to be a motion based on truth; it cannot be a motion based on fantasy or lies.

The Chief Minister needs to point out where Mr Coe said that people have been in his office. He did not. If he wants a copy of the question, I will give him a copy of the question.

**MR SPEAKER:** I remind Mr Corbell that the clerks will be running the clock on the debate.

**MR CORBELL** (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (2.52): The Chief Minister has put quite a simple and straightforward proposition. I am amazed at the very weak defence from Mr Smyth. Mr Coe asked the question. He said that it had been reported to him directly by people affected by this—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR CORBELL:** No, it does. It says very clearly that he is making representations on behalf of people—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR CORBELL:** It sounds to me, Mr Speaker, as if a bit of a raw nerve has been touched. It sounds to me as if perhaps they do not have any names of people who have complained about this scheme. Perhaps they are just making it up. The proposition of the Chief Minister is a simple and straightforward one. If people have complained, tell us who has complained and the Chief Minister will willingly write to them on the matter.

That sounds to me like a very responsive approach by the Chief Minister and it is disappointing that when push comes to shove the Liberal Party are not prepared to substantiate their position in this place. They need to put up or shut up. They need to front up with those names if they sincerely believe that the questions they are asking in this place are in response to representations made to them. Either the representations have been made to them or they have not. It is a simple question and they should be able to answer in a simple fashion.

**MS HUNTER** (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (2.54): Mr Speaker, I am concerned that people's private details will be tabled in the Assembly. I guess I am trying to find a way forward, but that may not happen.

**MR SESELJA** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (2.54): I will speak briefly simply because of the ridiculous statement from Mr Corbell, in particular.

We have had families come to us. In fact, I had one in my office yesterday. The individual said to me specifically that he did not want to be identified.

*Government members interjecting—*

**MR SESELJA:** No. If you are saying to me that either this person did not come into my office or he is a liar or he does not exist or, in fact, the people quoted in the *Canberra Times* do not exist or that John Thistleton is a liar—because that is essentially what you are implying—then it is absolutely outrageous for you to say that we cannot take up this issue.

I will put the counterpoint. Table in here all the people who have got a house under the land rent scheme. There are none. We know that a lot of people have signed up and all of them have been frustrated. A number of them have expressed that concern. I think Mr Stanhope wants to name and shame them or in some way vilify them.

**Ms Gallagher:** He wants to write to them.

**MR SESELJA:** He wants to write to them. It is fascinating, Mr Speaker, that they chose not to come to the government. It is fascinating that they chose to come to the opposition and the *Canberra Times* because they have no faith in this government to get it done. When they say they have been contacted by no-one perhaps that should not surprise us because people who have been led astray by this scheme do not feel that this government will listen to them. They feel that the only way they can actually get any action is through the media and through the opposition.

This is a ridiculous motion that impinges on the privacy of these particular individuals. If the counter is that these people do not exist, there is no-one who feels that they have been led astray, there is no-one who has been adversely affected by this land rent scheme, the government should have the courage to say that these people do not exist.

We have already heard the Chief Minister say that no-one is out of pocket, but they should have the courage to say that no-one has been hurt by this flawed land rent scheme. They should say that we are all liars because no-one has actually come to us. They should say that the journalist in question is a liar. They should say that the person who is quoted in there either does not exist or is lying.

It is an absolutely ridiculous assertion and it is designed to distract attention from how badly this land rent scheme has eventuated and the fact that not one person—not one family—has been helped by this scheme to date and not one lender has provided finance to one family under this scheme to date. That is their embarrassment. The motion to suspend the standing orders is a ridiculous motion and we will not be supporting it.

**MR BARR** (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Planning and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation) (2.57): The fundamental point that the opposition need to confront in the wording of their question is that, if they are demanding an apology from the Chief Minister to someone, they must be prepared to give some indication of who those people are.

To address Ms Hunter's point, it need not be on the public record in this place. If Mr Coe could provide the details of the personal conversation he had, that might ease the concerns of the Greens in relation to this matter.

The opposition takes this line of questioning and asserts that the Chief Minister must apologise to a group of people who are allegedly hurt by the government's efforts in this area to help them into home ownership, in stark contrast to the position of those opposite, but then refuses even the basic courtesy of providing some of that information so as to enable the Chief Minister to contact the people that are allegedly so concerned.

We have had the allegation in a series of questions today in question time. For those of us who have been in this place for a little while, it has echoes of Mrs Burke and Mr Pratt, who used to come into this place with lots of fictitious examples and were never actually able to table any evidence in support of their particular assertions.

The challenge for Mr Coe and for the Leader of the Opposition is to come clean on this one. You have run your entire question strategy on this, guys, so you will want to have some evidence to back it up. Bring it forward. Let's see it.

**MS BRESNAN** (Brindabella) (2.59): I agree that the opposition need to back up these claims when they make these allegations. But, to be fair, Mr Coe's question was not stating that people had personally come to his office, and I do not think it is appropriate to be asking for people's personal details to be tabled here in the Assembly. I would suggest that perhaps Mr Coe and Mr Stanhope could have a conversation about this and those details could be provided in a private manner, rather than here in the Assembly, if that is what is warranted.

**Mr Stanhope:** I would like to respond to that, Mr Speaker.

**MR SPEAKER:** You have already spoken, Mr Stanhope.

**Mr Stanhope:** I propose to amend the motion as suggested by Ms Bresnan.

**Mrs Dunne:** We are suspending standing orders at this stage.

**MR HARGREAVES** (Brindabella—Minister for Disability and Housing, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections) (2.59): On the question of a suspension of standing orders, in my time here, following on from what Mr Barr was just saying, I have heard so many times members from that side say, "All these people kept coming to my office. People are always ringing me up and people are always coming to my office and telling me these things." That was the constant carping from the former shadow minister that Mr Coe has succeeded.

**Mrs Dunne:** I raise a point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker. This is about whether or not the standing orders should be suspended. It does not matter what a former shadow minister, who is no longer a member of this place, may have said once. It is about whether or not we should suspend standing orders today.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mrs Dunne, I think we cannot take the point of order. It has been a fairly free ranging conversation so far. Mr Hargreaves, at least stick to the issue of the land rent scheme and the suspension of standing orders, please.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. The issue is whether we should suspend standing orders so that Mr Coe can produce the names of those people who have supposedly contacted him. Quite frankly, it is a case where we do not believe it. We have been burnt in the past with these people across the—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR HARGREAVES:** This is the only vehicle which can allow—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR HARGREAVES:** Fifteen seconds and the generalissimo and his little mates—away they go. Mr Speaker, they are just trying to disrupt the matter. We are trying to give Mr Coe an opportunity to show whether or not he is a man of integrity, he is a man to come into this place and not attempt to put something into the conversation which is not quite true—and not to represent himself. We want him to show that he can substantiate the allegations that he makes that people have contacted him.

**Mr Barr:** To be fair to him, it probably wasn't his question.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Yes, I do not think he actually wrote the question, so therefore maybe he would like to take us up on the offer and table the names of all of the people on that side of the house that have contacted those people, so that the Chief Minister can correspond with all of them—or, shall we say, both of them; I suspect they do not exist. These people are denying Mr Coe the opportunity to show that he is an honourable man. They are denying him that.

*Members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order!

**MR HARGREAVES:** Mr Speaker, Mr Coe needs to know that this is a legislative assembly, not a pole-dancing place where people pay to go and have a look at it. I suggest that Mr Coe show that he is a man of integrity or whether he is not.

**MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (3.02):** We are debating whether or not to suspend standing orders. The Chief Minister seems to doubt that people are frustrated. I will quote from the *Canberra Times* of Saturday:

The ACT Chief Minister's Department deputy chief executive, David Dawes, said 340 people had attended information sessions since the scheme's launch in July.

He said 39 blocks were taken up, but those holding them were frustrated ...

That is one of the sources that Mr Coe was referring to when it was said that it was reported in the press that people were frustrated. There are people who have come to the opposition who have been frustrated by this scheme. That does not mean that we will divulge things, that we have heard in confidence, for the convenience of the Chief

Minister so that perhaps he can go around and monster them, because this is what will happen. The Chief Minister says, like in a fairy tale, “Give them my address so that I can go and be nice to them.” The other alternative is that he will send people around to monster them and tell them that they are quite wrong; that they should not feel frustrated, because he is Jon Stanhope and he is here to help them.

There are 39 families who are clearly unable to borrow money, who are out of pocket, who have paid substantial fees, who have paid stamp duty and who are now out of pocket, who have blocks of land or are in the process of taking possession of blocks of land that they cannot build on because no-one will lend them the money. These people do not have \$100,000, \$200,000 or \$300,000 put away somewhere as cash to build these houses, and they cannot borrow.

The point is that Mr Stanhope has been extraordinarily inconvenienced and discomfited by the revelations that his pet scheme does not work and, as a response to that, he has behaved in an inappropriate way today, demanding names and addresses of people.

Members of the opposition deal with their constituents on a confidential basis. If I write to a minister about a constituent’s problems I seek their permission to do so. If the constituent specifically says to me, “I do not want you to take this up” or “I want you to keep my identity confidential,” it is my responsibility as an elected member to do so. As a result of that, even if we suspend standing orders, and even if the Chief Minister succeeds in passing his motion, we cannot comply with it and meet our responsibilities as members in this place.

**MR SPEAKER:** The time for the debate has now expired.

Question put:

That standing orders be suspended.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 11

Noes 6

Mr Barr	Ms Hunter	Mr Coe
Ms Bresnan	Ms Le Couteur	Mr Doszpot
Ms Burch	Ms Porter	Mrs Dunne
Mr Corbell	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson
Ms Gallagher	Mr Stanhope	Mr Seselja
Mr Hargreaves		Mr Smyth

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

**MR STANHOPE** (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage) (3.07): I move:

That Mr Coe provide to the Chief Minister before the close of business today the names and addresses of those who have complained to him about the ACT government land rent scheme.

In the context of the question that was asked, and most particularly the question asked me to apologise to those people that Mr Coe claims to have been in some way seriously affected by the land rent scheme—I will speak briefly because we have just had a broad-ranging debate, which I think would fulfil the needs of the debate that we might have now—and in the context of questions that have been asked today and the information that the government is able to provide—and some of this information has been provided to me and the Treasurer during question time—as at 23 February, 40 blocks are being held by the Land Development Agency on behalf of Canberrans, young Canberra families with incomes of less than \$75,000 who would like to access the land rent scheme. Four blocks have been exchanged and one block has been settled.

As I have said repeatedly, the government has negotiated, since July last year when the scheme was launched, with all of the major banks in Australia and the financial sector more broadly. I am very pleased—as I have been saying—that we are in constructive, continuing negotiations with a major financial institution. The *Canberra Times* choose not to believe that. The Liberal Party choose not to believe that. I have to say, as a result of the nature of the article provided by the *Canberra Times* and the way in which it was written—the very negative, condescending and critical way in which the article was written—we see a rash of letters to the editor today all suggesting that the scheme has ended, that it is over, that it is flawed. We see the Liberal Party today mounting a sustained attack on the land rent scheme, actually creating genuine concern and distress, I am sure, which has probably led to some people contacting their representatives in this place as a result. It is one of those circles in life, a very negative media article on the front page of the *Canberra Times* which does not reflect the reality of the negotiations and refuses to believe that the government is in serious, constructive negotiations with a financial institution.

I acknowledge that perhaps it is a result of some of the negativity and the wholesale attack by the Liberal Party, most particularly, the non-believing. I am very proud and pleased now to be able to announce that a major financial institution has given its approval in principle to provide this loan product for the land rent scheme. It is a tremendous result for Canberra. It is a vindication of the land rent scheme. It is a fantastic scheme. It is a tremendous and innovative scheme. It gives genuine hope to Canberra families, struggling Canberra families—the families that the Liberal Party has abandoned and the families for whom the Liberal Party has no plan, no view, no vision and no concern. So it is with enormous pleasure that I can announce that we have today achieved approval in principle from a major financial institution who has some issues in relation to prudential regulation to finalise, and we hope that they will be successfully finalised. But as of today a major financial institution, which has asked not to be named—

*Members interjecting—*

**MR STANHOPE:** Keep attacking the scheme. There is only so much egg that can be taken to cover the faces of the Liberal Party in relation to this scheme. It is a fantastic,

successful, still breathing scheme. Today we have proudly received approval in principle. That organisation, until it actually achieves support from the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority, prefers not to be identified, and we will respect that. Over these last seven months we have worked diligently and rigorously to ensure that this scheme becomes a reality. We will continue to do so. We will not put it at risk, we will not talk it down and we will not trash it. We will not abandon young Canberra families with incomes of less than \$75,000 who dream of owning their own home. And today we cross a major threshold—approval in principle from a significant institution, a major financial institution, with the capacity to fund loans for all of those families that have sought to access this scheme.

At this stage, as I have said, we are holding 40 blocks. Despite some of the attitude and rhetoric, and the complete misinformation, there has been no stamp duty paid—as Mrs Dunne just asserts. There are no legal fees. This land is being held by the LDA on the basis of expressions of interest—on the basis of expressions of interest by those people that they would wish to access this scheme should they be able to attract a loan, should they be able to attract a financial institution that is prepared.

Today, we have made a major advance. We have agreement in principle subject to approval by the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority. That is a major next step in relation to advancing the land rent scheme and ensuring that it becomes a reality. This is a very significant moment for the scheme. ACT government officials from Treasury and the Chief Minister's Department, as I have been saying constantly since July, have been in negotiations with all sectors of the financial sector seeking a loan product that meets the needs of those who wish to access the land rent scheme. And today we have a major company, a major institution, that has said, "Yes; we will go with this product. We will provide a product. But we have got some checks to do. We need in the first instance the support of the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority." Subject to that—and these are still significant issues; there are still hurdles to jump and hoops to go through—we have made a major advance today. I hope that we can maintain the momentum.

I hope that the negativity, the talking down, the trashing and the rubbishing of the land rent scheme that we have seen over the last week has not damaged the prospects of this scheme, has not put at risk the opportunity for those young families to access this fantastic and innovative new route to home ownership. It is very important.

I would hope that we could work together on this and that the Liberal Party would not take the position which the Treasurer and the minister for education described so cogently and well before. What we now see is opposition for sheer opposition's sake—obstruction for the sake of obstruction; a determination to become the problem, not part of the solution; and a simple incapacity to accept the fact that they lost the last election.

The fact that you lost and you have taken a blow does not mean that you need to abandon completely your responsibility to the people of Canberra in the way that you are doing. All right; you lost. You took a blow. Take it on the chin. Pick yourselves up and get on with the job that you have been elected to do and that you are paid to do—instead of just obstructing every step of the way, putting at risk \$230 million of



investment in our schools and trashing a land rent scheme that is innovative and cutting edge, something that will provide home ownership opportunities for young Canberra families that otherwise—

**Mr Hanson:** Holding you to account is a principle of what we are doing here, Mr Stanhope.

**MR STANHOPE:** Young Canberra families earning less than \$75,000. We know that you do not esteem them. We know that you do not care about them.

**Mr Hanson:** And you want their names and addresses. You care so much about them.

**MR STANHOPE:** That is about, as it has been indicated. Mr Coe stands up in this place and makes suggestions or claims which—to be honest, and it goes to the motion, of course—we just have a tad of difficulty in accepting. It is appropriate, in the context of the question he asks, to provide—not that I amended the motion—names and addresses. All of you do it all the time. You all make representations to ministers and the government all the time on behalf of constituents. I am simply suggesting through this motion to Mr Coe—I receive, I have to say, to his credit, significant correspondence from Mr Coe on behalf of constituents whom he names, all the time, as I do from each of you. Each of you writes to me every day of the week naming constituents—

**Mr Barr:** Some more than others.

**MR STANHOPE:** Some more than others, yes. I have not received a letter from Mrs Dunne in five years. But some of you write regularly on behalf of constituents whom you name, whose addresses you provide me. You ask me to contact and ask me to make representations—make representations on their behalf and ask me to respond to their needs. We are simply suggesting that what you do on a daily basis you do through this motion—provide me with the names and addresses and I will respond. I will give them the assurances that I can give them about what a wonderful scheme this is. I will probably drop into the letter a suggestion or two about the Liberal Party's attitude to the land rent scheme, but you will excuse me that, I am sure.

**MR COE (Ginninderra) (3.18):** I rise to speak against this ridiculous motion, this ridiculous distraction on what is a complete failure. Not only has this scheme stalled, I reckon the engine is off, the in-principle agreement they had with another financial service. I think we might have heard that before about that scheme. Have we heard it before? I think we might have heard it before.

Here we are, eight months later, eight months down the track, and we still have 39 families that are frustrated. The Chief Minister may disagree with people in his department about whether they are actually frustrated or not. But they are the professionals. Mr Dawes was a professional when he was appointed. Mr Stanhope has spoken very highly of Mr Dawes in this place since my election. I can recall him speaking very highly of Mr Dawes; so I would find it very hard to believe the Chief Minister would question the judgement of Mr Dawes when it comes to this matter.

I find it particularly amazing how arrogant this Chief Minister is in creating a distraction on this when you have 39 families that have signed up to this scheme, with good intentions; they have signed up to this scheme, wanting a house; they have signed up to this scheme, wanting to better their lives for their children. And here we are, eight months later, with a government so arrogant that they will not even acknowledge that things are not going according to plan. I find that absolutely staggering. Then again, that is pretty indicative of what this rock-show government is all about. This Labor government has let down so many families and this is yet another example where he refuses to actually take responsibility for his actions.

What I find particularly amazing is that, when it comes to the banks, when it comes to those great banks which we have heard the Treasurer rip into—we have heard the Treasurer rip into banks about the financial crisis—here we are, we have the Chief Minister trying to be a good corporate citizen and failing to be a good Canberra citizen, trying to be a good corporate citizen and protect his powers in the banking industry and he will not give away the name of a corporation that may give finance to a scheme like this. Yet he expects me to give the names and addresses of people that have contacted my office about a scheme that the government has set up and that is not going to plan, trying to buck-pass its scheme onto a failure of ours.

I think the people of Canberra expect better than that. I think the people of Canberra, when they voted at the last election, did not expect that they would sign up to a government scheme that would so grossly let them down. Regardless of what scepticism there is of government generally in our society, I think there is usually some sort of a sense of security that you get when you sign up to a government program that you are not going to be ripped off, that you are not going to be rorted.

**Mr Corbell:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I appreciate this has been a wide-ranging debate but at some point I would anticipate that Mr Coe would actually address the terms of the motion before us, which is that he provide to the Chief Minister before the close of business today the names and addresses of those who have complained to him about the ACT government land rent scheme. We have heard this broad commentary about what he thinks about this government and so on but he does at some point during the debate need to address the substantive terms of the motion before him and I ask you to draw his attention to that.

**Mr Seselja:** On the point of order, Mr Speaker: Mr Coe has directly dealt with the motion, in particular about providing names and addresses. He has made a contrast. I also want to make the point that the Chief Minister had a fair bit of latitude in his speech in terms of the land rent scheme overall.

**MR SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. I think the Chief Minister was fairly wide ranging as well.

**MR COE:** I do not think, when people sign up to a government scheme, they would expect to be ripped off, would expect to be rorted, would expect to be let down. I am not saying all of that is true of this particular scheme, except I think you could categorically say that there are some people out there that feel pretty let down. Even Mr Dawes has said as much when he said that people are feeling pretty frustrated.

In fact, some of these people, some of these 39 families, have accrued stamp duty debts of around \$5,000. Think about that: a land rent scheme with stamp duty! Last time I rented something, whether it be a car or perhaps a TV, I do not think you paid stamp duty on it. In this scheme there is. We are not accusing the government of being sly about this fact about stamp duty; we are not accusing them of that. But we are saying that this scheme has not got all the silver lining that you might hope for. What this scheme has done is let down people at every step along the way.

What the Chief Minister has done today, by saying that there is another financial provider that has given in-principle agreement and that he will not name in this place, is giving more hope to the 39 families that have signed up for a better deal. If the in-principle does not quite turn into reality, that is more hope that is going to be dashed by what is a scheme that is absolutely riddled with problems.

In actual fact, we in the opposition did oppose the scheme at the time. We raised a lot of concerns about the scheme. We said you would have trouble pulling it off. We said you would have trouble getting finance. Here they are, eight months later, with frustrated families, refusing even to acknowledge it. He will not even acknowledge the banks. He will protect the anonymity of a bank, he will protect a national or an international banking organisation, but he will not protect the privacy of people that have contacted my office, in good spirit, trying to get an answer, trying to get a house on the block of land that they had allocated to them. I find it pretty amazing and pretty indicative of what this government is all about.

Mr Stanhope raised, in his speech earlier, that I had contacted his office on numerous occasions. And I have; I have contacted his office about many constituent inquiries. On not one of those, have I given away the name or address of someone that has contacted my office. I think, if they contact my office about something which is not directly about their personal welfare—it could be about something in their street; it could be about a pothole down the road—I do not need to give their name and address.

Here we have the Chief Minister demanding the names and addresses of people that have contacted my office. I find that pretty outrageous. I find it pretty outrageous that a person that tries to be this great advocate of social justice, a great advocate of the Westminster system, a great advocate of integrity, would come into this place and demand that I give over names and addresses of people that contacted my office.

To be honest, I think if I directly contacted the people that contacted my office and told them about this motion, that would confirm in their minds, it would reaffirm why they contacted the opposition and why they did not go to the government. The way you are handling this issue, the way you are handling this motion, the way you are handling these 39 families, is disgraceful. The smokescreen you try to create by moving a motion like this, trying to get the names and addresses so that you can write to them about who knows what, I find pretty disappointing.

In conclusion, I think this motion is disgraceful and I would urge all those here to vote against it.

**MR HANSON** (Molonglo) (3.27): Chief Minister, representations have been made to the opposition. If you do not believe us, call us liars.

**Mr Stanhope**: No, just give me the names. I do believe you, obviously. I have asked for the names.

**MR HANSON**: Clearly, you do not. They are the inferences you have been making across the chamber. This goes to the nub of the point that you are making. We know that people are frustrated because we have read it in the paper. We know that there are a minimum of 39 people who have been affected by this scheme. We know that some of them have contacted the opposition. But, clearly, all of them are feeling frustration because David Dawes, who works for you, has explained that to us in public.

Why is it that you are demanding these names if not to try and score some point, to try and turn the motive of the question that Mr Coe asked, the point of which was that there are members of the community who have taken up this scheme who are feeling frustrated and are demanding an apology—deserve an apology, I should say? You are trying to turn it around to infer that the opposition is being disingenuous. That is not the case. Clearly, there are members of this community who have gone on board with your scheme, believing what you told them about this being a viable scheme, and it has turned out it is not.

The point that Mr Coe has raised, which goes to the heart of the Westminster system, is that when people contact the opposition, they should do so feeling that there will be no comeback on them. If they do not want their names put forward, for the Chief Minister in the Assembly to demand the names and addresses of these people actually goes to the nub of the Westminster system of democracy.

You know that because the reality is that we have an opposition, and it is the opposition's job to keep you accountable. When we receive representations, if the people making those representations do not wish to be named and do not want their addresses to be provided to government, it is absolutely against the way the system is meant to work for the Chief Minister of the ACT—you know this, Chief Minister—to demand their names and addresses.

The Chief Minister is trying to infer that we are being disingenuous or loose with the truth. That is not the case. For that reason, the motion moved by the Chief Minister is a disgraceful motion. In almost the same breath, in refusing to give the name of a financial institution, he has as much as admitted that he knows that what he is asking is absolutely outrageous. He understands what privacy is about and why we cannot give those names if people do not want them given.

I ask the Chief Minister to withdraw the motion. I think it is absolutely outrageous. He knows it. We should get back to discussing the substantive issue, which is the land rent scheme.

**MR STANHOPE** (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development,

Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage) (3.30): I will respond to one point that Mr Hanson made.

**Mrs Dunne:** This is to close?

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, this is to close the debate.

**MR STANHOPE:** Yes. Ms Bresnan has proposed an amendment. I support the amendment. I acknowledge that it goes to the point that Mr Hanson has just made. I drafted the motion in some haste and, really, with the benefit of a little more time I would have—

**Mrs Dunne:** You had a bit of a brain snap and now you are embarrassed.

**MR STANHOPE:** No. I circulated the motion. Ms Bresnan's proposed amendment—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR STANHOPE:** I am just responding to a point well made by Mr Hanson and identified by Ms Bresnan. Actually, Ms Hunter went to this point in her initial remarks about a better way through with time made available for debate. I think a number of us have identified that there are issues around privacy. If an individual has made representations and wishes them to be treated confidentially, then of course I will respect that.

But Ms Bresnan proposes an amendment that deals with those issues, and the government is more than happy to support and endorse both the sentiment which Mr Hanson expressed and which is reflected in Ms Bresnan's proposed amendment. Had I had my time over again I would have drafted my motion in those terms.

**MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (3.32), by leave:** I move:

Omit all words after "Minister"; substitute:

"the contact details of those constituents who have complained to him about the ACT government's land rent scheme, only if the constituents consent is provided."

Our amendment makes the point that Mr Coe's statements do need to be backed up, but also notes that we are dealing with private information here. People who have contacted Mr Coe in confidence must give their consent and details will only be provided to Mr Stanhope if they do actually provide that consent.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

### **Questions without notice**

**MR SPEAKER:** I invite Mr Coe to ask a supplementary question if he wishes.

*Mr Coe interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** That being the case, I call Mrs Dunne.

*Members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! Mrs Dunne has the floor for questions without notice.

### **Land—rent scheme**

**MRS DUNNE:** My question to the Chief Minister is regarding the still-breathing land rent scheme. Chief Minister, yesterday in the media you said, “This notion that they are out of pocket, that it is costing them, is just not true; it’s bulldust.” Chief Minister, what is the government’s position regarding legal fees incurred as a result of the land rent scheme? Are they considered to be an out-of-pocket expense?

**MR STANHOPE:** I am glad that Mrs Dunne asked this question. In an earlier debate today, Mrs Dunne stated quite specifically that they had all paid their stamp duty—none of them have—and that they had all paid holding fees, and none of them have. Mrs Dunne, I am pleased to have this opportunity to go to some of the details and some of the attacks about the scheme.

Part of the overall trashing of the scheme by the Liberal Party over this last week has been based on a complete misunderstanding of land rent. That is why, in my earlier answers, I sought to explain how important it was to understand what it was we were seeking to achieve.

No, Mrs Dunne, people have not paid stamp duty. No, Mrs Dunne, people have not paid holding fees. Mrs Dunne, the LDA is holding land on behalf of, I think now, 40 people. Forty working Canberra families on incomes of less than \$75,000 have, in great anticipation and in great hope, now identified land through the land rent scheme, through the LDA, which the LDA is holding for them while they seek to identify finance.

As I mentioned before, one person has identified land and has actually settled. She has actually found finance. She has found finance independently and she has settled. In the context of whether moneys have been paid, whether stamp duty has been paid, yes, in relation to that block they have. One family has actually identified a source of funding and has settled. Four young families earning less than \$75,000 have exchanged. So yes, in relation to those four exchanges there would. I do not have the detail but there would have been some fees and some arrangements made.

For those families that have not exchanged or settled, and they are essentially the families that are the focus of the Liberal Party’s agitation, they have not paid; they are not out of pocket. It may be that some people have taken legal advice, but of course that has nothing to do with the government. There have been compulsory information sessions.

**Mr Seselja:** You did not lead them astray then?

**MR STANHOPE:** We all take all sorts of different advice for different reasons. As part of it—and a significant part, and we have made it compulsory, which is very unusual in relation to government projects or proposals—it is compulsory for anybody wishing to access the scheme to attend an information session at the CIT where every aspect of the scheme is explained in detail. We go through the notion of land rent. We go through the issues of finance. We go through respective responsibilities. We go through the issues of costs and the legalities and the nature of what is a unique, innovative and not well understood scheme.

This is not a case of people walking blindly. Every single one of the families that has identified a block and asked the LDA to hold it has been through a compulsory, formal training session or information session in relation to the operations of this scheme. This is not a question of people being hoodwinked or blindsided. There is a formal, compulsory, professionally delivered information session at the CIT in relation to every step and every aspect.

To suggest that people are being blindsided, that people do not know what the issues or risks are—we have been open and up front. We have insisted that people attend and that they cannot access the scheme or land until they do. Through that detail—through those detailed sessions—those people have had explained to them every aspect, including issues and difficulties in relation to accessing a lending product at this stage.

They have not been hoodwinked. They have not been told, “You can access this land and we guarantee you finance.” It is not our business to guarantee finance. We in fact tell them that we are not aware of a financial institution that will lend. They go into this with their eyes open. They are told up front that we the government are working to identify sources of finance. And they still proceed. They still express the interest. They still identify land. They know of no other possibility or arrangement by which they will access home ownership. They know of no other scheme.

The Liberal Party have never suggested a possibility or an option. They would not be going to the Liberal Party for advice, help or assistance or for an innovative solution for families earning less than \$75,000. We have. We are. We are proud of it. Today we have taken another significant step on the path in identifying through negotiation a lending institution that today has expressed approval in principle to provide a lending product for land rent.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Dunne, a supplementary?

**MRS DUNNE:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I have a supplementary question. Chief Minister, will you offer compensation to those Canberrans who are involved in the scheme and who might wish to withdraw for their out-of-pocket expenses because you have a barely breathing land rent scheme?

**MR STANHOPE:** There is absolutely no circumstance in which I can imagine or conceive that compensation would be available at all. I think it is an absolute nonsense proposition.

## National Multicultural Festival

**MS BURCH:** My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, can you tell us how successful the 2009 national multicultural festival was?

**MR HARGREAVES:** I thank Ms Burch for her question on land rents—the multicultural festival 2009. I do not mislead the Assembly. I do not talk about stamp duties when it is not true. The 2009 national multicultural festival was one of the most successful festivals we have staged. I would like to quote one line in the paper today which I think sums it up pretty much. Of course, these people opposite are not interested in it. It says:

Canberra's Multicultural Festival is universally acknowledged as the best festival of its kind in the nation.

The numbers bear that out. In January and February, of course, the festival website, for those that are literate, [www.multiculturalfestival.com.au](http://www.multiculturalfestival.com.au)—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR HARGREAVES:** and I exclude you from that previous comment—had approximately 800,000 hits. Think about it: 800,000 hits on multiculturalism. A couple of days prior to the festival the organisers were concerned about the extreme weather conditions on the day of the food and dance spectacular. The festival team addressed all potential issues so that the attendees of the food and dance spectacular would be as comfortable as possible, with temperatures soaring over 40 degrees Celsius and with the potential to rise even higher on-site due to environmental aspects such as crowds and concrete. We know that it got pretty hot down near the stage. Mr Hanson probably was not there.

Pleasingly on the day, under such hot conditions, around 75,000 people attended the event. That was 10,000 more than last year, even with the extreme weather conditions. I also wish to acknowledge that I did see Mr Coe and Mr Dozpot and Ms Bresnan, and I thank them for their attendance. I also saw Mrs Dunne and I thank her for her support for the festival, even though she did take the opportunity to try and give me a serve, but you get that.

Two sanctuaries were included in the festival's map this year to cater particularly for the elderly and young parents in need of a pit stop. They could find respite in a cool drink and a comfortable sit down or even a little bit of quiet, private space. In fact, a key stakeholder in the city precinct has sent a letter full of praise and congratulations to the festival office and I would like to share these sentiments with you:

The removal of the toilet block from our entrance and the stopping of waste disposal collection from the adjacent car park, maintained the quality and standard of the environment around the building. We also appreciated that instead of a stage with the continuous entertainment being located on City Walk near the fountain, there was an art zone. This not only cut down the noise, but also on congestion in that area of Civic.



Thank you, also for distributing car passes direct to residents of the building. This seemed to work much better than in the past.

And so on. Mr Hanson can sit there with a grin on his face and denigrate multiculturalism, but he will stand condemned for all time.

**Ms Burch:** Oh, you're going to get a letter, John. You will get a letter from him in a minute. Don't upset him.

**MR HARGREAVES:** I will get a letter from him but it will not have anybody's name on it.

**Mr Coe:** Very witty.

**MR HARGREAVES:** I wasn't talking to you, young fella. I do not bother talking to people like you. You are an urchin.

**Mr Coe:** And you're a professional John.

**MR HARGREAVES:** I gave you a compliment before, Mr Coe. I hope you enjoy that compliment because it is the last one you are going to get.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hargreaves, you have dealt well outside the directly relevant component of this question.

**MR HARGREAVES:** I take your ruling. Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will try to ignore the innate ramblings of mad people across the chamber henceforth.

The multicultural festival actually belongs to the people. There is a very strong sense of ownership in Canberra that we have developed but we have an international reputation. I was at a couple of multicultural events over this last weekend and was congratulated heartily on what we are trying to do. I should mention that it has grown incredibly, as people who went to Glebe Park know. It has 250 stalls. That is a 25 per cent increase on last year. That shows that people are making a penny out of it in support of their particular multicultural community.

Those folks opposite can denigrate it as much as they like but it will not make any difference. The multicultural community marches on without them. I think one of the successes that we had was expanding it into Glebe Park. There was a lot of shade in there. It was a very nice green area and it was relaxing. It showed that the place was expanding.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Burch, a supplementary question.

**MS BURCH:** A supplementary question, yes. Can the minister then go on to explain what impact the multicultural festival has on our multicultural community in the ACT?

**MR HARGREAVES:** Yes, the multicultural festival has a significant and highly positive impact on the multicultural and broader community in Canberra. We see how significant this event is to the multicultural community from the fact that many of the community groups begin preparations six months prior to the event. Some groups even prepare all year round.

The government recognises that the festival has a unique role in promoting sustainable multicultural communities in the ACT. That is why the government is proud to support, through the multicultural grants, multicultural groups in their preparations and participation in the festival. Many multicultural groups put forward proposals specifically to enable them to participate, or participate to a greater extent, in the festival. These applicants frequently emphasise the unique opportunity the festival provides them to express their cultural heritage and share precious traditions with the wider community.

The festival truly is a vehicle for enhancing and promoting harmony and social cohesion. It is so successful in this because of its breadth and depth in and across the community, particularly the multicultural communities in the ACT. Year after year, it is wonderful to see how the festival is truly the main formal vehicle in the ACT to encourage the passing on of cultural traditions. The festival provides a significant opportunity for cultural traditions to be showcased and developed.

The ability for intergenerational participation in the festival is also of great significance to the multicultural community. Indeed, the festival encourages active community participation of all ages. For example, grandmothers proudly make exquisite traditional costumes for their grandchildren who perform on stages. Families get together to prepare foods to share with the wider community.

Of course, I recognise that community groups regularly get together to celebrate and pass on their own cultural traditions. However, the festival provides a significant platform for these to be shared with the broader community. Through the festival, languages, dances and food are wholeheartedly shared and embraced by all sectors of the community.

The festival is unique in the way it brings together so many different parts of the community, including, significantly, the diplomatic missions, the ACT government and multicultural communities. Every year, we have increasing numbers of diplomatic missions and multicultural community groups wanting to participate. This year we had 65 diplomatic missions. Compare that with about three or four only a few years ago. What we are seeing, in fact, is the diplomatic community and the multicultural community making sure that people keep in touch with their contemporary homeland, that they do not lose access to their contemporary homeland.

It is all well and good to preserve the languages here but to freeze them in time is not good enough. We need to make sure that young people can speak the contemporary language. I suggest that, with Mr Seselja's command of Croatian, if he went back to Croatia now, he may have a little difficulty speaking Croatian in the villages, largely because he is illiterate in Croatian; we know that. He can be taught. But we need to

make sure that what he is taught here is contemporary language because we need the contemporary slang and those sorts of things from the villages. I do know a word in Croatian but I am told by my adviser not to use it in polite company. I thought I might use it here with Mr Seselja but I will not, because it is a really rude word, just like those thrown across the chamber at me.

I have to say that one thing about multiculturalism in Canberra is that we do it particularly well, we do it with good humour and we do it with an awful lot of affection across the groups. The gala ball, the dinner, call it what you will, that we have each year is evidence of that.

When I was walking along the walkway and saw the food and dance spectacular, I heard young people saying to their friends, “Come and see my embassy’s stall,” or, “Come and have something to eat at my country’s food stall.” We had people from, for example, Venezuela and Ecuador, setting up. It was the first time they had ever been here. People actually went along and enjoyed that. We are seeing multiculturalism taking hold amongst the young people as well as some of the older people. That is the magic part about living here. It is the multicultural community; it is full of harmony, goodwill and joyous celebration of things that are different.

Lastly, Mr Speaker, I indicate to you that the festival director, Kabu Okai-Davies, actually became an Australian citizen smack in the middle of the festival. I thought that was a wonderful demonstration. We were, very fortunately, able to confirm citizenship in the middle of our festival. I thought it was a joyous time. We look forward to a bigger and better one next year.

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

## **Supplementary answers to questions without notice**

### **Land—rent scheme**

**MS GALLAGHER:** Mr Speaker, I have a matter outstanding from question time. In answer to Mr Doszpot’s question, strangely enough pretty much the exact same question was asked of the then Treasurer on 16 May 2008 by Mr Seselja. So Mr Seselja perhaps could have answered Mr Doszpot’s question. If the undergraduate questioning is going to continue—which is, do I know every question that was answered by a previous Treasurer 15 months ago?—then let’s begin. Throw it at me. I am going to read them all; I will rehearse them; I will be able to table them again. Continue your strategy. I table the information that has already been provided to the opposition so that they can read it again.

Land Rent Scheme—Estimates 2008-2009—

Answer to question No E08-006.

Answer to question taken on notice on 16 May 2008.

**MR DOSZPOT:** On a point of clarification, Treasurer, my question was to you and whether you had asked for any modelling since you had been Treasurer. The question was not about past Treasurers.

**MS GALLAGHER:** That was your supplementary, mate, not your question.

### **Land—rent scheme**

**MR STANHOPE:** I would like to provide some supplementary information to an answer I gave to Mr Coe's question. During question time, Mr Speaker, I fear I may have misled the Assembly. I said that I had received numerous pieces of correspondence from Mr Coe. My office has advised that, in fact, I have only received five letters. It is not all that numerous really—that is about a letter a month. I just want to provide some perspective: I actually talked up the level of Mr Coe's activity. I have received one letter a month from Mr Coe, so I was perhaps overly generous. I just want to clarify the record.

### **Papers**

**Mr Speaker** presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act—Auditor-General's Report No 1/2009—Road Projects—Fairbairn Avenue Upgrade and Horse Park Drive, dated 23 February 2009.

Standing order 191—Amendments to:

Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) (Enforcement) Amendment Bill 2008 (No 2), dated 16 February 2009.

Dangerous Substances and Litter (Dumping) Legislation Amendment Bill 2008, dated 16 February 2009.

Freedom of Information Amendment Bill 2008, dated 16 February 2009.

Visit to the Tasmanian Parliament by the Speaker and Clerk of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory on 6 February 2009—Report by Mr Rattenbury MLA, dated 24 February 2009.

**Mr Stanhope** presented the following paper:

Ministerial Travel Report—1 January to 31 December 2008.

### **Rhodium Asset Solutions Ltd—statement of corporate intent Paper and statement by minister**

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

Territory-owned Corporations Act, pursuant to subsection 19(3)—Statement of Corporate Intent—2008-2009—Rhodium Asset Solutions, dated February 2009.

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

Leave granted.

**MS GALLAGHER:** As required under section 19 of the Territory-owned Corporations Act 1990, I hereby present a 2008-09 statement of corporate intent for Rhodium Asset Solutions. This initial statement reflects Rhodium continuing to trade as normal throughout 2008-09 as it was prepared immediately following the government announcement that the proposed sale of the company would not go ahead.

However, in submitting the statement of corporate intent to the voting shareholders, Rhodium foreshadowed that a revised statement of corporate intent would be provided as more information became available about the decision to wind the company down. You may recall that on 10 February 2009 this Assembly passed a resolution agreeing to dispose of Rhodium's main undertaking. I therefore expect Rhodium will soon be submitting a revised statement of corporate intent to the voting shareholders.

As soon as the board has finalised Rhodium's modified statement of corporate intent, it will also be tabled in the Assembly as required under section 21 of the Territory-owned Corporations Act. In the meantime, I commend Rhodium's initial 2008-09 statement of corporate intent to the Assembly whilst noting that it contains limited financial information.

### **Paper**

**Ms Gallagher** presented the following paper, which was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting:

Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 26—Consolidated Financial Report—Financial quarter ending 31 December 2008.

### **Operations of the Gene Technology Regulator—quarterly report Paper and statement by minister**

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

Gene Technology Act, pursuant to subsection 136A(3)—Operations of the Gene Technology Regulator—Quarterly report—1 July to 30 September 2008, dated 1 December 2008.

I seek leave to make a short statement in relation to the paper.

Leave granted.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I present the 1 July to 30 September 2008 quarterly report of the Gene Technology Regulator. Under section 136A of the Gene Technology Act, the regulator must prepare and give the Minister for Health quarterly reports on the operations of the regulator under the act as soon as practicable after the end of the quarterly reporting period.

According to the reporting requirement of the Gene Technology Act 2003, the Minister for Health must present a copy of the quarterly report of the Gene Technology Regulator to the Legislative Assembly within six sitting days after receipt of the report.

## Papers

Mr Corbell presented the following papers:

Civil Law (Wrongs) Act, pursuant to section 205—General reporting requirements of insurers.

### **Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)**

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Agents Act, Consumer Credit (Administration) Act, Court Procedures Act, Liquor Act—Attorney General (Fees) Amendment Determination 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-5 (LR, 29 January 2009).

Children and Young People Act—

Children and Young People (ACT Childcare Services) Standards 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-11 (LR, 12 February 2009).

Children and Young People Childcare Services Assessment Requirement 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-12 (LR, 12 February 2009).

Children and Young People Childcare Standards Report Requirement 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-13 (LR, 12 February 2009).

Court Procedures Act—Court Procedures Amendment Rules 2008 (No 3)—Subordinate Law SL2008-50 (LR, 23 December 2008).

Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act—

Crimes (Sentence Administration) (Sentence Administration Board) Appointment 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-15 (LR, 13 February 2009).

Crimes (Sentence Administration) (Sentence Administration Board) Appointment 2009 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-16 (LR, 13 February 2009).

Crimes (Sentence Administration) (Sentence Administration Board) Appointment 2009 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-17 (LR, 13 February 2009).

Criminal Code—Criminal Code Amendment Regulation 2008 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2008-56 (LR, 22 December 2008).

Dangerous Substances Act—Dangerous Substances (Explosives) Amendment Regulation 2008 (No 2)—Subordinate Law SL2008-54 (LR, 22 December 2008).

Gambling and Racing Control Act, Financial Management Act—Gambling and Racing Control (Governing Board) Appointment 2009 (No 1)—

Disallowable Instrument DI2009-8 (LR, 9 February 2009).

Gene Technology (GM Crop Moratorium) Act—Gene Technology Advisory Council Appointment 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-9 (LR, 9 February 2009).

Health Professionals Act—Health Professionals Amendment Regulation 2008 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2008-53 (LR, 22 December 2008).

Legislative Assembly Precincts Act—Legislative Assembly Precincts (Licence Fees) Determination 2009—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-10 (LR, 12 February 2009).

Occupational Health and Safety Act—Occupational Health and Safety (General) Amendment Regulation 2008 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2008-51 (LR, 22 December 2008).

Planning and Development Act—Planning and Development Amendment Regulation 2008 (No 5)—Subordinate Law SL2008-52 (LR, 22 December 2008).

Public Place Names Act—

Public Place Names (Bonner) Determination 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-6 (LR, 3 February 2009).

Public Place Names (Casey) Determination 2009 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-14 (LR, 12 February 2009).

Public Place Names (Harrison) Determination 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-4 (LR, 22 January 2009).

Road Transport (General) Act—Road Transport (General) (Australian Road Rules—Nightlink Taxis) Exemption 2009 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2009-7 (LR, 5 February 2009).

Territory-owned Corporations Act—Territory-owned Corporations Regulation 2008 (No 2)—Subordinate Law SL2008-49 (LR, 10 December 2008).

## **State of the ACT budget**

### **Discussion of matter of public importance**

**MR SPEAKER:** I have received letters from Ms Bresnan, Ms Burch, Mr Coe, Mr Doszpot, Mrs Dunne, Mr Hanson, Ms Hunter, Ms Le Couteur, Ms Porter, Mr Seselja and Mr Smyth proposing that matters of public importance be submitted to the Assembly. In accordance with standing order 79, I have determined that the matter proposed by Mr Hanson be submitted to the Assembly, namely:

The state of the ACT budget.

**MR HANSON (Molonglo) (3.57):** The world is facing an economic crisis that has brought into sharp focus the ability of all governments to manage their budgets. It is in this context that I am speaking today about the state of the ACT budget, because as we move forward in these uncertain economic times, this is a conversation that we need to have, and that we need to keep having.

It is particularly important here in the ACT, as we are such a small jurisdiction. As we hear of the vast amounts of money being spent on stimulus packages both here in

Australia, federally, with the \$42 billion, and the vast amounts in the US, with the trillions of dollars, it is very important that we do not lose sight of the fact that, although our figures are smaller as we go into deficit, they are, on our scale, equally important. We should not lose sight of the fact that, whilst the \$17 million deficit for this year and the \$163 million for next year are smaller amounts, their scale, for the ACT, is huge.

It is a conversation that needs to address not only the long-term implications but also the implications in the short term—that is, the budget for this year and where the ACT sits right now. And that is the budget for 2008-09. It is important because the outcome for this financial year actually sets the platform for 2009-10 and the years beyond.

In order to shape the debate, it is interesting to look at the government's response to the global economic crisis and at how they have framed this budget as we have moved forward from mid last year to now, as the credit crisis and the economic crisis have unfolded. So what are the government doing in the short term, and what have we seen them do in this financial year? Really, until recently, we have seen them do very little. Indeed, what have we received from the current Treasurer about the deterioration in the 2008-09 budget? Very little. Most of the conversation seems to be about the outyears.

She is not alone in her approach to this. In the lead-up to the election last year, the Chief Minister, who I remind you, Mr Speaker, was the former Treasurer, assured the Canberra community that the ACT economy was performing strongly. In the Assembly on 26 August, the Chief Minister, who was then the Treasurer, said:

... the ACT economy has experienced a period of sustained economic growth and prosperity.

So whilst around the world the warning signs were ringing and it had become apparent that there were problems, he was saying to the Canberra community, to the Assembly, that the ACT economy had experienced a period of sustained economic growth and prosperity.

Whilst this was unfolding, the crisis was looming and governments in various jurisdictions around the world were starting to develop responses to this crisis, our Treasurer was in denial. Soon after, on 9 September—two weeks later—he did identify that the ACT had a “slowing economy”. The question was asked just before the election: what was the Chief Minister telling the Canberra community? Did he understand what the prospects for the ACT economy were, and implicitly for the budget in this financial year, and was it already looking less favourable? But if he did understand that, he certainly was not going to say that to the community shortly before the ACT election.

In fact, not only did he not make suggestions about the severely deteriorating prospects for the 2008-09 budget, but he said quite the opposite. I will quote what the Chief Minister said on 19 September 2008. I can table the document, which is a Labor press release policy statement, in the Assembly. He said:

ACT Labor has given its word—



its word—

that the election promises it makes will be fully funded and will allow the ACT to maintain surpluses in each of the years of the next term of government.

This is a Chief Minister who simply would not admit the deteriorating prospects for the economy, and simply said to the Canberra community, leading up to the election, “We’re going to have surpluses.” It has proved not to be the case.

What happened then? With the ACT election out of the way, we began to see a different picture emerging. On 11 December 2008, a report in the *Canberra Times* revealed that the ACT was indeed facing the prospect of a budget deficit. On the following day, another report in the *Canberra Times* revealed that the ACT Treasury had actually warned the Stanhope-Gallagher government that a deficit was possible for 2008-09.

When the Treasurer released the midyear budget review on 23 December, it showed that the budget outcomes for the current financial year and the outyears would actually deteriorate dramatically, from an aggregate surplus of \$244 million as at May 2008 to an aggregate deficit of \$286 million as at 23 December 2008. The Stanhope-Gallagher government was maintaining the fiction, however, that the outcome for 2008-09 would remain in surplus, and at that stage it was saying there would be a surplus of some \$15 million.

The Canberra community now had the extraordinary spectacle where, in September, the Chief Minister, who was then the Treasurer, said, “It’s our word that we’ll have surpluses for the next four years,” yet our budget situation had deteriorated in such a short time frame to the point where we have had a turnaround of half a billion dollars. That is a financial turnaround of \$100 million a month. It is almost unbelievable. It is just incredible—the volume of money and how we could turn from having his word in September, before the election, to the situation that we have now.

Turning now to the impact of what is occurring, my question is this: what is the impact of the budget deficits on the government’s ability to deliver its policies and its promises? The Stanhope government said, “It’s our word that you’ll have surpluses.” We now know that that is not the case, so what are the implications? What is going to happen now?

If we are going to have sustained deficits—and it appears that, every time we get a budget update, those deficits grow—what is actually going to occur? I will quote from the editorial in today’s *Canberra Times*:

The global economic plunge will force Governments to curtail many programs as their budgets go into debt. Doubtless the downturn will be used as a cover by administrations to break promises they never intended to keep.

**Ms Gallagher:** Are you going to table the document?

**MR HANSON:** Certainly.

**Mr Smyth:** Today's editorial?

**MR HANSON:** It is in the *Canberra Times*, in the editorial.

**Ms Gallagher:** No, the document you referred to earlier.

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Burch):** Mr Hanson, you need leave to table the document.

**MR HANSON:** I seek leave—

**Ms Gallagher:** You said you would table it—an ALP document.

Leave granted.

**MR HANSON:** It is actually a media release of 19 September. I table the following paper:

Budget 2009-10 surplus—Media release—ACT Labor, dated 19 September 2008.

So what is the impact? We have talked about the fact that we have extended deficits. Every time we get an update, these deficits seem to grow. As I read from the *Canberra Times*, there is a belief in the community that the government is going to hide behind the global economic crisis to start dismantling election promises that it made.

This government have a pattern of behaviour. We have seen it with the school closures. In 2004, the government went to an election saying, "You know we're not going to close schools," and they did. This time it was to run surpluses, and they are not. So what is actually going to change? Are they going to start stepping away, delaying or cutting programs or are they going to simply rack up massive deficits and take us further into debt? You have got to do one or the other because of the position that we are in.

What promises—I refer to the crossbench—in the Greens-Labor agreement is the government now going to step away from or delay indefinitely? It is time for this government to be honest. They have got to tell us what is going to be cut, what is going to be delayed or how much debt we are going to be burdened with in the ACT economy. And when do you anticipate, if that is the case, that we are actually going to get back on track? The point is that this did not need to happen in the severity that it has.

**Ms Gallagher:** Oh, come on!

**MR HANSON:** Treasurer, you may laugh, but the deterioration in our budget position has no doubt been influenced by the global economic crisis, and I do not contend that we could have fully inoculated our budget against the impact of that

global economic crisis. However, it is quite clear that this government has failed to prepare the ACT economy sufficiently, so that it is robust enough to face the bad times. It has squandered the good times.

In 2001, the government inherited an incredibly strong budget position from the former Liberal government. We know that the economy, on the back of the property boom, has done extremely well over the last seven years. We know that the revenue boom is of such proportions that it is \$1.6 billion over and above what had been budgeted for in successive ACT budgets. So it is \$1.6 billion on top of what we had expected. But where has it gone?

The tragedy for the ACT is that the Stanhope-Gallagher government has squandered that bonus that we have received. The government has enjoyed unprecedented prosperity—prosperity that no other ACT government has had the luxury of. We have had windfall revenues, through every stream of revenue imaginable—the GST, stamp duty, commonwealth grants, property tax, dividends and interest payments. So all of this money has been coming in—\$1.6 billion over and above what we had expected—but we have completely squandered the good times and not anticipated the bad times. The minister, with her economic cycle, perhaps should have anticipated this.

So the \$1.6 billion which should have helped to prepare us has been frittered away, and unfortunately this government has spent wildly. I will give as an example what happened at the last election. The ACT Liberals went to the election with a policy where we identified savings, and this government scoffed at it. They did not want savings; they just wanted to spend, spend, spend and waste, waste, waste. So while we identified a number of savings, you refused to do so. This government has got itself into a position where, because of its own actions—

*Ms Gallagher interjecting—*

**MR HANSON:** Madam Assistant Speaker, could the clock be stopped while the minister has a personal conversation?

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Please, minister.

**MR HANSON:** Thank you. Because of your failure to address the economy's strengths and to harness that, your options are now limited. The revenue has dried up, so what are you going to do? You are going to have to cut or delay programs or run massive deficits which are going to put us into debt for years to come.

You have brought down these budgets in the time that you have been in government. The opposition believes, and I think the Canberra community believes, that you have misplaced priorities, be it with closed schools, statues, the waste that was FireLink, Rhodium—and I notice that a document was tabled today with respect to some more of the waste that has gone into that business—the single-lane GDE, the arboretum, closed libraries, reducing access to people's services, the fiasco which was hospital pay parking, the secret functional review that we do not get to see, and the list goes on.

During the boom times for the ACT, during the past few years, the Stanhope-Gallagher government has failed to position the economy properly, so that

when the economic situation deteriorated, as inevitably it would—I hope the minister understands this; she certainly talks about economic cycles—and there was going to be a downturn, we were not prepared for it.

What should we have done? We should have strengthened and diversified our economy. We should have spent more wisely. We should have cut the waste. We should have realised that the good times would end. We should have invested more in essential infrastructure. We should have made investing in Canberra more attractive to business. We should have inoculated ourselves for the bad times. We should have instilled confidence in our economy and not talked it down. That is what we should have done, but what is the case now?

The reality is that the government now have some hard decisions to make, and they have got to be up-front with the community. They cannot go through the sham of giving their word about services that just did not eventuate. They have got to start telling the truth to the community. They have got to tell us what the true state of the budget is. They have got to tell us now what programs they are either going to delay or cut. They have got to tell us how much debt they are going to burden our economy with, and they have got to tell us how and when they are going to get us out of that debt.

**MS GALLAGHER** (Molonglo—Treasurer, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Women) (4.11): I welcome the opportunity to talk about the state of the ACT budget today. There is no doubt that the world economic outlook is bleak. The global financial crisis is expected to take a significant toll on growth and employment in both advanced and developing economies throughout the world and we are seeing just the beginning of this in news reports every day. The International Monetary Fund is forecasting advanced economies' output to shrink by two per cent in 2009. The full effect of the global financial crisis is yet to hit the Australian economy and it is in this context that governments must formulate responses in 2009.

The ACT economy will meet the most challenging world economic environment in generations from a position of relative strength. The ACT has performed strongly over recent years. Our unemployment rate is at an all time low of 2.6 per cent and we recorded economic growth of 2½ per cent in 2007-08 in real terms. This is a strong growth rate given that it came on the back of record high levels of activity in the years before that.

The global financial crisis that started as a result of difficulties in the US subprime mortgage market has led to a significant economic slowdown across the globe. The pace of the slowdown may prove to be unprecedented. Problems in financial markets have been transferred into the real economy. The magnitude of the world slowdown means that both the Australian and ACT economies will not escape from the fallout.

While we are very fortunate that our unemployment rate is at 2.6 per cent, it is nonetheless very likely to rise in 2009. However, we do expect that the rate will remain below the national average and that employment and economic growth will remain positive. In this situation there is little the territory government can do to

stimulate the demand in the local economy, given the causes and magnitude of the global economic downturn and the relative size of our own ACT budget. However, we can maximise the stimulatory impact coming from the commonwealth government by running fiscal policies supportive of these packages.

All governments strive for surplus, but now is not a time to be running counter-fiscal policy in an attempt to maintain budget surpluses. If all the states and territories were to do this, this would negate the massive efforts by the commonwealth to cushion our national economy from the global economic slowdown.

As I have said a number of times, now is not the time to make knee-jerk reactions. In response to the deteriorating global economy and consequent fall in tax revenue, the commonwealth has recently released its updated economic and fiscal outlook. This outlined a significant reduction again in government revenue and forecasted a budget deficit of \$23 billion, down from a surplus of \$5 billion over a few months earlier. Included in the update was a \$42 billion stimulus package, the nation building and jobs plan. Although the plan will add to the commonwealth deficit, it is considered necessary to support growth and jobs.

So, while budget deficits may not seem appealing, responsible deficits serve a purpose during economic downturns by supporting jobs and growth, and this is what sound economists and commentators are saying. Indeed, Mr Smyth, we found a nice little quote from you very much along those lines, so I look forward to hearing what you have got to say about that when you stand to speak.

**Mr Smyth:** Good. I'm glad you listen.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I always listen to you, Mr Smyth. I do not often agree with you, but I always listen.

The ACT government can now use its previous good economic management to allow it to run an operating deficit during the slowdown while still maintaining service and delivering a record capital investment program.

I have previously advised the Assembly and the community that the finances of the territory have suffered considerably due to the impacts of the global financial crisis and the resulting national economic downturn. The midyear review published in December outlined that the forecast budget outcome for 2008-09 and the forward years had weakened substantially, and this is consistent with the expected budget outcomes of all other states and the commonwealth. The factors influencing these changes are largely external, unprecedented and beyond our direct control.

The weaker budget outlook for the territory largely reflects the ongoing effects associated with the deterioration in the global markets, the flow-on effect of interest rate cuts, a decrease in the GST revenue pool due to lower consumption spending at the national level, and a reduction in forecast taxation revenue due to a decline in activity in the housing market impacting on conveyancing revenue. These four factors alone are driving our budget into deficit, and none of these is of the ACT government's doing. They reflect the circumstances happening elsewhere internationally and nationally and we cannot influence these factors.

At the time of the midyear review the revised general government sector net operating balance was forecast to be a surplus of \$15.2 million, with deficits forecast across the forward estimates. These forecasts have now been further affected by recent announcements by the commonwealth government and the Reserve Bank of Australia. As mentioned, the commonwealth government released its updated economic and fiscal outlook in conjunction with the nation building and jobs plan. The UEFO identified an expected further deterioration in GST revenue.

This will have an impact on the ACT bottom line of around \$32 million in 2008-09, rising to \$50 million per annum from 2009-10. Additionally, the recent further interest rate reduction of one percentage point equates to approximately a \$14 million reduction in the territory's interest income. I hope you find that information useful in terms of your calling for a picture of the real state of the ACT budget; that is as up to date as I am able to provide to the Assembly.

Notwithstanding the current environment, the ACT economy continues to be relatively sound, with low unemployment levels, an anticipated boost to consumer confidence from falling interest rates, and continued strong activity in the ACT construction sector.

Although the budget is now moving into deficit due to factors that are well beyond our control, the underlying budget structure is sound, owing to our own prudent financial management in the past. If we had not undertaken those structural reforms to our budget three years ago, the majority of which the opposition opposed, there would be no doubt that our current fiscal position would be a lot worse than it is now.

The budget will be in deficit and that is the reality not just for the ACT but for most, if not all, other jurisdictions as well. The budget is expected to be in deficit for factors well beyond our control. We have recently seen governments of all nations struggle to deal with this unprecedented crisis.

The government's fiscal strategy has been to target reasonable surpluses to provide a buffer against unforeseen circumstances and shocks and to ensure the sustainability of high quality services. However, the magnitude of this unprecedented fiscal shock is larger than the buffer. This could not have been foreseen; I think we have gone over this a bit in question time as well. In fact, today the Australian markets fell to five-year lows, and world markets dropped as Wall Street fell to its lowest level since 1997. But the buffer we had has worked to ameliorate the full impact of the shock.

Where to from now? I believe it would be irresponsible economic management to make policy decisions for the sole purpose of delivering surpluses. Many other considerations such as core service delivery, community safety, risk mitigation and protection also have to be considered. In the interim, we will introduce into the Assembly on Thursday a local initiatives package, delivering a modest program of additional capital projects for the remainder of this financial year.

Given the employment market uncertainty that is now evident as an outcome of the global credit crisis—and it is happening here; I spoke with one training company that

is having difficulty placing 60 apprentices looking for work—the government is acting to provide confidence in the areas of emerging capacity such as the building and construction industry. Some of our discussions and consultation with industry have revealed that smaller construction firms and subcontractors are expected to experience emergent capacity in 2009. That is why we are targeting this local package. It is to assist in utilising that capacity to ensure a pipeline of activity over the next few years and provide confidence to employers to retain their workforce, and to help support local jobs and economic activity.

When people see the package on Thursday—and I am hopeful that the Assembly will support that package—when they look at the purpose behind it, the reasons behind it and the target of it, it will be very hard to object to supporting it.

The challenge for this government, and certainly for me as a new Treasurer to this portfolio, is to work through the impacts on our underlying budget position; that is, to look at how we need to respond now, but also over the next few budgets, to the community to indicate the path back to a surplus operating position over the medium term. This will take time and it will not be achieved in one budget year. However, we will be taking into consideration our local economic indicators, the need to maintain high quality services, to deliver on commitments we have made to the people of Canberra and to deliver on our infrastructure that we proposed in last year's budget.

I was interested to hear Mr Hanson's, I guess, argument that we have been reckless spenders and that we have wasted the rivers of gold that have come to us. I guess my response to that would be that you can isolate those projects that you have isolated, but the majority of recurrent expenditure by far, in terms of impact on our bottom line, has gone into core areas of government service delivery, and no amount of trawling through the budget papers of the last four years will deny that: health, education, child protection, disability—increases in support for the community sector.

If you want to translate that as wasting revenue to government, try and do that, but I would also challenge you then to say what part of those you would have not done. What part of the child protection system would you have not responded to? What part of the health system would you have not grown? Would you not have funded more elective surgery? Would you not have funded extra cancer specialists? These are the pressures that governments have to respond to year by year. As our city grows, as our demographic needs change, we have to respond to that. And no government can not spend on those core areas of government service delivery and maintain the high quality services that we have.

Mr Hanson made a bit about election promises and what was done. Our election promises over the forward estimates, I think, on average were between about \$35 million and \$38 million a year. Our spending promises through the campaign did not exceed that. In fact, the document you tabled says:

ACT Labor has given its word that the election promises it makes will be fully funded and will allow the ACT to maintain surpluses in each of the years ...

That is the text. So read into it that our election promises that we make will be fully funded and will allow the ACT budget to remain in surplus.

**Mr Hanson:** And will allow the budget to remain in surplus.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Well, they would on their own. Nobody at that time had information of the catastrophic effect of the global financial crisis on the ACT budget. Our election promises alone would not have driven the budget into deficit; they would not have.

**Mr Hanson:** On 19 September there was no warning? There was nothing apparent on 19 September? You are using the words.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Mr Hanson, it is a simple subtraction that you learn at maths, probably kindergarten, maybe year 1: you have this much surplus and you make this many spending commitments and you get left with this. And that is what we did. It left modest surpluses. Even if you take your argument, apply it to yourself, okay? Spending promises of \$286 million; that is what you promised. So you all saw this coming—revenue losses of \$19 million in the first year growing to \$34 million by the fourth year?

**Mr Hanson:** You are quibbling with the words. The point is that you gave your word that there would be surpluses.

**MS GALLAGHER:** No, I am not—and savings slashing services to \$200 million. So this is what your response at the moment would be: you would have got into office, very excited about being in government—thankfully that did not happen—and you would have gone, “Right, I have to make \$35 million worth of savings this financial year, in six months time.” That is what you promised in your election commitments.

**Mr Smyth:** No, you misrepresent.

**MS GALLAGHER:** No, I am not misrepresenting you; I am not.

**Mr Smyth:** No, you do. It is in your document. It’s a fact. Remember this—

**MS GALLAGHER:** I have got the summary here from Treasury, summary of Liberal election commitments, including all the savings proposed. That is what you would have done: a \$35 million hit. Sorry, I was wrong; it was a \$32 million hit this financial year, growing to \$52 million next year, \$57 million the year after and \$58 million the year after that. You would have slashed the budget at a time when every economic commentator is saying that that would be the wrong thing to do. That is what you would have done in order to deliver on your election promises, slashing the budget—

**Mr Hanson:** No, we want to cut waste—cutting waste.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Right, so providing a nurse at the Alexander Maconochie Centre is waste, is it? That was what you were going to do as part of your savings. That is what you are going to do as part of your savings.

*Opposition members interjecting—*



**MS GALLAGHER:** It was a four-year effect, mate; it was a four-year effect: the nurse was going, as was a whole range of other services in government. Two hundred public servants in Canberra would have lost their jobs under you. That is the economic response that you would have had: slash the budget, sack public servants and slash revenue. Well, hasn't that turned out to be the absolute worst plan ever suggested? Nobody agrees with it—and thank God you were not given the opportunity to deliver it.

**MS HUNTER** (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (4.26): The ACT Greens, like everyone in this place and the territory, are concerned about the state of the ACT budget. In the ACT Treasurer's statement released on 23 December 2008, she forecast a surplus of \$15.2 million for this financial year, down from the \$73.8 million surplus estimated in the pre-election budget update in September 2008. That was a very significant drop of \$58.6 million in just three months between estimates. In addition, in the same release she predicted deficits in the order of \$100 million through the forward years to 2011-12.

The state of the ACT economy, and the Australian and world economies, has rightly occupied quite a deal of our time in the new Assembly. We have all in the main acknowledged that the events leading to the deterioration of financial markets were unprecedented and largely unforeseen. Almost all major advanced economies have been driven into recession by the global financial crisis and no economy is likely to escape its impact.

Not many people were able to predict the continuing downturn in the economy. On 30 June last year, an article by Peter Martin, then economics editor for the *Canberra Times*, indicated that, according to a survey of leading forecasters conducted at the time, the ACT would survive its present downturn and return to economic strength in the year ahead. Three of these forecasters said that interest rates would rise. Four expected them to remain steady. One only expected lower interest rates, but he did not expect all the cut to be passed on by mortgage lenders. Most expected the Australian dollar to fall from its then high of US96c; only Westpac expected it to climb further, reaching US99c by mid-2009. So we understand and can see how hard it was to predict the continuing downturn, with even the experts in this field not knowing how significant the impact would be.

What we now need to do is manage what we have and put measures in place to work through the problem. Compared to other states and the Northern Territory, the ACT has a relatively small financial base; therefore, the impact of interest rate cuts, a downturn in household spending and the decrease in GST revenue on the ACT budget are significant.

In this economic climate it is essential therefore that the ACT government manages existing assets and revenue in a responsible manner and ensures that close attention is given to preserving existing financial resources, stimulating the economy and ensuring that jobs are protected as a high priority.

The ACT Treasurer indicated in her December statement that our net worth is strong, and across the forward years strong cash surpluses are forecast. We are aware that the

territory has strong cash reserves, of a predicted \$441 million by the end of the financial year as outlined in the Treasurer's midyear review. Preserving that net worth and existing and future cash holdings needs to be a priority.

The ACT Treasurer has indicated that one of the causes of the reduced surplus was the impact of investment returns, including superannuation. The ACT government could consider following the federal government's lead in holding a significant portion of funds in cash as one way of ensuring that funds are preserved until such time as the economy recovers.

We note that since the downturn there has been a second appropriation bill, in December. And we are due to have a third appropriation bill tabled this week. Coupled with the federal government's nation building and jobs plan, passed recently in the Senate, these represent a great opportunity for the ACT government to insulate the ACT economy from the impact of the recession and deliver much-needed capital works projects to benefit the territory. Time will tell if the measures in these bills have the desired effect of preserving jobs, improving household spending and stimulating private sector investment. Close monitoring of the economy is required.

We were pleased to see in today's *Canberra Times* that the ACT Treasurer has raised with the federal finance minister the issue of cuts to the commonwealth public service. Preserving levels near or at existing commonwealth and ACT government staff levels will complement the aim of the appropriation bills and the federal government plan, with ready-to-go capital works projects to stimulate the private sector.

In the last session, we debated a matter of public importance on community service delivery and the current financial crisis. We stated how vital it was to maintain funding and support for those with limited resources who deliver services to an increasing number of people affected by job losses, rent increases, rising food prices and homelessness. There needs to be close attention paid to the needs of this group in the ACT budget context. We need to ensure that there is no reduction in funding at a time when the community service sector is stretched the most.

To do nothing in these challenging times is irresponsible. We support the need for prompt action to stimulate the economy. As I said at the outset, we are very concerned about the current economic crisis and its impact on the ACT economy. We call on the Treasurer in the ACT government to work with her Treasury officials, her commonwealth counterparts, the private sector and Assembly members to act to preserve existing assets through well-planned capital works programs and high levels of employment so as to enable the ACT to withstand the current economic downturn.

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (4.32): I will start where the Treasurer finished. The Treasurer asserts that at that time nobody knew that things were going to get as bad as they got. Mr Hanson raised the issue that the Chief Minister, then Treasurer, said:

ACT Labor has given its word that election promises it makes will be fully funded and will allow the ACT to maintain surpluses in each of the years of the next term of government.

That is the commitment: “We have crafted our policies; they will maintain surpluses.” And the Treasurer asserts that nobody knew what was going on around them. They clearly were not reading the papers at that time.

**Ms Gallagher:** So you were, Brendan, and you modified yours!

**MR SMYTH:** I was. It was on the front page of the *Canberra Times*. Three days before that promise was made—three days—Lehman Brothers filed for chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in the US. You only have to look at September in the US to find out what was going on with the world economic situation, particularly the bankers. September—mortgage lenders Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac rescued by the US government, a bailout; Lehman Brothers files for bankruptcy; Merrill Lynch agrees to be taken over by the Bank of America for \$50 billion; a US\$85 billion rescue package for insurer AIG; and Citigroup buys Wachovia.

The problem for the government is that they made their promises in the light of what was going on in the world. The rest of the world seemed to know. We promised stronger surpluses; we promised bigger surpluses; and we identified things that we thought were wasteful spending that could be redirected. We were doing what a responsible government should have been doing.

We need to go back to their history in government and this government’s view on deficits. The Treasurer very kindly quoted me on deficits. I will tell you what I think of deficits: deficits may be appropriate as the economy slows down or as things change and the automatic adjusters that are built into budgets kick in to protect the economy and to protect citizens. A deficit does not necessarily have to be a bad thing. Now might be one time where a deficit is not a bad thing. But the important thing is: how do you emerge from the deficit? You have got to have a plan to get out of it. What we had from the government was that they have no plan. They are bereft of ideas.

This is not new. You only have to go back to the 2003-04 budget, in which—for the information of some members who were not here then—the government, at the height of the economic boom, planned for a deficit. Indeed there is a sequence of deficits in this government’s economic planning over the years. That is why we are in the state that we are in. That is why we are in the problem that we are in at the moment.

This government did not manage the good times at all. In fact, on many occasions their budgets were bailed out by unexpected revenue—even though, in the estimates, groups like the Property Council and indeed the Liberal Party were saying to the government, “Your estimates are wrong.” This is the government after seven years of reckless spending; this is a government that, at the height of the economic cycle, was spending more than it was earning. This is the government that did not make the attempt to drought-proof the ACT economy—and, indeed, left it with paper-thin surpluses that dissolved almost immediately the corner was turned from the good times to the situation that we now face. The problem is that it should never have occurred.

Ms Gallagher said that they were prudent managers. Yes. Prudent management cut business programs; prudent management cut funding to tourism; prudent management stopped research and development in the territory by cutting those programs. As we have seen in recent budgets, they have had to restore some of the funding to tourism. They have now had to instigate some business programs. They got rid of them all. The preparation they made for a downturn in the cycle was counter-intuitive. They said, “Let’s not prepare. In fact, let’s under-prepare. Let’s remove the things that would buy us a future should we need to.” What they did was squander it.

The government is predicating saving the ACT economy on the Rudd government stimulus package and on the package they will bring down next week. We will get to both of those in a moment. It is based on capital works spending. Madam Deputy Speaker, you only have to go to the Auditor-General’s report that has just been tabled in this place, *Road projects: Fairbairn Avenue upgrade and Horse Park Drive*. What does the Auditor-General say as she joins the people who have said that this government cannot deliver capital works? Let me read the auditor’s opinion on page 4. It is quite instructive. Page 4 says:

Each project examined (the Fairbairn Avenue Upgrade and the Horse Park Drive (Gundaroo Drive to Federal Highway) Project) delivered a road that met construction specifications. However, the overall management of the projects was not effective to deliver the projects on time and on budget. In particular:

- planning for both projects suffered from poor co-ordination with some key stakeholders, and inadequate resourcing;
- deficiencies in certain aspects of the management of the Horse Park Drive ... Project reduced the accountability of the consultant, Roads ACT and Procurement Solutions for the project;
- there was significant delay in resolving project variations; and
- risk management practices could have been more effective during the projects with improved planning and consultation.

And then at the end, to top it off, it says:

Responsible agencies have not evaluated the projects against the original objectives to determine whether intended outcomes have been achieved.

We bought a road, but what did we get for it? “We do not know because we did not check.” That is the sad litany of seven years of capital works projects under the Stanhope-Gallagher government: they are not delivered on time; they are not delivered on budget; they are not delivered full stop. That is the problem.

Even now, we see them covering the Alexander Maconochie Centre debacle. The prison is now open—opened in August—but it is still shut. There are no prisoners in a prison. It is almost Sir Humphrey. It is that wonderful episode from *Yes Minister* where the best hospital is a hospital with no patients. The government has now

applied that to the prison system: build a prison; make it state of the art, make it spicky; have the grand opening—but don't have any prisoners, because it works better that way. There will be no break-outs from this prison, I can assure you, because there are no prisoners. That is the problem.

Now we go to the stimulus package. It is amazing. In this place in December we had both the Chief Minister and the Treasurer saying, "We have got a stimulus package coming. We are going to stimulate the economy." Boy, did that change. Very quickly that changed. Reports in the *Canberra Times* on 18 December 2008 said:

The ACT government would introduce a second "mini-budget"—  
a mini-budget—

in the new year that would bring forward capital works in a bid to stimulate the local economy, Treasurer Katy Gallagher said yesterday.

Let us stimulate that economy! We are going to use the age-old trick of the Labor Party to deliver capital works. We have got another damning report from the Auditor-General that says that they cannot deliver them on time or on budget. But we are going to go ahead. A second mini-budget. Sounds important. Sounds big.

Then we get to the reality of February. There it is tucked away in the *Canberra Times*. The Treasurer is now saying:

We're not calling it a stimulus package, we're too small to stimulate.

If it is not a stimulus package and it is not going to stimulate, what is it and what are we doing? And it goes on. She goes, "No, you have got to listen to me." I do listen to what you say. I am reading what you said. I have listened. I am reporting it back to you—this constant backtracking from the government. What we have got in today's admission from the Treasurer is that you have to cross your fingers because it will not have any effect at all. Here is the Treasurer today. Ms Gallagher said yesterday, as reported in today's *Canberra Times*:

... it's a very modest package—don't get your hopes up ...

That is the problem: people do pin their hopes on their government in the bad times. In poor economic times, they look to government for leadership.

What we have got is a running up of the white flag—the surrender by the Stanhope-Gallagher government, in particular by the Treasurer, who is not across her portfolio: "Don't get your hopes up; I've got no ideas." The problem is that you are taking the money for the job; you have got the word "Treasurer" on your business card. And you are hiding behind the global financial crisis to say "not, not, not responsible". I will again read the quote from the *Canberra Times* editorial this morning:

The global economic plunge will force governments to curtail many programs as their budgets go into debt.

That was the downturn that will be used as cover by some administrations to break promises they never intended to keep. And the promise they never intended to keep was that their policies would keep the ACT in surplus for the next four years.

We have a government that, over seven years, have spent between \$1.6 and 1.7 billion of extra revenue to achieve absolutely nothing. There is no new convention centre—which would have brought additional revenue. They canned the business programs; that would have grown new businesses. They abandoned their economic white paper, which had 46 priorities and nine key areas, and said, “Well, we’re not working on that any more.” They have abandoned business and, through that, they have abandoned the ability to pay for social programs into the future. (*Time expired.*)

**MS BURCH** (Brindabella) (4.42): The Treasurer has already outlined this afternoon some significant external factors impacting on the ACT budget. I am wanting now to address the motion by outlining how the government has placed the ACT and the budget in a position to confront the current challenges.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the ACT government’s fiscal management has been based on ensuring prudent and responsible management of the territory finances as a key component to a successful economy. Maintaining a AAA credit rating has not only resulted in lower borrowing costs for the ACT government but a reduced tax burden for the people of the ACT. The AAA credit rating also instils confidence in the ACT economy, including to business considering expansion options and to potential investors.

Almost three years ago in the 2006-07 budget, the government implemented significant and deep structural changes to place the ACT budget on a long-term sustainable footing. The ACT government introduced a series of structural reforms into the budget processes which focused on efficiency savings. These structural reforms essentially addressed a longstanding mismatch between spending and revenue in the ACT. These were difficult decisions for the government; they were unpopular but they needed to be made. They placed the territory finances on a sound footing. Needless to say, the opposition opposed them. The budget today has more than \$1 million in efficiencies embedded within it. Structures were streamlined and back office costs reduced. The reforms now allow the ACT government to meet the current fiscal and economic challenges with a sound budget structure.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the reforms were not introduced in anticipation of the shock and the magnitude of the current global financial crisis. However, the major reforms implemented by this government have certainly ensured that the ACT is better placed to face down such an unprecedented crisis. The reforms were opposed outright by the Liberal opposition, and we can only but imagine the state of the ACT budget and government service provision if the Liberal opposition had been in control.

The government’s fiscal strategy focused on a balanced combination of efficiency gain and revenue measures. The strategy was not based simply on revenue raising; in fact, around two-thirds of the structural adjustments were based on expenditure savings and only around one-third related to revenue measures. Had this government

not had the sense and, may I add, the strength to reform the budget for government service delivery three years ago, had the Liberal opposition had their way, the ACT budget would be in deficit by hundreds of millions of dollars. Alternatively, government services and employments would have been decimated.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is quite ironic that the opposition is trying to have it both ways—it opposes structural reform and commits to forgoing revenues, yet it wants to talk about and, in fact, is concerned about the budget position. Its actions simply do not match its utterances. This government has restructured the territory finances without compromising the services it delivers. In fact, services in priority areas have been enhanced. Expenditure has been more tightly controlled and efficiency gains have been directed to the front line priority services.

The revenue measures introduced by this government were necessary, justifiable and reasonable, yet they were opposed by the Liberal opposition. As an example, the Liberals sought to abolish the fire and emergency service levy, a levy introduced in 2006-07 budget to offset just some of the costs of fire and emergency services. The levy provides a significant revenue of around \$23 million forecast in 2008-09. The revenue from this levy is used to fund provision of emergency services within the ACT. Since 2001, the government has increased expenditure on fire and emergency services by around 120 per cent. If the Liberal opposition had their way, the budget bottom line would either take another \$25 million hit or our fire and emergency capacity would be reduced by \$25 million. This is just one example, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The opposition's commitments to forgo revenue run into more than \$70 million. As the Treasurer noted, the task for us in the next and future budgets will be to chart a path back to a surplus operating position over the medium term. Prudent financial management is needed to continue to manage the budget and to deliver on its policy priorities. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is fortunate at times when prudence and fiscal responsibility are required that the ACT's budget is not in the hands of those that would not put the ACT economic future before political point-scoring.

**MR SESELJA** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (4.48): It is a pleasure to speak to this very important issue today, and I thank Mr Hanson for bringing it forward. It is important that we reflect on the state of the ACT budget. Of course, it is quite a challenge to get detailed and up-to-date figures out of this government, but it is fair to say that we are headed into deficit. We are probably already in deficit, and the question is how big is that deficit for this year and how big will the massive forecast deficits actually be for coming years.

We would not be surprised, of course, if the numbers that have been provided to date actually understate the size of the deficit. We need to go back a step—partly to respond to what Ms Burch said—and we need to actually look at how the government has got to this point. This is a government that refuses to take responsibility for its actions. We saw that in the good times—in the very, very good times that we have just had—when this government was receiving hundreds of millions of dollars—in fact, billions of dollars—in extra revenue. It was not just billions of dollars every year. Every year it would budget for significantly more money, and it would get more than

it budgeted for—to the tune of around \$1.6 billion over and above what had been budgeted. We have seen the size of the ACT budget grow in a massive way during that time.

We know where the money came from—it came from the property boom, stamp duty in particular, other conveyancing and land sales. We have seen significant amounts of money flowing into territory coffers. We have seen extra money from GST, and, of course, we have seen significant tax increases on ordinary Canberrans. As a result of all of these things, we have seen a massive revenue boom.

The government sought to take the credit for that during the good times. They said they were good economic managers because they could run some surpluses in the best economic times that this country and, in fact, I think this city has ever experienced. We have had the massive growth in commonwealth employment, fuelled, of course, in part, by the sound economic management of the former Howard government. In the last few years of the Howard government, contrary to Mr Rudd's recent assertions, we saw a big increase in the size of the public service and we actually saw significant benefits as a result for Canberra, for Canberrans, for jobs here in the territory and, of course, for revenue flowing into territory coffers. So they claim the credit for that, but the ACT government did nothing in that time to diversify the economy; they did nothing to actually really find genuine savings.

Talk about waste. They have had this \$1.7 billion windfall, and we saw the stark contrast during the election campaign between the Labor and Liberal parties. The Labor Party refused to make any savings to pay for their promises. They came out with promises that they had not planned on making, particularly in relation to smaller class sizes, but they refused to make any savings. We saw even in those good times that their projected surpluses were whittling away as a result of poor economic management. They were disappearing. There was no stimulus.

The Liberal Party actually put forward a stimulus package involving getting rid of stamp duty for first home buyers, and we did it through limiting some of the growth in the outyears and through cutting some of the obscene examples of wasteful expenditure. This government said, "That is unacceptable. We shouldn't be looking for savings". They made all sorts of hysterical claims about what we were doing, but it was the right thing to do. It is the right thing to target your spending, to target your tax cuts to stimulate the economy so it helps first home buyers. But to do that responsibly you actually have to cut out some of the waste, and this government has refused to do that. They have refused to offer relief to first home buyers and they have refused to offer any genuine tax relief in their entire time in government, but they have continued to spend.

They were able to get away with it, in a sense, during the good times because they could still deliver surpluses, although surpluses which were getting smaller and smaller. Those surpluses should have been bigger and should have been invested in real and lasting infrastructure. We should have seen an investment in structural reform, and we saw an exercise in pretending to be about fiscal management—they closed a few schools. We saw the panicked response to that and the minimal savings as a result of that.



We know that this government continue to spend millions of dollars more than they should through their agencies and departments on government advertising. They continue to waste our money, particularly through spending within the Land Development Agency. We had a whole range of examples, and each one of those spending measures and each one of those examples of wasteful spending—whether it is the \$5 million on a busway that is not going to happen or whether it is the \$200,000 a month which we were spending and I think still are on a relatively empty building at Fairbairn—is a significant amount of taxpayers’ money.

What Jon Stanhope and Katy Gallagher have said is that every bit of that spending is good spending and that we should hold on to every bit of that spending. Instead of making those savings and being able to deliver tax relief and stimulus and targeted spending that actually makes a difference, they believe that fundamentally any spending is good spending. This is where the Treasurer really has struggled to articulate a message. I think her message is this: “There are some tough times coming. It’s not our fault, and now any spending is good spending”. When we have our \$200 million deficit or \$300 million deficit, or whatever we get to, she will blame external factors. She will take no responsibility for the fact that a government actually has to make hard decisions. She will take no account of the fact that the budget now is actually far bigger than it was a few years ago, and that even with a slowdown in revenue it will still be far bigger than it was a few years ago.

The money has been there, but it has not been targeted. This is the new Treasurer’s narrative—that is, any spending by government is good spending. It does not matter if it is not targeted; it does not matter if it is wasteful; it does not matter if it is for things that we do not need or if it is for advertising that is really about getting the Labor Party re-elected. She believes no account should be taken of that and that tax relief should not be given to young families and first home buyers because the government wants to spend millions of dollars on a busway that is not going to be built. They want to spend \$5 million on FireLink, which has not been delivered. They want to spend millions of dollars on extra government advertising, because they want to grow like topsy certain areas within the Chief Minister’s Department instead of actually showing some restraint.

They are the priorities of this government; that is their legacy. When we see the budget deficits in future years, the people of the ACT will be smart enough to know that, although revenue is slowing down, this is a government that cannot handle it. They could not handle the good times; they did not make the savings; they did not make the structural reforms. They have done nothing of substance to shield the ACT from the downturn; they are simply going to ride the wave. In the bad times we can expect big deficits and hard times, increased taxes and reduced public services because they cannot make the fundamental hard decisions that need to be made. They refuse to even match the most basic savings measures. Madam Assistant Speaker, I thank you very much.

**MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Burch):** The time for the discussion has now expired.

## Victorian bushfires

**MR CORBELL** (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (4.56), by leave: I move:

That this Assembly notes with gratitude the outstanding efforts of ACT emergency services and police personnel providing dedicated assistance in dangerous conditions to bushfire stricken communities in Victoria and further notes the efforts of, and congratulates, the broader ACT community in donating financial assistance and essential goods to these communities.

We have all watched with a growing sense of horror the unfolding story of the devastating bushfires in Victoria. The stories of heroism and of tragic loss have dominated the national media, the national consciousness and conversations we have all had in our workplaces, in our homes and in our community over the past two weeks. Given the unprecedented death toll, there are many Canberrans who are mourning the loss of friends and family members, and our thoughts and prayers remain with all of those people who have lost loved ones, friends and colleagues at this difficult time.

Today Senior Firefighter (Qualified) David Balfour, who was so tragically killed on the fireground last week, was laid to rest. Again I take this opportunity to extend to Mrs Balfour and her children and to their extended family and his firefighter colleagues our sincere condolences. We also express our gratitude for the exemplary professionalism and selfless service displayed by Mr Balfour throughout his career in the ACT Fire Brigade to the Canberra community and, most recently, to our Victorian friends in their hour of great need.

Of course, Madam Assistant Speaker, for Canberrans the poignant images of destruction in communities like Kinglake, Marysville and Churchill and descriptions of the firestorms have brought rushing back memories of January 2003 when our own community suffered the most violent extremes of a threat we live with every year—the threat of bushfire.

Australians have a remarkable capacity and willingness to help each other in the face of crisis, and the remarkable outpouring of financial, emotional and material support to those left homeless by the Victorian fires is another example of the enormous generosity of Australians to their fellow citizens when they need it most.

It is also important to recognise and reflect on the assistance we Canberrans received in our hour of great need in 2003, and it is testament to the character of people such as David Balfour that we have seen the opportunity to go to Victoria and help as an opportunity to return the favour and repay that debt. There is, of course, a long and proud tradition of interagency cooperation amongst emergency services that crosses state and jurisdictional boundaries, reflecting the commitment of those full-time and volunteer firefighters, SES and other agencies who risk and sacrifice so much to protect and thus support our community.

ACT government agencies across the whole spectrum of the public service have been involved in providing support to their Victorian counterparts in recent weeks and it is appropriate that the Assembly takes this opportunity to reflect on those efforts and to record its thanks to all involved.

Four emergency services task forces totalling around 500 people have travelled from the ACT to Victoria. Each of these task forces has been made up of staff and volunteer firefighting personnel from the ACT Rural Fire Service, the ACT Fire Brigade and the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. These task forces have included two compressed air foam system tankers, five heavy tankers and 10 light units from the ACT Rural Fire Service and the ACT Fire Brigade. They have included remote area fire-fighting teams, field support teams from the SES and ACT Ambulance, InTACT technical and communications support and fleet maintenance staff and equipment. These task forces combated the fires in the Beechworth, Dederang and Murrindindi areas with members conducting direct property protection, working in rough country on active fire fronts as well as back-burning and blacking-out fire affected areas.

Teams of ESA mapping and planning support volunteers and staff have been rotated through Kilmore, Yarra Glen, Traralgon, Diamond Creek and Kinglake assisting Victoria Police. ACT Policing have provided experienced officers to assist with disaster victim identification. Teams from Domestic Animal Services, including two animal recovery control centre trailers, have been working with their Victorian counterparts and the RSPCA to care for family pets and wildlife. Other ACT government departments and volunteers have supported the emergency services in Canberra by providing vital backup to allow specialist staff to be released to Victoria, including, for example, ACTION Buses fleet maintenance staff.

Our experience from 2003 in disaster recovery, including the recovery task force, has been drawn upon by Victoria in planning and mobilising their recovery efforts. The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, which is responsible for disaster recovery, continues to liaise closely with its Victorian counterparts. A formal offer of support and assistance has been made in this regard. ACT Health has contingency arrangements in place and is participating in contingency planning for possible future assistance across the spectrum of emergency response, public health and mental health support.

We are fortunate in the ACT to have dedicated, professional people in our emergency services, both full time and volunteer, and in the public service experienced in dealing with all the consequences and impacts of a disaster such as the one that has unfolded in Victoria. While they might say that they are just doing their jobs, the Assembly should recognise and applaud their efforts, their sacrifice and their dedication not only through their preparedness to offer support and assistance to Victoria but also for the quality of their service to the Canberra community every day. It is also appropriate that the Assembly recognise the significant contribution made by the employers of our emergency service volunteers who have willingly released them from their normal duties to undertake this important work, often at cost to their own business.

Finally, it is important that we recognise, and pay tribute to, the over 500 families who have stayed at home and have worried and supported and waited for the safe return of their loved ones. It gives me great pride as Minister for Police and Emergency Services to see the esteem in which the ACT task forces have been held by their Victorian counterparts. I have received those comments directly from my counterpart in Victoria, who has taken the time to ring me and to thank me on behalf of the Victorian government for the work of our ACT task forces and other personnel. The Premier of Victoria, Mr Brumby, has also indicated his thanks and his support for our help to his state at this time.

I know the Chief Minister wants to speak further, and I will leave it to him to speak on issues surrounding the support provided by the broader ACT community in donating financial assistance and essential goods. But I think it is important that we record today the Assembly's thanks and admiration to all of those Canberrans who have served in Victoria in recent weeks not only for their work there but for the work they and their colleagues do every day in our own community. I commend the motion to members.

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (5.05): It is a pleasure to stand and agree with the minister's motion. Canberra's efforts as a community have been outstanding and the impact of those efforts in the fire zones have been very important to the security of a great number of Victorian towns.

The area in Victoria that we were initially tasked to was the Beechworth region. One side of the fire was about 20 kilometres wide and the other side was about 10 kilometres wide. So we are talking about a fire that has consumed 200 square kilometres of bush. A lot of it is country that is as inaccessible as the worst parts of the Brindabellas. It was great that, at the end of many shifts, the volunteers were thanked by the CFA and the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment for their efforts. In some cases projected burns were not allowed to proceed because the conditions were so poor and there were enormous delays. The crews would have to sit there and wait to get onto the fireground, and that was frustrating.

I want to praise the efforts of the senior officers who commanded the ACT task force. They have control over the lives of all the volunteers on the fire fronts, and that is an enormous responsibility. I will not name the individuals, but they know who they are. Their efforts to coordinate the volunteers and ensure their safety were tremendous. Often only one vehicle would go up until it was ascertained that it was safe for the rest of the volunteers to arrive. If there was a problem, people were pulled back from the line. Safety was the ultimate consideration. The groups that went south were incredibly well led and it is to the credit of the offices and their training that they were able to do that.

It is very important that we understand what was going on. A lot of the work was done at night in country that we, as volunteers, had no knowledge of. A lot of it involved back-burns and bringing down of very big timber. Some of the trees down there are two metres wide at the base. One particular tree caused us some grief. We had two bulldozers, a D8 and a D6, which are some of the biggest pieces of

machinery that you can put into these areas, and we could not shift this tree. It was enormous. It was burning at the top and generating a lot of sparks that were crossing the fire break. So it was tackled with chainsaws and brought down very effectively and in a very safe manner by the volunteers.

That professionalism, I suspect, was a repeat of 2003, but for a large number of the volunteers it was the first major fire they had been to and I think that the ACT has got out of it a rural fire service with a great deal of experience. Some of the volunteers went down for two of the four task forces and I know that some were planning to go back for a third time.

It is testament to the professionalism of the task force that, at times, where there were excess vehicles or crews being rested we were split up and used to man Victorian vehicles. At one stage task force 3 had five tankers and three light units. Most nights we managed to pick up another five or six Victorian light units and it was impressive to see all those vehicles working together to achieve the objectives. That was at Beechworth.

When we arrived, parts of Beechworth were out of control. On the eastern road out of Beechworth parts of the fire had got to within about 50 metres of the last house in Beechworth. So it did get very close. But while that fire was dangerous, weather conditions made it far safer than what was faced further south. I do not know if people know Beechworth, but there is a campus of La Trobe University there—it used to be the Beechworth mental asylum—and there is a nice bank that overlooks the oval. One task force was sitting there as the task force that included David Balfour drove off. We were all quite happy to be going home. We were sitting back and waving goodbye and none of us had any idea of what might happen. As they were leaving we were told that their first objective would be to cut a fire break in an area near the big river. The front in that area was 100 kilometres wide. There was 100 kilometres of unrestricted, running flames. Their first job was to ensure that that fire break went in, and they did a good job.

The Victorians were very professional. Large deployments are interesting because there is a lot of hurry-up and waiting in situations like this as things are ascertained, but when you get on the fire ground you do the job. But at all times safety was stressed. Just reflecting on the incident shift plans for some of the shifts that were done down there, the key messages included: highest priority and beware of falling limbs and trees, especially when blacking out. Mr Corbell is a member of the Rivers Brigade and he will testify that most of your time is spent splitting open logs on the ground or bringing trees down and putting on the things that continue to burn. It was in circumstances like those that David Balfour died.

It is the luck of the draw in many ways. The trees are big. They are amazing. They are just hanging there. You cannot understand how structurally they can just remain, but they do. If you have ever used a chainsaw, you will know the sound. There is this moment when the tree gives way. It finally surrenders and there is this crack and you can see all the heads go up. At night often you cannot tell which tree has given way. They fall with such speed and they are so big, particularly the trees down there, that when they fall, they shatter and bits go everywhere. Such are the circumstances and it

is a credit to the volunteers that they wanted to go. It is to the credit of all the volunteers that went down and those that wanted to go. It is dangerous. We accept that and we look out for each other. The camaraderie in the field is just extraordinary. People do look out for each other and you can see the teams grow closer together.

I pay tribute to all of you, whether you are from Gungahlin or Hall or Molonglo or Jerrabomberra or Southern or Geysers Creek; whether you went down with the parks and conservation light units or whether you are from the headquarters of the RFS or the fire brigade. We had an ambo attached to each shift. The ambos were out in the field with us continually doing a great job checking on hydration and sprains and bruises and headaches and all sorts of things. The SES crew were just sensational in making sure that there was extra drip torch fill and a place for the refuel and hot tea going.

The maintenance staff from the fire brigade and the RFS were just great. The tankers would pull up. Young Gary would jump out of his vehicle, the hoods would come off the units and the capens would be lifted. The air guns would be blowing because, as you can imagine, there is an enormous amount of smoke and dust. On shift change one crew would come off and laugh at the next crew but the next crew would get straight on. You checked your water; you checked your fuel and your drip torch. It was just smooth; it was seamless. We should be very proud of the way they behaved. They covered themselves in great glory.

To the police who are down there now, particularly the forensic guys, it is a job I certainly could not do, and we wish you well.

The minister mentioned the ARC units, the animal recovery and disease control trailers. They are a fabulous invention. The head of domestic animal services, an ACT public servant, designed them. They were an answer to the problems that we had with pets and horses and all sorts of things that turned up after 2003. We have two of those units and they are now helping down there.

I want to mention Larry the bus driver. Every expedition has its local hero and ours was Larry the bus driver. Larry is a guy from Kambah who is on hire. He shuttled buses from where we were sleeping to where we were fighting the fires. He did a great job. He was the light and joy of the trip. He had a joke for everybody and he picked on us all incessantly, but if Larry did not know what was going on, then nobody knew what was going on.

In the local community, to the churches that have organised services; to the arts groups that are putting on concerts and to members of the multicultural community who are going to put on functions, thank you for what you do. It is great that we as a community have the opportunity to repay all the assistance that we were given. To the charities that collected material and got it down as quickly as they could, you cannot understand what joy it brings if you have nothing to receive a small parcel, even if it is just toothpaste and soap and hand towels, as the start of the rest of your life. The people who receive those parcels really do appreciate them.

I acknowledge that the minister thanked all the bosses. The volunteers could not go unless the boss said they could. It is hard for some businesses, particularly in this time,

to let a staff member go. I think we have to understand the reasons why some firms would not let a worker go. But to those that were in a position, often at great expense to themselves, to allow workers the time off, indeed, to the bosses that took time off from their businesses and the self-employed people who put aside their own work at great personal expense to go and serve the broader community, we acknowledge the huge role you played in facilitating volunteers being able to go.

To the public, thank you for your prayers and the dollars and the goods that you sent. Thank you for ringing and making contact friends in Victoria. Keep it up. It does not stop. It will not stop for months. Please do keep it up because they do appreciate it.

It might sound a bit luxurious, but where we were eating was slightly different from where we were sleeping. In the middle happened to be the Beechworth Bakery, which is Victoria's foremost and best-known bakery. The hospitality we were shown there was just fantastic. You would be sitting there and person after person would come up and say, "Thank you." It was much like here in 2003. They truly are grateful. There were different patches there from all the different services—from New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT. The sense of security that gave to those who really suffered cannot be underestimated. It is just tremendous.

I would like to relay one story to the Assembly. When my unit first arrived on the fireground the unit leader went off to have a look at where we were going, so we went up and chatted to some Victorian CFA chaps. As we got closer to these three guys who were putting in a back-burn, they got older and older and older and older. The senior guy in the group was 72. He had come across from Yarrowonga, which is probably about an hour or an hour and a half away from where we were. He was absolutely cheerful and absolutely dedicated and he said was not going home until the job was done. You know, if I am still fighting fires at 72, I have to say I will be very pleased. I am sure Mr Corbell would agree with that as well. He was not going to stop. Nothing was going to defeat this guy. For me he was the epitome of what was going on there.

We had a guy called Mouse, who was the bulldozer driver. Now, as you can imagine, if some bloke gets called Mouse and he drives bulldozers, he is not, and he did not act like one. I do not know where this guy came from because we said to him, "Do you know where you are?" He said, "I've got no idea. The boss said, 'Cut me a firebreak down there,' so I will and I'll keep going until he tells me to stop." I do not know how long this guy had been going on this particular night. Just about nothing would stop the Mouse. If you needed to know anything, the Mouse was the man to speak to.

We returned on the buses on Sunday. People were very happy that they had been, but they were also very happy to go home. As the minister said, they were going home to their families, and to get there and see the families there to welcome you back I think is just a very solid reminder of why volunteers volunteer. They do it for their community; they do it for those that they love and then they do it for the community and for their country. I think there was a great deal of satisfaction on those buses going back. They deserve that satisfaction.

Those who were here might remember that after the 2003 fires I suggested that the government might like to put a medal together for the volunteers, which the

government did. The talk on the bus on the way back was that they did not want anything in the way of thanks, but a number of them actually said that a little clasp on the medal might be nice. Currently it says “Canberra 2003”. Minister, perhaps the department might consider “Victoria 2009”.

They like to be acknowledged. They do not want money; they do not want in-kind. They get their satisfaction and their reward from what they do. Most of them, I think, are incredibly fulfilled by what they do because it is very real and very practical because to get the thanks and to see the joy that you bring to people in their community when you are there as a visitor is very rewarding. It is with much pleasure that the opposition will support his motion today.

**MS HUNTER** (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (5.20): This Assembly notes with gratitude the outstanding efforts of ACT emergency services and police personnel providing dedicated assistance in dangerous conditions to bushfire stricken communities in Victoria and further notes the efforts of, and congratulates, the broader ACT community in donating financial assistance and essential goods to these communities. I would like to thank the minister for this opportunity for the Assembly and the ACT Greens to officially thank our ACT emergency services and police personnel for their remarkable work in Victoria over the past few weeks.

More than 500 people from the ACT went to Victoria to help in its time of need. The ACT personnel included ground and remote area firefighters from the ACT Emergency Services Authority, fire-fighting rangers from Parks, Conservation and Lands, volunteer firefighters, intensive care paramedics, mechanics, radio support staff and more. We have an experienced workforce in these areas and, of course, many of these personnel undertook these same jobs here in the ACT in 2003. As a well-resourced community and given our proximity and the experience of our personnel, it is imperative that we help our neighbours in any and every way we possibly can.

Many of these people were deployed as ACT staff; some were volunteers. But they all shared one goal—to help Victoria in a time of crisis. They willingly took on a dangerous task and left the safety of the ACT in those weeks knowing that they would be put in situations of extreme danger. The sad death of ACT firefighter, Mr David Balfour, is a stark reminder to us all that our emergency services personnel regularly put their lives on the line in their daily work. It is extraordinary that people die in their service to the community and we acknowledge this with great respect and admiration.

Today the Australian Federal Police are wearing their peaked caps in the ACT as a tribute to the service that Mr Balfour gave in carrying out dangerous work on behalf of the community. This is a very meaningful gesture that also acknowledges the service given and the sacrifices made by emergency services every day. As a community, we are extremely grateful for the bravery that people show in their jobs and while volunteering, and we know that the Victorian community were very thankful for the assistance.

As a community which only six years ago survived an extreme bushfire, we Canberrans relate to the Victorian disaster with heartfelt sympathy. As a community,



we all want to do as much as possible to help the Victorian community get through this very difficult time. We are a responsive community. Given people's shock and horror and the little that we could do from afar, countless people in our town did what they could. They organised fundraisers and coordinated donation drives. Many people have donated food, money, clothing and toys. School children have organised food collections amongst their school mates and many truckloads of donated items have made their way down to Victoria to help those affected people start in rebuilding their lives.

The RSPCA ACT have also sent resources to help with animal rescue and rehabilitation of our native wildlife, as well as equipment to help check microchip details of roaming domestic animals. The ACT community have responded to the call for donations of blood. I understand that the ACT is generally one of the highest blood donor places per capita, which is something we can be proud of. Since the bushfires, blood donations have been unprecedented. I believe there is a growing sense around the country that we are all part of the same place with the same challenges.

This Victorian bushfire disaster has highlighted the amazing sense of giving and compassion that we all share for each other. Our emergency services are a shining symbol of that goodwill. Again, Madam Assistant Speaker, I would like to thank all those ACT staff and volunteers who travel to Victoria to assist in such a dire emergency and to all those in the wider ACT community who have made contributions to the citizens of Victoria following the bushfire tragedy.

**MS PORTER** (Ginninderra) (5.24): I rise to support Mr Corbell's motion and to thank him very much for bringing this matter before the house today. As we all know, the events that have unfolded over the last fortnight in Victoria have been deeply disturbing and upsetting for the whole of the ACT community. As Mr Corbell says, we have been watching this tragic event unfold each day, bringing more devastating news and horrific images as well as the images of overwhelming human kindness, generosity and strength.

We also experienced strong reminders of our own traumatic firestorm in 2003 and are reminded of the kindness, generosity and strength that were demonstrated here at the time by our emergency services workers and by other members of the community, whether in formal roles or non-formal roles. I instance the formal roles of our non-government organisations such as the Red Cross, Salvation Army and other relief organisations, as well as the counselling and support organisations such as Lifeline, and the hundreds of volunteers who came forward at the time wanting to do something—anything—to help people who were in such need.

As we have seen then and see now, the level of interstate cooperation in times of natural disasters is overwhelming. Madam Assistant Speaker, we here in the ACT have been only too willing to make our contribution to the effort. Members of our local community have sacrificed their time and risked their lives for our fellow Australians. Our emergency services and our police personnel have readily responded, participating in fire-fighting or contributing actively to the ongoing relief and recovery effort. Mr Corbell has mentioned other people who have gone down to assist other agencies at this time of great need.

Great risk comes, of course, with this level of service. As we have all been discussing here this afternoon, one of the members of our community, Senior Firefighter David Balfour, lost his life in Victoria making this ultimate sacrifice. I, along with others in this place, wish to express my deep sadness and my condolence to his family, his friends and his colleagues.

I spent a couple of hours at my community fire unit training at Hawker on Sunday reflecting on the situation that has unfolded in Victoria. It made a sobering experience for us all as we in Canberra were forced again to confront the harsh realities of our environment. In this specific context, the unit was again obliged to consider our preparedness to protect our suburb even at a time when our training program is at a particularly active phase in the middle of summer.

Community groups such as the community fire units can play a critical role in limiting the destructive impact that a national disaster can have on a community at the interface between the suburban street and the rural landscape. We also reflected on the fact that we were training as the nation was mourning. This nation was pausing to mourn those that had lost their lives as a result of the Victorian bushfires.

As Mr Corbell said, over these last dreadful weeks we have seen our emergency service workers, police and support staff rotated through the devastated areas of Victoria joining with colleagues from Victoria and, indeed, across the country and from overseas. As we know, community groups as well as government agencies also played important supporting roles in times of this emergency.

Madam Assistant Speaker, Mr Corbell noted that Australians do have a great capacity to do what they can to help others when confronted with difficult circumstances. I am pleased to note the support that has come out of this community since it was made aware of the extent of this tragedy. We received wonderful support from all over Australia and across the world at the time of our great need in 2003. Many of those people who have gone down to Victoria have said that this is their way of giving back because they were given so much in 2003.

The Canberra community—in fact, the nation—has been generous in its giving in other ways. I would suggest that there has not been any event over the last few weeks where there has not been an opportunity taken to raise funds to support those people who have been left homeless by the Victorian bushfires.

Local fundraisers have been held, as we have heard from other members, all across our community. We experienced them, of course, at concerts such as the Multicultural Festival. I attended the CAT awards on Saturday evening. At this event, as well as other arts community events, there has been generous support for the request for funds. As Mr Corbell has said, others also supported this important and vital effort, such as businesses and agencies who released their staff from normal duties, and families who waited while their family members fought fires and rendered aid to others so many kilometres away.

In recognition of the efforts of so many Canberrans who donated their time, their expertise or their financial assistance to the victims of this natural disaster, I commend

this motion to the Assembly. I would just like to say that it has been a great privilege to be able to add my voice to Mr Corbell's motion.

**MR STANHOPE** (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage) (5.30): I do echo and reiterate the sentiments of my colleague the minister for emergency services. I pay tribute also today to the great upswelling of the grassroots community support by the people of Canberra through its churches, its schools and its community groups. Our community knows better than most the impact of the catastrophic devastation confronted by towns across a swathe of Victoria.

Many Canberrans have had personal experience of such loss. Many others have seen friends and loved ones personally affected. There would be few Canberrans untouched in some way, large or small, by our own experience with fire in 2003. It was therefore inevitable that our hearts would go out and hands would open and reach out to Victorians.

St Paul's Manuka, St David's Red Hill and St Luke's Deakin, for instance, donated the takings from their 15 February collections. Lake Tuggeranong Lions Club took collections in buckets at retail outlets in Fyshwick on 14 and 15 February. The YMCA donated 10 per cent of the takings from the monster garage sale on 21 February to the fire victims.

Mitchell-Gunghalin Rotary had a sausage sizzle. The Quakers held an open day at the friends meeting house and collected donations. Members of the Charnwood community held a sausage sizzle and raffle at the Charnwood shops. FM stations 104 and 106 ran an appeal for the donation of goods, and 18 containers were loaded by volunteer labour with volunteer drivers freighting the goods to the Salvation Army in Victoria.

The RSPCA sent two mobile vet units to fire-affected areas. ABC Triple 6 listeners donated a total of \$11,500 on air during the breakfast program. Our local Indigenous community held "Canberra Cares", a fundraising concert at Boomanulla oval. The Multicultural Festival and Triple 6 combined for a fundraising concert in Garema Place, which raised over \$10,000.

Bunnings staff operated sausage sizzles at their stores, donating all funds raised. Our arts organisations have also opened their hearts and held out their hands. Canberra Rep donated all ticket sales from the 19 February performance of *I hate Hamlet*.

The Salvation Army was in the foyer at the CAT awards on 21 February, raising over \$1,300. Free Rain collected in the foyer at every performance of *Guys and Dolls*; \$5,000 was collected at the CSO proms concert. Canberra's performing arts community is coming together for a fundraising concert at the Canberra Theatre this Thursday at 7.30. Canberra's birthday event, Celebrate in the Park, on Monday, 9 March will also be a fundraiser.

Our sporting organisations have shown their generosity also. Softball ACT had bucket collections at their local competitions. The Brumbies raised \$77,000 at their match

against the Crusaders. All gate takings from the Canberra FC-Melbourne Knights game went to the relief fund; \$50 of each entry fee for the Corporate Challenge component of the Stromlo running festival is being donated. Brewers Best Cricket Club and southside teachers are playing a limited overs match and will donate \$1 for every single and \$5 for every six scored.

The Independent Schools Rowing Association used their regatta on 14 February to raise funds. The Bush Capital Horse Rescue Association is sending horse equipment and \$2,500 was raised at a collection during the Belgium-Australia hockey match.

Donations were collected at the Swans-Port Adelaide match at Manuka. Canberra's business and corporate citizens have shown, as they always do, their sympathy and their support. Canberra International Airport has donated \$200,000 and ActewAGL, Actew and TransACT, a total of \$100,000. Retailers at the Melba shops have given \$500 each and have held a fundraising barbecue. Floressence Day Spa and the ACT Fire Brigade raised \$26,400. Staff from Ginger Catering are donating all their tips for the month of February.

Young Canberrans similarly have displayed their spirit and their compassion. Many schools, public and private, have arranged fundraising events as well as providing practical assistance. To give just a few examples that have come to my attention, a group of year 9 students from Lyneham high school helped pack relief boxes. The Birrigai outdoor school is donating sleeping bags. Lyneham primary had a uniform-free day and raised \$5,000.

Calwell high school students raised \$1,000 from a sausage sizzle, and many other public schools organised their own fundraising events and contributed between \$1,000 and \$1,500 to the appeal. The 180 students at the Orana school at Weston raised \$8,600. Merici college collected \$10,000, as well as a large quantity of toys and goods.

There have been countless fundraising events held over the past two weeks. Each donation, no matter how large or small, adds up. It adds up to well over three-quarters of a million dollars through events run here in the ACT. It adds up to a caring city. I would like to place on record my appreciation for the speed and the compassion with which Canberrans have joined together to show families hundreds of kilometres away that the thoughts and prayers of the national capital are focused on Victoria at this time.

In concluding, Mr Speaker, on the day that David Balfour was buried it is also appropriate for me, along with many colleagues from the Assembly—Mr Corbell, Ms Hunter, Mr Seselja, Mr Smyth and Mr Doszpot—to place on the record today my condolences, those of the government, indeed, I am sure those of every member of the Assembly, to David Balfour's family, friends and colleagues.

I acknowledge today too that the thoughts and prayers of all in the national capital are also with David's family, with David's friends, and with his colleagues on the day on which one of ours, seeking to support another community as a firefighter, paid that supreme price—his life—through supporting that community.

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (5.36): This is an important motion and I thank the minister for emergency services for bringing it forward. It is appropriate that it should be done on the day, as the Chief Minister has just reminded us, when one of our own firefighters was buried after his untimely and tragic death in the heart of the fires in Victoria.

One of the things that many people said to me after the tragic fires of 2003 in the ACT was what a wonderful thing it was that it showed that Canberra was a city with heart. There were the activities of fundraising and, when the fires broke out and emergency accommodation had to be provided to people at schools around Canberra on the night of the fire or following the fire, we got to the stage where radio broadcasts were put out saying: "Please don't bring anything else. Do not bring any more food. We have enough sandwiches et cetera." That showed just how much heart the people of Canberra have.

That has been repeated in the response to the tragic bushfires in Victoria. The Chief Minister gave a lengthy list of activities undertaken spontaneously by the community that show that the people of Canberra are prepared to dig deep in support of their fellow Australians who are suffering, because we remember what it was like. We remember what it was like for us in Canberra, for our neighbours and friends, and we know to some small extent what these people are going through.

In the last little while I have attended a range of arts functions. The Free Rain Theatre Company collected money. When we were at the CSO prom concert at Government House there was a large collection again. When I was at Free Rain, I was approached by the Canberra Repertory Society, who told me that they were going to donate all of their takings for their preview night and asked me to do all that I could to help publicise that event so that they could get a full house for their preview night.

The other night some members—Ms Porter, Mr Coe and Mr Doszpot; did I see you there as well, Mr Doszpot?—attended the CAT awards, where the Salvation Army was collecting for the bushfire. Over the weekend, I had an opportunity to attend a number of community functions where there was fundraising. I think the Chief Minister spoke of the sausage sizzles at both the Charnwood shops on Saturday and at the Melba shops. Actually, it was not a sausage sizzle at the Melba shops; it was an egg and bacon roll sizzle, with bacon from the excellent Melba butcher. I understand that Rotary also did a collection at Jamison on behalf of the Balfour family on Saturday morning, as well as donating some of the proceeds of their normal Jamo trash and treasure. They are just some of the examples of the outpouring of support from people in the community who can do no more than donate.

But on top of that there are the extraordinary lengths that have been gone to by members of our volunteer service and also our paid emergency services people who have gone on multiple occasions to Victoria to help in the fire-fighting effort. Mr Smyth spoke at length and eloquently about that.

The work of Canberrans is going on. I draw members' attention to the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Benefit Concert, which Mr Stanhope alluded to. I want to pay tribute

to the work of the artistic director, Mr Ian McLean, my own senior staff member Mr Clinton White, who has organised this concert, along with the generous community support from the Canberra Theatre, Zoo, ActewAGL, Channelvision and Canprint. I also pay tribute to all of the people who are performing at the concert: the band of the Royal Military College Duntroon, the Blamey Street Big Band and a range of other artists including Annie and the Armadillos, Franklyn B Paverty, Leisa Keen, Rachel Thorne, Tony Haley, TAPistry, the Legs dancing studio, Stephen Pike, the Canberra Philharmonic Society and the cast of *Mikado*. All of those people are giving generously of their time, giving freely of their time, in the hope of raising substantial amounts of money.

I commend the show at 7.30 pm on Thursday, 26 February to all members here, in the hope that they can attend and that they will commend it to their friends as well. It would be unfortunate if we ended up sitting late because we could not organise our business and if members here were not be able to attend as we had planned to do.

All in all, this is an important motion. It is important that we pay tribute to the generosity of the people of the ACT—generosity given by volunteering time and money, giving up substantially, and the generosity of the people of the ACT who allow their loved ones to go away. As has tragically happened in this circumstance, one person has given up his life for his fellow Australians, and we should mark that with great respect.

**MR SESELJA** (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.43): I thank Mr Corbell for moving this motion and we are very happy to support all of the sentiments in the motion.

We in Canberra in various ways have experienced bushfire, particularly in 2003. Most of us would remember that day still very vividly—the horror of that day in many ways and the difficulty of that day but also, of course, the great courage of so many in our community who fought the fires and the great generosity of many in our community and from around Australia who lent a hand both during the fire emergency and after in the recovery process. Canberrans in a particular way have felt the desire to repay some of that in the wake of this devastating bushfire emergency and tragedy in Victoria and have responded in a very generous way.

We note the efforts of our emergency services and police but also the volunteers and all in the community who have donated their time and their money to help in the recovery process. We know that is going on around Australia but we pay particular tribute to the contribution made by Canberrans. We do have some understanding of bushfires. Whilst we, I suppose, look back now and feel that we were in many ways lucky that we did not experience far greater devastation, given what has gone on in Victoria, ours was still a massive fire event. We lost four lives and 500 homes and we will never forget that.

It is worth paying tribute to some of the small things and large things that are being done by way of fundraising efforts in the ACT. We know that the Brumbies game on the weekend was a benefit game for the appeal. I understand the Brumbies players donated their match fees, which I think was about half of the takings, to the bushfire appeal. That was a significant amount of money for them to give up.

From my own experience, my children had the opportunity to busk at Curtin shops on the weekend as a fundraiser for the Victorian bushfire appeal. We have seen around Canberra the willingness of so many to just have a go, to do small things in their community, to give of their time, to give a little bit of their money, to encourage other people to give a little bit of their money, to help in the recovery, which will be a very long one.

I take the opportunity to pay tribute now to David Balfour. A number of us attended the funeral today. He has made the ultimate sacrifice while helping others. We can question why it had to be this way, why this tragedy had to occur. So many have lost their lives, and one of our own has lost his life, fighting to save others, to save property, to save people. Those who were there at the funeral saw the great tributes that were paid to David by family and friends. I think we were all touched by the stoicism of his family. It is particularly moving and particularly tragic when someone dies leaving a young family, children, behind. We saw all of their grief, and the sacrifice hit home to us. But we also saw great courage in the face of that from David's wife, Celia, and from, in particular, his sister-in-law, who spoke so eloquently at the funeral. She spoke of the family's grief but she also spoke of the wonderful relationship that she enjoyed with David and the wonderful impact he had on those around him. That was particularly touching for those of us who were there.

I take the opportunity, on behalf of the opposition in this place, to pay tribute to the Balfour family—to David Balfour for the sacrifice he made; to Celia; to his children, Alison, Frances and Daniel; and to all of his family, friends and colleagues and those who have lost someone very special to them. We grieve with them in their loss; but it was done in the service of others and we should remember that. We should remember that this was a sacrifice made on behalf of the people of the ACT for the people of Victoria.

I would encourage all Canberrans to continue to get behind the various fundraising efforts that are continuing. This will be a long rebuilding process. The ACT has contributed significantly and we hope that we can continue to contribute in numerous ways. I am sure the generosity of Canberrans will continue. We will recall the generosity that was given to us and we will look to repay that in whatever way we can. We pay tribute to all of the volunteers, the emergency services personnel, the police and all Canberrans who have assisted in the recovery and the fundraising efforts.

**MR CORBELL** (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (5.49), in reply: I thank members for their support of this motion and for joining in expressing our support, our congratulations and gratitude for the efforts of all those who have made a contribution to assisting the Victorian community to recover from and deal with the consequences of the fires there just over a week ago.

In listening to members' comments I think I am struck most by the fact that we are a small city but we make such a mighty contribution, and that is something of which we should all be proud. Whether it is by fundraisers, volunteers, firefighters, police,

public servants, health professionals—whoever it may be—the contribution is a mighty one. It shows the strength and the heart of our community and it is important that we pay tribute to that today and express our thanks to all of those involved in making that contribution, whether financial, in terms of time, expertise or whatever it may have been. I thank members for joining in support for this motion.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## Death of Mr Noel Flanagan AO

**MR SMYTH** (Brindabella) (5.50): Last week I had the honour of attending the requiem mass of thanksgiving and a celebration of life for one Noel Joseph Francis Xavier Flanagan AO. Noel was born on Christmas Day 1917 and died on St Valentine's Day 2009. He was buried at St Peter Chanel's, Yarralumla on Wednesday, 18 February 2009.

The best words to describe the life of Noel Flanagan are those from his family, so I shall simply read:

Noel Joseph Flanagan was born in the town of Tocumwal on the Murray River to Elizabeth and James Flanagan on 25 December 1917. He was the oldest son, with two brothers, Jack and Kevin, and two sisters, Kathleen and Dorothy making up the family.

He went to the local Catholic primary school and learnt the piano (rather badly). He spent his high school years boarding at St Patrick's at Ballarat. A good student, and a passionate sportsman, he was School Captain as well as Captain of the cricket, tennis and AFL teams in 1935 and 1936.

He started his public service career in the PMG in Melbourne in 1937. Noel studied part time, and graduated with a Commerce degree from Melbourne University. In World War II, he enlisted in the R.A.A.F. Whilst Noel was having emergency surgery his Liberator bomber crew flew out over Balikpapan, Indonesia and they were shot down with no survivors. For the rest of the war Noel was a Pilot Instructor training others to fly.

He moved to Canberra in 1947 and lived at the Hotel Acton. Between 1949 and 1953 he worked as Private Secretary to various Ministers for Immigration (Calwell and Holt). He continued with his sport, playing AFL for Queanbeyan/Acton and tennis at the Reid Tennis Club. He became an avid golfer at the Royal Canberra Golf Club, and continued to play until well into his 80s.

But sport was not enough. He was smitten by a gorgeous girl, Dell Justins who also worked in Parliament House, and, on 4 April 1953 they married. Noel and Dell have five children—Kerry, Louise, Paul, Patricia and Mary.



He had a distinguished career in the public service. He worked in the Public Service Board from 1958-65 and the Prime Minister's Department from 1966-72, where he set up the Australian Honours System. A highlight for the family was the year in Spokane, USA, in 1974, where Noel ran the Australian pavilion at the World Expo. The culmination of his career was his appointment as Director of the Australian War Memorial in 1975, where he introduced the Volunteer Guide service and succeeded in making the AWM more than just a memorial, but an accessible living history of the way war had touched and affected so many Australian lives. He was Chair and Board member of the Australian National Committee of the International Council of Museums from 1977. He was awarded an AO for his public service.

His Catholic faith was very strong and he devoted much of his time to helping others—through the Legion of Mary, L'Arche, the YMCA and Meals on Wheels.

The partners of his children had to “run the gauntlet” to be accepted by Noel as good enough to be part of the Flanagan family. They all succeeded, and grew to love and respect him. He was an adoring Pop to his nine grandchildren Joanna, Harriet and Emily McIntosh, Ashlin and Bethany Flanagan, Lindsay and Dylan Owen-Taylor, and Jade and Patrick Oduro. He made relentless enquiries of them regarding their schooling, sport and pets and was known to regularly dole out top up pocket money.

One of his friends once said of him that “people were his drug”. His Saturday morning forays to the Fyshwick markets were legend—his “people fix” for the week. He was a wonderful, if sometimes opinionated, friend.

But the centre of his life, the thing that gave him most joy was his family. We will miss him terribly, but know he is now at peace, and, as he asked us to do, we will remember the good times.

It is interesting that Noel wrote a few last words to go in the booklet. It is a great description of his love of his family and his care and compassion for the rest of the world. It simply reads as follows:

My heartfelt love to my ever faithful wife Dell, my wonderful children and their partners, the fab grandies, and siblings and the many friends with whom we have shared so much joy, laughter and close association and a prayer for those in many parts of the world who suffer from famine, war, neglect and have no one to love them.

My eternal thanks.

God bless you all. Noel.

### **Arts organisations Canberra area theatre awards**

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (5.55): I would like to pay tribute to a number of arts organisations that I have had the privilege to visit—and participate in their events—over the last two or three months. I was given the privilege of becoming the shadow

minister for arts by the Leader of the Opposition; it is something that I have aspired to for some time and it is a role that I take on with considerable enjoyment and anticipation.

I would like to pay tribute again for the huge amount of work that is done by volunteers across the ACT in arts organisations. Over the past few weeks, I have had the opportunity to visit the Canberra Youth Theatre, Music for Everyone, Canberra Youth Music and a number of galleries—including the Solander Gallery and the M16 Artspace—and to participate in a number of other cultural activities, including the splendid show of *Guys and Dolls* being put on by Free Rain at the moment at the Q theatre in Queanbeyan. I have not yet had a chance to take in Canberra Rep's presentation of *I Hate Hamlet*, which I hope still does pay great tribute to the bard.

And there is the wonderful work of the Canberra Symphony Orchestra, which is an organisation that is close to the hearts of many people, as seen by the fabulous prom concert with a bohemian theme this year that we experienced at Government House two weekends ago. We had a bohemian theme this year because the Embassy of the Czech Republic was a sponsor, to celebrate the Czech Republic's acquiring of the presidency of the EU for 2009. Part of their contribution to cultural life in Canberra was the sponsorship of the CSO prom concert.

One of the other highlights was the CAT Awards—the 14th CAT awards—that took place on Friday night. I had a choice: I could go to the rugby or I could go to the CAT awards. I took the CAT awards. I gather it was a stunning rugby match that was a cliffhanger; I have a tape of it that I will have to watch at some stage to keep up with the rest of the family. But while my family went off to the rugby, I went off to the CAT awards. It was a splendid night. I pay tribute to especially the work of Coralie Wood, who came up with the idea in the first place. At the time, people did not think that it would last. But it was, in a sense, our own little theatre Oscar awards. It is a tribute to the fact that over the last year an inordinate number of people have contributed to the cultural life of Canberra and the surrounding region through high quality theatre.

It is incumbent upon us to do what we can to support those organisations. I look forward to being able to continue my association with the CAT awards in the 15th and successive years and to a continuing association with a whole range of community arts organisations. Most of the work that is done by these people is done by volunteers. They often have one or two people who are paid, but through those one or two people who are paid a vast amount of teaching and learning in the arts and music goes on, to the enrichment of the entire community.

### **Canberra area theatre awards**

**MR COE** (Ginninderra) (6.00): I rise this evening to pay tribute to all those involved in the Canberra area theatre awards. The CAT awards, as they are more commonly known, are a fantastic event that showcases the theatrical talent of Canberra and the region. I very much enjoyed the event on Saturday, 21 February this year at the Canberra Theatre.

Founded in 1994, the awards have gone from strength to strength and are surely one of the key events on the city's social calendar. In 2008, entries came from Batemans Bay, Bega, Bowral, Cowra, Merimbula, Orange, Parkes, Queanbeyan, Wagga Wagga, Wellington, Yass and, of course, Canberra.

To produce an event such as the CAT awards takes an enormous amount of effort by many people. I would like to thank the members of the board, the sponsors and the judges who contribute so much. I would like to make special mention of the sponsorship provided by Telstra Country Wide. They have provided sponsorship for several years and it is very much appreciated. Often, financial sponsorship by companies in areas that are not core business does not return the best financial return in investment, but it is that decision to still go ahead with that financial sponsorship which really does show the character of the companies and their commitment to the community.

The theatrical community is not a small community. Theatre is a great and inclusive activity that brings people together from all walks of life. I would like to thank the thousands of people from across the region who contributed to dozens of plays and musicals that we enjoyed in 2008.

In recognising the CAT awards, I must personally thank and honour Coralie Wood OAM for her fantastic leadership over many years. Coralie would be known to many in this Assembly, if not everyone. She is a leading Canberra identity who has contributed much to the life of our city.

In conclusion, I pay tribute to Dennis Martin, Coralie Wood and the rest of the team for their fantastic work in making the CAT awards the success they are. I look forward to next year's show.

### **Canberra area theatre awards**

**MR DOSZPOT** (Brindabella) (6.02): I also wish to add my thoughts on the CAT awards. A fair bit has already been spoken about the commitment and the contribution of many people from our community. Simply, I would like to make a little postscript to some of the things that have been said.

Apart from the wider community from Canberra and the broader region, the CAT awards include a lot of the schools in Canberra that take part in it. There is a tremendous contribution from both the students and all the teachers who are involved, most of the time in a voluntary capacity, in assisting in the development of our youth with their theatrical ambitions. The activities of Coralie Wood—Ms Porter has also played a considerable part—have contributed to that.

But I refer to all of the activities that are related to the CAT awards. Much has been said by Mr Coe and Mrs Dunne. The activities have very much made a contribution to theatrical life in Canberra and have been a great launching pad for some of the youth of our area for further ambitions in their chosen career in the theatre; a lot of them have gone on to greater things.

I simply echo the words of my colleagues in congratulating Coralie Wood and the board and also the participants in the CAT awards.

### **Canberra area theatre awards**

**MS PORTER** (Ginninderra) (6.03): It is getting a bit repetitive, but I rise also to add my congratulations to Coralie Wood OAM for the wonderful work that she has been doing over numbers of years. I will not repeat everything that I said that evening as patron; you have echoed what I said on Saturday evening when I stood and spoke at the awards as patron.

It is very sobering to think that it was not so many years ago that Coralie said to me after one of the award nights, “This will be our last award night.” I was shocked to hear her say that. She disclosed that she had been funding the awards for numbers of years out of her own pocket. I was distressed to find that out. I asked her why she had not applied for some funding to assist her with this work. As members have already said, this is a fantastic award because it highlights the work that these volunteers do, not only in treading the boards but in all the work that goes on behind the scenes and that gives us so much pleasure as audiences throughout the region as well as in the ACT and that develops wonderful skills in our young people in particular, and in older people. It is a wonderful thing that we have; we are very privileged to have the CAT awards.

However, Coralie felt that it was not something she wanted to go down the route of. She did not want to form an incorporated organisation so that she could apply for funds, because she felt that that would take a lot of work and she would have to involve a lot of people in that. She did not want to approach people to help her; she thought she could do it on her own. But she was running out of steam. I suggested to her that she might like to think about forming an incorporated organisation—first of all, a steering committee—and that she might like to think about some people who were very close to her who would be devastated, like I was, that it was not going to go ahead.

To give her credit, she did this. She bit the bullet and she gathered together some people, some of whom were mentioned, who are now board members. On Saturday night, those people were mentioned and recognised; I too recognise them for their hard work. I too recognise Ian Peters for coming forward the minute I asked him to consider sponsoring it, to be the first major sponsor for the CAT awards. I thank him for that. Sadly, he is unable to provide that sponsorship through Telstra any more, because he has moved on.

However, we were very pleased that ActewAGL has now committed to be a major sponsor. We know how much ActewAGL pours into this city and how much it supports many community activities. We thank them for doing that. We thank everybody—all the volunteers and everyone who is involved in giving us such wonderful pleasure, as other members have said, not only here but in so many cities and towns around our region.

Like Mrs Dunne, I am very fortunate to go to many events—and a couple in the region when I can. As we know, travelling is not something we get much opportunity to do in our region because we are so busy here. I would like to thank them all. I commend Coralie and her team. I am sure that we will be seeing them for the 15th awards, and the 16th, 17th and so on and so forth, and that we will all be enjoying them for a number of years.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.08 pm.**